

Forty-two Years Ago

By M. V. BRADBURY, '37

FORTY-TWO years ago last September a group of young men and women hurried down the lonely, sun-baked main street of a small Oklahoma town. Reaching a grey stone building* on the south side of the dirt road, they climbed the dusty stairs to the second floor and entered the office of the president of the new University of Oklahoma.

A full-bearded president, D. R. Boyd, and the three members of the university faculty greeted them. Enrolment was rapid and simple—English, Latin, Math, History and Science.

Prep courses many of them took, for opportunities for advanced education in the recently opened territory had been limited. Some had been prepared by private academies for college work and were classified as university freshmen. They also took Latin, English, Math, History and Science, but theirs were more difficult classes.

Among the prep students was J. W. Barbour, a young man living on a farm two and one-half miles southwest of Norman. At present he is a Norman druggist. From him comes the description of O. U.'s first students and classes:

"There were about one hundred twenty-five of us, rather evenly divided between girls and boys. Some were young, some as old as forty or forty-five.

"Our classes were held in the upstairs of the building, where we used one-armed chairs much like those the present classes have.

"Few of the classes were crowded. This may have been a very good thing, for in those days the girls wore huge flower-garden hats and often did not remove them in the classroom. With a choice of empty chairs, we boys could avoid sitting behind one of the masterpieces of millinery.

"It was not long before we were well acquainted with the faculty. Our group was so small that we had frequent contacts with Dr. Boyd, Dr. Edwin DeBarr, Prof. W. N. Rice and Prof. F. S. E. Amos."

When asked the cost of attending the university for a year in the nineties, Mr. Barbour said, "My own expenses were slight, for I lived with my parents and had no board or room to pay. For a friend of mine who did not live at home, expenses

*This building, behind a new brick front, is still standing at 12 West Main Street.

were between \$100 and \$150 a year. This covered everything.

"My friend and three other boys rented a three-roomed house for \$10 a month and did their own cooking and housework. Their food and household expenses were \$1.50 a week."

The majority of the students lived with their parents or relatives in Norman. It was common for them to help with the family house or shop work after school hours. But few young people attempted to support themselves by working during the school term.

Since most of the students were members of Norman families, their social life was closely linked with that of the townspeople. Informal parties in the homes were the chief amusements. Public dances were frowned upon. Parlor dates were in vogue.

Parlor dates were really parlor dates in 1892. Mother and dad and the rest of the family remained in the living room and daughter and her friend spent the evening in the parlor—a smaller room opening off the large one. There were double doors between the rooms and daughter was properly chaperoned.

Double and triple dates were quite common. Here also the young people spent the evening within one of the homes. Sometimes several couples called at the home of a friend who was having a date and made an informal party of the meeting.

Candy pulling was quite popular at those gatherings. Candy pulling, Mr. Barbour declared, did not refer to the pulling of taffy or any other confection. It was a method of choosing partners for a game. Two bowls of broken vari-striped stick candy were passed, one to the girls and one to the boys. Each took a half-stick. His partner was the person having the matching end.

Square dancing was the greatest fun of all. "We danced most often," said Mr. Barbour, "to the tune of 'Old Dan Tucker.' If we had no musical instruments to provide the music, we sang it while we danced.

"Church hymns and religious pieces were the best known songs and, for that reason, the most sung. Frequently, when a group of us got together, we would sing one after another of them. There was usually some one to play the piano for us."

Sunday night brought church dates. To ask a young lady for a church date one

sent a note by a young boy to the girl in question. The messenger waited until she could write an answer and then returned it to the sender. Usually the girl went to church with her parents and was met by her date immediately after the services.

If the boy's father was generous, the son was able to sport a horse and buggy and took his lady fair riding.

Mr. Barbour smilingly denied knowledge of the location of the most popular lanes for those buggy rides. They were probably not, he decided, the Chickasha or Noble highways and side-roads, as now. They were much closer to the then undeveloped town and are more than likely a part of Norman's residential district today.

Another event which furnished occasion for dates was the opera. Light operas were presented by stock companies in the two-storied building which has since been converted into the University hotel. The entertainments were presented from three to six days at a time and nearly everyone attended.

The Sooner lass of '92 had a sure method of testing the affection of her suitor. She determined its depth by the size and elaborateness of the valentine which he sent her on the good Saint's day. If it was made of hearts and dainty paper lace and carried a tender message, she was pleased. But if it was made of red celluloid, was about 15 by 20 inches in size, and stood on a wire easel, she treasured it, indeed. For the sender surely was very fond of her. He had paid \$10 for her remembrance.



J. W. Barbour, Norman druggist, enrolled in the first class of the University in 1892. Completed his prep work four years later and began to study pharmacy. In February, 1897, he received his Ph.C. degree. For six weeks he clerked in a Shawnee drug store, moved to Chickasha, where he worked in a pharmacy for eight months.

Returning to Norman, Barbour took up his present position as a Norman business man and druggist. Married Frona May Jackson of Norman. Has two children—Jeanette, clerk in the processing department of the Internal Revenue department in Oklahoma City, and Jack, freshman in the University.

From 1918-22 served two terms as Norman's first mayor under the managerial form of government. Between 1926-34 was chairman of the Cleveland County Democratic Central committee.

Is active in lodge work, being a Master Mason, Royal Arch Mason, Knight Templar, Council Mason, member of the order of Eastern Star, member of the White Shrine of Jerusalem, district deputy grand master of Cleveland and McClain counties, and a Shriner of the India Temple at Oklahoma City.

Has 21 near relatives who have attended or are attending the University of Oklahoma.