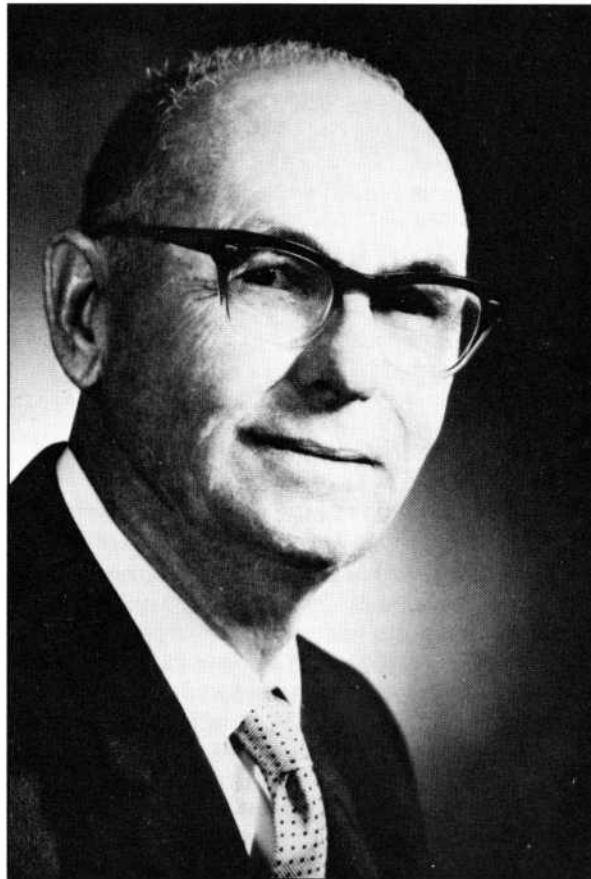


# The Seeds Of Excellence

The Story of the University of Oklahoma Foundation

By GEORGE L. CROSS



**WARD SPRAGUE MERRICK**  
*A BIOGRAPHY*



**EDITOR'S NOTE:** When OU President George L. Cross first met Ardmore oilman Ward S. Merrick on a fishing trip in June 1946, the University of Oklahoma Foundation was little more than a good idea. Its assets totaled \$28,000 and its chairman — Cross — was having serious misgivings about his own ability as a fund raiser. Merrick was his first major convert to the cause.

After visiting with Cross, Merrick made a significant financial contribution to the fledgling foundation and persuaded his stepmother, Mrs. Frank Merrick, to join him. But even more importantly, he became one of the first elected trustees, beginning a quarter century of service that would include five years as vice chairman and eight as chairman.

Merrick's leadership was a vital ingredient in the successful completion of every major funding activity of the OU Foundation from 1947 until his retirement in 1972. As Cross records in *The Seeds of Excellence*, he continued throughout his life to contribute generously from his personal resources and from the Merrick Foundation, support which his family has maintained.

Ward S. Merrick Jr., who had followed his father into the family oil business, became the second Merrick elected to the Foundation board, serving from 1972 until ill health forced his resignation in 1978. He was named an honorary trustee for life. His place on the board was filled by his sister, Elizabeth Merrick Coe, president of the Merrick Foundation, who also is a member of the Foundation's investment committee.



Ward Sprague Merrick was born to Frank Willard and Grace (Gorsline) Merrick on June 27, 1895, in Randolph, New York. His father was in the oil business, as was his paternal grandfather, John Alonzo Merrick, one of the early producers in the Titusville, Pennsylvania, Field.

In 1900, Ward moved with his parents to Chicago, where he attended public schools and graduated from the Oak Park High School in 1915. Immediately after graduation he was incapacitated for nearly a year with typhoid fever. When the United States entered World War I, Ward enlisted in the U.S. Army. Soon after his enlistment he was transferred to the Air Service and trained as a pursuit pilot at Rantoul, Illinois. Later, when he arrived in France, he found that he would need to learn to fly all over again to pilot the French plane assigned to him. The war ended a week before he would have qualified for combat duty. He was discharged in February, 1919, with the rank of second lieutenant in the Air Service.

