



EDUCATION THROUGH THE PRINTED WORD  
*Part of the University Press series on Civilization of the American Indian, illustrating the vigorous brand of culture stimulated by the University of Oklahoma.*

## Short Grass Culture Pattern

By KENNETH KAUFMAN

EVERY successive wave of immigration which has swept over Oklahoma has brought its own peculiar culture, and its own thirst for culture. Perhaps it is in the air or the soil or the climate, or perhaps it is in the tearing up of ancient cultural roots in another land, and the subsequent stimulus deriving from the necessity for creating a substitute for it. At any rate, there has never been a substantial addition to the population of Oklahoma which has not immediately been impelled to create, to write, sing, build, orate, draw, paint, act. The very first white men to see Oklahoma, the adventurers who came with Coronado four hundred years ago, included a man who, felt impelled to write a book. His name was Castañeda, and his account of the adventure contains the most dependable information we have on Coronado.

With the first serious beginning of settlement in what is now the State, the universal thirst for things of the spirit made itself felt. The Indians of the Five Civilized Tribes brought with them over the "Trail of Tears," a good many treasures besides their material possessions. They brought their Bibles and their hymn books, their printing press and their newspapers, their love of learning. The first book to come from Oklahoma was a primer in the Creek language, composed and printed at Union Mission in the old Cherokee Nation in 1835. The printed word in Oklahoma is 72 years older than the State itself.

It is only fair to say, however, that most of this early writing in the Indian tongues was either concerned with tribal affairs or was religious in tone, and therefore not properly belonging to literature. A few years before the Civil War, how-

ever, a young Cherokee named John Rollin Ridge was pouring out his soul in conventional, melancholy verse, very much like that of other popular English-speaking poets of his day. His book published in 1868, is one of the rarest and most precious collector's items as yet emanating from Oklahoma. Another Indian poet, Alexander Posey, a Creek, did a great deal of verse writing; his book also is a rare, much-sought volume.

At almost the same time the Cherokees began their publishing venture, English literature and an indigenous art made their beginnings. Washington Irving wrote his *Tour of the Prairies* from material gleaned in what is now Oklahoma; one of the most exciting episodes in the book occurred not far from the halfway point between Oklahoma City and Norman. And George Catlin, who accompanied the famous Dragoon Expedition of 1834 made while in southern Oklahoma the three hundred drawings which adorn his book on the American Indian.

Shortly after the Civil War several books appeared, not properly literature, but belonging to the history of culture. They were diaries, memoirs and reminiscences by army officers, Indian agents and employes of agencies, and the like. Perhaps the most important as well as the most interesting of these is Thomas C. Batty's *A Quaker Among the Indians* (1875). With the opening of the Unassigned Lands in 1889, there was a phenomenal burgeoning of literature. Every county seat and many other towns had newspapers; and newspapers of that day were very kind to poets, much kinder than the poets deserved. Their old files are filled with poetry; and most of it is pretty awful. But it illustrates the long-

ing the early settlers had for sweetness and light. One of those pioneer editors, Thompson B. Ferguson, of Watonga, afterwards appointed territorial governor by President Theodore Roosevelt, even wrote a novel (apparently the first to come from Oklahoma) on the new country, *The Jayhawkers*.

But literature began in earnest with the close of the first World War. In 1918, just fifty years after the *Poems of John Rollin Ridge* was published, appeared the delicate, ethereal *Airs and Ballads* of John McClure, a student in the University. At about the same time, or perhaps even earlier, Muna Lee, also an O. U. student, began writing the lyrics which have been described by competent authority as "The most delicate love songs of contemporary American poetry." In the 1920's there was a remarkable florescence of poetry on the campus. Students and faculty members alike were producing verse of a very high order. Lynn Riggs, Stanley Vestal (W. S. Campbell), B. A. Botkin, Elizabeth Ball, John Woodworth, Katherine Shepard Hayden (Salter), were making themselves famous, while more modest poets were turning out an amazing lot of good verse, much of which saw the light in newspapers, magazines and in particular the *University of Oklahoma Anthology* edited by the late Joseph Francis Paxton and published as a University Bulletin at irregular intervals from 1921 to 1929.

