

The Return of the Sooner Magazine

By CAROL J. BURR



1928-1930



1930-1935

Sooner Magazine has had a long, often distinguished, sometimes checkered career as a major source of information on the University of Oklahoma. From 1928 until its demise in the early '70s, the magazine was the main link between the University and its alumni. With this issue, *Sooner Magazine* surfaces once again, now under the sponsorship of the University of Oklahoma Foundation, Inc., not just for alumni but for all Oklahomans who care about their University.

The bound library volumes of the old *Sooner Magazine* are a history of OU, but each volume also reflects the editorial philosophy, talents and interests of the 17 editors and five alumni executive secretaries/directors who produced the magazine for nearly 50 years.

President William B. Bizzell hired Joseph A. Brandt (later OU's sixth president) to establish the University Press, but he also contributed Brandt's services to alumni secretary Frank Cleckler to edit the first *Sooner Magazine*. Brandt's focus was on the institution itself; his editorial formula was a "maximum of news . . . minimum of propaganda—no pretensions to be literary or controversial."

When a new alumni president in 1933 insisted on converting the magazine to an alumni association house organ, Brandt ended his volunteer editorship and was succeeded by the first paid editor, part-time, Ernie Hill.

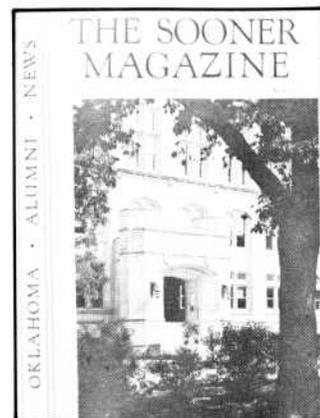
Roscoe Cate, city editor of *The Norman Transcript*, moonlighted the job before

becoming *The Sooner Magazine's* first "full-time" editor in 1936 — but he also worked in OU press relations. Ted Beard was named alumni secretary.

Cate's magazine was a newsman's magazine, packed with items about alumni, students, faculty, campus events, one-page features; nothing very long nor very deep. He redesigned the magazine, bought a camera and sought more and better pictures. However, World War II's manpower and paper shortage gave Cate temporary responsibility for the alumni association and the student union and reduced *The Sooner Magazine* to a tiny-type chronicle of wartime news about alumni in the military.

In 1944 OU's new president, G. L. Cross, tapped Cate as his financial assistant, later vice president. Edith Walker and Elaine Larecy filled the editorship until Beard returned from war. Beard hired a succession of part-time editors, mostly students: Catherine Robinson, George Souris, Jess Heck, Larry Stephenson, David A. Burr. Beard built the magazine around his own column, "Riding the Sooner Range," an extraordinary, breezy, slang-packed travelog that defied the editorial blue pencil.

When Beard died in 1950, the new alumni secretary, R. Boyd Gunning, gave Burr a full-time job and a free hand in redesigning and modernizing the magazine. The photo essay became a *Sooner Magazine* staple; commentary was encouraged, and once again the focus was on



1935-1937



1937-1938



1938-1942

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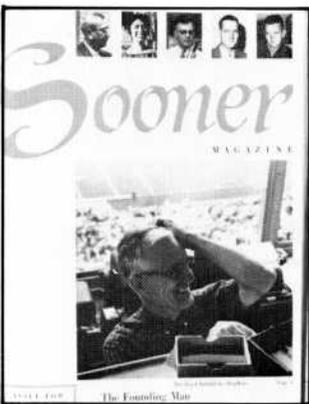
1942-1949



1949-1953



1953-1954



1954-1964

Return of Sooner Magazine

Continued from Page 2

the institution without neglecting the alumni.

Four times a year, from 1951 to 1956, the magazine carried a supplement, "The Oklahoma Quarterly," edited by Professor L. N. "Fess" Morgan, comprised of informative, often scholarly articles by faculty and alumni to "make the broth a little stronger," Gunning explained in an introduction.

