



prologue.

Get your holiday gift lists ready for 2015; OU's 125th anniversary books are the perfect answer.

When institutions are young, they, like children, celebrate each birthday like there is no tomorrow. Then the maturation process takes over, festivities reserved for the “big ones.” Universities, in keeping with their declaration of being built for the ages, more often mark quarter-centuries and call them anniversaries. The year 2015 is such a milestone for the University of Oklahoma—125 years since creation by the first Territorial Legislature, December 19, 1890, 17 years before statehood.

President David Boren already has kicked off a 125th anniversary-themed, \$500 million private funding campaign—Live On, University—and as-yet-unannounced public events associated with the observance will run throughout the year. They will be interesting, educational, even fun, but largely forgotten as the University builds toward its 150th and on and on. More likely to stand history's test is a trio of University of Oklahoma Press publications devoted to OU's colorful past, remarkable present and perhaps a nod toward its promising future.

Available next fall will be the latest edition of *The Sooner Story*; a coffee-table treatment of University images and photographs 1890-2015 titled *Path to Excellence*; and David W. Levy's long-awaited *The University of Oklahoma: A History, Volume 2, 1917-1950*. They follow in the dust of past anniversary books that have been invaluable resources for writers, editors and fact-checkers.

The first came at the half century—Roy Gittinger's *The University of Oklahoma: A History of Fifty Years 1892-1942*, a carefully researched, remarkably accurate account dating from the first classes, rather than the official 1890 establishment. It reads like a catalogue—extremely useful but pretty boring stuff.

Harold Keith's livelier 1948

Oklahoma Kickoff was football-focused but contained an amazing amount of institutional history as well. After his retirement as president, George L. Cross produced a series of well-received books dealing with the issues of his 25-year presidency, but they were topical in nature. Only in 1965 did someone take another crack at telling the complete University story, not on the quarter-century, but for some reason at 65. Writer Charles F. Long and editor Paul Galloway produced a meticulously researched version in a special edition of *Sooner Magazine*.

Back on the 25-year track, the 75th brought this editor out of retirement and back to *Sooner Magazine* to edit Carolyn G. Hart's *The Sooner Story*, which revised Long's work and carried it forward to 1980. *Centennial: A Portrait of the University of Oklahoma*, published on the 100th anniversary in 1990, went big with coffee-table treatment, strong on photographs, in hard cover, written and edited by Carol J. Burr, designed by Bill Williams.

The new *Sooner Story* is written by Anne Barajas Harp, who has blended three years of original, post-1980 research into Long's and Hart's material to span the years to the present Boren administration. OU Press Editor Charles Rankin calls her work well-written and “remarkably seamless.” The Boren Years contrast with the previous chapters, being more topical than chronological, emphasizing “big ideas”—internationalization, focus on students, development of fine arts resources, landscaping and physical plant expansion.

Path to Excellence returns to the coffee-table, hardcover format, drawing on OU Archives and Western History Collections so blessed with vast photo material that there is very little overlap with *The Sooner Story* or David Levy's history. The text and captions are by John

Lovett, Kristina Southwell, Jacqueline Reese and Bethany Mowry.

Rankin describes *Path to Excellence* as OU's history told through its architecture and campus life, starting with the early black-and-white images, through the old color of the 1950s and 1960s, presented in their original faded and blurry state when compared with the last third of the book in high-quality contemporary color photographs by Charles Robert Goins, Rich Taylor, Robert Taylor and Hugh Scott, and designed by Julie S. Rushing.

For the most complete, best researched and entertaining University history that has been and will be produced, turn to David W. Levy, a master historian but also a gifted writer. The only fault to be found here is that it comes out in pieces with long waits in between; Levy is not to be hurried. Volume 1, 1890-1917, was published in 2005 and is still available in paperback. Volume 2 picks up at the end of WWI and ends with the educational explosion at the end of WWII. What was planned as a three-volume series will undoubtedly need four.

Levy's impressively deep research and nuanced and perceptive presentation set out an objective view of the development of the University of Oklahoma (he never uses OU), populated by people the reader really gets to know, their attributes and also their flaws. His heroes are presidents and a host of faculty of all types—but he also names the villains of the piece.

Immodestly it must be said that for all of these publications celebrating the University, *Sooner Magazine* has been a resource. Most big-ticket events dating back to 1928 are on its pages as well as a myriad of the significant smaller stories that will never see a history book. Should we note here that in October 2018, *Sooner Magazine* will be 100 years old? I feel another history coming on. —CJB