Charlie Gould was born in Ohio in July 1868 but moved to Kingman, Kansas, with his family when he was 18. There the Goulds came to know the Bucklins, and while the two mothers worked side by side for the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the two boys, Charlie and George, became good friends. Two years after the move, young Gould decided that he wanted to teach school. He attended a normal institute in Kingman, and on a hot August night he went to hear a lecture on "The Geological Story of Kansas."

Six decades later he could still remember that transforming moment: "I hung entranced on every word. I felt the spinal shiver which betokens the last word in emotional appeal. This was my conversion. Up to that time, I do not believe that I had heard the word geology spoken. . . . This lecture changed the entire current of my life. At that time I did not know what a geologist did, but I then and there resolved that whatever things a geologist did, those things must I do."

Gould taught in small Kansas schools until 1892, earning enough money, at last, to join his friend George Bucklin at Southwestern College in Winfield, Kansas (a school that had a curious and important relationship to the new university being built in Norman, Oklahoma). The Bucklins had moved to Winfield when George entered Southwestern, and Charlie roomed with them. Inevitably the two boys split up.

In 1895, George left college to read law for a couple of years. He arrived in Norman—just a few weeks shy of 22, handsome, athletic, gregarious—to continue his education in the fall of 1897. President David Ross Boyd immediately noticed him and invited him to work in his own office as the president's only secretary. By the time he was a sophomore, George Bucklin was also the University of Oklahoma's registrar. Meanwhile, Charlie Gould, still determined to become a geologist, went off to the University of Nebraska and there earned an M.A. in 1900.

Meanwhile, in Norman, Professor Albert Heald Van Vleet had his hands full teaching all of the natural sciences—including geology. By the fall of 1899 (just as Gould was beginning the final work on his degree at Nebraska), President Boyd indicated that the next addition to the faculty should be a geologist. Such an appointment, he believed, would not only take some of the enormous burden from Van Vleet's shoulders but also would be important in view of the growing interest in the potential profitability of Oklahoma's natural resources.

When George Bucklin learned of Boyd's intention, he naturally thought of his friend, Charlie, and spoke to Boyd about him. Boyd asked Bucklin to invite Gould to visit Norman during the Christmas vacation of 1899. (Thus the first verse of the final poem printed below conveys Gould's memory of his very first impression upon stepping onto the campus.)

During their talks that Christmas, Gould and Boyd agreed that the young geologist would join Van Vleet's field camp in the summer of 1900 (for which he would receive no pay). In September, he would move to Norman to organize the study of geology at the University of Oklahoma (at the extraordinarily meager salary—even for that time—of $400 a year).

In his autobiography, Covered Wagon Geologist (1949), Gould recalled the situation he found: "There was absolutely no equipment for carrying on the work of the department; no classrooms, no laboratories, no collections, no library, nothing but a young chap just out of college, turned..."
loose on his own resources and permitted to sink or swim." Van Vleet graciously moved into his own office a desk for his new colleague, and Gould began teaching the 10 students who enrolled in his first two courses in the fall of 1900.

Before he concluded his illustrious career, Charles N. Gould was one of the most highly regarded geologists in the United States, the teacher of a generation of distinguished geologists, and the founder of perhaps the best known school of its kind in the country. By the time of his death in a Norman nursing home on August 13, 1949, he had produced, according to one accounting, 260 scientific papers, 572 reports on oil properties and 251 studies for the National Park Service. He was a major force behind Oklahoma's oil industry.

Perhaps it is not surprising that a man who could hang "entranced on every word" of a lecture on Kansas geology and who felt "the spinal shiver which betokens the last word in emotional appeal" might combine with his scientific interest a poetic sensibility. Throughout his long and productive career as a scientist, Gould produced papers with titles like "A New Classification of the Permian red beds of southwestern Oklahoma" (1924) or "The fossil Glyptodon in the Frederick gravel beds" (1929). But there was another side to this notable scientist as well.

His poems are not likely to be confused with the immortal works of great literature—some of them read a little like lectures in geology—and Gould probably never tried to publish them. Nevertheless, these poems reveal a deep love of the natural environment and a particular affection for the Oklahoma landscape. They show him to be a man who could see below and beyond the merely practical and who noticed, not only the land's economic potential, but its history and beauty as well.

