Tributes to Soonerland's Buchanan

By Dr. Stratton D. Brooks,
President of University of Missouri

One of the most pleasant experiences of my life was during the eleven years of association with Dean James S. Buchanan. His lovable disposition and great likableness were unusual. His insight into student nature was keen and correct. The inspiration that he has given to thousands of young men and women will be one of the guiding influences of their lives. The service that he has rendered to the State of Oklahoma is one that few men have had the opportunity to render. I am only one of the many who will grieve at his loss.

He had a major hand in carrying the university through its formative years prior to my coming, and fully as important a function during the period of my stay. This was a period of very rapid progress involving many difficult situations, in all of which he showed himself an administrator of unusual ability. It would be impossible to find any man who has had a greater hand in making the university what it now is, than he had.

By Dr. Joseph Francis Paxton

James Shannon Buchanan was just one month older than I, and he was born October 14, 1864, during the battle of Franklin, Tennessee, not far from the battlefield.

I met him first in the autumn of 1896, when I came to the University of Oklahoma to try to fill the chair (or shall I say the hard sofa?) of Greek and Latin. He had been on the university faculty about two years when I arrived in Norman and had been married to his first wife, née Vinnie Galbraith, less than a year. Their home, a little cottage not far from the present Baptist church, was often a pleasantly hospitable place during the next few years to me and to the late Vernon L. Parrington, who joined the little faculty a few years later than I.

Mrs. Buchanan, who had taught piano in the then Edmond Normal, was an accomplished pianist, and she was often given to slighting her husband because of her alleged disdain of the "low-brow" style of music which, he said, was the only kind he could enjoy.

The then Professor Buchanan, besides being an effective teacher, informal and direct in style of attack, was above the ordinary as a public speaker on patriotic occasions, such as the Fourth of July, and he had a very mordant humor. Witness the following: Some years ago, when I had just had a mustache rather long and of long standing, removed, some of my friends said I looked ten years younger; others thought I appeared ten years older. I put the case to Uncle Buck. His comment was, "Well, Paxton, just strike an average and you'll be right where you were."

Mr. Buchanan was a tender-hearted father and husband, man and official. Dozens of those who at times were somewhat officially censured by him bore no lasting feeling toward him, but gratitude.

Others can speak with more infinite knowledge of his various official roles; I merely wish to add that, notwithstanding occasional differences of opinion about university policy, it was impossible for me (or any other reasonable being) to bear lasting resentment against a man so essentially kindly.

His energies were for many years bent towards making this corner of the little planet which is our immediate world a better place in which to live. What finer eulogy is possible?

Farewell, my friend of long years.
Sic tibi terra lexis.

By Luther Harrison
in the Daily Oklahoman

To many a University of Oklahoma student—particularly to those of the university's earlier years—there was little difference between the university and Doctor J. S. Buchanan. When the graduate thought of his happy campus days he thought of Uncle Buck also. In a literal sense many thought of Alma Mater as Uncle Buck and somehow regarded the loved instructor as the university itself. And to those who assigned to this prince of men so high a place in university life there comes a lasting sorrow now. In many a quiet little village and out among the age-old hills there are sorrowing hearts today that a great soul at last has reached its journey's end.

Here in Oklahoma and in states and nations far removed from the Norman campus there is a monument grander than any ever before erected to the memory of an Oklahoman. That monument is composed of the men and women led from darkness into light, from despondency into eternal hope, from bitter discouragement into abiding faith, by the loving soul who by the might of a sympathetic comradeship lifted the thoughts of his students to a higher plane and turned their faces toward the stars.

By Walter W. Mills
in the Oklahoma City Times

Thirty-five years of faithful service in the University of Oklahoma stand as Doctor James Shannon Buchanan's contribution to the state. He had seen that now great institution grow from a humble beginning. He was a potent influence in shaping and furthering that growth. And his must have been a pleasant journey, for he made many friends along the way; made them and kept them. There are grizzled men about the state who were students under Uncle Buck; men whose sons now tread the campus their fathers trod, and these will mourn this man's death, as will the undergraduates of today.

Uncle Buck gave the best that was in him to this state and its great school. He gave ungrudgingly and with joy in his work. The grief the state must feel in the passing of such a man, is mixed with pride in such a worthy public servant; with the satisfaction of the friendship of the kindly dean. He has gone from classroom and campus, but his influence endures in the school he served, and in the hearts and lives of many men and women.

By Edwin Kerrigan
in the Cleveland County Democrat-News

Officially, Doctor J. S. Buchanan, who was called early last Thursday to his last great leave of absence from the University of Oklahoma, will go down in history as one of the first faculty members of the state school, a great educator and a man with many degrees and many claims to fame.

Unofficially, Uncle Buck will be remembered by university alumni and former students as a man with a corn-cob pipe, from whom the meanest freshman could get comfort and the haughtiest upperclassman advice which made his ears burn.

He knew more students by their first names than any other faculty member. Among other things, he will be remembered as a man. It is worthy of comment that the great rank of friends,
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who will miss him when they next return to visit O. U., is masculine.

