



# The Missing Gift from the Class of 1934

Once in a while over the past half century, someone would ask, "Whatever happened to that sculpture of the Land Run on the old stadium clock tower?" The question usually evoked a blank stare. The clock tower itself disappeared in the 1949 north end zone expansion, and with it the bas-relief sculpture mounted at its base, facing the Reflecting Pool.

Surely this gift from the Class of 1934 was stored somewhere for safe-keeping—but where? It is difficult to lose a 3½ by 10-foot, 3,000-pound bronze, and indeed, it was not really lost, merely misplaced.

The sculpted bronze was a major project for that senior class, ultimately made possible when President William Bennett Bizzell designated \$1 from each graduation fee to cover the cost. The work was designed and executed by art students Thomas K. Simms, of Oklahoma City, and Julius Struppeck, of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, under the supervision of OU sculpture professor Joe Taylor.

Originally the piece was to be mounted on an ornamental base and placed at the north end of Parrington Oval. When construction of the Reflecting Pool and a tower to support the football game timing clock was announced, to be financed by funds left by previous classes, the site for the 1934 memorial was shifted to the stadium.

The Land Run depiction features a woman and child riding in a Conestoga wagon pulled by four horses, with a figure representing Will Rogers walking along beside. Native Americans mounted on ponies are in the background; cattle and a dog complete the composition.

Simms and Struppeck first sculpted the scene in clay, and then it became the first OU artwork to be sent to Oklahoma City to be cast in bronze, rather than to New York City or the west coast. Before being mounted on the clock tower, the bronze was displayed in the Union lobby to be inspected by the sponsoring seniors.



Robert Taylor



Leslie Baumer

**Not lost, merely misplaced. The bronze sculpture completes a giant crane ride over the Oklahoma Memorial Union building and into the new courtyard.**

In the mid-1980s, with the University's Centennial celebration approaching, the Campus Planning Council was told that the bas-relief had been located in a Physical Plant warehouse and asked for a recommendation for its reinstatement. Their suggestion that the bronze be placed on the wall at the southwest corner of the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art never was implemented.

Eventually, in 1993, Oklahoma City attorney Barry R. Simms contacted the University on his cousin Tom Simms' behalf to request that the sculpture be

"A Sooner Covered Wagon," the Simms-Struppeck representation of the Land Run, given by the Class of 1934 to be mounted on the north stadium clock tower, ended its nomadic life with appropriate ceremony and a permanent home at the Union.

released for a one-man art show in Beaumont, Texas. Some discussion ensued that after the showing the piece should be hung permanently, either on the campus or in Oklahoma City. With nothing resolved, Barry Simms took responsibility for the bronze, displaying it in his backyard.

When President David Boren heard the story of the bronze's nomadic wanderings, his keen interest in preserving OU history caused the Simms-Struppeck work to be recalled to the campus. The north wall of Oklahoma Memorial Union's new courtyard was deemed an appropriate location. The move required an enormous crane, parked on Asp Avenue, to lift the 3,000-pound bronze up and over the building, lowering it into place to be secured to the wall by OU Physical Plant workers.

Neither Simms nor Struppeck—nor their professor, Joe Taylor—lived to see their art restored to the campus where the Class of 1934 had intended it as a memorial to their time at OU. But in an August 29, 2003, ceremony, representatives of the University community rededicated the Land Run sculpture to students and alumni past and present. —CJB