Gould no doubt wrote his poems in spare moments and carefully saved them. Today, they reside in a manila folder among the learned and technical works that comprise the large collection of his personal papers at the University he served so long and so well.

BLACK MESA

The roof of Oklahoma
A mile above sea level;
Grim sentinel, guarding the valleys of Cimarron and Carrizo,
A flat-topped rock table, capped with malpais, with level skyline,
Looking ever eastward toward the rising sun.

Product of old earth's internal fires,
Reminiscent of the time when hot and seething lavas
Belched forth from crater mouths,
A hot and viscous flood
Upon the land, seeking a resting place.
A tongue of lava, half a mile wide, extending eastward,
Moving slower and ever slower until the mass congealed, cooled,
And hardened into solid rock, black and forbidding.

Long ages passed. The unending years have come and gone.
Erosion has cut away the softer rocks on either side,
Leaving the black lava, malpais, perched high on the cliff,
Until today, Black Mesa, the roof of Oklahoma,
Stands sentinel over the Cimarron and Carrizo.

OLD TRAILS

Scars on the soft bosom of Oklahoma,
Gashes cut by wagon wheels
Or paths worn by the feet of long-horn steers,
Stretch on and on toward distant horizons.

Radiating trails
Cut by four-horse government stage coaches
Carrying mail and blue-coated soldiers
From Fort Smith to Towson, Gibson, Arbuckle,
Or from Fort Reno to Cobb, Supply, Sill;
Reminders of Indian warfare.

Wandering trails
Made by huge six-horse trail wagons
From the Great Salt Plain of the Cimarron,
Or from the Salt Plains of Red River,
Marking the track of the salt haulers
To settlements in Kansas and Texas,
Or to military posts.

Straight trails,
Chisholm, Texas, Jones and Plummer,
Worn by feet of countless thousands of cattle,
By cow ponies and chuck wagons,
From the plains of west Texas
Northward across many rivers; the Red, both Canadians, the Cimarron.
Still ever northward, following the early grass
To Abilene, Wichita, Dodge City, 
There to meet the iron horse.

Faint now and dim, 
Scarcely to be discovered.
Nature's soft hand has smoothed out the rough surface, 
And the plow has all but obliterated the last marks.
But old men, once cowboys, now bent and bleary eyed, 
Will tell tales of ghost herds of cattle 
And of stage drivers and salt haulers 
That still follow the old trails, 
And on stormy nights, when lightnings flash, 
One may almost hear, among the rolling thunder, 
The jingle of traces 
And the bawling of stampeding herds.

THE RED BUDS

A smear of red across half a State. 
A riot of red color, 
Scarlet, crimson, purple, magenta, 
With streaks of green and white.

From Beam into Carter, 
And from Harmon into Payne, 
In all of western Oklahoma 
These brilliant red colors. 
Red soils, red fields, red canyons cut in shale and sandstone, 
Brick red water in the streams.

The whole landscape is red, 
But tempered with the light green of prairie lands, 
Or ribbons of timber, dark green, along the streams. 
A checkerboard of farms; 
Green corn, and yellow squares of ripening grain, 
Or perchance a field of fleecy cotton, white as snow, 
To break the dull monotony of red.

SPRINGTIME IN THE KIAMICHIS

Tall trunks of oak and pine, 
Uphold a canopy of green 
Through which dart shafts of golden sunlight.

Tiny rivulets, with water crystal clear, 
Tinkle like fairy anvils 
Over mimic water falls.

Red bud, blushing pink, glowing among the trees. 
White dogwood, like sheeted ghosts, behind a clump of pines. 
Blue-eyed violets winking immodestly at Sweet William, 
Fragrant May apple, Solomon's Seal.

The distant tinkle of a cow bell among the pines, 
A fleeting glimpse of a deer crossing the road, 
A cardinal flashing like red flame among the bushes, 
Mocking birds and blue jays flitting among the trees, 
The moaning and sighing of tall pines, 
Breezes rippling the grasses, 
Glimpses of fleecy clouds driving overhead.