In the meantime, in 1918 his father and stepmother, Elizabeth Merrick (his mother had died in 1906, and his father had remarried) had moved to Ardmore, Oklahoma, where his father and a friend were developing an oil business. Immediately after his discharge Ward joined his family in Ardmore. On March 1, 1919, he went to work for his father as a roustabout and general oil-field worker. When in later life he was asked by a reporter for the Oklahoma Independent Petroleum Association what work he performed for his father, he said, "I did just about everything but milk the family cow and that's only because we didn't have one." He went on to explain that, while he did whatever needed to be done, his principal responsibility was to load casinghead gasoline into tank cars from his father's gasoline plant. While loading casinghead gasoline was not the safest occupation one might hope to have, the variety of duties Ward performed in addition to that responsibility gave him an excellent opportunity to become familiar with the oil business.

Despite his multiple duties Ward found time for romance. On some so-

cial occasion he met Jinks Ikard, the popular and attractive daughter of Milton and Nellie (Waites) Ikard, of Ardmore. Shortly thereafter, Ward decided that she was the girl for him. Despite intense local competition in an oil-field area where attractive young women were a definite minority, Ward won out: he and Jinks were married on October 26, 1922. Ward was never one to be outmaneuvered by competitors.

After returning from their honeymoon trip late in 1922, Ward and Jinks made their first home in the oil-field community of Graham, where, as one writer put it, their cottage was never free, day or night, from the throb of pumping units and drilling rigs. Ward was promoted from roustabout to field superintendent and given increased responsibilities and an office in the Simpson Building, in Ardmore.

As time went on, Ward's father decided that his son should be thinking of going into business for himself. In a recorded interview with William A. ("Mac") McGalliard, a free-lance writer of Ardmore, Ward explained what happened:

My father said to me one day, "Ward, you're spending an awful lot of my money. Just spend some of your own," and from that time on I took an individual interest in every play that we had of from 5 to 10 per cent. It was a kind of gradual deal, but it grew so much faster than my income that I soon owed more money than I could possibly imagine that a bank had. . . . And that followed through all the time until Mr. Merrick sold out the Merrick's Inc. After that, I had some leases of my own and drilled quite a few wells.

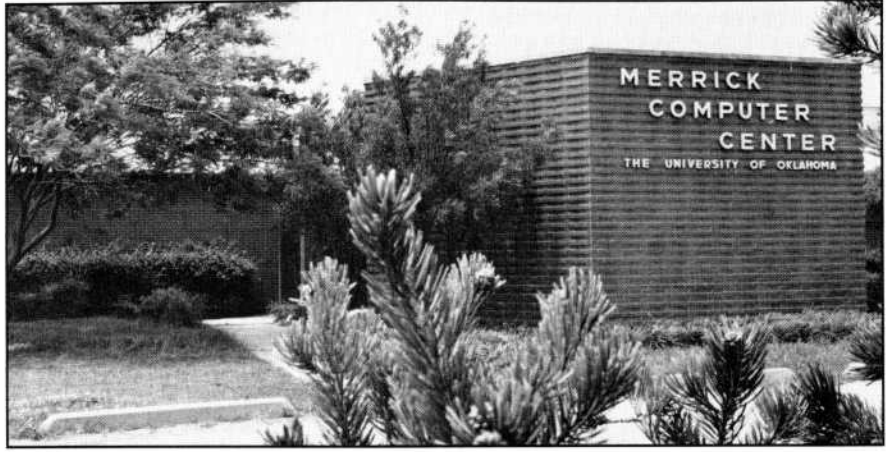
Ward handled the properties he had acquired extremely well, and he was soon on his way to becoming one of the most successful and influential participants in the oil business in southern Oklahoma.

Ward and Jinks had two children, Elizabeth Ikard Merrick and Ward Sprague Merrick, Jr. In later years Elizabeth married Charles Coe, and the couple established a home in Oklahoma City. Ward, Jr., and his family made their home in Ardmore, where he went into the oil business — the fourth consecutive member of the immediate Merrick clan to do so.

Frank Willard Merrick died in 1945,



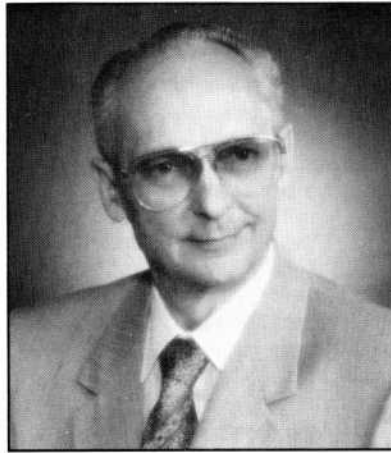
*Frank W. Merrick*



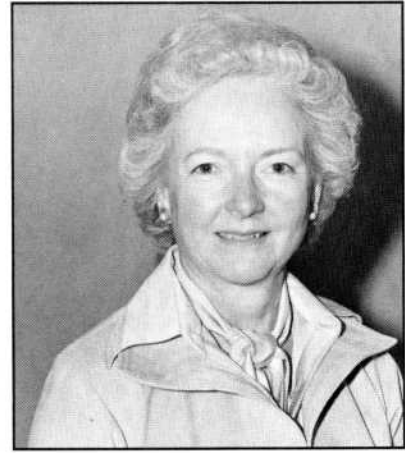
*The University of Oklahoma's Merrick Computer Center*



