



Dr. Scroggs' last picture

Grand Old Man

By HERBERT H. SCOTT

Few Men Follow Their Ideal Of Service to Humanity As Closely as Joseph Scroggs

A gangling, knowledge-hungry lad lay sprawled out on a home-tanned bearskin rug squinting at a thick, wordy encyclopedia by the light of a country fireplace.

And as he studied the big book intently in what we nowadays would call a not-too-pleasant environment, he considered himself lucky. For he was the only youngster in that sparsely settled area of Missouri who even had an encyclopedia to study.

No, this isn't a story about Abraham Lincoln writing on a shovel with charcoal. This lad turned out to be Dr. J. W. Scroggs—Doctor Joseph Whitefield Scroggs, if you please—identified in newspaper accounts at the time of his death recently as missionary, educator, author, editor, musician, preacher, philosopher, inventor, friend, and, of course, founder of the University Extension Division.

Yes, his life is closed, at the age of 88, but his works live on, and they always will.

He blazed the frontier trails of education for all in Oklahoma; he carried the torch of friendship, co-operation, neighborliness, brotherhood of man, unity of purpose and the aiming of people toward the common goal of good citizenship and a higher standard of civilization.

Dr. Scroggs furthered Oklahoma education and civilization. He pioneered learning in the state. He is said to have established the first kindergarten west of the Mississippi.

It was early in his life that he hit upon the idea of taking education to the people instead of merely setting up education and letting the people come to it.

I came to know Dr. Scroggs intimately in his last years and many times he has

told me about that encyclopedia that he studied, and in which he saw a vision.

In the trips he used to make to my office, which necessarily grew less frequent as age crept upon him, he has told me about his father reprimanding him for staying up late at night, reading that big book.

"Joseph," his father told him, "you'll never grow to be a strong man if you don't put that book down and get some sleep."

And then Dr. Scroggs would chuckle in the way he could still do until the day he died, and he would point out that the conversation took place three-quarters of a century ago up in Missouri.

"And I'm still able to work," he'd say.

It was from his own early experience that he first conceived the idea of taking education to the people. The idea was impressed more and more on him in his work with the frontiersman in what is now Oklahoma. He spoke of this vision often in his late life.

His firm conviction that enlightened citizens were essential to the life of our democracy, that everyone was entitled to the privilege of learning and not just those who could afford to attend the higher educational institutions in residence—was the foundation upon which the University Extension program was built.

Education for all the people was his motive when he first came to Indian territory and started one of the first newspapers in what is now Oklahoma, the *Indian Chieftain*, edited at Vinita, where his work in education was centered around the old Worcester Academy.

Proof that this philosophy was a religion with him was his ordination as a Con-

gregational minister. The little church he built in Vinita ("Church Union") still stands, but is now the Congregational Church.

He wanted to teach the people. By that time, he was educated himself, having attended Lafayette and Washburn universities. He wanted to share his knowledge with the less fortunate.

Often he has told me how he worried all through his youth because of the many young men and women whom he knew, personally, and who were starved in their quest to know more.

So, it was a red letter day, indeed, for Joseph Scroggs when the state legislature granted a \$10,000 appropriation to spread learning throughout the state. This was the founding of the Extension Division. Dr. Scroggs has told me about the difficult time he had getting the legislature to approve funds for this new project.

But he labored unceasingly, in spite of his sixty years of age, and proved that the action of the state legislature had been thoroughly justified.

He travelled all over the state, often making as many as six hundred lectures a year. He started correspondence work, opened extension classes, established debating and public discussions, and later began visual education work and the famous community institutes.

In one of his last visits to my office, he talked about the early days in the Extension Division.

"When we couldn't get a qualified teacher for a group of students who wanted to take a course, we helped them the best we could," he said. Always there was an eagerness to help the handicapped student who, for some reason, could not attend the University at Norman.

"They often did not receive credit for their work," he said, "but they were interested in learning the subject matter, and we provided it for them."

Then an unforgettable smile came across the face of "the grand old man of Oklahoma education" as he recalled how he silenced the skeptics of extension work by producing a correspondence course enrollment of 1,500, which was an astounding figure in those days.

