

Laura Ella Crews

Much of Oklahoma was settled by **land runs** in which previously-restricted land was opened for **homesteading** on a first arrival basis. The Oklahoma Land Run of 1889 was the most **prominent** of Oklahoma's seven land runs, which included the following:

- April 22, 1889: Land run to settle Unassigned Lands, **designated** Canadian, Cleveland, Kingfisher, Logan, Oklahoma, and Payne counties.
- September 22, 1891: Land run to settle Iowa, Sac and Fox, Potawatomi, and Shawnee lands.
- September 23, 1891: Land run to settle Tecumseh, the pre-designated location of the county seat of County B, later renamed Pottawatomie County.
- September 28, 1891: Land run to settle Chandler, the pre-designated location of the county seat of County A, later renamed Lincoln County.
- April 19, 1892: Land run to settle the Cheyenne and Arapaho lands.
- September 16, 1893: Cherokee Strip Land Run, the largest in US history, opened nearly 7,000,000 acres purchased from the Cherokees for \$7,000,000.
- May 23, 1895: Land run to settle the Kickapoo lands.

1. Read and discuss the story of Laura Ella Crews. What is remarkable about her story? How were attitudes toward women different then than they are now?
—Discuss vocabulary words. Students will use contextual clues to guess the meaning and use dictionaries or the definitions included to find the actual meaning.
—On an Oklahoma map, students will locate the area where Laura Ella Crews had her homestead.
—Students will make a timeline of the life of Laura Ella Crews and relate it to historic events in Oklahoma (coming of the railroad, etc).
2. Students will use an online search engine or library resources to research a topic of interest related to the reading passage about Laura Ella Crews (land runs, women pioneers, railroad, oil fields, etc.) Students will write short papers based on their research.
3. Students will use an internet search engine to find a list of Oklahoma Centennial Farms in your county. Students will:
—Select one farm and find additional information. (What was produced? When was the farm originated and by whom? Is the farm still with the original family? What changes in agriculture have occurred over the years: growth, farming ways, products, man power, etc? Where is the farm located?)
—Present the information to the class in a creative way—as a news report, a summary, a skit, etc.
—If possible students will visit the farm, take pictures and talk to the current owners.

Oklahoma Academic Standards

GRADE 3

Economics: 1,2,3.

Geography: 1E; 2B. History: 1,7,10

Speaking and Listening: R.1,2,3; W.1,2. Reading and Writing Process: R.2,3. Critical Reading and Writing: R.7; W.2. Vocabulary: R.1,3,5. Research: R.1,2,3,4; W.1,2,3

HIGH SCHOOL

Oklahoma History: 2.7

Speaking and Listening: R.1,2,3; W.1,2. Critical Reading and Writing: W.2. Vocabulary: R.1,3,5. Research: R.1,2,3; W.1,2,3

Vocabulary

adventurous— ready to take risks or to deal with the new and unknown

churn— to stir or shake in a container (as in making butter)

claim— an area of land marked out by a settler or prospector

crudely— planned or done in a rough or unskilled way

designated— called by name or title

homestead— a piece of land acquired from U.S. public lands by living on and cultivating it

Homestead Act— several United States federal laws that gave an applicant ownership of land, typically called a “homestead”, at little or no cost.

land run— a historical event in which previously restricted land of the United States was opened to homestead on a first arrival basis

levied— collected by legal authority

money crop— an agricultural crop grown for sale to return a profit

production royalties— a share of a product or profit claimed by the owner for allowing another to use the property

prominent— distinguished

sod house— house built from bricks made from the grass-covered and herb-covered surface of the ground

staked— marked the limits of a piece of land by driving a stake (a pointed piece of wood or metal) into the ground as a marker

Run, Girl, Run: Laura Ella Crews, Last Survivor of the Cherokee Land Run

Laura Ella Crews was born January 23, 1871, the sixth of seven children. Her father died in 1873 while the family was living in Kansas. The family **staked claims** in Oklahoma Territory in three land runs. Two of Laura's brothers and a brother-in-law made the first Land Run of 1889 and staked claims near Guthrie. Her brother and mother staked claims in the Sac and Fox-Iowa-Pottawatomie Land Run of 1891.

Laura had an **adventurous** spirit and tried to stake a claim in the 1892 Cheyenne-Arapaho Land Run. She was 21 and unmarried. It was unusual for a woman to stake a claim on her own, but not impossible. Under the **Homestead Act**, a widow, a female head of household, a woman deserted by her husband or an unmarried woman who was 21 and a US citizen could seek homestead.

Laura failed in her first attempt, but the next year she and her brother lined up for the Cherokee Strip Land Run and managed to stake adjoining claims halfway between Garber and Covington. They built a home overlapping both claims to meet "proving up" requirements. A homesteader had to be the head of a household or at least 21 years of age to claim a 160-acre parcel of land. Each homesteader had to live on the land, build a home, make improvements and farm for five years before they were eligible to "prove up".

Settlers' first homes were small and **crudely** built. If wood was not available, they built **sod houses** or dug a shelter in the side of a hill. Settlers started by planting fruit trees and growing a little corn, vegetables and a small amount of cotton as a cash crop. Most settlers would have at least one cow, some chickens and a few pigs.

Men attended to the livestock and the crops. Women made the family bread, produced lye soap from ashes, raised hops from which they obtained yeast for baking and separated cream and **churned** butter from the milk of the family cow. They made clothes for themselves and the children and knitted stockings, mittens and sweaters for winter. They saved scraps of cloth and rags, tore them into strips and later wove carpets for the floors.

Corn and wheat were the principal grain crops. While almost every farmer raised corn both for food and livestock feed, wheat was the principal **money crop**. The Santa Fe and Rock Island railroads each supplied \$10,000 worth of wheat seed at cost to the settlers. They **levied** no transportation charges and allowed farmers to pay for the wheat after the **harvest** of 1891. Railroads soon extended into farming regions, connecting farmers to markets in Wichita or Kansas City. Within a few years, large quantities of wheat were transported from grain centers.

Ella's homestead proved to be part of the Garber-Covington oil field. The **production royalties** enabled her and her family to move to Enid. She never married but raised her brother's six orphaned nieces and nephews.

Laura Crews lived to be 105 and was the last survivor of the Cherokee Strip Land Run. At age 100 she told her great-great nephew, "If I were younger, I'd like to homestead on the moon."

