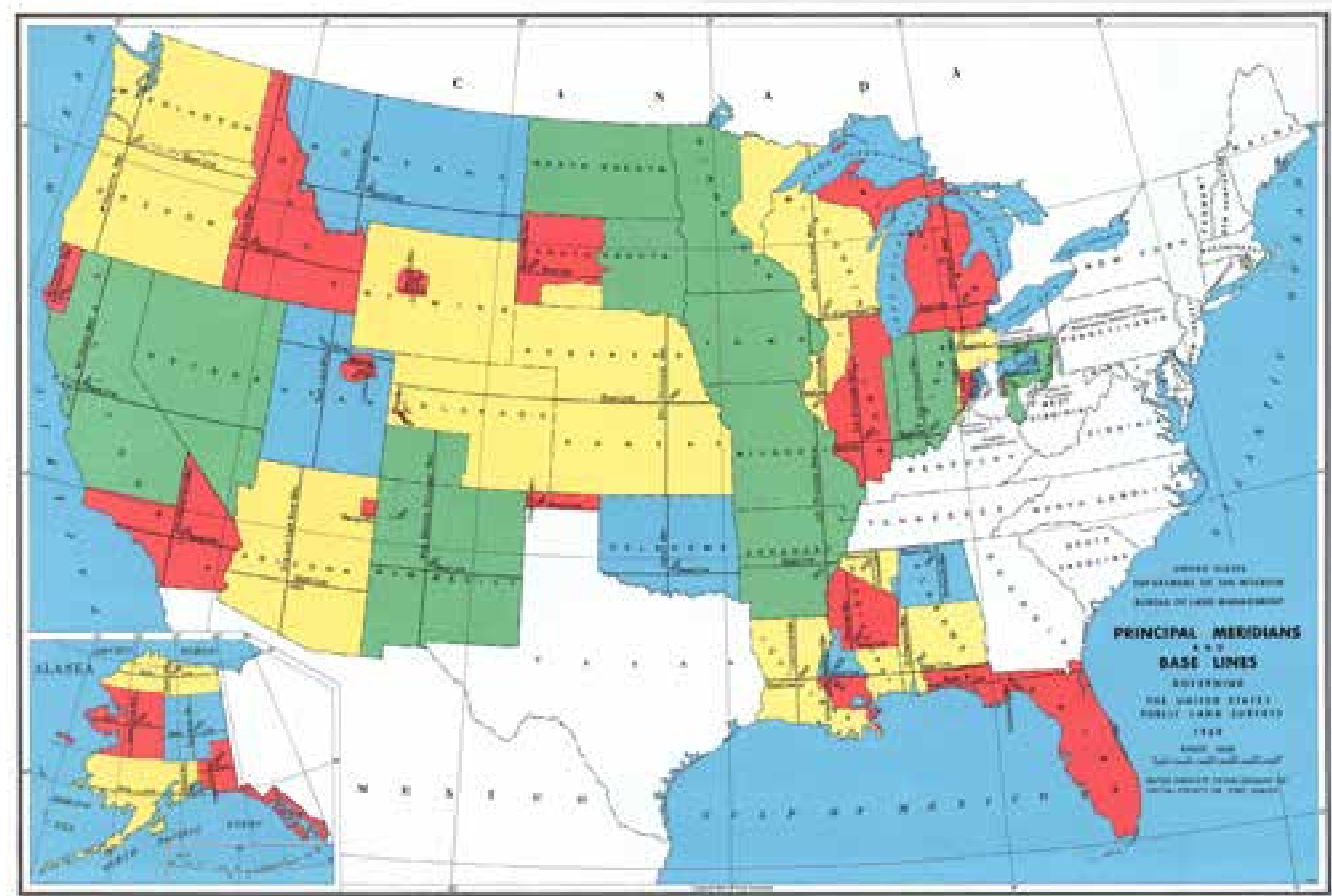


# The Chisholm Trail, Born Again

The United States Bureau of Land Management uses a series of meridians and baselines to divide land into townships. The sixth principal meridian runs from south to north from Oklahoma through Nebraska. Texas uses a modified system to divide its land.

