

# Treasures from the Archives

Second in a Series

## *My Dear Friend:*

### David Ross Boyd and the Details of Office



by David W. Levy

**W**e are accustomed to speak of the university community—ours or any other—as being composed of three parts: (1) the students, (2) the faculty and (3) the administration and staff. Ninety years ago, however, no one familiar with the University of Oklahoma would have described its organization that way. Throughout its early history, the institution surely would have seemed to consist of only two parts: the students and the faculty.

When the 1904 academic year began, there were approximately 475 students on the campus. A great many of them (185) were considered not yet ready for college level work and were studying in the Preparatory Department. Only 125 of the total were in the College of Arts and Sciences, and the rest were divided between the schools of Pharmacy, Medicine, Fine Arts, Mines and Applied Science. Twenty-nine were in the Business course. These students were taught by a faculty consisting of 10 professors and 22 instructors (eight of them, like those who gave music lessons, paid entirely out of student fees).

Although the University of Oklahoma had students and

faculty 90 years ago, there was virtually no such thing as an administrative staff. Both the Registrar and the Librarian were instructors, and alongside his presidential duties, David Ross Boyd taught his philosophy class. Not counting those who met regular classes, the University's payroll consisted entirely of a head janitor and six assistants, a night watchman, a carpenter and a model maker. Three sophomores were hired as dispensing clerk, assistant to the registrar and assistant librarian. One freshman was paid to be mail carrier and another served as secretary to the president.

The absence of an administrative apparatus meant that President Boyd was required to deal with thousands of details that no modern university president would dream of addressing. Everything came across his desk, and almost nothing could be delegated to anyone else. The letters on the following pages—all of them chosen almost at random from the academic year 1904-05—give a small indication of the staggering range of the first president's responsibilities. They also convey a sense, no doubt, of his meticulous grasp of detail, his tireless attention to individual students, his essential decency and humanity.

*Continued*



June 25, 1904

David R. Boyd

Norman, O[klahoma].T[erritory].

Dear Sir:-

We have before us your favor of June 22nd and in the first part of your letter you refer to a lathe which you purchased of us, but further on we would infer that it is the foot power or fly wheel that you have reference too.

If it is the lathe will say that we hardly know how to suggest a remedy as it is of course a cheap machine and one cannot expect very much from it. However if the foot power is meant we will report the matter to the factory and they will no doubt gladly replace any parts that are defective.

Awaiting your further pleasure we remain,

Yours truly,  
H. J. Bruner H[ar]dw[are] Co.

*The H.J. Bruner Hdw. Co.,  
Kansas City, Mo.*

June 27 1904

Dear Sirs:

*Replying to yours of June 25th regarding the Lathe we purchased from you we would say that it is the foot power that is defective. The shaft is soft. It slips when treadled. Kindly take the matter up with the factory and have them replace the shaft and spring that lifts the treadle. The rollers bed themselves in the shaft of the fly wheel and fail to clutch when the pedal is used.*

Yours very truly,  
/s/ David R. Boyd



Lexington Okla.  
July 22, 1904

David R Boyd

Dear Sir:-

I am going to attend the University this coming school year and will have to partly earn my way. Is there any chance of getting a position sweeping, carrying the mail or any other permanent work that I can earn \$1.50 a week at.

May I hear from you in regard to this matter soon.

Yours very truly

/s/ Everett Carpenter

Norman, Okla., July 25, 1904

*Mr. Everett Carpenter,  
Lexington, Okla.*

*My dear Friend:—*

*I am very glad to learn that you are intending to come to the University this year. I do not now know of any particular place that I could direct you to that would bring you \$1.50 per week. However, if you are industrious*

*you ought to have no difficulty in finding work around here that would bring you that sum. About seventy-five students found work last year that partly or entirely paid their expenses. A great deal of work develops about the time school opens. You ought to be early on the ground. Rarely or never a student gets a place who is not here. When you come, come right up to the office and let us know what you want, and we will be able to assist you then.*

*Yours very truly,  
/s/ David R. Boyd*



Enid Oct 8th

Dear Sir

You will perhaps be surprised to receive a letter from me but I write you in regard to my son Ralph Dangerfield as I am very much worried about him since Roger Peard his Roommate has come home with Typhoid Fever.

It is reported here that Norman is an unhealthy place the water bad etc. & that the Fever is almost Epidemic.

Ralph has written me nothing to that effect but I fear he has not told us fearing we will bring him home & I know he would dislike very much to leave School as he seems much interested in his School work.

I would be pleased if you would write in regard to affairs there as I feel I could rely on what you might say. Hoping to hear from you.

*/s/ Mrs. C H Dangerfield  
1225 Ninth St Enid Ok.*

October 8 1904

*Mrs. C.H. Dangerfield  
1225 Ninth St  
Enid Oklahoma*

*My dear Mrs Dangerfield:*

*The report about Norman being an unhealthy place is absolutely without foundation. It is one of the most healthy localities in Oklahoma and this has been one of the healthiest years we have ever had. I was sorry to learn that Roger Peard's case has developed into Typhoid fever as this is the first case that has developed locally in the school. Every year, students come here and get sick later on in the fall but in every case they have brought it with them. Until two weeks ago, I am told by one of the leading Physicians here in Norman, that he had never known of any town being so entirely free from cases of sickness. The Doctors were almost without occupation and they attributed it to the city water that we use.*

