

Rolison, W. Edward and Carol Duncan. *Route 66 and the Story of Sam Hawks: Pioneer, Entrepreneur, Politician*

Sam Hawks is a name that most people do not know. He was someone whose importance to western Oklahoma is easily missed. He is one of those classic historical characters who worked mostly behind the scenes. He was never elected or served in a particularly high office. He was born outside of Oklahoma and did not arrive in the state until after statehood, so he missed the famous land runs and the ratification of Oklahoma's Constitution. He helped in the development of Oklahoma, but his impact was largely felt in western Oklahoma and not in either of the metro areas of Oklahoma and Tulsa. Western Oklahoma has never been one of the major focus of historians whose have studied Oklahoma. This is a tough road to how for a biography. To tell the story of Sam Hawks does not just involve telling Hawks' story but also explaining to the reader why they need to care about the story of Sam Hawks. Thankfully the authors, W. Edward Rolison and Carol Duncan, do just that.

Sam Hawks was born in Tennessee in 1882 before coming to western Oklahoma in 1909. The book follows the life of Hawks throughout his life from his birth in Tennessee in the late 1800s until his death. After telling of his birth and early life in Tennessee the book primarily focuses on Hawks' life in Oklahoma. Hawks' early years in Oklahoma as a hotel operator in Clinton, OK. He then became a postmaster who developed and expanding routes in western Oklahoma, serves as the campaign manager for Bill Murray's successful campaign for the Governorship during the 1930s, and eventually he became Chairman for the Oklahoma Highway Commission which helped to bring Route 66 through western Oklahoma. The authors do a good job of putting Hawks' impact into context which helps the reader see how this unknown figure made a lasting impact on Oklahoma that still affects Oklahoma today.

The most important thing about this book is that it is not just about Sam Hawks. If Rolison and Duncan had only told the story of Sam Hawks himself then the book would still be of interest to people interested in the history of Oklahoma. The book might not have a lot of interest beyond that. Instead Rolison and Duncan use Hawks as a lens to tell the story of Oklahoma, particularly western Oklahoma. The authors cleverly realize that to understand Hawks' impact they need to put Hawks in his historical context. The growth and development of Clinton as a western hub between Oklahoma City and western Texas is one of the areas they spend some time on because of how important Hawks was to that development. This focus expands the potential audience of the book considerably. A modern reader may not recognize the name 'Sam Hawks' but they will recognize Clinton, OK. Rolison and Duncan demonstrate that Clinton might be a completely different place if Sam Hawks had not arrived in town in 1909.

The extreme willingness of the book to depart from Sam Hawks himself is the book's greatest strength. This is particularly true when the authors introduce Alfalfa Bill Murray into the narrative. There are chapters of the book, particularly the chapter dealing with the failed Bolivian colony led by Murray, where Hawks disappears from the narrative. Rolison and Duncan check in on Hawks but there are sections of the book that function as a profile of Murray. Murray is a fascinating character to read about in 2025. The authors see, quite accurately, that Murray is a Trump like character during his peak. This helps the reader to bring this period of history to life. Sam Hawks is not just developing roads and postal routes that impact western Oklahoma, but he exists in a political context that readers can see reflected in modern times. This once again strengthens one of my main takeaways from the book... the story of Sam Hawks is not one that is limited to historians. His story mirrors the politics of our own time.

The authors do a clever job of using tons of photographs and other images throughout the text. One of the ways that the topic is

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brought alive is by constantly using images to help the reader. They do not simply tell you about the hotels that Hawks built in Clinton... they show you the hotel. When discussing Alfalfa Bill's back-and-forth with the society editor of the Daily Oklahoma the book provides the reader with a large photograph of the society editor. You do not have to flip to a glossy section in the middle of the book either. The authors integrate the dozens, if not hundreds, of images into the text throughout the book. This is extremely important given that this biography has many locations and characters that appear throughout the book. There is also Clinton itself, a character, that changes and evolves over the decades of Hawks' life. Rolison and Duncan do an excellent job of tracking those changes over time with newspaper excerpts, primary sources, and images that help the reader track where they are at any given time.

If I had one criticism of the book it comes from the book's greatest strength, I am not sure I understand Hawks' character. Rolison and Duncan are obviously limited by their historical source material, but I would have loved to know more about Hawks' internal thoughts. The book does an excellent job of placing Hawks' actions in their context. I know a great deal about what Hawks did and how western Oklahoma continues to benefit from him. I would have liked to learn more about what Hawks thought. Why has Hawks drawn to Murray? Given that he knew Murray why did Hawks stay in western Oklahoma and not go to Bolivia? The authors give some information but questions like that are largely unanswered beyond speculation. This is due to the primary sources that Rolison and Duncan have to rely on but it does make Hawks himself a figure like Charles Foster Kane. Hawks remains this figure who has this great impact on the state and yet is almost tantalizingly out of reach. We know what he did but can only speculate on why he did it.

I enjoyed *Sam Hawks* a great deal. It is the kind of book that can be enjoyed by people interested in the history of western Oklahoma and Oklahoma politics in general. It tells the story of someone

who wasn't always the guy but was the guy who the guy depended on. It explores the Oklahoma of the past but connects it to the Oklahoma of today.

Dr. David Searcy
Southwestern Oklahoma State University