



# prologue.

For anyone researching OU history,  
*Sooner Magazine* is a valuable but, until now,  
a largely inaccessible resource.

When Joe Brandt launched the University of Oklahoma's first alumni magazine in 1928, he probably did not give a thought to having created a historical resource. A former Tulsa newspaperman who simultaneously was founding the University of Oklahoma Press—and who one day would become OU's sixth president—Brandt had more pressing matters to consider. Like all the *Sooner Magazine* editors who would succeed him, Brandt was scrambling issue after issue to compile enough information in readable form to fill all those blank pages, and then get the thing to press.

Whether by design or not, publication spanning 76 years—initially as an alumni magazine and since 1981 by the University of Oklahoma Foundation Inc.—resulted in a mass of material that might be termed at least an “informal” history of the institution, i.e. one assembled by journalists, not historians.

Scarcely a day passes that *Sooner Magazine* is not queried for some tidbit of OU lore. A newspaper reporter wants to know how early day football coach Bennie Owen lost his arm (a hunting accident). OU Public Affairs must reassure a woman who spotted a '20s *Sooner* yearbook photo of the hooded D.D.M.C. and thought the worst (just student hijinks, not Klan). An alumnus thinks his father was featured in *Sooner Magazine*, circa 1945, and sure would like to have a copy (would he settle for the photocopy?). Nationally syndicated columnist George Will's assistant even called to verify that Pulitzer Prize-winning author Vernon L. Parrington had been OU's first on-staff football coach. (Yes, that and much more.) And then students writing term papers and authors writing books.

The problem has been that *Sooner Magazine* was not indexed. Volume after volume stood largely unsearchable, save by personal knowledge or dumb luck. Oh, it was great fun looking, curled up in a chair for a couple of hours, attention repeatedly sidetracked by interesting if far-afield tidbits—fun but not very efficient.

Help was needed, but hiring an indexer proved difficult; several came and went until we finally found someone who got hooked on the project. Norman native and OU library science graduate Ginger Murray spent two years combing through old magazines, producing a highly professional index that is a time—no, make that life—saver. And in the process of revisiting history, she came up with a constant stream of contemporary story ideas, proving that the past is indeed prologue.

While Murray was solving our internal research challenge, Debra Engel, director of public services for the University Libraries, came forward with an even more ambitious proposal to make *Sooner Magazine* accessible online to anyone with a question and a computer. As the magazine's publisher, the Foundation agreed to purchase the needed digitization equipment and software, and *Sooner Magazine* became the program's pilot project. It proved to be a mammoth undertaking.

Sarah Robbins, the Libraries' electronic services coordinator, and her staff of student assistants began the project in 2001, scanning each page of each issue into the computer, the pre-1981 issues existing only in difficult-to-scan bound volumes. The information then was digitized to make it searchable in a variety of ways—by issue, subject, au-

thor, photographer, title, key words, etc.—all by going to <http://digital.libraries.ou.edu/sooner>.

In some ways, this was the easy part. Just as the project was getting underway, issues of intellectual property on the Internet came to the forefront, and organizations posting their printed publications on their Web sites found that they must obtain separate permissions from authors, photographers and other contributors. For those dealing with archival material, the task was daunting, but Robbins and her staff persevered and in February 2004 made available *Sooner Magazine* from 1981 to the present. The older issues back to 1928 will be posted as the digitization is completed.

From the library Web site, researchers also can access Murray's more traditional index, and a click on “Current Issues” will take you to the Foundation's Web site, <http://www.oufoundation.org>. There Webmaster Randall Agee posts each issue of *Sooner Magazine*—as well as the newsletter *Priority* and an abundance of other Foundation information sources—shortly after publication and in a more reader-friendly format. This resource, which is also searchable, includes issues back to Spring/Summer 2001.

Thankfully I am not required to understand the technological magic that evokes a response to my every inquiry; I merely take advantage of the new tools that better brains have devised, especially when the need is pressing and time is short. That is not to say, however, that on a slow day, when the phone does not ring and the boss is gone, I might not curl up with those dusty, old bound volumes and let my mind wander from one narrative to another in the dim reaches of the *Sooner* story.

—CJB