

SOONER MEMORIES



Scenes from a Scrapbook

By FRANK L. DENNIS

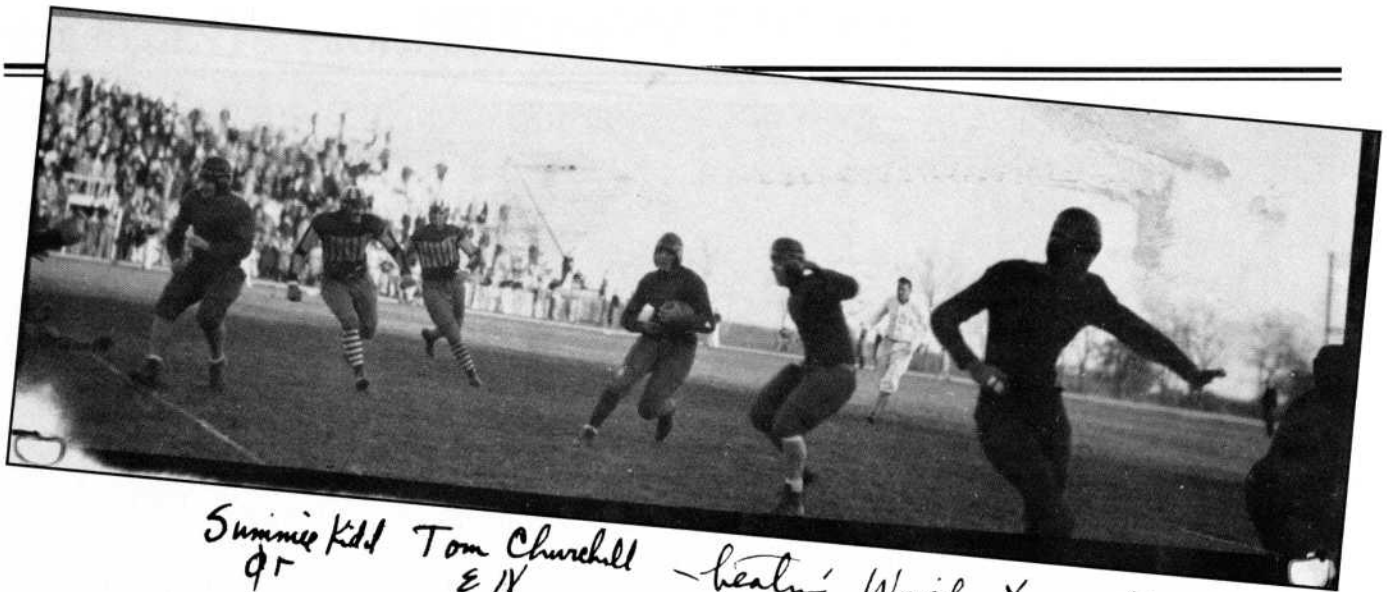
A few days after reading Frank Heaston's "Sooner Memories" article in the Winter 1988 issue of *Sooner Magazine*, I came upon a scrapbook that I had put together hastily in May 1928 as my class was about to graduate. Heaston's article focused on the OU of the '40s and '50s. After leafing through

the '20s scrapbook, I thought that the scenes, events and atmosphere evoked by the photos and clippings might be worth sharing with the OU family 60 years later. If the '40s and '50s seemed a long time ago, what of the '20s!

As editor of *The Oklahoma Daily* in 1926-27 and 1927-28, I had accumulated many photographs and clippings

of news articles that fairly represented the chief extra-curricular interests of the students of that era. Those interests plainly were: No. 1, athletics; No. 2, social life, notably fraternity and sorority affairs; and No. 3, campus politics.

A common denominator of my scribbled notations beside the photographs



Summie Kidd Tom Churchill
 Jr E IV - beating Washington 1927 28-7

Photo on Page 23 — Setting the tone for Frank Dennis' memories is a dapper 1928 quartet, from left, Kieran Morrison, Aubrey Skinner, Dennis and Savoie Lottinville.



was the name, home town, special interest and fraternity/sorority affiliation of those pictured. In the cases of the men, their athletic specialty was most often noted.

The student body at the time numbered 5,000/6,000. As *Daily* editor for two years, I knew just about everyone in school. To this day, six decades later, when I think of a '20s schoolmate, the identification that flashes on my memory's screen goes like this: Carl Albert, McAlester, KA, debater, Rhodes Scholar; Georgia Harter, Ponca City, Delta Gamma, freshman beauty queen; Mike Monroney, Oklahoma City, Phi Gam, politician; Ernest Sharp and Van Heflin, both Oklahoma City, both Phi Delt, both actors; Beth Campbell, Ponca City, Tri Delt, journalist; Aubrey Kerr, Ada, non-fraternity, politician; Eleanor Blake, Oklahoma City, Theta, French-speaking; Savoie Lottinville, Tulsa, Delta Tau, journalist, Rhodes Scholar; Earl Boyd Pierce, Fort Gibson, non-fraternity, Indian; — etc.

