

# Lew Wentz-- Practical Philanthropist

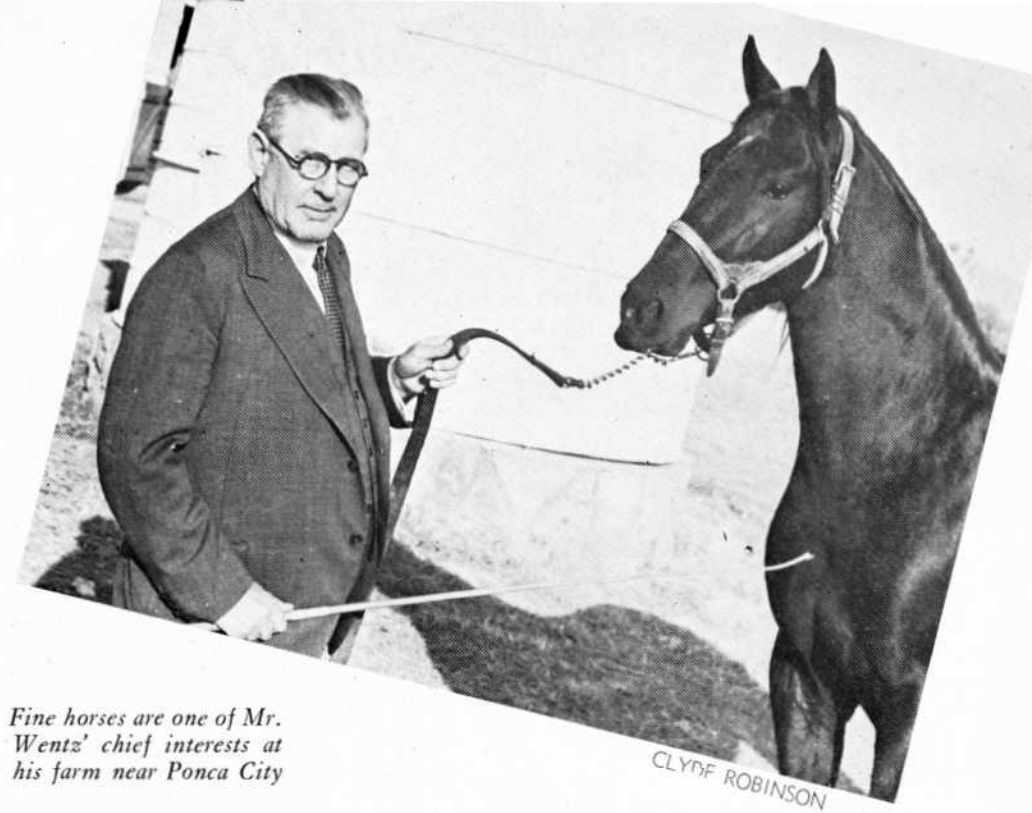
by  
Grace E. Ray

**T**HE fat Indian woman stood at the front door, and her blanketed figure made a wide silhouette in the night. She had come to the apartment of Lew H. Wentz, of Ponca City, with a tale of trouble. She told him that she and her small son were on their way to Nebraska when their car broke down, and that they were stranded in a strange city without money. Her words came in a whining voice. Mr. Wentz listened politely and questioned her until he was convinced that her story was false. He was well-acquainted in Ponca City, and he knew that her relatives lived near that town. But his attitude was kind. He took out a dollar bill and handed it to her. She went away satisfied.

Mr. Wentz then directed his attention to his guests, who were getting ready to go home. Ten minutes later, when they were seated in their car, he went out to speak to them again.

"Bread cast upon the waters," he recited with a smile. "Here's another Indian on the way to Nebraska whose car has broken down!" His friends laughed, and he walked back toward the dusky native at his door. As his guests drove away, Mr. Wentz had his hand in his pocket. They wondered how long his good humor would last. They tried to calculate how much it would cost him if Indians on the way to Nebraska, whose cars had broken down, continued to come to his door all evening. He would not mind the money angle, they knew, but he might tire of the attempted deception.

This recent incident illustrates the sympathy, sense of humor and keen insight of Mr. Wentz, well-known philanthropist who has distributed many hundred thousand dollars in gifts. His aid to college students is in the form of revolving funds administered by boards of trustees. He has given \$125,000 as a loan fund for students of the University of Oklahoma, \$75,000 to Oklahoma A. and M. College, and similar amounts to Tulsa University, Cameron College at Lawton, and Southeastern State College at Durant. Since he began to set up these funds in 1926, the University of Oklahoma fund has increased itself from \$125,000 to about \$175,000. In this state



*Fine horses are one of Mr. Wentz' chief interests at his farm near Ponca City*

more than two thousand needy students have been aided.

"Recipients of loans feel it is a debt of honor to repay the money and the low rate of interest in order that other students may borrow it," commented Mr. Wentz.