OKLAHOMA COAL

Seventy-five billion tons of bottled sunlight. 
Priceless stores of carbon; 
Power for untold generations. 
Stored in the hills of Oklahoma.

Formed in gloomy swamps, 
In far-off times when this old world was young. 
With rank growth of trees and giant rushes, 
Not like our modern trees, tall and graceful. 
But squat, blunt, grotesque, club-like plants 
Forming forests, dark, gloomy, and forbidding.

No singing birds lived in these trees, 
No brilliant bloom of flowers. 
Neither man nor beast yet lived. 
Not even reptiles in these dark and gloomy swamps. 
Fishes there were, and toad-like forms, and salamanders 
Crawling through the dark and slimy ooze.

Terrific storms blew down these ancient forests. 
The swamps were filled with wood and leaves, 
Then mud and sand washed in, from nearby mountains 
Covering the oozy mass, 
And throughout long ages, out of contact with air, 
The wood was slowly changed to coal.

Ten times was this repeated: 
Ten great cycles of growth of plants 
And their destruction, and covering by inwashed sediments, 
Gave rise to ten beds of coal in Oklahoma.
THE WICHITA MOUNTAINS

A silhouette of jagged granite peaks against the sky,
With clumps of oak and cedar;
Mountains in miniature.
Names reminiscent of the Indian, the cowboy, and the soldier,
Tepee, Quanah, Cutthroat, Headquarters, Signal, Scott, Sheridan.

These are but the remnants of once larger mountains,
Upheaved in olden times,
Worn down by erosion,
Submerged beneath the sea,
Buried beneath a load of sediments.
And now being uncovered.

Come stand with me on a high peak.
And look out over the level plain.
Note at our feet seacoast phenomena;
Islands, straits, capes, bays, inlets, promontories
Frozen in stone, the tops of buried mountains.
And between; a sea of plain stretching to distant horizons.

THE SOUTH CANADIAN

A dry sand bed, shining in the sun.
A seven-hundred-mile ribbon
Stretching east across the Plains.
From Colorado's snow-capped peaks
Fed by springs high up in Sangre de Christo
And the coal fields of the Rockies.

Trenching a deep canyon in New Mexico,
Crossing the oil fields of Texas Panhandle,
Trending ever eastward across Oklahoma, to join the Arkansas.

A dry sand bed shining in the sun.
When suddenly, without warning.
A foam-capped wall of seething, yellow, muddy water,
Fed by cloudbursts in the distant mountains,
Sweeps downstream fast as a horse can run,
Carrying death and devastation.

The grave of wagons, homes, and bridges,
The living tomb of cattle, horses, men.
Seven hundred miles of living death.

And when the raging flood has passed:
A dry sand bed shining in the sun.

THE UNIVERSITY CAMPUS

1889
Raw prairie
Carpeted with blue-stem grass
Crossed by a diagonal trail
Leading from Adkins crossing on the South Canadian,
Along which the Chickasaws drove herds of cattle,
To be shipped from the new, red, Santa Fe station, Norman.
A blank page, all untouched,
Waiting for a message yet unwritten.

1899
One lone building in a forty-acre field
With rows of little trees, waist high,
Where strips of prairie sod had been broken up.
A faculty of seven hard-working men,
Forward-looking and far-visioned men,
Willing to toil and hope and sacrifice.
Three hundred students,
Earnest young men and women,
From sod house, dugout, and cattle ranch.
A hope of better things to be.

1929
Twenty great buildings,
With stately towers of brick and stone
Scattered among shady groves.
Lawns velvet-smooth and brilliant bloom of flowers.
A faculty of three hundred men and women, active and alert,
Drawn from the far corners of the earth,
Scholars and teachers,
Who have delved deep for Nature's secrets,
And gathered up the lore of ages past,
And day after day pour their wealth of garnered treasure
Into the plastic hearts and minds of youth.
Campus walks crowded with a joyous, jostling, laughing throng;
Five thousand boys and girls
From farm and village and great city,
The finest that the sun looks down upon,
The pride, the joy, the hope of Oklahoma.

[Source: Charles N. Gould Papers, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Box 28, Folder 8]