*The water used at Mr Bridgewater's where your son is staying, is cistern water and is said to be excellent. I made special inquiry at the time that Mr Peard took ill. I will talk with your son and look into the matter again carefully and I want to assure you that I will do everything I can to keep you informed about the situation. There is probably more ground for reports in Enid or in any rapidly growing town than there is in Norman.*

*Last year, out of all of the nearly three hundred students who took Physical Culture we didn't have a single case of Typhoid fever or any other local illness. In fact, we feel that the health conditions here have been very much improved in the last five years. I am very glad you have written and have given me an opportunity to write these assurances.*

*I trust you will kindly write me and give me an opportunity, at any time you feel any anxiety, to write you the situation here and of relieving your mind if I can. Your son seems to be going along with his work in a spirited and successful way and I hope nothing will transpire to interrupt his work.*

*I am very sorry to learn of Mr. Peard's illness and will take special pains to investigate the case and, if possible, find its origin. Assuring you of my good wishes and of my desire to be of assistance to you at any time, I am,*

*Yours very truly,  
/s/ David R. Boyd*





Kingfisher, Okla. Dec. 13, 1904

Mr. D. R. Boyd  
Norman, O.T.

Dear Sir:

My son commenced school at the beginning of the term and I have been unable to come to Norman to see how he is getting along. Not hearing anything from the school, I take this liberty to ask you to please let me know how Willie is getting along in his studies, and would like to know his conduct during school hours, and if not too much trouble, I would like to know if the boys that he is rooming with there are boys that are steady. I would hate to have him get in the habit of running around nights as it is something that he did not do while at home.

An answer would greatly oblige,

Yours truly,  
/s/ J.C. Cross

December 15 1904

To Instructors:

Will you kindly furnish me with a statement in regard to the  
(a) Attendance  
(b) Conduct  
(c) Quality of work  
of William J. Cross immediately?

Respectfully,  
/s/ David R. Boyd  
President  
(Answer on back)

December 23 1904

Mr. J. C. Cross  
Kingfisher Oklahoma

My dear Friend:

I received your letter inquiring about your son Willie just at the time we were preparing a report of the Board of Regents of the University to the Governor and laid it aside until I would have more time. Since then I regret to say that it has been overlooked.

The Professors all report his attendance regular and his conduct good. The quality of his work however has not been as good as our Professors would like, but all report an improvement in the last three weeks. I had a talk with your son about the time I received your letter and I am convinced that he is settling down to do good work and that he ought to be continued here. He is a boy that we all think a great deal of. There have been no complaints at all of his wasting time or running around at nights or loafing around down town. I don't recall having seen him down town at all. I think it was just simply a question of his settling down to work and I think that he has shown that he is making progress in this.

Very truly,  
/s/ David R. Boyd

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Norman Okla  
April 11, 05

Dear Dr. Boyd

I request you not to write to my parents if you don't want me to go to parts unknown. If you will keep a letter from going home I will go home and tell them what happened and try to straighten up.

Your friend,  
/s/ Siron Bittner

April 20 1905

Mr. J. Bittner  
Cushing Oklahoma

My dear Sir:

Your son, Siron, returned to the University at the beginning of this semester and applied for admission. I called his attention to the way in which he spent his time when he was here before and told him that unless we had a good deal of assurance that he would not do the same thing and would study, we did not want to enroll him. He represented to me that he was coming on his own resources and that he had come to know the value of money through earning and that he was not here to waste his time and money. I accepted his statement as true and enrolled him.

Before he was here two weeks, I learned that he had been drinking, and in fact had become drunk. I called him up to the office and told him that he must go home as he was not sustaining the promise he had made. He begged me so earnestly and assured me so confidently that he would do better that I permitted him to continue.

After an absence of about two weeks, I returned home and found that he had been worse than ever. I then dismissed him from school. Since that time, he has been stopping down town and I understand is drinking a good deal. He is carrying a revolver and says that if I write you this information, he will shoot me. I should have notified you before this but he represented to me that he was down here on his own resources. However, I learned yesterday that he had received money from you and that his statement that he was supporting himself was untrue. He also has got into an altercation toward the [Manuscript indecipherable].

I feel that it is necessary for you to know these things and to act accordingly. I told the Marshall last night to tell him if he did not leave town before the three o'clock train today, I would telegraph you and have you come and get him. He certainly needs somebody to take charge of him. I regret exceedingly that this has occurred and sympathize with you in the pain that I am sure this letter will give you and shall be very glad to mitigate it if I can, but I feel that it would not be kind to you or to your son if I should not tell you this. Indeed, I believe I have done wrong in believing his statement that he was supporting himself. I regret exceedingly that I have not given you this information before this.

Very truly,  
/s/ David R. Boyd

[Source: David Ross Boyd Presidential Papers, Boxes 2, 3 and 4, University of Oklahoma Archives,  
Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma Libraries.]

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**About the Author:** David W. Levy's ongoing series for *Sooner Magazine*, "Treasures from the Archives," is based on several of the most interesting documents he has unearthed in the process of researching his history of the first 100 years of the University of Oklahoma, authorized by the Centennial Commission in 1990. In 26 years on the faculty of the OU department of history, Levy has earned the respect of

both students and colleagues for his superior teaching, outstanding research and prestigious publications. In 1987 his performance in the classroom brought him the institution's most coveted teaching honor, a lifetime appointment to the distinguished professorship that bears the name of the president whose correspondence he examines in "My Dear Friend"—David Ross Boyd. 