Two students of my time who became famous were Lynn Riggs and Joe Brandt. Riggs wrote a play called "Green Grow the Lilacs," which became the musical "Oklahoma!" Brandt became editor of the Princeton Press and president of OU.

An accurate indicator of the small town flavor of Norman in the '20s was the job that I got when I hitch-hiked into town in September of 1924. A high school teacher in Sand Springs had suggested that I look up a friend of his, the manager of the Norman Branch of Oklahoma Gas & Electric

Company. I did so — and the sainted man gave me a job milking a cow, driving the family car on errands and doing general housework at his residence on East Gray Street, downtown. I was an inexpert milker, a novice driver and a reluctant and sullen houseworker, but the kindly Carder family kept me, giving me board and room, until at the end of the first semester, I got a \$15-a-week job on *The Oklahoma Daily*.

I paid \$15 a month for a room shared with Bob Ingram (Blackwell, Pi Kapp, sports editor) and bought a meal ticket for \$3.50, which fed me for a week (a bowl of chili and a piece of pie cost 25 cents).

The high point of campus enthusiasm in my freshman year was the Sooner football team's first-ever victory over Nebraska, 14-7 — a Nebraska steamroller that the previous two years had beaten Notre Dame's team with the Four Horsemen backfield. Oklahoma did not substitute during the game. All the players were from Oklahoma towns. Three of the backfield were from Ardmore: Obie Bristow, Roy "Goat" Lamb and Earl "Yeinie" Hendricks. The quarterback was Elmer "Peanuts" Slough of Oklahoma City. The squad was so crippled by Nebraska that it won only one other game that year.

Frank Potts O.P.O
 football halfback. Made 65 yard
 run against Missouri 26 to beat
 them 10 to 7 - Track Cop + 27 -



Typical scene during revolution of 1927

Alice M. Kistler &
Bill Jackson & 4
Ted Dinko &
W. Black & A.E.
Warren Atfield & AXA



Harold Keith &
his sis Maxine

Bristow played for a Kansas City professional football team the next year. He was paid \$400 for the season, invested the money in a Mexican oil venture and profited enough to become a successful oil man.

The Sooner team in those days was coached by Bennie Owen. He lost an arm early one week during a quail hunt on the Canadian River and coached from the sidelines the following Saturday. He had one assistant, a math professor named Ed Meacham. Owen's brother Bill was the baseball coach, and brother Ted was the trainer.

Football was a different game then. The designations fullback, halfback, quarterback had literal meaning. The fullback lined up deep; the halfbacks were in tandem between the quarterback and the fullback. Everyone played both offense and defense, and when a player was substituted for, he could not return to the game. The ball was put into play where the runner was downed, or a yard or two from the sideline if he were run out of bounds. One of the most memorable plays of the era occurred in a game with Washington State. The State punter kicked into the wind from about his 20-yard line. After brief forward prog-

ress, the ball reversed itself and sailed back over the kicker's head, almost to the goal line.

The basketball team in those days was one of the best in the country. There was no NCAA championship tournament then, hence no recognized national champion. Scottie McDermott, an alumnus, was the coach. The team that won all its conference games had a first team made up of Vic Holt, center; Tom Churchill and Bruce Drake, forwards; and Granville Norris and Roy LeCrone, guards. At 6'6" Holt was just about the tallest player in America. There was a center jump after every basket, so Oklahoma got most of the tip-offs. The scores were sometimes in the 30s, rarely more than the 40s.

