Announcer: The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Emily Yeap: Spreading across roughly 40,000 to 45,000 square miles, the Ozarks covers much of the southern half of Missouri and a large part of northern Arkansas. It also extends into northeast Oklahoma and southeast Kansas.

There are many stereotypes about the Ozarks and Ozarkers. They range from frontiersmen to hillbillies to moonshiners and Banjo players. With his research on Ozarks history, Dr. Brooks Blevins tries to dispel those misconceptions and present the most complete portrait of the region. I'm Emily Yeap.

Blevins, who is the Noel Boyd professor of Ozark studies at Missouri State University, joins me today to talk about his research, including his latest project.

Brooks Blevins: I'm a native of the Ozarks, so I've been interested in the history of the Ozarks as long as I can remember. It's part of my history. I've been teaching courses here at Missouri State on the Ozarks for 10 years, and I really noticed that there was a need for a comprehensive history of the region, to give students a grounding in the region. But not just that. I think we needed a history of the region for the people of the region.

Emily Yeap: So he set out to write a comprehensive history of the Ozarks about five years ago, which resulted in a trilogy. The “History of the Ozark, Volume 1: The Old Ozarks” was published this summer.

Brooks Blevins: I didn't expect that it was going to turn into a three volume project at all. I envisioned a one volume history of the region, and I thought it was going to be a big fat one volume history of the region. But by the time I got the story to the Civil War, hadn't even started the war yet, I had a book length manuscript. At that point I realized, boy, I really sort of overdid it with the research here, and I don't want to cull any of these stories, and any of this information. So I had to make the decision, how am I going to convince a publisher that the world needs a three volume history of the Ozarks?

Fortunately, I had a good working relationship with the University of Illinois Press and they thought the idea of a trilogy of the Ozarks, especially one written sort of for a general audience, sounded like a really good idea.

Emily Yeap: Volume one highlights the early days of the Ozarks before the Civil War.

Brooks Blevins: We're talking about the history of native Americans in the Ozarks, the Osage, the so called immigrant Indians, who are pushed from east of the Mississippi into the Ozarks for a couple generations. The Shawnees, and the Cherokees, and the Delawares, and the Piankashaws, and the Kickapoos and all these different groups. So there's a lot on all of these groups interacting with each other in the late 1700s and early 1800s.

Then you had the story of white American settlement coming from east of the Mississippi and putting their stamp on the region, because that becomes the dominant population in the region within just a few years, in the early 1800s. And I have chapters on how these pioneer settlers lived, what they did. Hunting, trapping, a lot of things that hopefully will bring to life the everyday lives of these folks. And some of the things that they had to do to survive, that we sometimes forget about now. There's also information in there on agricultural practices of the early days.

And even on institutions, there's a lot in there on religion and the churches that were founded by the early settlers, and the schools that were founded. Even colleges that were founded before the Civil War, which may surprise some people to know that a place like the Ozarks had colleges before the Civil War. But there were a few of them. Just about anything that happened in the region before the Civil War finds its way into the book in some small way, at least.

Emily Yeap: For Blevins, the most surprising part about his research in the pre-Civil War period relates to the immigrant Indians.

Brooks Blevins: The so called immigrant Indians, the Shawnees, the Cherokees and the Delawares, who were kind of planted in the Ozarks from east of the Mississippi, and lived here for a generation or so, their attempt to establish an autonomous nation in the Ozarks. This became a very active attempt in the 1820s. But ultimately, the whole plan fell apart. What it did, it eventually planted the seed for what would become the official Indian territory, which is what we know today as the state of Oklahoma, and that would be founded a few years later. But there was that brief moment in time, where it looked like it was possible that there would be an Ozark Autonomous Indian Nation.

Emily Yeap: Volume one is available for purchase on Amazon.com. Tune in next Tuesday for the second in a two-part series about Blevins's research. I'm Emily Yeap for the Missouri State Journal.

Announcer: For more information, contact the Office of University Communications at (417) 836-6397. The Missouri State Journal is available online at KSMU.org.