Principal Meridians and Base Lines (1968 edition), U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management.



AS THE CHISHOLM TRAIL FADED, THE UNITED STATES CONTINUED ITS EXPANSION INTO THE GREAT PLAINS AND BEYOND.

After a series of land rushes by settlers known as “Sooners” and a failed bid by American Indian tribes to join the union as a state known as “Sequoyah,” Oklahoma was established as the forty-sixth state in 1907. Former cowtowns in Kansas sought new growth opportunities, and the population of Texas grew steadily as oil and agricultural industries thrived.

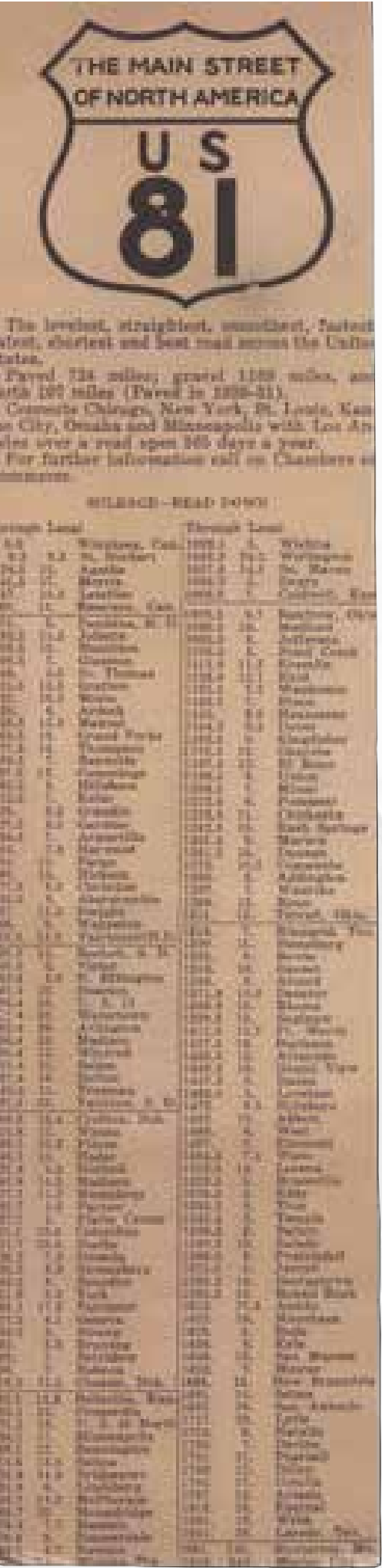
An attorney and entrepreneur from Newton sought to connect the Chisholm Trail states in an effort to bring additional attention and investment to his town. John C. Nicholson saw the growing movement to improve infrastructure in Kansas—known as Good Roads—as a unique opportunity.

Nicholson spearheaded an effort to connect towns from Winnipeg, Canada, to Galveston, Texas, with an improved road that would run along the sixth principal meridian, the geographic dividing line between tallgrass and shortgrass prairie.

Known as the Meridian Highway, Nicholson’s road followed the Chisholm Trail through Kansas and Oklahoma to Fort Worth. Nicholson would also help to build and promote an improved road known as the New Santa Fe Trail. Both of Nicholson’s roads intersected in his hometown: Newton, Kansas.

The influence of the Chisholm Trail on contemporary travel and commerce can still be seen today. The Meridian Highway—now known as US 81—remains an important route for local and regional traffic. In the 1950s and 60s, the newly created Interstate Highway system included a route that closely followed the Chisholm Trail corridor. Interstate 35 remains a vital channel for travel and commerce in the Great Plains and Midwest, and the Chisholm Trail name remains front and center for travelers in Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas.

BACKGROUND IMAGE:  
John C. Nicholson and others touring the Meridian Road.  
*Courtesy of Harvey County Historical Society*



A mileage chart for US Highway 81, also known as the Meridian Highway.  
*Courtesy of Harvey County Historical Society*