

A quick spin through
OU's past leads from a lone
building surrounded by prairie
grass to a world-class institution
where a passion for possibilities
still rules.

By ANNE BARAJAS HARP

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OU WESTERN HISTORY COLLECTIONS



The University
at **125**

1890-2015

Every Sooner worthy of wearing crimson and cream knows the legend of David Ross Boyd's

arrival in the barren prairie town of Norman during the summer of 1892 and exclaiming, "What possibilities!" But as the University of Oklahoma prepares to celebrate its 125th anniversary, even the most die-hard Soonerphile may have trouble comprehending how a school begun by a handful of faculty and 57 "dead earnest" pioneer students became today's world-class academic and research institution.

From its earliest days, optimism and a belief in the transformative power of education have ruled at OU, which quite literally rose from the ashes – not once, but twice. But neither flames nor political dramas that led to the resignations of Presidents Boyd, Evans and Brooks deterred OU from its mission.

Even the devastating effects of

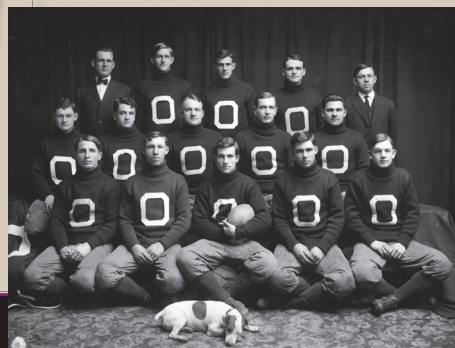
Above right - OU's first president, David Ross Boyd, at his desk. Right - Students at the "Rock Building" on Main Street in 1892. The facility was rented for \$20 a month until OU's first building was completed.



A colored postcard highlights the destruction of University Hall in December 1907, while a ribboned invitation from the Young Women's Christian Association greets new female students in 1911.



Boyd House, circa 1914



Coach Bennie Owen (back row, far right) and his "1911 All Victorious Team."

1890-1916

The Kiowa Five (right) were recruited to OU by professor and artist Oscar Jacobson and brought Native American art to international audiences for the first time. Below is the earliest-known photograph of the OU RUF/NEKS in 1920.



World War I failed to dampen the spirit of a university expanding on two campuses or OU's "Roaring '20s" students, who were wild for football and pranks between law and engineering students.

The university matured and spread its influence despite the Great Depression, thanks to the guiding hand of President William Bennett Bizzell. It's no secret that Bizzell's passion for books led to the library in his name, but OU's doctoral programs, the OU Press, *World Literature Today* and OU Outreach also are his legacy.

World War II revolutionized OU, as female students out-
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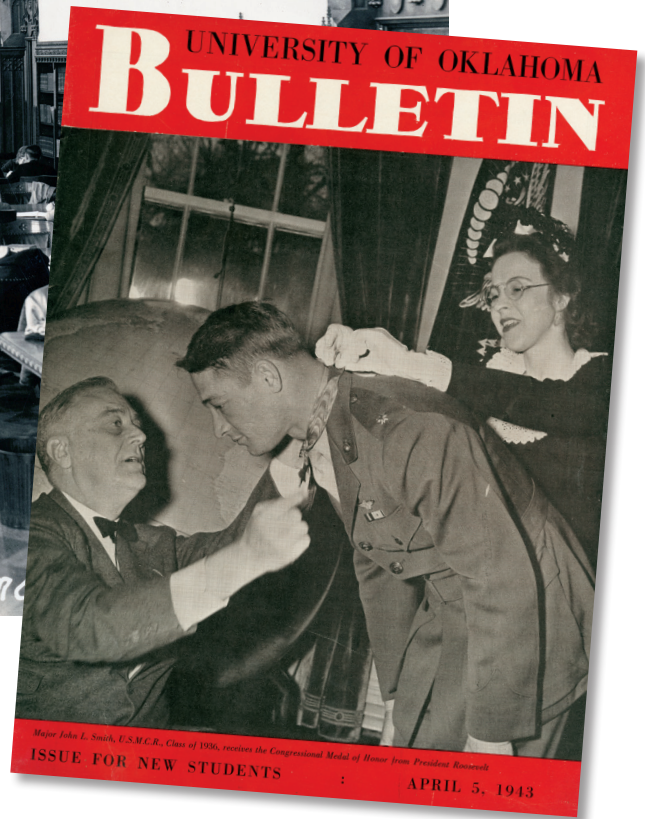
Company A, 1st Battalion, on the steps of Monnet Hall in 1918. OU's Student Army Training Corps was begun by the U.S. War Department during World War I and had more than 1,300 members.



