

Walter Ferguson, '07

By BENTON, '33

IN 1889, a youngster of three left the covered wagon camp of his parents and toddled out to discover for himself just what this new land of Oklahoma was all about. He got lost and was lucky enough, strangely, to stumble into the camp of the Dalton gang, notorious Southwestern bandits. Until well after dark, the bandits entertained the child, or vice versa, and they treated him, we suppose, to a cupper of Mulligan stew. Late that night the child's father found him. The "desperados" escorted both father and son back to their camp in time to stave off nervous hysteria on the part of the mother. The bandits had no thought of robbing the "Boomers." They were after bigger fry than mere settlers making the run into the new territory.

The child was Walter Scott Ferguson, subject of this piece, and the father was T. B. Ferguson, who later became governor of Oklahoma Territory. The incident, with many others, was used by Edna Ferber in her novel *Cimarron*, which incidents she obtained when she visited "Little Cim" some forty years later in his home in Tulsa.

A sketch of Walter Ferguson wouldn't be complete without this tale. It is typical of his ability, even at an early age, to make friends with anyone.

He was born in Sedan, Kansas, in 1886, made the run with his parents, who settled in Watonga, Oklahoma. There he simultaneously started to school and to work—as a devil in the newspaper office. His childhood can be dismissed with the story, still current, of an old Watonga settler warning another not to kill a rattlesnake, "because it might bite that Ferguson kid."

Shortly after his father became governor of the territory, Walter entrained for Wentworth Military Academy, and there received four years of actual education, graduating in 1906, despite many disciplinary measures to prevent it.

In the fall of 1906, he entered the University of Oklahoma, where he was one of the founders and first president of the school's first fraternity—Kappa Alpha.

From various sources in Norman, where the University is located I have been able to learn that his University education was more social than scientific and contained more riot than research.

But there was too much printer's ink in his blood for a regular academic education. His parents founded, and still ran

one of the oldest papers in the territory, on which he had worked ever since he could hold a 'stick.' In 1908, he left school to cover the constitutional convention. Following this were several reportorial jobs over the state. And in 1908 he married Lucia Loomis, whom he had met at the University.

The young couple bought the *Cherokee Republican* and settled down in this county seat town to publish a paper that soon became known throughout the state.

His entry into politics was easy and inevitable. He was elected to the state senate and there introduced many of the state's laws, among which was—of all things!—the State Bone Dry Law.

In 1920, he sold his paper and moved to Oklahoma City to enter the advertising business, at which he did so well that the largest local bank took over his services exclusively. In 1921 he was made vice-president of the institution.

Six active years of banking followed, during which time he was elected to the state Federal reserve board. In 1927, he was made vice president of the Exchange National Bank of Tulsa, now the National Bank of Tulsa, where the family moved. Other positions include a directorship in the M. K. and T. Railroad. And in August he resigned from the bank to accept a position as executive vice-president of the Mid-Continent Oil and Gas Association, Oklahoma and Kansas division.

His experience in newspapering, politics and banking has given him probably more acquaintances than any other man in the state of Oklahoma, besides a fund of stories and anecdotes that he ought to put in print. *Who's Who* lists him as a member of the Oklahoma Club, Oklahoma City, the Tulsa Club, Tulsa, and the Press Club, Washington, D.C. He tries to avoid a show about being a K.A. and the first fraternity man initiated in the state, but it is a fact in which he takes a secret pride. He also tries to conceal his pride in the fact that his wife, Mrs. Walter Ferguson, is Scripps-Howard's premier woman columnist and has one of the largest audiences of any woman writer in the country.

In 1931, at the 25th anniversary of the founding of Beta Eta of Kappa Alpha, he was presented with a ring from the other founders of the chapter, inscribed, "To the Daddy of Kappa Alpha in Oklahoma." There such facts were brought to light that he and "Deac" Parker, another founder (now editor-in-chief of Scripps-

Howard newspapers), had a contract with the local bartender to sweep out for all the beer they could drink, and the fact that the chapter's first presidential chair was a beer keg. His son was chairman of the convention committee, and though he never would admit it, he enjoyed that as much as the gift of the ring.

At some time or another every man prominent in politics in the state has felt the pointedness of his pen or his disarming sarcasm. He is still more of a country editor, seeing and knowing everyone and everything about him, than he is a business man, but he has found that this humanization of business pays.

His hobbies include duck hunting—at the T-Bone ranch near Cherokee, home of his first triumphs and first friends—bridge, and his collection. The collection, by the way, is one of the finest of its kind in the country. It comprises photographs of every one prominent in Oklahoma history, letters, journals, many of them unduplicated, Indian bibles, guns of well-known bandits, books of cattle brands and rare editions of Southwestern books.

He is the father of three children: Benton, twenty-five; Ruth, eighteen and Tom, twelve. He is well under the control of Mrs. Ferguson, but, despite opinion to the contrary, he's the final head of the house. There's a lot of bluff to him, but he usually knows a little of what he's talking about, and he always gets away with it.

To anyone who doesn't know him, he is gruff, capable and callous. And to those that do know him he's capable and friendly. Few know him better than I do, for to me he's just the 'old man'—my favorite father.

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Davis Visits Pinky Tomlin

Jack Davis, Sooner swimming star, spent the Christmas holidays as a guest of Truman "Pinky" Tomlin, '34ex, in Hollywood. Tomlin, who has appeared in four motion pictures, is to begin production of another movie which he wrote. He will play the leading part. It is to be known as "The Arkansas Traveler."

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