He will be remembered for the entertainment provided by his wit and the thoughts casually dropped as a speaker at many meetings and dinners at which alumni and former students have gathered. The soft, slurred speech from Tennessee was a welcome relief in a day of crisp pronunciation.

Mention of a corn-cob pipe may mean nothing to students at the school today, but those who camped on the trail of learning in former years know the famous pipe. Uncle Buck was the only man with dispensation to smoke when and what he pleased in the university halls, albeit he probably granted that dispensation to himself. And his smoke was a corn-cob pipe.

And the pipe was the barometer. When the smoke haze swept thick from his office window in administration hall, Dean Buck wrestled with a knotty problem. When the smoke waited out in gentle puffs, it was safe to go in and attempt an explanation of grades, behavior or general unfitness which had come under official observation.

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FROM THE STAGE OF LIFE

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He was a good conversationalist and that is a rare quality these days, but it is a quality involving rare gifts and great versatility. He was an unusually good after-dinner speaker. I shall never forget as long as I live the twinkle in his eye as he arose to speak on many occasions when I was present, and I will always recall with pleasure the contagious spirit of his genuine good humor on these occasions. There is not a man or woman, perhaps, within reach of my voice who does not recall some good story that they have heard him tell on one of these happy occasions when he drew men and women to him with invisible chains of love and affection by his good stories and sound philosophy of life.

Doctor Buchanan's long career as a teacher of history has brought to him distinction and wide spread popularity. His famous courses, known as Courses 155 and 156 on the political history of the United States, in which he emphasized the statesmanship of Andrew Jackson, have been popular in the university, and former students of the institution will long remember him in connection with these courses. He began his administrativa work in the university as dean of the college of liberal arts. His executive duties brought him in contact with most of the students who entered the university. In this capacity he contributed much to raising the academic standards of the institution. But, above all else, he guided countless thousands of students into proper channels of learning and scholarship.

During the two years that Doctor Buchanan occupied the president's chair, he did much for the university. It was a critical time and his problems were many. The friends of higher education in Oklahoma will never forget the great service he rendered during those years in bringing order out of chaos and in guiding the destinies of the institution through this crisis.

While Doctor Buchanan was always interested in politics, he never held but one political office. He served as a member of the constitutional convention and took the greatest pride in the constitution that was formulated at Guthrie in 1906. He has attributed much of the progress of the state to its organic law and he has cherished for the members of the constitutional convention, with whom he served, the deepest affection through the years.

T HE measure of a man's life," said Plutarch, "is the well spending of it, and not the length."

Sheridan said in Pizarro: "A life spent worthily should be measured by a nobler line,—by deeds, not years."

Du Bartas in the same vein says in Days and Weeks:

"Who well lives, long lives; for this age of ours Should not be numbered by years, days, and hours."

It was the young poet, Bailey, who said:

"We live in deeds, not years—in thoughts, not breaths— In feelings, not in figures on a dial We count time by heart-throbs. He most lives Who thinks most, feels the noblest, acts the best."

Euripides a long time ago raised the question:

"Who knows but that this life is really death, And whether death is not what men call life?"

There is implied in these quotations the comforting thought that mortal man is predestined for two immortals—an immortality of influence and good deeds and the immortality of the soul. It should be a comforting thought to us today that this man lived the kind of a life that will perpetuate his memory and his influence for all time to come in the university and in the state that he served. There are no forces in nature that can destroy the influence of a good and useful man. Certainly, the man whose memory we cherish today has won this kind of immortality.

But we cherish the thought that death is not the end and that there is a life beyond the grave. The question has been asked by men in every age of the world: If a man die, shall he live again? It was Plato who reasoned that God never created a desire in a man's heart without providing for its satisfaction. A man thirsts, for example, and water has been provided to appease his thirst; man hungered and there is food to satisfy this hunger; man longs to live and all wise, beneficent God has made it possible for him to live here and hereafter. It is my belief that this is the strongest argument that has ever been made for the immortality of the soul. While we cannot demonstrate a life after death like we demonstrate a mathematical proposition, we can accept it confidently on the basis of an abiding faith that in the eternal purposes of an all wise God, it is absolutely a fact.

I realize that words are rather meaningless in soothing the hearts of those who have been caused to suffer such a great affliction, but it must be comforting, after all, to a family group that has been deprived of such a loved one to have a heritage such as this man is leaving behind him. My sympathies have always gone out to children who must struggle in life to overcome a bad inheritance, who cannot point with pride to parents whose lives have not merited either distinction or the reputation for good deeds. Doctor Buchanan has left to his wife and children memories that must cheer their hearts in all the years that are to come. His kindness, his good cheer, his fidelity and his love for them will prove a benediction that will grow more significant as the years come and go.

I am glad it was my privilege to know this man. I believe I will be a better man, a better citizen, a better president of the university he served, a better father and husband because I worked side by side with him during the past five years, and I believe that the same is true of many of you. Those who serve this university have a new responsibility placed upon us today, a responsibility to carry on with larger vision, with greater perseverance, with a greater willingness to sacrifice that the things he dreamed of for the institution might come true. It is a satisfaction to me, and I hope it is to you, in this sad hour to realize this man's per-