A University Born of Politics
Norman Feared for Growth if Oklahoma City Was Capital

By Mort L. Bixler, Secretary, Mobile, Alabama, Fair Association

Establishment of the University of Oklahoma at Norman was made the foil of a battle of wits between Guthrie and Oklahoma City for the capital of the Territory of Oklahoma. This fight brewed complications not anticipated. At the present period of this millennium, the history of those events are not of historical significance, but there is an inborn disposition in almost everyone to attach importance to the truth about such events, especially those with which they may have been connected.

The location of the university and other major educational institutions was not considered in the first election and there were many people in Norman opposed to locating the capital at Oklahoma City as they believed it would have the effect of stunting the growth of Norman; in those days all towns were equally important in their location and with the capital at Guthrie, Norman would have a better chance to thrive and attain greatness, and, but for political ambition overflowing itself, and townsite greed spreading its contaminating influence to the exclusion of all other interests, there is no telling where the University of Oklahoma might now be located. But destiny shaped the ends well and the result has not been harmful either to the institution or state.

It is now perhaps forgotten that there were those connected with the administration of President Harrison who believed it possible that two states might be organized out of Indian Territory. With the South Canadian and Washita rivers for a boundary, it took no stretch of imagination to vision a rock ribbed Republican state north of those turbulent streams and a Democratic commonwealth on granite foundations on the south, a prospect equally pleasing to the horde of politicians, great and small of both parties, who had come to the newly discovered political spa to quench their thirst for political spoils or renew their youth, and they were an agreeable lot of fellows. To locate permanently the capital at Guthrie, as evidenced by expressions of Governor George W. Steele, and activities by other

The Law Creating the University and Establishing Its Purpose

The interior as provided in said act.

8. The president of the University shall be president of the several faculties, and the executive head of the instructional force in all its departments; as such, he shall have authority, subject to the board of regents, to give general direction to the instruction and scientific investigations of the several colleges; and so long as the interests of the institution require it he shall be charged with the duties of one of the professorships. The immediate government of the several colleges shall be intrusted to their respective faculties, but the regents shall have the power to regulate the course of instruction and prescribe the books or works to be used in the several courses, and also to confer such degrees and grant such diplomas as are usual in Universities, or as they shall deem appropriate, and to confer upon the faculty, as below, the power to suspend or expel students for misconduct, other causes prescribed in such bylaws.

9. The president of the University of Oklahoma shall be provided with the means of acquiring a thorough knowledge of the various branches of learning connected with scientific, industrial and professional pursuits, in the instruction and training of persons in the theory and art of teaching, and also instruction in the fundamental laws of the United States and of this Territory, in what regards the rights and duties of citizens, and to this end, it shall consist of the following colleges or departments, to-wit:

First. The college or department of arts;
Second. The college or department of letters;
Third. The normal college or department;
Fourth. Such professional or other colleges or departments as may be added thereto or connected therewith,
THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA FACULTY IN 1901

This unusual collection of photographs is in the possession of Dr. Charles N. Gould, and shows the University of Oklahoma faculty in 1901. The top row—John J. Merrill, professor of music; L. M. Upjohn, founder, school of medicine; Mr. Evans, instructor in English; J. W. Sturgis, professor of Latin; second row—C. N. Gould, professor of geology; Mr. Matlock, professor of German; A. H. Van Vleet, professor of biology; third row—J. S. Buchanan, professor of history; David R. Boyd, president of the university; J. F. Paxton, professor of Greek; Fred S. Elder, professor of mathematics; bottom row—L. W. Cole, professor of psychology; Edwin DeBarr, professor of chemistry; and V. L. Parrington, professor of English.
appointed officials, was plainly a part of the Republican program; to await the opening of the Cherokee Strip and other reservations on the west to locate the other institutions was the logical thing to do at that time.

This might have worked out in a manner satisfactory to the first legislature had the political leaders at Guthrie been satisfied with the even political break, resulting from the first election whereby the council or senate would have been organized by the Democrats and the house by the Republicans. Nothing but the "white hog" would satisfy the Republicans and Guthrie partisans. They saw the opportunity to rob the Democrats of the council organization spoils and they wasted no time in doing it. The election returns from "No Man's Land" revealed some irregularities to the secretary of state; minor matters of detail in the conduct of the election as a result of inexperienced clerks, in no way affecting results, but offering an opportunity to frighten "Senator" Grimmer, whose German birth and Beaver county isolation made him an easy mark, resulting in his agreement to help organize the council Republicans, which aroused a feeling of indignation in yours truly that called for reprisal. There happened to be one member of the legislature who had withstood both threats and blandishments to influence him to declare himself for either of the contestants for the capital — his choice secretly was Oklahoma City but fortunately, he had been elected an independent and was thereby in a position to upset the plans of the Republicans to organize both houses.

