

The Seeds Of Excellence

The Story of the
University of Oklahoma Foundation

By GEORGE L. CROSS

Since his retirement in 1968, George L. Cross has devoted much of his time to preserving the story he is so uniquely equipped to tell: his 25 years as president of the University of Oklahoma. His seven books are not a formal history of the institution; they are topical rather than sequential, each focused on a single theme — integration, intercollegiate athletics, academic freedom, college administration, the wartime campus, research, and now private giving. Although making extensive use of resource materials in the interest of accuracy, Cross emphasizes the personal approach.

In *The Seeds of Excellence: The Story of the University of Oklahoma Foundation*, Cross deals with private philanthropy from territorial days when hard-pressed settlers scraped together money for the first University building to the modern Energy Center and music building rising on the campus today. The purposes for these gifts have been as diverse as the donors themselves, and as usual the author looks for the human interest element in recounting this special area of the University's pursuit of excellence in education.

Coming issues of *Sooner Magazine* will excerpt several of Cross's tales of famous Oklahomans and their service to OU, beginning with the Neustadts of Ardmore.



Westheimer Flying Field

The Seeds of Excellence: The Story of the University of Oklahoma Foundation was already at the publisher when another chapter in the history of private giving to the institution drew to a close with the retirement of Walter Neustadt Jr. after ten years as chairman of the foundation's board of trustees. To those alumni and friends who keep pace with the progress of the University, the Neustadt name is practically synonymous with private support to OU, in terms of both personal service and financial backing.

The \$25,000 biennial Neustadt International Prize for Literature, sometimes called the "American Nobel," is supported by a \$200,000 1971 endowment from the family of Mrs. Walter Neustadt Sr. The Doris W. Neustadt Wing of Bizzell Memorial Library resulted from a \$2 million gift from the Neustadt children, Walter Jr., Allan, Jean and Joan, to honor their mother.

The late Walter Neustadt Sr., although not an alumnus, worked tirelessly for the success of the foundation as a trustee during its early years. Walter Jr. served in various volunteer leadership capacities even before his term on the OU Board of Regents, 1969-76, during some of higher education's most difficult days. When Walter Jr. received the University's most prestigious award, the Distinguished Service Citation, he and Walter Sr. became the only father and son to be so honored.

However, as the following chapter from George Cross's book so ably illustrates, the origin of this family affair with the University of Oklahoma predates even these two generations, all the way back to a young German immigrant whose train trip west was cut short when he ran out of money in the Indian Territory.

One result of the increased interest in aviation inspired by World War II was a decision by the Civil Aeronautics Authority to subsidize flight-training programs in certain educational institutions.

An institution interested in participating in the program must apply to the CAA for approval. To receive approval, an acceptable ground-school program with courses in meteorology and navigation, to be followed by flight instruction, was required. Under the plan the government would pay an institution twenty dollars for each student who successfully completed both the ground-school course and the flight-training program.

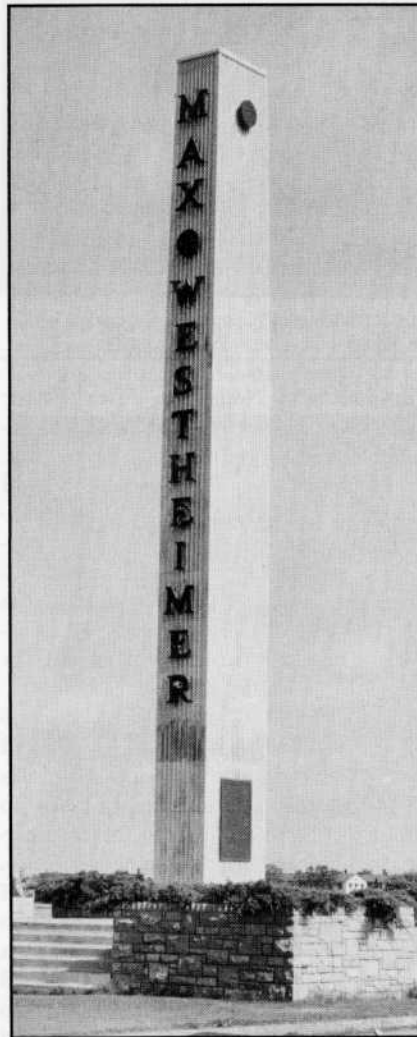
The University of Oklahoma applied for and received approval to participate in the program in late 1939. President Bizzell reported to the regents on October 2 that fifty students would enroll in the program and that C. N. Paxton, of the Department of Mechanical Engineering, would be in charge.

