

# HARRAH: Small city with bright future

By John Martin  
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Harrah is a city in Oklahoma County and a part of the Oklahoma City metropolitan area. Located 25 miles east of downtown Oklahoma City, Harrah has a population of approximately 6,000.

The first settler of the area, who was Potawatomi, arrived in the 1870s, but the town was not incorporated until 1908. The town was settled by Americans, Polish immigrants and other groups and had a cotton ginning center. The city is overseen by a city council and mayor and includes a police department and fire station.

**LOCATION:** Harrah is a small city with a total land area of 11.9 square miles and the city’s elevation is 925 feet above sea level.

It lies partly in the Great Plains near the geographical center of the 48 contiguous states in the United States. It lies between the larger city of Midwest City to the west and Shawnee, Oklahoma, to the east, in Oklahoma County.

**CLIMATE:** Oklahoma is located in a temperate region and experiences occasional extremes of temperature and precipitation typical of a continental climate. Harrah lies in an area known as Tornado Alley characterized by frequent interaction between cold and warm air masses producing severe weather. An average of 54 tornadoes strike the state per year.

The city frequently experiences temperatures above 100 °F (38 °C) or below 0 °F

**HISTORY:** The land that would become the town of Harrah had its first settler, Louis Navarre, in the 1870s. Navarre, was a member of the Potawatomi people who had signed an 1867 treaty to sell their Kansas lands in order to purchase lands in Indian Territory with the proceeds. They also became citizens of the United States and thus became known as the Citizen Potawatomi.

In 1890, Navarre and the Citizen Potawatomi participated in the allotment process implemented through the Dawes Act of 1887. With this Act, the Citizen Potawatomi people were forced to accept individual allotments. In the Land Run of 1891, the remainder of the Potawatomi reservation in Oklahoma was opened up to non-Indian settlement, with about 450 square miles of the reservation given away by the government to settlers

Frank Harrah, for whom the town is named, purchased 40 acres from Louis Navarre’s allotment in April 1898 and early settlers included a large number of Polish immigrants. More than two million Poles entered American ports between 1897 and 1913, and the immigrants formed small communities around Choctaw Nation coal mines.

## Frank Harrah

Local artist Ellen Gobin was commissioned by the Harrah Historical Society to complete a bust of city founder Frank Harrah. The bust took nearly five months to complete, and is now in the care of the lady curators of the Harrah History Center, located at 20881 Main St., and can be viewed with many other Harrah artifacts and documents preserved by the volunteer-run nonprofit. For more information call 454-6911.  
PHOTO BY RYAN HORTON

**CLUBB TOWN?** Originally named Sweeney, after E.W. Sweeney, who operated a ferry beginning in 1891, the town was renamed Harrah on December 22, 1898, and was incorporated in 1908. The town was almost renamed Clubb.

In the 1940s Harrah was a center of cotton ginning. Its population was 741 in 1950. By 1990 4,206 people lived in Harrah..

The population density is 428 people per square mile. The racial makeup of the city 84% white, 1% African American, 7.3% Native American, 0.7% Asian, 0.7% from other races, and 6.3% from two or more races. Hispanic or Latin makes up 4% of the population.

Of the 1,960 households, 33% had children under the age of 18 living with them, 57.6% consisted of married couples living together, 10.8% had a female householder with no husband present, and 26.3% were non-families. 22.7% of the households are occupied by a single individual and 26.1 percent had someone living alone who was 65 years of age or older. The average household size was 2.57 and the average family size was 3.02.

In the city, the population is spread out with 25.8% under the age of 18, 30.3% from 18 to 64, and 14.5% who are 65 years of age or older. The median is dropping lower and is currently 38.5 years. The population is 52.1% female and 47.9% male

The median income for a household in the city is \$56,302, and the median income for a family is \$76,725. The per capita income for the city is \$25,545. About 6.1% of families and 8.4% of the population fall below the poverty line, including 17.1% of those under age 18 and 4.7% of those age 65 or over.