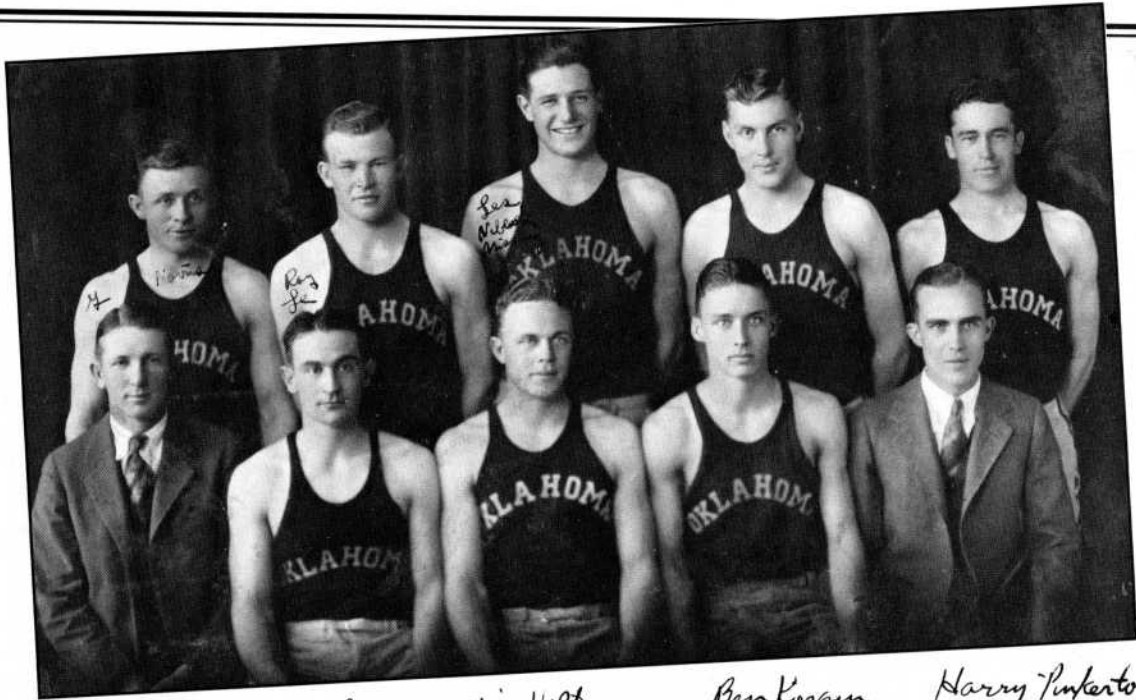
In those days all the schools in Oklahoma were segregated. Not only were there no black athletes, no blacks lived in Norman. There was an unwritten but de facto law that no black was to be in Norman after sunset.

The eligibility rules for athletes were pretty flexible. Some of the varsity baseball players were given money during the summers for play-

ing under assumed names as the Tuttle town team. One football player, Sam Clammer of Fort Collins, Colorado, played at a couple of other schools before playing for Oklahoma while in law school. He finally had to quit when Nebraska advised the authorities that Clammer had played long enough.

Campus politics was skillfully fought. Several students who later became elected public officials learned about campaigning in the campus elections. A speech instructor named Josh Lee was the mentor of many budding politicians. With several law students making up his team, Lee got himself elected to the United States Senate. He was influential enough to have three of those aides appointed federal judges: Royce Savage, Alfred Murrah and Luther Bohannon.

Service in the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) was compulsory for all (with limited exceptions). OU's ROTC program was field artillery. We all had to handle six-horse teams pulling caissons, had to learn range-finding, etc. The highlight of my ROTC career was the time when I had



Norris H KΦ Roy Laerone Vic Hackett Ben Korman Harry Pinkerton
 H KΦ H KΦ A T R H KΦ K E
 Coach H. V. McDermott Capt. Lane West Bill Haller Bruce Bridge George Xmas
 H KΦ H KΦ H KΦ H KΦ H KΦ

to ride one of the lead horses, then get off and back onto the critter while the outfit was at a trot. I got off all right, and got back on all right, except that when I got back on, I was facing the wrong direction. The whole army came to a halt while I got turned around. I never rose above the rank of private.

The only other ROTC incident that stays in my memory occurred during infantry-type maneuvers. The entire corps was at parade rest on a drill field that also served as the polo field. One cadet broke ranks at the northeast corner of the drill field, and as the army watched, sprinted diagonally across to the latrine at the southwest corner. A minute later, he reappeared and strolled back to his squad while the corps cheered.

During the '20s, drug use was unheard of at OU. In fact, awareness of drugs virtually was nil. About the only time one ever heard of drugs was when some unfortunate was said to have become a "drug fiend" because of addiction due to medical treatment.

Alcohol was not much of a problem either. As the state legally was dry, liquor was hard to get. For fraternity

parties, supplies of corn whiskey would be brought in. It was generally agreed that the "best" corn whiskey in the state was made in Coal County. Sometimes pure alcohol was the main drink at parties. However, drinking was not common. I do not recall that anyone was a known alcoholic. The only scandal related to drinking was the following: a popular young English literature teacher was found drunk and asleep one Sunday morning on the lawn of the McFarlin Memorial Church parsonage. He left town that afternoon.

