Planting a University
First Varsity President Recounts How He Did It
By George Milburn, ’30.

GLAMOROUS tales of men who challenged the untamed west hold a perennial charm; but the more prosaic accounts of the men who remained to build after the adventurous thrill-seekers had passed on, have a certain satisfying pleasure that no recital of western daring can quite give.

Such is the story of Dr. David R. Boyd, first president of the University of Oklahoma. It is scarcely one that the editor of a pulp-paper magazine would find acceptable for his readers. In it, however, are all the hardships and dangers and desperate courage of the Old West and all the magnificence and triumphs and rewards of the New. It is a story of epic proportions.

It is as great a story as Knut Hamsun's "Growth of the Soil," and it is a story far more worthy of America than "The Covered Wagon." It is a story of how civilization came to the plains country.

Doctor Boyd, whitened but not worn by his seventy-odd years, tells the story of the beginning now, and his is the singular satisfaction, denied most great builders, of viewing his labors' fruition:

"I cannot give the minute historical details," he tells his interviewers now. "Those items are printed in the books and it is to those books you will have to go if it is history you want. But I can tell a few stories of what happened here in Norman thirty-five years ago and I will tell them when you are ready to listen."

Perhaps, by way of preface, it should be explained that the legislature of the Territory of Oklahoma, had in an act approved December 19, 1890, "located and established the University of Oklahoma" at Norman "when $10,000 and forty acres of land should be given the territory by the city of Norman." These requirements were met by the city, and the first classes of the university met here in the fall of 1892.

At the time the act was approved, Doctor Boyd, a young man with a doctor's degree from the University of Worcester, a small Ohio college, was attracting some not altogether pleasant attention as superintendent of schools at Arkansas City, Kansas. Those were turbulent days. Thousands were massing on the Kansas border in anticipation of the Oklahoma land runs. Doctor Boyd undertook to set the idle Sooners to work around Arkansas City. He proposed to give the emigrants who had swarmed there employment at beautifying the town. The city officials were incredulous. Doctor Boyd ordered shade trees slips by the carload and the prospective Sooners were put to planting and cultivating them. The city officials were incredulous.

Doctor Boyd ordered shade tree slips by the carload and the prospective Sooners were put to planting and cultivating them. The city officials feared vandalism. Doctor Boyd made every school boy a watchman and a vigilante. His success at this bit of administration and his success as an educator caused Oklahoma's territorial legislature to extend the invitation that made him the university's first president.

"You can't grow trees on that hard pan," the inhabitants told me, "We've tried time and again and they always died." Well, what they had done was to dig up some saplings from the creek beds, and stick them down in shallow holes. As soon as the dry season of the year came the trees they had planted died.

"My source of supply, a nursery at Winfield, Kansas, was exhausted, but I heard of a man in Wisconsin who gathered up seeds in the forest and sold them. I wrote to him and got some tree seed. I then planted the five acres in rows back of where the administration building now stands. The next year the seedlings came up and I began to distribute them.

"Meanwhile the first university building, later destroyed by fire, was built. I remember, we had a Seventh Day Adventist make the excavations for it with an ox team. He worked hard on Sunday bellowing at his team of oxen, but he didn't do much on week days.

"The trees I planted grew, because they were properly cultivated. The top soil was first tilled—oxen were used for all that work in those days, hors-
es were for riding purposes—and then the holes were dug. All one summer I watered the trees I had put out to keep the drought from killing them.

"All the trees you see now along the University boulevard were from that first group of seedlings. We planted a row down the center for a parkway, but later those were cut down. I had this kind of an agreement with every person who got trees from me—if the trees died they were to be paid for; if they lived they were free. Not many trees died."

School work began that fall of 1892. At the beginning the new university offered the equivalent of a high school course and college work up to the sophomore year.

The seven counties centering around Norman contributed to the new school. All the rest of Oklahoma territory consisted of Indian reservations.

Here was very little of the collegiate manner about the new school. Boys wore high riding boots and denim trousers to classes. Girls were dressed in gingham and wore their hair in plaits.

Education was not the accepted thing it is today. It was necessary to do strenuous missionary work in its behalf. Doctor Boyd made long tours, describing to the new settlers the university and its advantages. He tells about it thus:

"Everyone was poor. They lived in dugouts on the barren prairies, establishing through residence titles to their land grants. But when I say they were poor, I do not mean that there were not a great many cultured people among the Sooners. They were not by any means ordinary drifters. I have seen grand pianos and copies of 'Harper's' in adobe huts."

Most of the men were working students. Only the sons and daughters of wealthy cattle men could afford to devote their time exclusively to their studies. It was not an unusual thing for a man to work part time at punching cattle.

The general poverty excluded many of the problems that confront the university president of today.

"'Necking?' Bicycles? Buggy rides?" asked Doctor Boyd, hoisting his eyebrows slightly in reply to those questions. "Why, yes, I suppose there was some 'necking' going on in my school, but not any more than is naturally good for the boys and girls."

