

The death of Walter Scott Ferguson, '07, Tulsa, was a severe shock to Oklahoma during March. The prominent Tulsan was a comparatively young man and extremely active up to his sudden death in Washington, D. C., where he had gone on business.

## Walter Scott Ferguson

(1886-1936)

**T**HE history of Walter Ferguson is the history of Oklahoma.

He was an integral part of Oklahoma and Oklahoma was an important part of him. He came to the territory in '89, the year of the run, left the University in '07, the year of statehood, and the growth of both to early maturity was strangely parallel.

Around no Oklahoman alive is there such a background of rich experience, such a colorful repertoire of stories. When Walter Ferguson's death was reported early in March, it immediately brought to relief the countless yarns about his boyhood, his youth and his manhood.

Hundreds of his friends paid written and spoken tribute to the former University student who was first a newspaperman, then a banker and for a time an oil company executive.

In the January issue of *The Sooner Magazine* appeared a short biographical sketch of the fifty-year old Oklahoma leader written by his son Benton who was graduated from the University in 1933. It was significant that of all the things written about Walter Ferguson that few repeated similar stories about him.

His coming to Oklahoma at the age of three, his experiences as a University student, his organization of the Kappa Alpha chapter on the University campus, his establishment of the *Cherokee Republican*, his years as a banker and newspaperman were similarly reported, but behind these better known phases of his life were widely varying accounts of the acts that made him the most colorful of Oklahomans.

The University lost one of its half dozen most outstanding former students with the

death of Walter Ferguson. Likewise, it lost a fine friend.

Perhaps, no better picture of the man could be drawn than the one that forms from the reading of what others have said about him. Many of the numerous comments are collected here.

The following tributes to Mr. Ferguson appeared in the *Tulsa World*:

**W. G. Skelly**, Tulsa oilman—He was a wonderful friend, a wonderful citizen, public spirited and with great intellect and admirable personal qualities. His loss to the city and to the state is just shocking.

**E. Fred Johnson**, Tulsa banker, civic worker and former president of the Tulsa chamber of commerce—Walter Ferguson had many interests; he was a noted figure in banking, oil, the newspaper field and public affairs. He had an unusually wide circle of friends and an unusually absorbing hobby—he loved Oklahoma as it is and as it was. He collected pictures, books, papers of an early day and the collection it took him for years to make he leaves behind him—a permanent and valuable contribution to his state.

**A. E. Bradshaw**, Tulsa banker and associate—Walter Ferguson had the true pioneer spirit; his death is a tremendous loss to the state. He was a tireless civic worker and leader, striving always for a better city and state.

**Morton Rutherford**, former state senator and attorney—I'm deeply grieved to learn of Walter's death. The entire state should regret that he has never written a history of Oklahoma, for no other man now living can write it as he could.

**N. A. Gibson**, attorney—For thirty years he has been my friend and I shall



treasure him in my memory as the embodiment of the spirit of Oklahoma, in that he loved and strove for the accomplishment and preservation of those ideals for which his father and mother and all such loyal pioneers have lived and longed to see realized in this state and their creation. Oklahoma and all the thousands who loved him have suffered an irreparable loss.

**Eugene Lorton**, publisher of the *Tulsa World*—The state of Oklahoma has lost one of its outstanding citizens in the death of Walter Ferguson; he was a leader as a newspaperman, as a banker and as an Oklahoma booster.

**R. D. Williams**, federal judge—I was terribly sorry to hear of Walter Ferguson's death. I esteemed him very much.

**John Rogers**, attorney—When I think of Walter Ferguson I think of the development of Oklahoma and the part that he and his father played in that development. His father, and Walter after him, had an important part in that development. He had the finest library on Oklahoma of any living person. It's a tremendous loss, his going this early in life.

**William H. Murray**, former governor—I first met Walter Ferguson at the constitutional convention. I was so impressed with him as a newspaperman that when the first legislature met and he was out of employment I gave him a clerkship and he did the reading for the first legislature. I have known him intimately ever since; he was a very able man, honorable and conscientious; he had a natural ability to see things not given to ordinary man. I don't know of anybody that I regret to lose as

much as Walter Ferguson, although we never agreed in politics.

**Walter M. Harrison**, managing editor of the Oklahoma Publishing company papers, said in his column in *The Oklahoma City Times*:

Some pieces write themselves. But stories about close friends who have been suddenly counted out falter at the finger tips. It is like that with Walter Ferguson. His prying face smiles down from the walls of my office. "With the best wishes of one country editor to another," is the line scrawled across his photograph. If death had not caught him unawares, he would have jested about it. There was a lot of puck in his personality. He loved life. He had a good time. He took good times and bad in stride, made fun for himself out of every situation. He was a fine host and a grand entertainer. He probably entertained too much. During these recent years much of his activity was tied up with getting things for others. He was known as a good Washington contact and was often there, helping some group pull somebody's chestnuts out of the fire. That kind of business means late hours and entertaining after a man has ceased to have any stomach for it. Whether it palled on Ferguson I do not know, but he was an effective emissary to the seats of the mighty.