A more bizarre scandal occurred one autumn night in 1926. A prominent student was found seriously but not fatally wounded on the front steps of his fraternity house. He had been shot. Neither he nor his fraternity brothers would tell what happened. The prevalent rumor was that he had been shot by a betrayed husband. No one ever was arrested.

OU in those days had a campus version of the Ku Klux Klan. The OU outfit called itself DDMC, which stood for Deep Dark Mystery Club, but no one except the members were supposed to know what the initials represented. It was DDMC's self-ordained

mission to put reputedly wayward students back on the path of good conduct. If a male student had gained a reputation for immoral conduct, DDMC would spirit him to the countryside in the dark of night and lecture him on the proprieties. One night they seized a self-reliant student who managed to beat up one of his captors, who was a campus leader. The abducted student also complained to the sheriff. Some accommodation was made, and as I recall, there was no prosecution. Both men later became prominent attorneys.

I mentioned that fraternity and sorority life was important to a considerable segment of the OU population in the '20s — and may still be, for all that I know. At that time, "rush week" occurred just before the opening of school in the fall. Among the most prominent sororities were Kappa Alpha Theta and Kappa Kappa Gamma. Their houses faced one another on University Boulevard. Like spectators at a sports event, hundreds of students would crowd the street between the houses to see who had been pledged to which sorority. Of course



Frank Dennis lived up to expectations born of his campus career, going on to become a respected newspaperman, Marshall Plan and petroleum industry official and Washington attorney.



Margaret Barry AAD Vic Holt A.T.O.,
 Boonville Queen 124 All-American

the "barbs" (i.e., non-members of Greek letter fraternities — non-Greeks, hence barbarians) didn't care, but to many the results of rush seemed important.

I remember another incident that hallmarks the era. One spring morning, at a time when practically every student was in class, the campus was aroused by the sound of a low-flying airplane. Through a classroom window, I saw a slow-moving biplane with a man standing on the upper wing. It was a barnstorming plane, one of the first flying machines ever seen in Nor-

man. Using a pasture on the edge of town as their base, the two young University of Texas fliers did a land-office business that afternoon, at \$3 per passenger.

If this memoir conveys the impression of Norman in the '20s as a rather countrified place, it has presented a fairly accurate but poorly focused view. As mentioned earlier, most of what I have written is about extra-curricular matters, the frothy stuff. As a whole, the student body was serious about academics and grateful for the opportunity to learn. We liked our president, W. B. Bizzell, a no-nonsense administrator with a remarkable ability to get what the University needed

from the state legislature. We respected our faculty, and we were proud of the reputations for excellence of some of our schools: petroleum engineering, law, journalism.

We were fairly serious students partly because there were few distractions. Probably not more than 20 students were permitted to have cars. With nowhere to go except to Oklahoma City on the interurban, to the Varsity Shop or Copper Kettle for a 5-cent Coke, to the movies for a quarter and to the Student Council weekly dances, life at OU was pretty serene — and a lot of fun.

EDITOR'S FOOTNOTES: Many of those who appear in Dennis' reminiscences went on to earn great distinction. Carl Albert (as mentioned in this issue's "Sooner Spotlight") became Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, and at one point was just a heart beat from the presidency. The late Almer S. Mike Monroney was a three-term U.S. senator. Ernest Sharp was well-known as a movie actor named Eric Rhodes, while the late Van Heflin starred in a number of major motion pictures. Eleanor Blake, now Mrs. John Kirkpatrick, is a noted philanthropist, co-founder with her

husband of the Kirkpatrick Center Museum Complex in Oklahoma City. Vic Holt parlayed his membership on the Goodyear Tire & Rubber basketball team into the presidency of the company; he died in April 1988. Beth Campbell, who also died this year, became a well-known Washington, D.C., journalist and wife of Joe Short, President Harry S. Truman's press secretary. The late Bruce Drake was one of the nation's most respected basketball coaches while leading the Sooners from 1939 to 1955. Tom Churchill, who died in 1962, competed for the United States in the Olympic decathlon.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: After completing his OU journalism studies in 1928, Frank L. Dennis pursued a newspaper career with the Kansas City Star, the Boston Herald, the Daily Oklahoman and the Washington Post, where he was assistant managing editor from 1942-52. While in Boston, he earned a 1935 Harvard law degree. From 1952 to 1953, he was director of information for Europe for the Marshall Plan, then returned to head the Washington information office of the American Petroleum Institute. He now practices law in Washington. Dennis and his wife, the former Katherine Wright of Miami, Oklahoma, also OU Class of 1928, have a son and daughter-in-law, Landt and Lisl Dennis, who are a well-known writer-photographer team specializing in travel subjects.