A 1929 postcard of OU's new library. The 1920s brought new freedoms to women, who bobbed their hair and reveled in jazz.



1917-1929



Above - OU students crowd the Great Reading Room in 1931. Right - A decade later, the campus would empty of male students serving in World War II. Among them was 1936 alumnus John Lucien Smith, who received the Congressional Medal of Honor from President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

“The real tidal wave of troops arrived when the war ended.”

The Pride of Oklahoma leads OU's homecoming parade along University Boulevard in 1935. The band had marched through downtown Oklahoma City the previous day to rally alumni and fans.



1940 Sooner Yearbook cover and the Naval Air Station base insignia, featuring a rabbit to represent the training program's speed, a gosport for aviation, and books for OU's academic training.

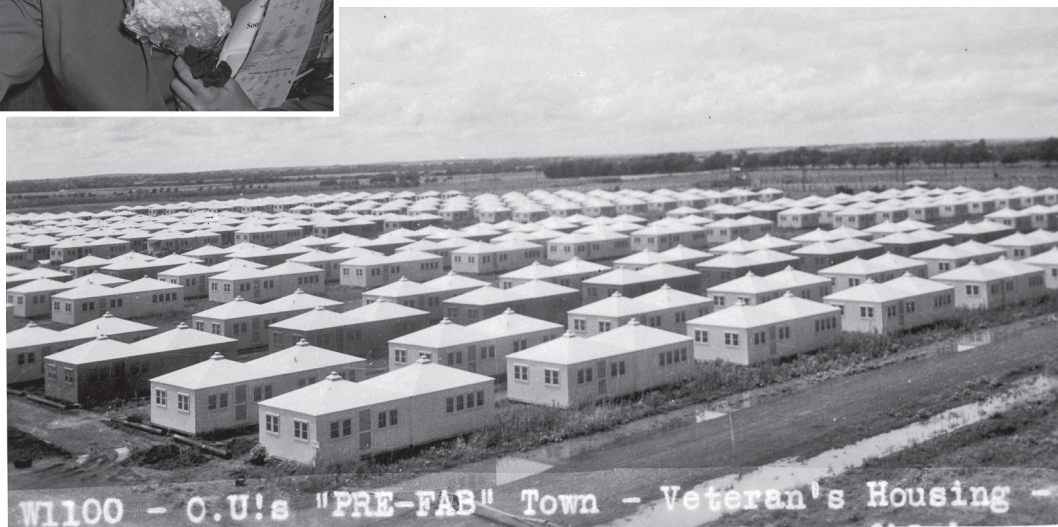
1930-1945



The Crosses congratulate Coach Bud Wilkinson on the Sooners' 1948 20-14 victory over the University of Texas, its first since 1939. OU's enrollment doubled after WWII and many students lived in "Sooner City," covering the area now occupied by OU's residence halls.

numbered males three to one and the university became home to the bustling U.S. Naval Air Station and Naval Technical Training Center. But the real tidal wave of troops arrived when the war ended and President Cross faced a student population that had suddenly doubled.

The fight for racial desegregation and real or imagined battles against Communism came to OU in the late 1940s, along with the twin tragedies of the BOQ fire and the Naval ROTC plane crash. The 1950s ushered in a calmer, idyllic student life highlighted by Coach Bud Wilkinson's three national championships and 47-game winning streak.



OU student Robert M. Wynne escapes the 1949 BOQ fire. Tragically, three students lost their lives and 20 were injured in the devastating South Base blaze.