*Ward S. Merrick: Oilman of the Year*



*Ward Sprague Merrick Jr.*



*Elizabeth Merrick Coe*

and shortly thereafter his wife, Elizabeth, discussed with Ward her desire to establish a charitable foundation in honor of the husband and father. After two or three years of discussion the Merrick Foundation was established on February 17, 1948. With modest initial resources, the foundation was greatly strengthened by the estate of Elizabeth Merrick, who died in 1958. The foundation, through Ward's careful management and wise use of its proceeds, brought great good not only to the Ardmore community and the University of Oklahoma but to many other parts of the state as well.

Merrick's way of promoting a project was to make a gift from the Merrick Foundation, add a personal contribution, and then give generously of his time in persuading others to give as well. A conspicuous example of his ef-

forts was the Southern Oklahoma Memorial Hospital, in Ardmore. After a planning session in 1950, Ward arranged for a \$1.5 million contribution from the Merrick Foundation, added a personal contribution, and then worked with others to secure gifts from 1,600 persons. After the hospital opened its doors in 1955, Ward served as chairman of the hospital's board of trustees for ten more years — giving a total of fifteen years of service. He used the same strategy in developing other local activities. He organized and funded in part Community Activities, Inc., a community foundation which constructed swimming pools in Ardmore, established the Oklahoma Vocational-Technical Center, organized a YMCA and expanded the YWCA, built little-league ball parks, and established a community ambulance system.


At the University of Oklahoma, after an initial gift of \$10,000 to help start the University of Oklahoma Foundation, Merrick contributed an additional \$10,000 to help publicize it and then gave of his time to a committee to help see that his publicity contribution was expended effectively. He contributed generously to the building of the university's OSAGE computer, worked tirelessly to persuade others to contribute, and then gave a final gift of \$220,000 to build a building to house the computer. In like manner he initiated and promoted the financing of the Oil Information Center at the University of Oklahoma, and he contributed \$750,000 to fully endow a professorship in western American history.

Ward took part in a great many other philanthropic ventures, too many to be described in this account.

But the major recipients of his benefactions were unmistakably hospitals and educational institutions.

Ward's many civic activities, local, state, and national, ranging from the chairmanship of the Ardmore Planning Board to activities with the Mid-continent Oil and Gas Association, are also too numerous to treat adequately in this account. The sixteen major activities listed in a biographical account which I have in my files fall far short of describing his full civic contribution.

In grateful recognition of a life so well spent, Ward received an endless string of honors, in fact practically every honor that can come to an oilman and philanthropist. Perhaps he treasured most his election to the Oklahoma Hall of Fame, the highest honor the state can give; the University of Oklahoma's Distinguished Service Citation, the greatest honor the university can give; and the Outstanding Oil Man of the Year Award in 1968 from Oklahoma Petroleum Council.

There was nothing about Ward's appearance or life-style to indicate that he was different from most other men — that he commanded great wealth or that his leadership as chairman of the University of Oklahoma Foundation had been a significant factor in bringing gifts totaling approximately \$20 million to the university. He was always modest, unassuming, and personable, with a ready, endearing smile — equally at home with United States senators, governors, and oil-field workers. For recreation he seemed to enjoy most using his excellent collection of tools, repairing and maintaining items about his home. In the words of his good friend Boyd Gunning, his philosophy appeared to be summarized in the words of Emerson: "The reward of a thing well done is to have done it." If this is true, he must have felt enormously rewarded, even in his final years, when, after the death of his beloved Jinks in 1972, he experienced failing health, a broken hip, surgery, and a paralytic stroke which curtailed his activities. He rejoined Jinks through death on December 22, 1978, and was placed beside her the next day in Hillcrest Memorial Park, in Ardmore. 

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.

This book is available in hard cover through the University of Oklahoma Foundation at \$19.95 postpaid.

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