



The Iceman Cameth

# A Fitting Tribute for a Life of Service

The sudden passing of former university president Stratton D. Brooks in Kansas City on the early morning of January 18, 1949, came as a shock to thousands of his friends and associates.

Harold Keith, '28ba, '38ma, was probably the last University official to interview Dr. Brooks prior to his passing. Keith in seeking background material for his outstanding book, *Oklahoma Kickoff*, enjoyed the philosophies of this eminent gentlemen as he raised the screen on passed events when Dr. Brooks was the main factor in building for a greater University of Oklahoma.

Hundreds of Dr. Brooks' friends and former colleagues have in recent days reminisced over incidents of work and social occasions wherein Dr. Brooks was on the "giving and receiving end" in the lives of these people.

Personally, as a youngster, I was given an opportunity to begin my work career upon graduation from the University by the then president, Stratton D. Brooks. The greatest philosophical lesson I have ever had in life was his terse comment after a discussion, "Well go on over and see Jack Alley (Professor John Alley, former head of the government department) and begin teaching school here on the side and work out your graduate degree." Then after a "Thank you, sir" and a start for the door he arose from his chair and said, "Come back just a minute—remember son, you are starting on a life's work. You will find two classes of people in life—namely, the reformer and the fool. Never be a reformer!"

Mrs. Ima James Reaves who for years was head of the women's physical education department at O.U. recently reminisced as follows:

"My first visit to President Brooks' office for administrative assistance came in the spring of '19 after I had had a run in with Mr. Tom Ferguson (Stratton D.—The II—Ferguson) over the building of a throne for the first May Day performance I staged on the O.U. campus.

"I had submitted my plans for a throne to Mr. Ferguson who gave me a fast brush off by saying, we have a throne that we have used for years and I'm not building another. I'm sure Dr. Brooks understood by the manner I entered his office that I was in trouble. (My red hair was standing on end). I stated my case. Dr. Brooks listened. He looked a bit amused. He asked if I had a drawing of what I wanted. I told him yes—

that it was in my office. He advised me to go back to the office and he would see what he could do about it.

"Some thirty minutes later Mr. Ferguson came to my office asking for the drawing. From that time on I put Dr. Brooks on a throne of my own."

In a recent letter from Marian Brooks Cralle, '15ba, '17ma, (Dr. Brooks' daughter) some of the comments were as follows:

"I spend most of my days writing in recent weeks when I am not spending it at the doctors. Many of father's Michigan friends were slow to hear of his passing. Even the ones Dorothy (Brooks Callaway, '22ma, Kansas City, Missouri) had wired were away from home. One was his college roommate and cousin who lives in Madison, Wisconsin. Both his son and grandson are named Stratton and his daughter Marian—not for me but from the great pioneer woman from whom I was named, father's mother.

"I know you will appreciate some excerpts from letters. One from Mr. Purdom, head of University of Michigan placement and appointments:

"I think Mr. Brooks was Michigan's most distinguished alumnus in the field of education. I think he was the most honest and courageous man I have ever known in education. At the same time he had a lovable character and appreciation in people those things which stood for the best."

"From Dean Charles Stocking (O.U. '12-'17), now at the University of Michigan:

"I am sure that I do not need to tell you that your father was one of the greatest and one of the most constructively useful men this country has ever known."

"Chester Westfall, '16ba, wrote a grand letter saying he thought he knew father better than any other O.U. student or any professor. I wish as ex-president of the Alumni Association he could write of father for the *Sooner Magazine* rather than some stranger of the more recent student generations."

Thus thousands of friends of Dr. Stratton D. Brooks "look back in retrospect." And now to an eloquent article paying a fine tribute to an outstanding gentleman, scholar and citizen—Stratton D. Brooks.

Ted Beard, '21ba.

## Dr. Stratton D. Brooks, 1869-1949

By HAROLD KEITH, '29BA, '39MA

The sudden death at Kansas City in mid-January of Dr. Stratton D. Brooks, president of the University of Oklahoma from 1912 through 1923, recalls the unusual circumstances of his coming to Norman, his liberation of the school from the Haskell political yoke, and the enormous industry, patience and tact he expended laying the foundation of what under Dr. George Cross' leadership has become the fast-growing modern University of Oklahoma today. While doing research for my book *Oklahoma Kickoff*, I followed President Brooks' trail closely. Much of the material in this article first appeared in my book. I talked to several of the older University faculty and longtime Norman residents concerning him. I also had two personal visits with him on May 16 and 17, 1944, one at my office and another at Bennie Owen's home, during which he frankly discussed his background, his ascension of the presidency of the University of Oklahoma, his handicaps here and how he tried to meet them.

In later years a friend showed Brooks the small bust of himself tucked away neatly in a nook of the Administration building, and remarked:

"Looks like you're squeezed in there pretty tight."

"I've gotten out of tighter places than that." Brooks laughed in reply. His remark was by no means an exaggeration. During his eleven-year tenure at Oklahoma, he was constantly and skillfully wrestling with powerful forces as he sought to build a fine school in the new state of Oklahoma, many of whose inhabitants were opposed both to higher education and to the taxation upon which it depended, and regarded with contempt and indifference the small University which Dr. David Ross had established 20 years before on the open prairie south of the raw, new town of Norman.

Brooks was a native Missourian of Dutch, English and Scotch ancestry.

"I was born in Everett, Missouri in 1869 but in 1871, at the age of two, I took my parents across the river to Michigan, where I grew up," he later described it. His father, Charles Brooks, was a frontier sheriff with

lots of vision who helped start a college in the Illinois wilderness.

Let's look for a moment at the circumstances which drew Brooks to the new state of Oklahoma which before the various land runs two decades earlier had largely been a grassy wilderness over which passed the Texas cattle herds on their way to the railroad shipping points of southern Kansas.

The embryo University at Norman had undergone an alarming deterioration during the Haskell political regime, Rev. A. Grant Evans, the second president, was a fine, Christian gentleman who desired to operate the school upon a strong administrative basis and improve the scholarship standards. However he could not escape the domination of Governor Charles N. Haskell's Board of Education which overstepped the functions of good board members and handled much of his administration themselves.

Consequently, the University from 1908 to 1912 acquired an unsavory scholastic reputation both within and without the new state. Much of its faculty was poorly qualified. Much of it had been politically