"There were a few bicycles on the campus, but not many. In the first place, they were too expensive. A good bicycle cost $150 in those days, the equivalent of what an expensive motor would cost today. I remember a Sunday afternoon gathering at which a photograph of two girls with their bicycles was passed around. Yes, those were the days when we sat around in the parlor on Sunday and looked at the photograph album. One of the boys to whom the picture had been passed, took it, glanced at it, and remarked, 'Well, I like the expression on the bicycles, and passed it on.'"

That passed for very good collegiate wit thirty-five years ago. Years have not brought a great deal of improvement.

**THE FIRST FACULTY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA**

Here is the faculty of the University of Oklahoma at the beginning of the twentieth century; reading from left to right: William North Rice, languages; Dr. David R. Boyd, president and mathematics; F. S. E. Amos, history; Dr. Edwin DeBarr, science. Dr. Charles N. Gould, director of the Oklahoma Geological Survey, studied Latin under Professor Rice.
There were no fraternities or dormitories on the University of Oklahoma campus at that time, of course. Students lived at so-called "boarding clubs," co-operative enterprises which employed a cook, housekeeper, a student commissary and rented a house. Studying was done by candles and kerosene lights. The fortitude with which early students bore study hall evenings is almost incomprehensible to a modern student.

There was one problem with which Doctor Boyd had to cope which does not cause the modern university president any loss of sleep. That was the matter of the open saloons.

ONE DAY a wealthy cattleman came in my office with his son. Both had had a drink or two. I could smell the whisky on their breaths. The father talked in the soft drawl of the Western plainsman.

"Ah aim for this heah son o' mine to get an education," he said after he had introduced himself.

"'Good,' I said, 'but I'd like to speak to you privately for a few moments, Mr. X.' We went out into the hall, and I said to him, 'You and your son had a drink together before you came up, didn't you?' 'Why, yes,' he admitted quickly, 'No hahm in that is theah?' 'Well, I don't care to decide on that,' I replied, 'but I must have an understanding with your son, that, since he is a minor, he will not be allowed to frequent saloons.' 'Oh, no subh, no subh, he won't do that. He wouldn't go to take a drink with none but his pa.' 'Well, I want you to tell me that.'

"I never had any trouble with that boy. He finished two years of college at the university, went to Kansas and finished in law and later got to be a probate judge."

"But the saloon dilemma was most completely solved through the cooperation of a saloon keeper! Doctor Boyd is free in admitting as much.

"He was an Irishman, and a gentleman in spite of his calling. I went to him and told him that some of my students who were minors had been getting too much. 'Now here is a list of all the students who are not minors'—there were not more than fifteen or twenty—'You can sell to them. They are old enough to know what they're doing. But I wish you would not sell to the minors, and I wish you would get all the other saloonkeepers to agree not to sell to minor students.' He agreed to do as I asked and no official of the law was ever more vigilant in seeing that the law was enforced."

During this time Doctor Boyd was having some trouble with his trees. The saplings had reached a good height, but they were being assailed by armies of tree-boring insects. This attack was all the more disastrous because there were no birds in Oklahoma with which an offensive drive could be made. It was possible to import predatory birds, but there were no trees growing at that time in which they could nest. Doctor Boyd found a solution to this problem by having driftwood logs hauled up from the river. These he set up on the campus, providing nesting places for woodpeckers.

"Some of the townspeople thought I was crazy, 'Look at the Old Man,' they said, ' sticking up those rotten logs out there around the college. Arent't those the actions of a madman?'"

UT THE logs were set up, the woodpeckers found nesting places, and the insect hordes were defeated. Then another perplexing situation came up. The telephone and telegraph companies had begun to set up poles and the birds began to make their breakfasts on them. A bounty of fifty cents was offered for each woodpecker. Then it was that Doctor Boyd caused the first bird protection ordinance to be passed in Norman and probably the first in Oklahoma territory.

It is slightly ironical that Doctor Boyd, one of Oklahoma's first educators and the one who built the University of Oklahoma's foundations, should be remembered as an horticulturist. But it is true. Fire has long since destroyed every vestige of the university to which he administered. The fact that he was the school's first president may soon be relegated to the text books and musty histories of the state. But spreading trees, the university city's greatest claim to beauty, for years to come, will serve as reminders that here once lived and worked a great builder and one who made one part of the world a better place in which to live.

Homecoming Program
November 9th, 1928

Noon. Informal luncheon, Y. M. C. A., Oklahoma City.

8 p. m. Pep meeting, followed by dance (place to be designated).

November 10th, 1928

Register at Oklahoma Union building. This will enable you to find your friends through the registration record. Have your mail forwarded to the secretary, University of Oklahoma Association.

Write your friends here, care the association.

10:30 a. m. Homecoming parade, Norman.

Noon. Association executive board luncheon, Oklahoma Union building.

2:30. Nebraska versus Oklahoma, Owen field.

5 to 7 p. m. Tea for alumni, former students, and wives, Oklahoma Union building.