He smiled again when I told him that we are now offering more than three hundred courses through correspondence. His only comment was: "I wish I could get in 'I told you so' a few times."

When Dr. Scroggs said that he offered courses that sometimes were not even accredited, he expressed a basic principle of his idea of education's function. He believed in a practical education; one that led to better citizenship. That was the main reason he founded the Community Institute, something entirely new to the people of Oklahoma.

"People will sing together when they will not speak on the street," he said. So he promoted singing as one of the features

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of the community programs. Along with the singing, lectures were given. These programs not only promoted better relationships in the community but injected education and culture into the community's heart as well. These community institutes were the basis of unity and cooperation of many Oklahoma communities and the real inception of their forward progress. The programs became so popular that for a time the Extension Division couldn't meet the demands.

For thirteen years Dr. Scroggs served as head of the University Extension Division and made it grow. To him the boundaries of the campus were the geographic boundaries of the state. He intended to resign as extension director for three years before he finally did. He passed the University's age limit of seventy when he had been director for only ten years.

But it was hard for University officials to replace this man, who at that time was regarded as one of extension work's "four horsemen" in the nation. Only last year he was voted honorary president of the National University Extension Association.

So for three years he continued his work before a successor could be obtained. The year that Dr. Scroggs finally resigned as director was the year in which I started to work in the extension division. I can remember how physically active the great educator was in his closing years of active service on the campus.

He had a bicycle with a wire frame on the handlebars to carry his books, and he could be seen pedaling around the campus in any kind of weather. Later, he bought a car and drove it himself, up until three years ago.

Although he was considered too old to work on the faculty, he was just as active at the time of his resignation as almost any faculty member.

His bicycle riding was only one example of his physical activity. He was a golfer and a good pool player. His golf game wasn't too good, but he enjoyed the exercise. There weren't any pool halls in Norman when he headed the Extension Division, but Dr. Scroggs saw no harm in a good game of snooker and he often dropped into a fraternity house to play with the boys.

Piano playing was about the only one of his musical talents that he had kept up at the time of his retirement as extension director. He had been an accomplished musician. He had taught piano, organ, violin, clarinet and trombone; and composed some hymns, as well as some folk dance tunes.

In the last three years of Dr. Scrogg's life, during which time I visited his home more frequently than he was able to come to the Extension Division offices, it was

easy to see that age was rapidly getting the better of the "grand old man."

Never could you get him to admit it, however. He kept one of the rooms in his house furnished as an office and his giant roller-top desk had drawers systematically marked so that he could find what he was looking for, when he wanted it.

It was in recent years that he perfected a garage door opener in his workshop. This invention caused the garage door to open automatically when the car approached it on the driveway.

Our visual education department filmed movies of Dr. Scroggs before he died without his knowing anything about it.

On the very day that we filmed him in action, which was, I believe, his last visit to the O. U. campus, he talked about extension work and about taking education to the people.

He was still thinking about the thing to which he had devoted his life.

He had worked all of his life and worked hard so that other people might live better than they had been living. Oklahoma communities are better places in which to live, and Oklahoma people are living happier, fuller lives because of Dr. Scroggs' long, tireless, effective work.

Dr. Scroggs was a living example of his own motto: "Learn all you can and do all you can."

Colchicine Magic

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for research. Too, if he experiments with plants, there are certain pieces of equipment he must have. An obvious one is a greenhouse. Colchicine does magic things, but it won't put a fur coat on plants: they still will freeze when the weather is cold. It is true that people everywhere can help in his work, but that isn't the point. Dr. Eigsti is chuck-full of ideas—ideas that involve technical training. These ideas must be tried by a trained technician under carefully controlled conditions.

That sort of work is the kind every university hopes to do. The reason I enjoy writing about Dr. Eigsti is because I think his work well illustrates the possibilities that lie ahead in the field of research. There are numerous men at the University of Oklahoma who have great ideas. They are loaded down with teaching and handicapped by lack of equipment. Only recently I heard a Texas newspaper official who is intensely interested in chemurgy say, "What we need is research and lots of it. Why don't these scientists in universities do more?" He had just realized what scientists have known for a long time—that research will pay good dividends. When he was asked how university scientists could do more research under present conditions, he shook his head and said, "Too bad, something ought to be done about it."

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