Among these contributors were, in addition to those mentioned, Mary McDougal Axelson, the late T. H. Brewer, John Begg Cheadle, the late S. R. Hadsell, Roy Temple House, Josh Lee, J. F. Paxton, Sanford Salyer, A. C. Scott, E. E. Dale. J.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 62)

## Short Grass Culture Pattern

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15)

W. Scroggs, Agnes Berrigan, James J. Hill, Maurice Kelley, Ruth Muskrat (who seems to be the only O. U. student of Indian blood to make her mark as a poet), Zoe A. Stratton (Tilghman), Joseph H. Benton, F. F. Blachly, Fayette Copeland, William Cunningham, May Frank, Violet McDougal, Miriam Oatman (Blachly), Vernon L. Parrington, and many others. The impact some of these poets made on the reading public in America is indicated by the fact that Mr. H. L. Mencken, never, surely, given to over-enthusiasms, once devoted a sizeable section of the *American Mercury* to the work of Oklahoma poets; and he coined a very memorable phrase in connection with that project: "The Oklahoma manner in poetry."

The same decade witnessed three very important developments in the history of literature in Oklahoma, all of them emanating from the University. B. A. Botkin began publishing his *Folk-Say: A Regional Miscellany*, an annual volume, of which four numbers appeared between 1928 and 1931. To this venture not only Oklahomans, but a great many others from various parts of the nation contributed. Some of them who afterwards became famous, first saw their work printed in *Folk-Say*, among them Paul Horgan, Mari Sandoz, and N. L. Davis. George Milburn, then a student, made his debut in the literary world with the first of these annuals, shortly afterward graduating to *American Mercury* and other magazines of like caliber.

In 1927, Roy Temple House started publication of a modest little quarterly devoted to review of books in languages other than English. It grew like Jonah's gourd vine, and eventually became a full-fledged magazine, running 500 pages and more to the volume, and with correspondents in all parts of the world. The magazine is now finishing its fifteenth year; its bound volumes constitute the largest body of information on current foreign literatures to be found anywhere in the world.

Perhaps the most important relation which the University has had with the growth of literature was the expansion of the University Press under the direction of Joseph A. Brandt, who became president of the University in 1940. His successor Savoie Lottinville has fully maintained his standard. When Mr. Brandt took charge of the Press at the invitation of President W. B. Bizzell, he immediately began a program of book publishing which has placed the Press in the very front rank of scholarly-regional publishing in the nation. Not more than one or two other university presses compare

with it, and certainly none excels it. The campus has, through the Press, become the Mecca for aspiring writers throughout the West.

Some of its triumphs include publication of John Joseph Mathew's *Wah' Kon-Tah*, a long prose-poem devoted to the portrayal of two of the most interesting types of all humanity, the American pioneer and the American Indian; Paul B. Sears' *Deserts on the March*, the book which awoke America to the prodigal waste of her natural resources; and Angie Debo's *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic* which won the John H. Dunning Prize in American History in 1935. Mathew's book was a choice of the Book-of-the-Month Club in 1932—the only university press book in the United States ever to win such a distinction.

It might almost be said that historical writing in Oklahoma is a University Press monopoly. To be sure many valuable histories have been published elsewhere, but new discoveries such as the Stand Watie-Boudinot-Ridge Letters, edited by E. E. Dale and Gaston Litton under the title *Cherokee Cavaliers*, Grant Foreman's books, *Indian Removal*, *The Five Civilized Tribes*, and a dozen others, Morris Wardell's *Political History of the Cherokee Nation*, Angie Debo's third book *The Road to Disappearance*, a history of the Creek Nation, all of which represent pioneering in the field of original scholarship, flowed naturally to the Press for their outlet. They constitute a body of knowledge on the past of the Southwest, and especially on local history, which is not surpassed in any region of the United States.

However, the Press has not confined its publishing to works on the past, nor to work of a rigidly regional character. Sociology, economics, criticism, the sciences, and many technical fields have been invaded by members of the faculty, past and present, whose books have been brought out by the Press. In this connection the following, among others, deserve especial mention: President Emeritus W. B. Bizzell, Dean A. B. Adams, Elgin Groseclose, Gustav Mueller, Royden J. Dangerfield, Cortez A. M. Ewing, Wilbur F. Cloud and Ernest C. Ross. Scholars and investigators from all over the country regularly offer their works to the Press for consideration. Nor do the Press-sponsored books appeal to the learned alone; dozens of Press books have been on the "Recommended List" of the Book-of-the-Month Club and similar organizations, and a great many titles have gone through several editions.

In addition to the Press, three other projects connected with the University

helped as well as encouraged literary work in the State.

The Frank Phillips Historical Collection, of which E. E. Dale is custodian, contains thousands of books, documents and photostats which have proved a veritable gold mine for writers not only of history, but also of fiction.

