

The Commission



The Centennial Commission, led by President Richard Van Horn, left, Katie Davis, Stanton Young and W. R. Howell, gathers for its fall 1989 session.

A TIME FOR GREATNESS

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he official Centennial Year ran from December 19, 1989, to December 19, 1990, the 100th anniversary of the signing of the territorial act establishing the University of Oklahoma at Norman. It was an act of faith. Nothing existed where this institution of higher learning was envisioned—just a patch of hard-packed prairie, dotted with buffalo wallows and nary a tree in sight.

The Centennial Celebration was dominated by the specter of the doughty men and women whose courage and unflagging confidence created a major, modern state university against all odds. Their struggles with a constant lack of funds, political interference, economic hard times, wartime stresses and fears, student hijinks and the often-elusive pursuit of academic freedom became

the grist for stories told and retold over 12 months of tributes to institutional history.

But the Centennial was more than flashbacks to past trials and triumphs. It was also a time to assess the University's present strengths and to project the forward momentum of OU's academic programs and service to the state and its people.

The Centennial Commission

The Centennial was three years in the making. On October 18, 1986, then-President Frank E. Horton called together 100 carefully selected members to serve as the Centennial Commission. With a like number of OU faculty, staff and students, the commissioners were charged with planning and carrying out the observance of the University's 100th birthday around the theme, "A Time for Greatness."

The chairman of the commission was one of the institution's most outstanding graduates, W. R. Howell of Dallas, Texas, chairman and chief executive officer of the J. C. Penney Company. The commission vice chairman and chairman of the development committee was Oklahoma City businessman and civic leader Stanton L. Young, long an ardent booster of the OU Health Sciences Center.

The original architect of the Centennial was OU's veteran vice president for University Affairs, David A. Burr, who also had served as director of the 75th and 90th birthday celebrations. Burr's death less than a year into the Centennial preparations left a void that was quickly and ably filled by the interim vice president, Donna Murphy, and the willingness of the commission members to shoulder added responsibilities. Even the resignation of President Horton in the summer of 1988 failed to slow Centennial momentum. Under interim president David Swank, and in the last months a new president, Richard L. Van Horn, planning for the celebration remained right on schedule. The OU founders would have been proud.

The composition of the Centennial Commission was calculated to reflect the diverse University family it represented. The commission members were chosen from hundreds of nominations from various geographic areas, professions and age groups. Included were some of the University's most successful alumni and some just beginning their careers. But whatever category they filled, they had one characteristic in common: a deep and lasting affection for the institution.

Each commission member was assigned to a committee charged with one aspect of the year-long observance. Pursuing the \$100 million goal of the Centennial Campaign was the development committee under Young and vice chairman Douglas R. Cummings, an



Plans for the 100th anniversary celebration were beginning to take shape when the Centennial Commission held its spring 1988 meeting in the Library of the Health Sciences Center.

Oklahoma City oilman. The celebration committee was headed by former OU Alumni Association president Katie Davis of Oklahoma City with CNN executive vice president Ed Turner as vice chairman.

Federal District Judge Ralph G. Thompson, Oklahoma City, served as academic affairs committee chairman, with Norman civic leader Jane Patten as vice chair. Promotion and special projects were the responsibility of Tulsa attorney David A. Johnson and Oklahoma City advertising executive Warren K. "Doc" Jordan as chairman and vice chairman. Norman mayor Richard L. Reynolds was chairman of the public affairs committee with vice chairman Clyde C. Cole, of the Tulsa Chamber of Commerce.

Chairing the Health Sciences Center committee was Martha Williams, Oklahoma City civic leader and wife of G. Rainey Williams, the distinguished head of OUHSC's department of surgery. Her vice chairman was Oklahoma City physician John Bozalis. The student affairs committee was chaired by Tulsan Robert S. Purgason of The Williams Companies with AT&T executive Harold L. Andrews, Chicago, as vice chairman.

The Centennial Commission met as a whole twice yearly to consider the ongoing work of the committees. After sifting through dozens of proposed Centennial activities, each committee submitted its program, complete with funding plans, for approval by the celebration committee. Coordination of the

events became the responsibility of veteran OU staff member Mary Lyle Weeks. Much of the cost of the celebration was borne by private donors, led by a gift from Chairman Howell.

The Centennial flavor permeated nearly every University activity during the birthday year, both those special events sanctioned by the commission and the more traditional parts of the academic calendar. Members of the faculty seized upon the occasion to host conferences and symposia in their specialties. The Office of Career Planning and Placement staged a Centennial Career Fair, bringing together 100 employers with more than 1,000 students to investigate career possibilities.

Student groups chose Centennial themes for Mom's and Dad's Days, Sooner Scandals, University Sing, Homecoming and the like. The Centennial logos were everywhere—on University vehicles, stationery and lightpost banners. Athletic teams sported Centennial patches on their uniforms; commemorative t-shirts, sweatshirts, caps and jewelry cropped up all over campus—and indeed wherever OU alumni could be found.

The theme from the specially commissioned Centennial anthem became familiar through radio and television spots and to audiences at University performances. *The Oklaboma Daily* and the *Sooner Yearbook* paid tribute to institutional history. Only the comatose could have failed to be touched by the biggest party the University had ever had.