Sooner Magazine was named the best alumni magazine in the United States and Canada for 1954-55 by the American Alumni Council, the first winner west of the Mississippi.

In 1957 another editor was lost to the president's office when Burr became Cross' assistant, then director of public information and later vice president under presidents Hollomon, Sharp and Banowsky. The new editor was Bill Fryday, succeeded in 1958 by Dick Smith, and in 1959 by Carol J. Robinson, who became Mrs. David Burr in 1962 and left the magazine in 1963.

Editor Paul V. Galloway, Jr., was never one to dodge controversy, and he had plenty to choose from during the five years that took higher education into its most chaotic era. While Burr had returned the magazine to Brandt's original publishing philosophy, Galloway took it several steps farther, relegating the class notes up to agate type and concentrating on campus happenings.

Some alumni praised Galloway for honest reporting of turbulent times; others were offended. Galloway left in 1969 for the *Chicago Sun-Times*, his most lasting contribution the 1965 75th anniversary history issue, produced with writer Charles Long. Gunning also gave up his alumni responsibilities in 1969 to devote full-time to the University Foundation.

Connie Burke Ruggles fol-

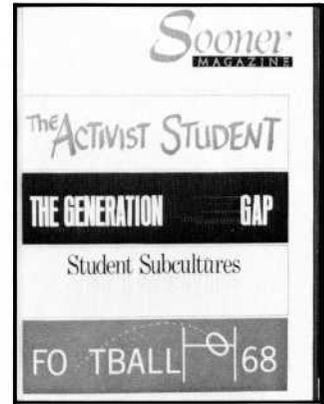
lowed Galloway as editor. Originally a monthly, the magazine had dropped to 10 times a year in the '50s and now was six times yearly, alternating with a tabloid newspaper called *Sooner News-Makers*, renamed *Alumni News*, which had been carrying stories about individual alumni since 1959. Burr had dropped "The" from the magazine's logo, now Ruggles dropped "Magazine" as well. *Sooner* gradually shrank in size and began to concentrate on alumni association news, especially after Gunning's successor, Ronald T. McDaniel, killed the tabloid. Ruggles resigned in 1971.

Once again known as *Sooner Magazine*, the publication was produced as a quarterly in 1971-72 by editor Emily Baker, who introduced the four-color merchandizing section hawking OU souvenirs.

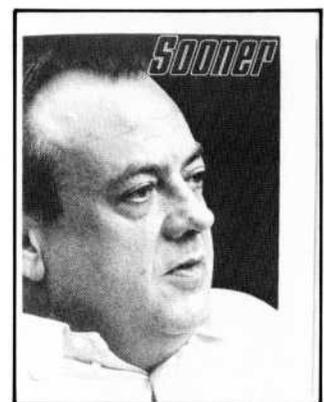
Editor Judi Freyer put out four issues of *The Sooner*, but the magazine was about to become a major casualty of the alumni association's financial troubles. A new alumni director, Jack Ledbetter, abandoned the magazine format in favor of a new tabloid, also called *The Sooner*, printing token magazines in 1974 and 1978.

The University's independently incorporated alumni association closed up shop in June 1980, turning its assets, including the copyright to the name *Sooner Magazine*, to the University of Oklahoma. Alumni affairs became the business of a new administrative department of the University, while the right to the magazine title was given to the University of Oklahoma Foundation for its new quarterly.

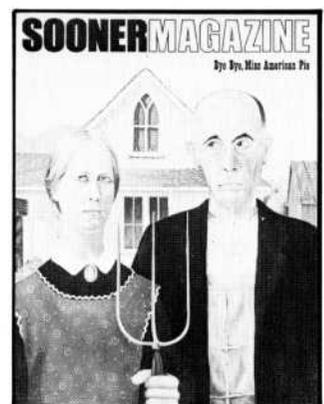
Do old magazines ever die? Some do, but some just change their names and their covers and drive cataloging librarians wild.



1964-1969



1969-1971



1971-1972



1972-1973