At the outset it did not appear to be a particularly profitable venture for the university. Land had to be rented for a flying field — a strip southwest of Norman near the west end of Main Street — and it was necessary to employ an instructor to take over some of Paxton's other teaching duties. But the new program led to some positive developments in the field of aeronautics at OU.

The first flight instruction program at the university was a success and led to a renewal of the contract with the CAA in October, 1940, with an allocation of forty students. An important side effect of the program was the stimulation of local interest in the possibility of developing an air field to serve the university and the city of Norman. The Norman Chamber of Commerce organized an aviation committee, chaired by T. Egbert Clement, Jr., to help promote the idea.

The first requirement for a project of this kind obviously was a tract of land for the purpose. The university had been renting land on a yearly basis, and, of course, permanent structures could not be erected on rented property. The possibility of obtaining a donation of land, or of raising funds from private sources to buy land, was

discussed by the chamber committee and with university officials, especially President Bizzell; Morris L. Wardell, assistant to the president; C. N. Paxton, professor of engineering; and Walter Kraft, superintendent of buildings and grounds. However, the best efforts to secure local financing — efforts in which Clement, of the chamber committee, figured prominently — met with failure.



The entire North Campus is the outgrowth of a gift of land for a flying field from the Max Westheimer estate.

The manner in which the university finally obtained land for its flying field — and many other benefits — is closely tied to the story of a Texas-bound German immigrant who ran out of money in Ardmore, Oklahoma.¹

¹Information supplied by Walter Neustadt, Jr., in 1982.

Max Westheimer, born in 1867, came to the United States in 1883 at the age of sixteen. He spent his first four years in the New World working in the cigar industry in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. In 1887, no doubt seeking greater opportunities, he decided to head for the Southwest and the booming town of Fort Worth, Texas. His funds were limited, and he was able to pay his train fare only as far as Ardmore, a stop in the Chickasha Nation, in Indian Territory.

Leaving the train, he found a job and made friends. Two years later, in 1889, he opened a general-merchandise store in Ardmore in partnership first with Frank Wymore and later with Sam Daube.

In 1897 he married Theresa Kalish. They had two daughters, Doris and Juline.

The well-managed Westheimer and Daube enterprise profited through the years, and the partners acquired extensive holdings of land. With discoveries of oil in Carter County in 1913 and 1914, Westheimer and Daube, under Westheimer's leadership, began acquiring and developing oil properties and soon became one of the most successful independent oil companies in Oklahoma.

When Doris Westheimer reached college age, her father sent her to Columbia University, in New York. While she was in school there, her father made annual trips to the New York market to do the buying for his store. On one of these buying trips Doris took leave of her classes at Columbia to accompany her father to the New York market. By chance the two of them met Walter Neustadt that day. Walter and Doris got along well, and after Max returned to Ardmore, they developed further the chance acquaintanceship. They were married in 1917 and established residence in Ardmore, where Walter first engaged in leasing and royalty activities and eventually became an independent oil producer.

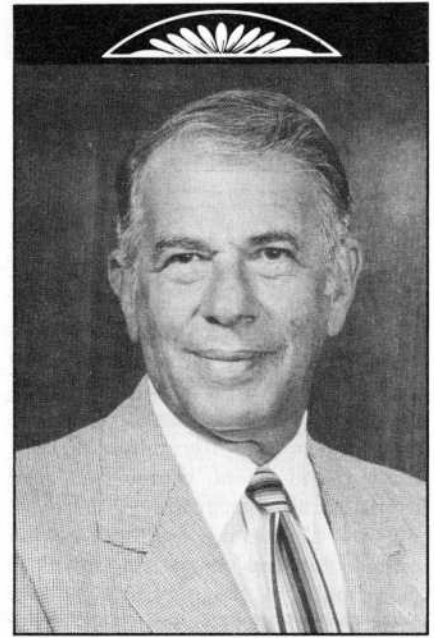
A very warm, close relationship developed between Walter and his father-in-law. When Max died in 1938, Walter became executor of his estate. William Potter, an Ardmore attorney, represented the estate. Potter was an alumnus of the University of Oklahoma and a member of Beta Theta



Max Westheimer



Walter Neustadt, Sr.



Walter Neustadt, Jr.