The literary page of the *Daily Oklahoman*, the only outlet adequate in the State for critical opinion on current literary production has had, in existence, two editors, both of them University members. This page featured books by Oklahoma writers, and has consistently offered information concerning our literary treasures which has proved a strong stimulus, not only to local pride but to aspiring writers generally.

Four or five years ago W. S. Campbell, who under the pen name of Stanley Vestal may justly be called the historian of the Plains Indians, instituted a series of courses in professional writing. His assistant in this work is Foster Harris, well known magazine writer. Campbell and Harris have trained a large number of young men and women, many of whom make their living solely from writing. During the past year students and former students in this department made an average of a sale every other day month after month.

In the field of music the University has always taken an active lead. Under the late Dean Holmberg, the Symphony Orchestra was a bright spot in the cultural pattern of the State. The influence the School of Music has exerted through the teachers and professional musicians it sent out, through the meets and contests it has sponsored, through the choir, glee club and orchestra tours which it makes over the State, is simply incalculable. The school takes great pride in the fact that Joseph H. Benton, formerly a leading tenor in the Metropolitan Opera Company, received his early training on the campus.

Oklahoma should offer the composer a field of raw material similar to that it offers the writer. Mingled with the wild and stirring themes of native Indian music go the haunting, sad melodies of the Negro, the plaintive wail of the lonesome cowboy, and the rollicking dance tunes of the "play party." All of these are genuine, unique forms of folk music; the musicians who in time to come, shall interpret them in more dignified form will have made a significant contribution to the music treasures of the world. To date the University is represented in the field of original composition by, among others, the late Oscar J. Lehrer, composer of anthems and cantatas, and by Spencer Nor-

ton, composer of a number of pieces which involve native Southwestern themes, notably the symphonic poem *Cibola*.

There is no such thing as a distinctive Oklahoma architecture, although the Indian teepee, the sod house, the log cabin all have elements which deserve development. Various members of the School of Architectural Engineering have essayed experiments in architecture which are interesting and stimulating. But the example which the University sets in the beautifully proportioned, chaste collegiate Gothic of the Administration Building, the Library and the Business Administration and Biology Building, exerts a silent influence for good taste which will in time bear fruit in the general level of architecture throughout the State.

Oklahoma has been particularly fortunate in the staff of the School of Art. Individual faculty members and students, among them O. B. Jacobson, Edith Mahier, Joseph Taylor, Dorothy Kirk, Leonard Good, Olinka Hrdy, John O'Neil and others, have created secure places for themselves; but the most spectacular phase of art in Oklahoma is the development of a large group of Indian artists, among them five Kiowas, Stephen Mopope, Monroe Tsatoke, James Auchiah, Jack Hokeah and Spencer Asah, Acee Blue Eagle, the Pottawatomie Woodrow Crumbo, the Cherokee Franklin Gritts, and the Cheyenne Richard West. They owe their success to the fact that Jacobson insisted that they should use Indian themes and a style deriving from the historical pictorial art in use by aboriginal Indians. More than thirty artists of Indian blood have been trained in the University. In 1930 Jacobson selected and edited a portfolio of beautiful colored reproductions of the work of the five Kiowas mentioned above, which was published in France and which created something of a furore in America as well as abroad. Murals by these artists adorn the walls of a great many public buildings in the State as well as in the East, notably in Washington.

Literature and the arts are as yet in the formative stage. Much of the important work in writing has been in what might be called the spade work in literature. There is not yet a discernible Oklahoma school of writing or art, although local pride burns fierce and high. But the very fact that our State has telescoped into a generation the cultural experience of the whole human race, that its ethnological and social elements are the most varied to be found anywhere on the globe in a similar area, that the State was born in drama, and is growing up in a tense, exciting era, makes significant artistic expression inevitable. Oklahoma is full of contrast, color, and natural cultural riches. The University of Oklahoma must continue to lead in developing them into a substantial culture.

IMAGE IS NOT AVAILABLE ONLINE DUE TO COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS.

A paper copy of this issue is available at call number LH 1 .06S6 in Bizzell Memorial Library.



**NEW SCHOOL YEAR**

Making the adaptations necessary for war time and changed conditions on the O.U. campus, the Oklahoma Memorial Union is open for another school year . . . serving alumni as their campus headquarters whenever they visit Norman.

**Oklahoma Memorial Union**  
University of Oklahoma, Norman