Ferguson was about as fine a "native son" as Oklahoma had. Although he was born in Kansas, he was a baby when his folks came over the line in 1889. His father's activity in politics and his service as governor put Walter into public affairs as a boy. He saw the state come from scratch and was proud of it. He knew its men and its history. He has the best personal museum of Oklahomania extant. It should go to the state some day. Too few who have lived their lives in Oklahoma are proud of the commonwealth. Ferguson was intensely proud of Oklahoma and spent as much time and ability as anyone I know in giving a good report of this young state to the world.

**Reford Bond**, chairman of the state Corporation Commission, said of Mr. Ferguson in the *Oklahoma News*: I've known Walter Ferguson since he was a student in the University of Oklahoma. As a publisher and a writer he was original and showed rare ability. As a banker he exhibited unusual executive ability and the foresight of a real financier. He had political courage, intellectual integrity and prescient intelligence. He had the faculty of making strong friends and holding them hard and fast.

**Ed Mills**, '32as, wrote a series of three articles about Mr. Ferguson in the *Oklahoma News*. One of them said:

It is definitely known that Mr. Ferguson was planning to make use of his valuable collection of Oklahoma historical records to write, with the humor of which he was a master, a history of the state and particularly of its country press.

And while his plans were as yet uncertain, it is also pretty well known that he was looking with anxious eyes at the newspaper field and his family says it was his hope to return to these two first loves, if possible, as soon as the proper course was made plain.

The history he hoped to write was to have been based not only on the personal experiences of a man who knew first hand whereof he spoke, but also on a collection of data and relics which many believe more valuable than that at the state Historical Society Building in Oklahoma City.

It would not have been history in the dull manner that disgusts so many youngsters with the subject in their school days, for Walter Ferguson could and did write wit and he lived with a love of life in all its forms.

**Roy S. Hadsell**, '04, professor of English at the University, was interviewed in the *Oklahoma Daily*, student newspaper:

Because he was secretary to the president of the university, Dr. S. R. Hadsell, now professor of English, had a good opportunity to become acquainted with Ferguson back in the days of 1905 and 1906. "Nearly every Monday morning," Hadsell said, "Ferguson was called into the office of Dr. David R. Boyd, president, to answer for some discipline case."

"Usually I would have to go into his classes after him," the English professor recollected.

"When I winked or lifted my finger, Ferguson would know he was wanted in the president's office."

Hadsell said that years later when he would meet Ferguson on the Oklahoma City streets the Tulsa bank official would answer, "All right I'm coming."

Another amusing incident Hadsell recalled was when Ferguson and George B. Parker, now editor-in-chief of the Scripps-Howard newspapers, started a small newspaper called "Maude." The little newspaper adorned with cartoons of "Maude the Mule" lasted only two or three issues for it talked too freely about the faculty, he disclosed.

Both Parker and Ferguson, Hadsell said, dressed up every Sunday morning to attend the president's Bible class at the Presbyterian church. The next day they usually visited the president, but not to talk about Sunday school. Both were good friends of Boyd.

One of a series of anecdotes from the *Oklahoma News* follows:

The yellowing files of the *Oklahoma News* yield a sketch written about Walter Ferguson in 1922, the burden of which was "the Ferguson nerve."

The story tells about his days at the University of Oklahoma:

"In those early days, the less claim for outward distinction the freshman had, the better suited he was to the general crowd. The title of 'Gov.' seemed to drop natural-

ly on the son of the last territorial chief executive, but when the title dropped on, the great, democratic student body seemed to drop off. . . .

"They liked his looks immensely, in a way, but there was something about his nerve that they couldn't endorse. The students just couldn't resist the impulse to arise against anybody who looked as if he thought he was 'somebody.'"

"But did this frustrate the Ferguson nerve? Not much.

"There was one tall, angular freshman who wore glasses and affected a skull cap and went by the solemn title of 'Deak' (G. B. Parker, now editor-in-chief of the Scripps-Howard newspapers).

"He cottoned to 'Gov.' from the start. It must have been that their games of poker seemed to dovetail; they liked the same brand of starry stuff; their minds turned to thoughts of girls of the same name—in fact they seemed to share the same ambitions to win an education and also a game of draw or two.

"These two gathered souls of kindred ideals about them, organized a club and proceeded to watch the world and the university go by."

And then the story relates Walter's experience with the Wolf boys. Bret Harte, it seems, never penned a yarn about men who were quicker on the trigger than the Wolf boys.

"It happened that on a certain occasion, the little group in which 'Gov.' Ferguson moved organized a hunting party to the Canadian wilds. Inadvertently they pitched camp in the Wolf neighborhood, and were brewing coffee over a fire as winter shadows fell over the sandy slopes.

"Out of the wastes rode Bud Wolf and his pack. Bud whipped out his six-shooter and aimed nonchalantly at the bubbling pot.

"All of the hunting party went for shelter except one. That one was 'Ferg,' who stayed out there kidding the life out of Bud Wolf and even got a laugh out of him."

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Wilson Brown, '35ex, and a former city editor of the *Oklahoma Daily*, is now employed with the Works Progress Administration at Washington, D. C.

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Louise Armstrong, ex-'34as, is assistant secretary in the office of Rep. Josh Lee, 1629 House Office Building. Miss Armstrong became the bride of Joe Wilson, Maysville, on December 9. Mr. Wilson is a former student of the Wentworth Military Academy, at Lexington, Missouri. They are making their home in Washington.

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Maureen Eady, Norman, a former university student is employed as a stenographer in the general accounting office of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, Washington, D. C.