



# postscript. David Levy's History of OU

For more than six decades, anyone writing about the University of Oklahoma's early development has had reason to be grateful to Roy Gittinger, author of an unassuming—and long out-of-print—volume titled *The University of Oklahoma: A History of Fifty Years, 1892-1942*. Between its covers, the pioneering OU student-turned-professor-turned-administrator dutifully chronicled each faculty appointment, building project, academic evolution, forward step and backward slide of the institution's fledgling years. As a reference work, the Gittinger book is invaluable—as a fireside read, less than stimulating.

Now along comes David W. Levy with the first of his three-volume, definitive history of the University, and inanimate names become full-blown characters in an unfolding drama, the facts and figures adding framework to a fascinating plot. The Julian J. Rothbaum Professor of Modern American History and David Ross Boyd Professor of History at OU, David Levy adds to those credentials his skill as a master storyteller, as readers of *Sooner Magazine* should know.

When his research took him to the primary sources historians so love to explore, Levy uncovered archival gems that, while enlightening, probably would not make it into his final manuscript. *Sooner Magazine* became the beneficiary of the surplus, a popular series of articles, now 19 and counting, called "Treasures from the Archives."

*The University of Oklahoma: A History, Volume 1, 1890-1917*, a November 2005 publication of the University of Oklahoma Press, has the deft Levy touch, beautifully and lovingly written, his scholarly attention to detail marked by a wry humor that keeps the narrative moving. And the reader should resist any temptation to skip the footnotes, which are chock full of intriguing asides.



Shevearn Williams

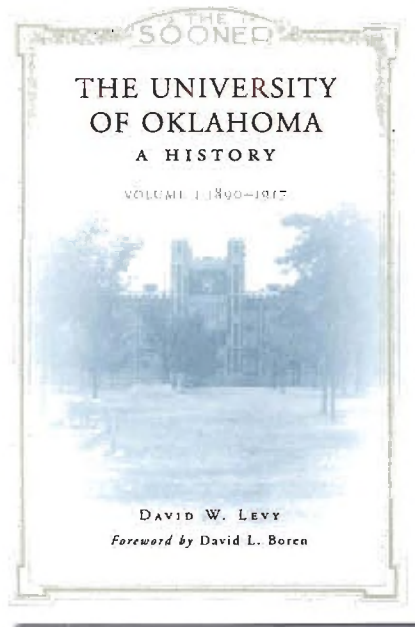
OU Historian David W. Levy

Levy sets the scene for his tale by describing the land into which the Five Civilized Tribes would be sent to join their more nomadic brothers, the territory that subsequently would be opened to settlement in the land runs, the area that would become Norman, the political decisions that placed a university there. Then the author peoples the town and the institution with those who might not have known they were becoming historical figures—but certainly did know they had a monumental job on their hands.

The patriarchal President David Ross Boyd dominates the first two-thirds of Volume 1, adroitly guiding earnest students and a lively young faculty past the pitfalls and tragedies that could have derailed their academic enterprise at several junctures. Some of their names are campus landmarks now but once they were all very human individuals with lives of more than passing interest. Parrington, DeBarr, Holmberg, Gould, Owen, Paxton, Van Vleet, Buchanan, Rader, Felgar—the list goes on and on.

When Boyd finally succumbed to the political upheaval of statehood, President A. Grant Evans briefly takes the stage, ably reorganizing the administration before handing off to the even more skillful Stratton D. Brooks. Brooks set about refining and expanding the scope of the University, bringing it to an institutional maturity envisioned by its founders.

Here the author pauses in 1917, on the brink of that first Great War, as the world is poised to intrude on the affairs of the young university and "things were about to change." Levy has a guaranteed readership for Volume 2 (expected in 2007) in those who will hate to see Volume 1 end. Even if you know the rest of the story, nothing compares with having David Levy tell the tale. —CJB



*The University of Oklahoma : A History* (368 pp., \$29.95/hardcover) is available in bookstores or directly from the University of Oklahoma Press: 1-800-627-7377 and [www.oupress.com](http://www.oupress.com).