

# Our Neighbor on the Hill

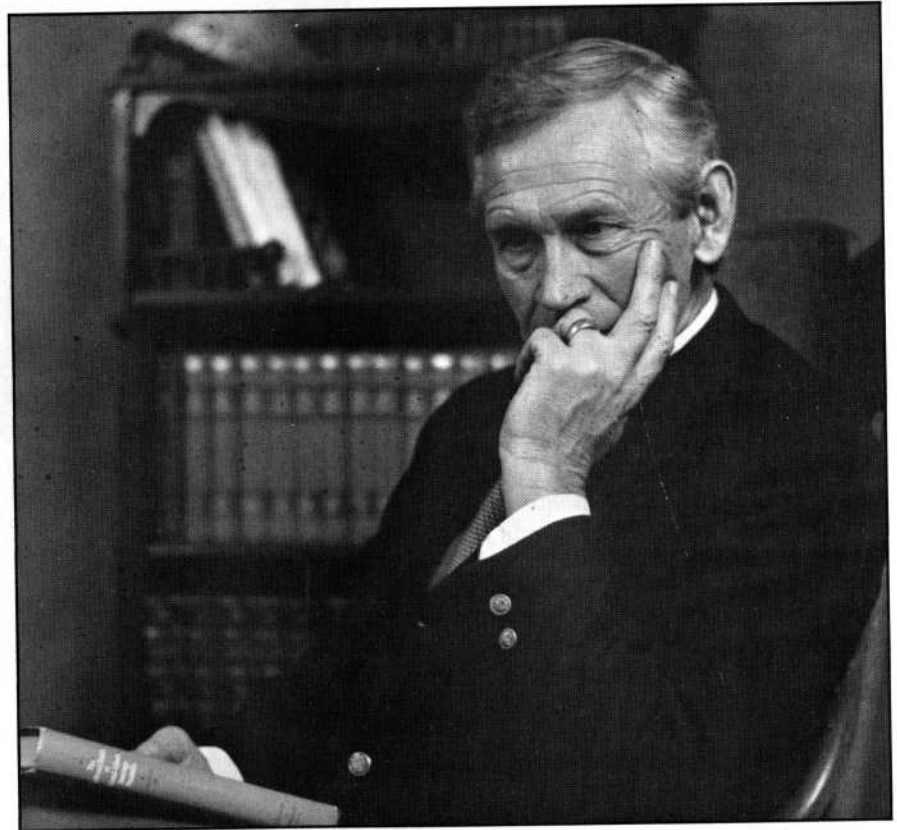
By F. Grover Fulkerson

**EDITOR'S NOTE:**

*Student memories of their favorite faculty members usually run along the same lines, with special consideration for the professors' unique idiosyncrasies. Good teacher. Brilliant researcher. Wise counselor. Entertaining speaker. Then vita sheets supply enough antiseptic facts to fill out the picture. The job trail. Professional memberships. Publications. Honors and awards. But the measure of the person is much more. Who was he off the speaker's rostrum, outside the classroom, laboratory, library? Who was he to family and friends— or, in the case of this contribution to "Sooner Memories," to an admiring neighbor?*

*The cold facts about the late Arrell Gibson must include his distinguished record as a historian, an author, a veteran professor at the University of Oklahoma. Holder of three OU degrees — B.A. 1947, M.A. 1948 and Ph.D. 1954 — Gibson began his faculty career as assistant professor of history in 1957, up the ranks to associate, then full professor and finally George Lynn Cross Research Professor. He was curator of the OU Western History Collections 1957-72, curator of history for the Oklahoma Museum of Natural History (formerly Stovall) from 1960 until his death November 30, 1987.*

*He directed the work of 35 doctoral and 68 master's students, spent semesters as visiting professor at the University of New Mexico, Arizona State University and the University of South*



**Arrell Morgan Gibson**

*China in Canton, People's Republic of China, which awarded him an honorary doctorate. He received countless professional awards and honors, the Muriel H. Wright Award from the Oklahoma Historical Society and the Ray Billington Award from the Western History Association given posthumously. He served on the boards of*

*museums, historical, cultural and literary societies, authored more than 100 journal articles, several textbooks, encyclopedia entries and 25 books, one of which, *The Chickasaws*, was runner-up for the 1971 Pulitzer Prize.*

*For all this, Grover Fulkerson remembers Arrell Gibson as the neighbor on the hill.*

I remember Arrell Gibson, not as a teacher, nor even so much as a prominent writer, but as a good neighbor and friend.