Independent, indignant and inordinately fond of a political scrap, when he found that Grimmer remained firm in his promise to vote with the Republicans, he sent a telegram to Guthrie if they wished to put a bill through those reckless but bewitching prairies, hunting the votes, in dugouts and one room shacks, of the pioneers of '89 — the result was Senator Brown voted for all the officers of the council, with the exception of the chaplain, a South Methodist preacher by the name of Stevenson — he balked there, not because of the personality of the candidate, but because of his church. The matter was arranged by Grimmer voting for Stevenson, which made the official family unanimously Democratic.

When caucusing for the officers, the institutions were divided up. The member of the council for the "flat-"er" district of Cleveland and Canadian counties, chose the university and was elected president pro tem, it being his duty on account of parliamentary knowledge and experience, to preside almost continuously over the sessions of the council. G. W. Gardenhire of Payne was elected president and chose the A. & M. college; Gardenhire was a Demo-Pop and believed in "gittin' plenty while he was gittin'" — and he got something that might have otherwise gone to El Reno but for his political complexion. Dr. J. W. Howard of Oklahoma county was awarded the normal school for Edmond. There was no need for an insane hospital as what crazy folks there were were harmless and there was a commodious penitentiary in Kansas for the outlaws, so there was nothing else to divide.

The price demanded of Oklahoma City was a Republican vote to organize the council and the sacrificial sheep was J. L. Brown, Republican whose dye permeated the marrow of his bones; and "Oh! my countrymen," what a sacrifice it was. He begged and beseeched his friends not to ask him to drink the cup, but politics was no pink tea affair to men who had ridden cranky bronchos across those reedless but bewitching prairies, hunting the votes, in dugouts and one room shacks, of the pioneers of '89 — the result was Senator Brown voted for all the officers of the council, with the exception of the chaplain, a South Methodist preacher by the name of Stevenson — he balked there, not because of the personality of the candidate, but because of his church. The matter was arranged by Grimmer voting for Stevenson, which made the official family unanimously Democratic.

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The events in Oklahoma, from April 23 up to and including the election campaign and the organization and sixty days session of the legislature should make good reading even now; there were events out of the ordinary and incidents connected with the legislative history of capital bill number 7 in the council, which grew out of the "infamous cabal," not always reported by the Guthrie papers and which probably have not been written about since. One of the most dramatic was when indignant Guthrie citizens, in their excitement, jumped the railing of the council chamber, invading the sanctity of the council; all the animosities of election of Senator Charles Brown of Logan, who had worn out the patience of the presiding officer, with his extraordinary filibustering tactics, hoping by some means to prevent Governor Steele vetoing the bill.

Recalling the closing moments of the council; all the animosities of the session were forgotten and John Foster, Republican of Logan, dean of the council, was chosen to make the motion to adjourn. He pleasantly recalled the association of the members; reviewed the accomplishments of the council, which was not such a bad record after all and finally said: "And now, Mr. President, I move that the first legislative council, do now adjourn sine die." The president then said with great solemnity, after the motion prevailed, "I now declare this council adjourned and I will sign the die" perhaps the first and last expression of its kind in legislative history.

EDITOR'S NOTE—Mort L. Bixel, secretary-manager of the Mobile (Alabama) Fair association, was a member of the territorial council that established the University of Oklahoma: he represented Cleveland County. Last month The Sooner Magazine presented Mr. J. J. Burke's reminiscences of the university's beginning: Mr. Bixel was a leader in the political battle that resulted in founding the university at Norman:

Kappa Tau Pi Goal

"A chapter of Kappa Tau Pi on every university and college campus in our land should be set as your goal," said President Bizzell of the University of Oklahoma, in addressing the opening session of the national convention of Kappa Tau Pi, honorary religious fraternity at its second three-day annual meeting at Norman recently. Doctor Bizzell expressed his approval of such an organization on a campus and showed its place and work on our present day campuses. Kappa Tau Pi now has four chapters, University of Arkansas, Oklahoma City University, A. and M. college at Stillwater, and University of Oklahoma. Following he address of Doctor Bizzell, a program of expansion and strengthening of the national organization was outlined, and work will be started soon in establishing chapters in several of the out-of-state universities.