

The Tree Lighting

A HOLIDAY TRADITION



The Centennial holiday season begins on the Norman campus with the traditional tree-lighting festivities west of the library plaza, complete with carols, hot cider, Santa and his elves.

December 19, 1990

THE PARTY OF THE CENTURY



Dick Van Horn carves a piece of the University birthday cake for Regent Ron White, left, at the Party of the Century on December 19, 1990.

It's done every year—assembling on the Dunlap Plaza by Bizzell Memorial Library to officially usher in the holiday season by lighting the two big cedars and welcoming Santa to the campus. But this year, December 3, 1990, was special. The Centennial was winding down. Lighting the trees, like everything else during this celebration year, took on a historic significance.

Several hundred joined voices in carols, sipped hot chocolate and apple cider and heard from Student Body President Craig Adkins, OU President Richard L. Van Horn and Santa Claus, in that order. The University community's children, at least, seemed most impressed with Santa.

The historic day finally came, after three years of planning and a year of special events that had all but overwhelmed the academic and social calendars of the University community. On Wednesday, December 19, 1990, OU was 100 years old.

The Centennial Commission already had met for the last time during the gala Homecoming Weekend. Some felt that the actual birthday party would be anticlimactic. But a small luncheon, originally planned for campus and state officials, committee chairmen and vice chairmen and donors to the Centennial Arches campaign, was quickly oversubscribed as more and more volunteers expressed a desire to be on hand for the final event.

All paths led to the Oklahoma Memorial Union as students and faculty took a break from finals to join the off-campus visitors and a large representation of retired faculty and staff at the party. But first there were momentous announcements to be made.

The afternoon press conference was staged with suitable drama with development committee chairman Stanton L. Young flanked by oversized pie charts on one side, the Centennial candle on



the other. A gleeful crowd of nearly 400 heard Young announce that the \$100 million drive had actually netted more than \$150 million. President Van Horn translated the figures in terms of academic strength and enrichment.

Then each celebrator, who had been given a white candle in a red plastic holder, passed the light from one to another until the ballroom was bathed in a rosy glow. The media had come primarily to hear the campaign results, but they stayed for the candlelighting and cake as well. On-camera interviews with campus notables, such as President Emeritus George L. Cross, were being conducted in remote corners of the room as the gigantic birthday cake was being carved.

The cake stood nine feet tall, more of an architectural than a culinary masterpiece, constructed primarily of Styrofoam with a strategically placed middle layer of the real stuff for ceremonial carving and consumption. But most of the crowd opted for the massive red and white sheet cakes served up by the Oklahoma Memorial Union bakers.

The 4-foot-tall Centennial Candle added another innovative touch. Unable to find a wax candle of proper majesty, OU publications director Bill Williams fashioned his own from PVC pipe and paraffin. It burned beautifully.

Then it was time to dedicate the time capsule and break ground for the Centennial Arches at the south oval entrance to the main campus on Lindsey Street. The actual burial of the time capsule had occurred several days earlier; a handsome commemorative granite bench was set in concrete to mark the spot.



TOP LEFT: The flame is passed from candle to candle as the campus celebrates its Centennial.

TOP RIGHT: President Emeritus George L. Cross, left, lights 100th birthday candles for Martha Williams, Ralph Thompson and John Bozalis, key members of the celebration's commission.

BOTTOM: Centennial Arch Campaign Co-Chairmen David Wise, left, Joy Kelly and Todd Cunningham preside at groundbreaking ceremonies on the University's official anniversary date.



Members of the time capsule committee crowd around as Van Horn and White unveil the granite bench that for the next 100 years will stand guard over the buried memorabilia of 1990.

While the Party of the Century went on in Norman, HSC staff and faculty had their own Centennial birthday cake in Oklahoma City. Presiding were Oklahoma City Councilman Goree James, left, OU Foundation Coordinator Jean Whitby, Development Director Hershel Lamirand and Faculty Senate Chair Glenda Ochsner.



Time for Greatness



First sealed in a concrete vault, the capsule was an aluminum tank containing approximately 40 items designed to provide a contemporary snapshot of the University for future generations. Each item had been de-acidified and the air inside the capsule replaced with argon, an inert gas, to prevent oxygenation and to prolong the life of the contents.

The chosen memorabilia included a copy of the Centennial book, a 1990 *Sooner Yearbook*, an Affirmative Action brochure, a message from President Van Horn, an issue of *The Oklaboma Daily*, an AIDS pamphlet and a football press guide. Among the many ideas rejected by the committee were technology-dependent items such as computer disks, Nintendo or videotapes.

The time capsule was the project of the Employee Executive Council with Bill Henwood and Peggy Roberts as co-chairs. Staff volunteers from both the Norman and HSC campuses rounded out the committee. Helping to obtain the concrete protective vault and the granite bench were Jerry Cooper of Central Burial Vault, Inc., of Oklahoma City, and Bill Willis of Willis Granite Products.

Groundbreaking for the Centennial Arches provided the closing ceremony for the year-long celebration. The arches, designed to match those class memorial arches at the other three entrances to the main campus, are a birthday gift from the Centennial student body. Presiding at the groundbreaking were the three students who had served as chairs of the arches committee during the two-year fund-raising drive.

The fickle Oklahoma weather, which had been miserable just days before and similarly forecast for immediately thereafter, held beautifully throughout the Centennial day. Sunny, calm and warm in mid-December. Then just as the last shovelful of red earth had been turned and the final photograph taken, the wind turned to the north, the temperature dropped, the clouds rolled in.

"How's that for timing?" someone remarked. "But then what should you expect from the university with the greatest school of meteorology in the world?"

And so everyone went home, back to their appointed tasks, whether business, home, family or final exams, soon to be caught up in the holidays, the semester break, then back to begin the second century. But none of those who had been a part of the Centennial year ever would forget the experience. They had been a part of history, and as their legendary predecessors in 1890, they knew it only too well.