Many years ago, while living in Muskogee, we built a shack out in the woods in eastern Cleveland County, which we called our cabin and to which we—Mary Jane and I and the three children—retreated on occasion when the stresses of life became too threatening.

As the area developed, we sold off small pieces of the “ranch.” Eventually, someone built a nice house high on the hill overlooking the beautiful valley, and one day we learned that the distinguished Dr. Arrell Gibson was living there and writing a book on the Chickasaw Indians.

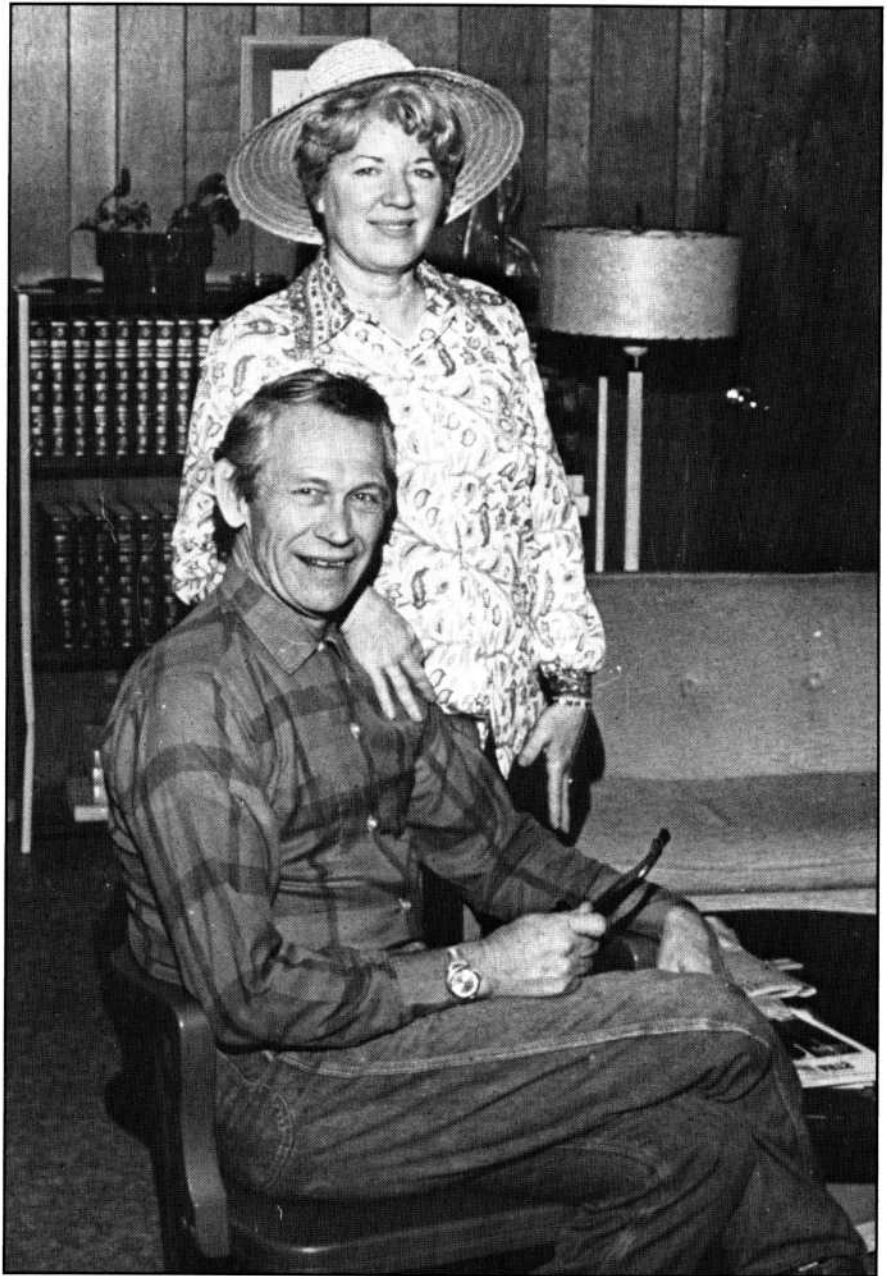
It wasn't hard to get acquainted with Arrell; busy as he was teaching and writing, he was no bookworm. He went up and down the little country lane making friends with everyone.

