

# On living in Norman

BY GEORGE MILBURN, '30

MY friend Walt Mills once wrote in his *Oklahoma City Times* "Don't Worry" column that the Oklahoma state chamber of commerce probably would never fully appreciate me. Perhaps he was right about that, and the possibility has caused me considerable anguish. However, I do feel that I still have something to expect from the Norman Chamber of Commerce, because I've really treated this town white. Indeed, I've gone out of my way to do something big for Norman, Oklahoma, and I often find solace in believing that my efforts will be recognized some day. I'm fond of imagining what form the city's gratitude will take.

To be sure, I've never gone on any booster trips, or anything like that. And I didn't contribute to the fund for inducing someone to build a first-class hotel on Main Street, although I did read the architect's specifications devotedly and I've always thought that, if the hostelry ever did rear itself above the hoardings, as soon as it got finished I'd go down on Sunday evenings and lounge around in the lobby reading a Gideon Bible.—Norman doesn't offer many inducements for getting away from home, and I sometimes consider that one of its virtues, or vice versa, at other times. So we're usually at home when my pious companions come to see us.—But I was writing of what I hadn't done for Norman: I have never contributed anything to the various old clothes drives, inasmuch as all the old clothes I have are always in active use at the time the Lions and Boy Scouts call, if they don't call too early in the morning.

We could go on with this, of course, and make up an impressive list of the things I've neglected to do for the community I live in. After all, though, some of these things are only superficial, and scarcely evince the true civic spirit. I have been remiss in many of these things, I confess, but there is one thing that I have done for Norman! I have never lost any opportunity to put a good word for it in writing. As early as July, 1931 I was saying in the Editorial Notes of the *American Mercury* that I considered it a very tolerable town to live in. I thought I turned a neat compliment to the place that time, and I have continued to get in one

when I could. Nothing so extravagant as to be fulsome, but always some simple little tribute to my adopted home town.

I have been going about this business of quietly publicising the joys of living in Oklahoma's University City for almost two years now. I shouldn't care to make an estimate of the amount of good I've done, or the number of homes into which I've carried the message, or the number of inches of newspaper mention I have been instrumental in bringing the town. Still, I have a feeling that what I've done has directed almost as much attention to what a fine up-and-coming town this is as one of those brochures chamber of commerces like to mail out. I don't mean those elaborate ones, of course; only those unpretentious little four-fold ones.

Unfortunately, I have never before been permitted to go into detail about my reasons for liking to live in Norman. I believe that the churches, schools, miles of paved streets, shipping facilities, and other points of excellence have been mentioned. I should put none of these among my reasons. I sometimes describe in letters the scenic beauties of the place—the broad dun vista that is my upstairs window. It is always exhilarating to look out across the empty horse lot and see that expanse of prairie, whether it's undulating with heat waves, or shrouded in snow, or blue with mist. But that, of course, I like because of the lack of Norman, rather than because of Norman. I suppose that I'd find it very disheartening if Norman were to expand rapidly in our direction and if some realtor of vision were to start up a residential section south of our house. No, there are undoubtedly many beauties to be found in Norman, natural and man-made, inducement enough, I suppose, but none of these is enough to make me want to live on here while the world beckons and there's nothing to keep us other than the possibility of a garnishment.

The real reason, or perhaps I should say reasons, I find Norman a perennially refreshing town in which to live is that so large a part of its population seems to be people who are interesting and at the same time genuine. Genuine people too often are pretty dull. But in all my acquaintance among Norman townspeople,

and it is wide, I cannot think of a single poser. Remembering other communities of enjoyable folk in which I have lived I find this nothing short of extraordinary. Indeed there are times when I rather miss some of the good old arty affectations, for purposes of contrast if nothing else.

I do not know of any other small town in America to which I could go and expect to find as many congenial, and at the same time intelligent, people. It is an invigorating thing to know that around the corner there are Dorothy Kirk, who paints a good water color, and Betty, who knows a good book; Paul Dooley, with whom I can compare notes on bumming expeditions; Caswell Proctor, with his stories of the oil fields; Joe Brandt, with his puns; Forrest Clements, who converses on the exotic customs of primitive peoples; the Courts with their evenings of music and polemics; Walter Campbell, one of the most distinguished American biographers; Jo Mathews, who brings the wealth of two civilizations on his visits from Pawhuska; Ben Botkin, whose criticisms are the most helpful I have ever had; Gene Alessandri, who has marched with the Foreign Legion in Algiers; Al Thomas, the authority on Spanish civilization in America; or Van Heflin, who has sailed in tramp steamers on every ocean. I could go on at length, but this begins to sound like a Chesterfield advertisement. It is sufficient to say that people of inimitable charm live in Norman in a number far out of proportion to its population. They furnish my good and sufficient reasons for our staying on in town when my intuition tells me that we really should be getting on.

It is, of course, the University of Oklahoma that provides these good companions, just as it is the university that brings to us Bertrand Russell and Paul Whiteman and Norman Thomas and Lynn Riggs and Oscar Ameringer, that gracious loveable old radical editor. It has often occurred to me that education does not come to one in its real, broadest sense while one is enrolled in the University, but only after one has been resident in Norman for a few years.

So it is a civilized town, and I like it. And if someone will bring this little piece to the attention of Mr Kuwitzky, I'll be much obliged.

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The Bureau of Municipal Research on municipal government is re-organizing its material collected since 1924 for the use of the Oklahoma Municipal League, state, city officials and students studying government. This material includes books and magazines on varying subjects of civic government, from sources all over the nation. The university library cooperates with the bureau in binding volumes of magazines. Robert K. Carr, instructor in government, is present director of the bureau.