In addition to his sincere love of people, he shows a great interest in birds and animals. He has established a large game preserve which is one of the show places of the West. There he has one of the best private collections of ornamental pheasants in the United States, a herd of sika or Japanese wild deer, thirty-seven White Fallow deer, and about one hundred fifty white-tail deer, droves of snow geese, flocks of wild turkeys of the breed used at the first Thanksgiving party of the Pilgrims, a flock of Arizona wild turkeys, and some of the finest purebred saddle horses and registered Shetland ponies in the country. He has ponies straight from the Shetland Islands.

**N**OW stand back out of the way—we're going to lead out a big mean stallion!" he cautioned a group of guests at his farm recently.

The wrangler brought out Vagabond Prince of Larigo II, a handsome, gentle Shetland who stood quietly while a girl fed him sugar. Among the saddle-bred horses are a 3-year-old stallion, Prairie Chief, sired by Jack Robin Twigg; and Red Bud Peavine, a five-gaited stallion sired by Moreland Peavine.

Mr. Wentz has a museum in which there is an assortment of antique horse-drawn vehicles including one used by a former U.S. president; a snow-sleigh, gig, surrey, and a basket-cart with padded up-

holstering for hauling children. He always takes his guests buggy-riding. He usually drives Lady, a mare that trots off in the style of the finest driving horses of other days.

Mr. Wentz's favorite recreation is a walk on his farm. He goes there every Sunday and spends hours among the herds and flocks. He gives the fawns the bottle, fills water troughs that have run dry, feeds the deer alfalfa, and calls these dainty creatures by name.

Mr. Wentz attracted national attention as a founder of the first large-scale bathing beauty contest for "unmarried ladies under five years of age and unmarried ladies between the ages of five and twelve years." Started 14 years ago, the contests are conducted annually in the \$100,000 swimming pool that he built for Ponca City.

Entrance to the pool, and the use of it, are free at all times to adults as well as children. Here the youngsters swim in safety. There are no longer casualties in the Arkansas River and other old swimmin' holes, as in the past. Parents drive out to the pool, park their children with Mr. Wentz's life-guards, go to their work, and return later for their offspring. An aquatic nursery is something new in the care of children.

Opportunity to swim hour after hour in this magnificent pool is merely one feature of the girls' and boys' camp, in which the pool is located. Mr. Wentz gave more than \$400,000 for construction of this camp northeast of Ponca City, which is available for supervised groups of young people from Oklahoma and neighboring states.

A central lodge of native stone is surrounded by neat cabins equipped with

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bunk-style beds reminiscent of cowboy quarters in Oklahoma. A home-like cottage for the caretaker stands on the camp grounds, which front a beautiful lake bordered by oak trees.

"When I retire I want to come out here and live in the keeper's cottage," declared this millionaire, who could build himself castles on the Cimarron or anywhere he wishes.

However, he has simple tastes, and throughout his career he has occupied a small apartment, distinctive only in the excellent taste in the furnishings, linen, china and silver. One of his antiques is a nickelodeon entitled "The Queen Orchestra," which has huge metal disc records. This instrument came from a saloon in Colorado which was operated by Bob Ford, the man credited with shooting and killing Jesse James, the early-day bandit.

Mr. Wentz is best known nationally for originating a practical system of aid to crippled children. His first aid to a crippled child was given in Ponca City when his attention was directed to a boy in his 'teens who was a victim of infantile paralysis. The boy's legs were crooked, his back bent, and his shoulders drooped until one lung was being crushed. Mr. Wentz employed surgeons, and the boy's health greatly improved. He was educated, and for a time he held a job as bookkeeper, but his system had been weakened, and he died soon after reaching manhood.

In another instance, by securing the aid of experienced physicians, Mr. Wentz saved a Tecumseh boy from the unnecessary amputation of an arm. These experiences led Mr. Wentz to provide aid on a broad scale for crippled children. He devised a plan that has been copied by many other states. With President W. B. Bizzell, of the University of Oklahoma, and four other experts as his guests, he toured cities in the eastern part of the United States and inspected hospitals. They brought back ideas for construction of the most up-to-date hospital for treatment of children's afflictions. He and others interested the legislature in appropriating money to build the hospital as part of the University School of Medicine plant.

Mr. Wentz "appropriated" from his own personal bank account the funds to build the crippled children's school adjoining the hospital. His system for aiding crippled children is recognized as one of the first in the nation to put this kind of charity on a business-like basis with a solid foundation and a permanent organization behind it. However, he refuses to take credit for the successful operation of this movement in Oklahoma, ascribing the honor to Joe N. Hamilton, Oklahoma City, secretary of the Oklahoma Society for Crippled Children, who joined Mr. Wentz in the effort to co-ordinate all agencies and to hold clinics for crippled children throughout the state.

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