Pi fraternity — a membership which later took on significance in the affairs of the university.

In the meantime, T. Egbert Clement, Jr., was associated with his father in the Clement Mortgage Company, of Norman.² The company held mortgages on land in various parts of Oklahoma, especially the south and the southeast. During the Depression years of the 1930s there were many mortgage foreclosures throughout the state, and considerable legal work was necessary to get titles cleared and transferred. Egbert Clement's job involved a great deal of traveling about the state on such matters.

Clement was also a member of Beta Theta Pi and well acquainted with Potter. It was natural that he would select Potter to help with his foreclosure problems in the southern part of the state.

Clement Mortgage Company held a mortgage on a piece of property in the southern part of the state. In the abstract of title to the property the names Westheimer and Neustadt appeared. In 1939 a problem arose in clearing the title, and on a trip to Ardmore to see Potter, Clement asked his friend what he knew about West-

²Information supplied by T. Egbert Clement in 1982.

heimer and Neustadt. After Potter supplied the information, the pair apparently engaged in some small talk, and Potter asked Clement what he had been doing recently other than looking after his mortgage business. Clement replied that he had been spending practically all of his spare time trying with little success to find someone to donate land or money to buy land for an air field at the university.

Potter told Clement that he represented the Westheimer estate and that Westheimer's will authorized the executor to use an amount up to \$50,000 from the estate for the purpose of public charity and benevolence. Perhaps Walter Neustadt, executor of the estate, and Westheimer's two daughters might be willing to use a portion of this amount to buy the land for the air field. Potter offered to help arrange a meeting with Neustadt and representatives from the university to discuss the possibility. Potter told Clement that Neustadt might be willing to contribute to an air field for the university, because by then any air field held potential military significance.

Armed with this information, Clement returned to Norman and reported to President Bizzell. Early in 1940, Neustadt agreed to meet with representatives from the university.

He invited President Bizzell and others of the president's choosing to have lunch at his home in Ardmore and discuss the matter. In response to this invitation Clement drove President Bizzell and Wardell to Ardmore.

The tract of land the university hoped to acquire had already been selected — a quarter section north of Norman. After lunch Neustadt agreed to furnish the money to buy the land. He presented President Bizzell a check in the amount of \$10,500, dated August 26, 1940. On the back of the check he had his secretary type the conditions of the gift:

Donated to the University of Oklahoma, by the estate of Max Westheimer, for the purchase of the Northwest 1/4 of Section 24, TWP 9N, RGE 3W, Cleveland County, Oklahoma. Given to said institution and to be used exclusively for an airport and training school, for the training of students and citizens in all lines of aeronautics, including pilots, mechanics, etc.: Said airport to be known and designated as the Max Westheimer Flying Field of the University of Oklahoma.

President Bizzell reported the gift to the regents at a meeting on October 7, 1940. In a resolution of acceptance, the board acknowledged the intent of the donor, expressed appreciation for the generosity of the Neustadt family, and directed that copies of the resolu-

tion be sent to "Mr. Walter Neustadt, son-in-law of Mr. Westheimer, and to Mrs. Walter Neustadt and Miss Juline Westheimer,³ daughters of Max Westheimer."⁴

Bizzell then asked the regents for authorization to apply for a WPA grant to develop the flying field, including construction of a hangar and runways. The regents approved the request and authorized him to sign such documents as might be required for WPA assistance.

In the meantime, Neustadt's enthusiasm for the project he had helped initiate increased markedly. Later in the summer of 1940 he delivered to the 160 acres between 500 and 600 cubic yards of stone to be used in the construction of an administration building and hangar, and he assembled in Ardmore steel windows, doors, and other structural-steel items for later delivery. The total value of these materials was about \$5,000. An additional gift of cash arrived on November 18 — a check for \$10,000 to be used in the construction of the buildings.

Bizzell moved promptly with an application to the WPA for a supporting grant, and the government approved \$196,000 for the development of the flying field.

In the meantime, however, it had become apparent that the quarter section purchased with the Westheimer money was not large enough for the operation. Two more tracts of land adjacent to the university's section were for sale, but the university lacked the funds to buy them. One of the tracts, of approximately thirty acres, adjoined the university's section on its northeast corner; the other tract, totaling one hundred acres, was directly south of the original purchase.