The same year that Arrell's book was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize, Herman Burnett, who lived across the fence, raised a watermelon that took first place at the County Fair. I think Arrell may have been as excited about the watermelon prize as he was with his own success.

It was in the late 1960s. That meant that the woods were full of “hippies.” Soon we were having trouble with our cabin/shack. We would go out there and find it occupied by squatters — liberated, long-haired college students who had gone natural and were not particularly respectful of private property.

Well, we didn't much care as there was little that could be done to hurt the cabin. But we did make agreements with the squatters that there would not be too many people or dogs around the place to upset the neighbors.

One day it happened. I was at work at the hospital. I was called to the telephone to hear an irate woman demanding that I come out there and make one of those “damn hippies” put his clothing on. She had gone over to the Bennett Nazarene Church to pick up a group for a Sunday School picnic.



*On state occasions such as induction into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame, Arrell Gibson could don white tie and tails with the best of 'em. He would travel halfway around the world to offer his expertise to fellow historians. But he was happiest in jeans and boots at home with wife Rosemary, also a successful writer.*

She came home to find a young man prancing around nude out in front of the “cabin.” She felt it was a bad influence on the little ones.

Somehow I got into touch with someone who went over there and advised the young man to put on some clothing and to apologize to the neighbor lady.

He was cooperative. Having dressed, he went straight to the offended lady and apologized profusely, stating, “Lady, I had no idea you had that hang-up about clothing!”

That evening Mary Jane and I went down to talk with the young people. We had a pow-wow. It was all written

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**The boys signed the brown paper bag. To seal the deal they all went to Dr. Gibson to witness the agreement.**

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down on a brown paper bag: only two people and two dogs at a time could live in the cabin; the offending young man would have to go; the tent at the bottom of the hill would come down; and the occupants of the place would not do anything contrary to our "Judeo-Christian" ethics. (One of the occupants, the one with the most hair, was Jewish.)

To my surprise, the boys signed the brown paper bag. To seal the deal, we all went up to the good Dr. Gibson's house for him to witness the agreement.

When this fine gentleman opened the door for us, he exclaimed, "It's grand to see you!" And after witnessing the brown paper bag that we had drawn up, he said to these unwashed young rebels, "It's going to get cold down in that cabin. If any of you get sick, run out of groceries, need to use the telephone, or need help, just come on up to the house. I will be glad to see you."

Imagine that! In those days, hardly anyone was glad to see those scruffy hippies.

I think he was glad to see almost everyone. How could he write 25 books and have time to be glad to see everyone? I, at least, always felt he meant it when he would greet me with "Glad to see you!"

When I visited him in the hospital, he sat up in bed and said, "My, but it is great to see you!" We got right down to planning big things for his retirement. He was going to teach me how to catch a big fish, using some of the tank full of goldfish which we have at my place.

Tonight it is comforting to think that now Arrell has crossed over into that land that is fairer than day, that he is probably going up and down the golden streets shaking hands and saying, "It's grand to see you!"

Someday, in the sweet by and by, I hope to hear his greeting once again. @



Western History Collections

*Shown here in distinguished company in 1959, Arrell Gibson, second from left, was the new kid on the block. The big names on the history faculty were Edwin McReynolds, left, W. Eugene Hollon, Donald Berthrong and Edward Everett Dale.*



*In addition to his teaching, research and writing, Gibson served as curator of the OU Western History Collections from 1957 to 1972 and curator of history for the Oklahoma Museum of Natural History (formerly Stovall) from 1960 until 1987.*