Prentice Gautt broke the OU athletics color barrier. He became an Academic All-American and was named MVP for the 1959 Orange Bowl.



Above, an OU 75th anniversary coin featuring the profiles of Presidents Boyd and Cross. Students change classes on the South Oval in 1958.

1945-1965



The Kent State tragedy hit home in May 1970, when OU students held several days of protests that culminated with the Naval ROTC Field Day demonstration.



President J. Herbert Hollomon was brilliant but highly controversial. Ideas from his "Plan for the University" were implemented over the next two decades and included the OU Student Association.

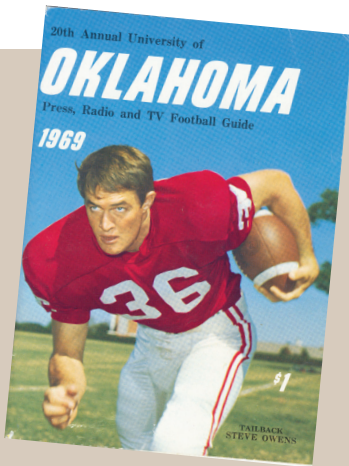
Cultural change swept OU in the 1960s and 1970s, crescendoing with the 1970 Field Day demonstration and the 1973 firebombing of President Paul Sharp's home. Yet the era's activism also shaped a generation of students who became state and national leaders.

The 1980s meant oil booms and busts, and President William S. Banowsky led OU to survive this dynamic period "bloodied but not bowed." The decade ended with OU bloodied again; this time by a series of athletic scandals that made national headlines rivaling football coach Barry Switzer's three national championships.

OU's Centennial celebration kicked off the 1990s in style, and that period saw the dawn of OU's emergence as a research and weather superpower.

When the Boren era began in 1994, OU reveled in a renaissance that generated a head-spinning tally of achievements, including record-breaking private fundraising, a six-fold increase in endowed faculty positions, three thriving campuses transformed by \$2 billion in construction projects, and an internationalized education attracting the nation's finest students – including the largest class of National Merit Scholars in U.S. public higher education.

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Above - Steve Owens brought home the 1969 Heisman Trophy. Center, President Banowsky meets with the 1980 President's Leadership Class.



At right - the leggy fashions of 1973 hit OU's Noman campus.

1966-1980



At right - the 1980s brought computing into OU classes.
 Above - On a sunny day in 1991, at least one class took advantage of spring weather on the lawn of Bizzell Memorial Library.



“The 1990s saw the dawn of OU’s emergence as a research and weather superpower.”

Sooner pride flourished with athletic traditions like the Sooner Schooner in 1989 and basketball legends Wayman Tisdale and Coach Billy Tubbs, photographed in 1983. New Sooner pride bloomed in 1992 with the appointment of Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher as an OU



Laura Tontiz



REGENT FISHER COMES HOME



Stacey Don West

1981-1994




Robert Taylor

David L. Boren receives the Mace and Collar, the official symbols of the OU presidency, during inauguration ceremonies in September 1995.



Robert Taylor

President Boren and First Lady Molly Shi Boren receive a resolution honoring 20 years of OU service from the Board of Regents in 2014.

Today, OU eagerly looks to a future made even brighter by the forthcoming Stephenson School of Biomedical Engineering and two new Residential Colleges. Yet, for the 300,000 alumni who have called OU home during the past century and a quarter, one reality stays constant: the University of Oklahoma will always live on to teach, inspire and serve. 

Anne Barajas Harp is assistant editor of Sooner Magazine.

(Editor's note: To commemorate OU's 125th anniversary, the OU Press is publishing three new books this fall: The Sooner Story; Path to Excellence; and The University of Oklahoma: A History, Vol II. For more on OU's history, visit the Western History Collections special exhibit, "A History of OU: 125 Years of Excellence" in Monnet Hall, Room 300.)



Stacey Don West

The OU Sooners celebrate a win over the University of Tennessee Volunteers with fireworks at Oklahoma Memorial Stadium in September 2014.



Robert Taylor

The Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication, seen here in 2005, is just one example of the unprecedented growth and success of the Boren presidency.

1995-2015