Members of the Norman Chamber of Commerce, especially Clement and T. Jack Foster, persuaded the city of Norman to become a partner of the university in the development of the airport. In 1941 the Norman City Commission authorized a city election to vote on the issuance of \$20,000 in bonds, the proceeds to be used to buy the two tracts and help develop the



The third generation of the Westheimer/Neustadt family of Ardmore honored their mother, Doris Westheimer Neustadt, with a gift of \$2 million to the \$13.1 million library wing which was named for her in May 1982 ceremonies.



In 1972 Doris Neustadt presented the silver eagle feather, symbolic of the Neustadt International Prize for Literature, to French poet Francis Ponge. The \$25,000 prize is endowed by a \$200,000 gift from the Neustadt family.


³Mrs. Alexander Wells.

⁴Minutes of the Board of Regents, October 7, 1940, p. 949.

field. The bond issue was approved, the land was purchased, and after all the expenses of the transaction were paid, approximately \$9,000 remained for improvements. Upon approval by the Norman City Commission an agreement was signed on October 9, 1941, by which the two tracts of city land were leased to the university for ninety-nine years.

Egbert Clement was named "Man of the Year" by the Norman Chamber of Commerce for his efforts in obtaining the Westheimer gift and promoting the city's participation in developing the air field.

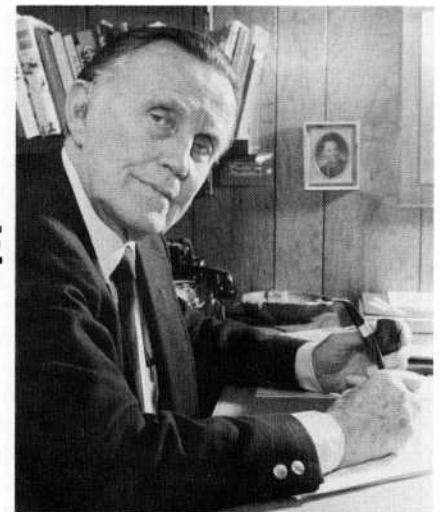
In 1940, Westheimer Field was approved by the War Department as a Class 3 airport and as an auxiliary flying field for Tinker Field, southeast of Oklahoma City. The field was lighted for night operations, and a thirty-six-inch beacon was installed.

The Norman City Commission's resolution approving the ninety-nine-year lease was interestingly prophetic. World War II was raging in Europe, and though the United States had not yet entered the war, the commission's resolution provided for possible use of the airport by the "United States of America." Two months after the resolution was signed by Mayor Sylvester Grim, and attested by Maurice Crownover, city clerk, and before facilities under construction by the university could be completed, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. The United States Navy leased the field from the university in 1942, added several hundred acres, built several million dollars' worth of physical facilities, trained pilots there for the duration of the war, and returned the entire facility to the university when the war ended. Thus the Neustadt family's original gift of \$10,500, with additional contributions totaling \$15,000, ultimately brought to the university assets totaling \$7,096,465. And this was only the beginning: the family Max Westheimer established in Oklahoma has continued to be of immeasurable benefit to the university through the third generation — through gifts of money and service by Walter Neustadt, Jr., as a member of the Board of Regents and a director of the University of Oklahoma Foundation. 

A New Book by
George Lynn Cross

THE SEEDS OF EXCELLENCE

*The Story of
the University of Oklahoma
Foundation*



Created to facilitate private giving to Oklahoma's flagship institution of higher education, the University of Oklahoma Foundation was born in December 1944, during the first of George Lynn Cross's 25 years as the university's president. The foundation's first home was the bottom drawer of the president's desk; its total assets, \$160.

Forty years later, with foundation assets topping \$60 million, its operations housed in its own building, and a separate division of the university engaged in private fund raising, President Emeritus Cross has chosen private giving as the theme of his sixth book on the development of the institution.

The Seeds of Excellence goes all the way back to those pioneer Oklahomans who were willing to dig deep into their meager resources to build a university on the barren prairie. Cross pays tribute to the generosity of spirit and vision for the future which caused Sooners past and present to furnish the university with a margin for quality which state funds could not supply.

Many of the names in this book — individuals, families, companies, charitable foundations — are familiar to most Oklahomans; others will be remembered primarily for the gifts they made, while some preferred anonymity. Cross has researched all the stories, the successes and the failures, and punctuated them with the personal anecdotes that set his Sooner chronicles apart.

Now at the publisher, this book is available in hard cover through the University of Oklahoma Foundation at \$19.95 postpaid.

Order Form

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