

O.U. was housed in this small cluster of buildings when Oklahoma became a state in 1907. From left to right they are: a frame gymnasium building which was recently torn down, the Carnegie Library, the Administration Building and Old Science Hall.

On the eve of statehood, the Territorial University had a scanty past but there was a great

Hope for the Future

By John Wagoner, '51

On November 7, 1907, Oklahoma became a state and O.U. became a state University. From early-day issues of the Mistletoe, first University annual, and the O.U. archives comes an illustrated story giving a glimpse of the acorn from which the oak has grown.

President David Ross Boyd's announcement was a harbinger of great things to come. He had secured a donation of \$30,000 from Andrew Carnegie for the construction of a University library. Carnegie Libraries were common everywhere, but it was 1903, and this was the first university library to be built as a gift of the philanthropist.

The library was another building block in the university President Boyd was shaping for Oklahoma Territory. Work had already begun on the new Science Hall northwest of University Hall, the only brick building on the campus. And east and a little north of the single large building, a wooden gymnasium had gone up during the summer months of 1903.

When finishing touches had been put on these campus landmarks, the August, 1907, *University News-Letter* published a large picture of the campus to show the Territory — now on the verge of statehood — how the University had grown. A block of type in the cor-

ner of the posterboard picture sheet stated:

"It was the idea of the Territorial Legislature in establishing the University to be of service to the young people of Oklahoma. It felt that they were entitled to the very best education that could be provided, that thousands of dollars were wasted every year by those who went out of the Territory or who had to pay tuition in some private school, and that all should have an op-

portunity of getting a higher education. So the University was established and now offers over 270 different courses, has seven distinct schools, 700 acres in grounds, eight large buildings, and the best of equipment — all valued at \$500,000."

Viewed against a backdrop of today's University, the 1907 campus takes the aspect of a 2-room country school. But it had

made long strides since September 15, 1892, when the first students enrolled in the new Territorial University.

The act which created the University provided that it should be located in Norman on condition that Cleveland County vote bonds to provide \$10,000 in money for the use of the Board of Regents in constructing a building. The building had been started, but it was clear that it would not be ready for occupancy for several months after the enrolment period. President Boyd located an unoccupied building on West Main Street, rented it for \$20 a month, and proceeded to enrol students on the day



In this stone building on Norman's Main Street the University had its beginning. Classes were held here while the first University building was being completed. It is now occupied by a furniture business.



Described by an early-day professor as "a building with a wart on its top," the above structure was the first University Administration Building, erected in 1893. In fact, it was the only building on the campus for some time. It was destroyed by fire in 1903, and was replaced by a new building.

scheduled for the opening of the University.

A total of 119 students attended the University in the temporary quarters while work on the new building proceeded slowly before halting because of lack of funds. The territorial legislature came to the rescue with an appropriation which brought the building to completion in August, 1893.

The *Norman Transcript* heaped descriptive words upon the new structure:

"Both the interior and exterior of the Oklahoma University building is not alone a picture of beauty, and symmetry, but a model of art, an encomium upon the architect and a living panegyric upon the skill of the contractor. The inside finishings are complete and so commodious that the professors all predict a much more interesting and progressive term this fall."

Historian Roy Gittinger, '02ba, describes the new building facilities in his history of the University:

"The twenty-two rooms were well light-

ed and well ventilated for that period. A heating and ventilation system was installed at a total additional cost of \$5,500. Two wells furnished a good supply of water."

But a different view of the building was held by Vernon L. Parrington, who came to the University in 1897 as instructor in English and modern languages. He recorded his first impressions of the building in the 1905 University annual:

"As I came on to the campus I stopped—this was the University! The word had always meant—well, something very different to me. A single small red brick build-

ing—ugly in its lines and with a wart atop—a sort of misshapen cross between a cupola and a dome—stood in a grove of tiny elms. Across the front and especially about the door, some ivy had made fine growth and was the one restful thing that met my eyes."

Whether the first University building was an eyesore or a thing of beauty, it did not last long. In January, 1903, it was destroyed by fire "from causes unknown." From the first of the year through March, classes were transferred to the Rock Building on West Main where the University had its beginning. A new building, which had been started before the first one burned, was completed and the faculty and students marched from the Baptist Church to the campus on March 16 in a colorful ceremony to commemorate the opening of the new brick structure.

Planned as a beautiful building of the Renaissance type, the new University Hall blueprints had called for the construction of a much larger structure than the appropriation would cover. To bring the cost down to the amount of money available, the west wing was left off, and the finished work hardly resembled the architect's plan.

Like its predecessor, University Hall

The second University Administration Building was photographed from this angle for a good reason: short finances had forced the contractors to clip one wing planned by the architects. Like its predecessor, it burned. O.U.'s third Ad Building is located on the same plot of ground.



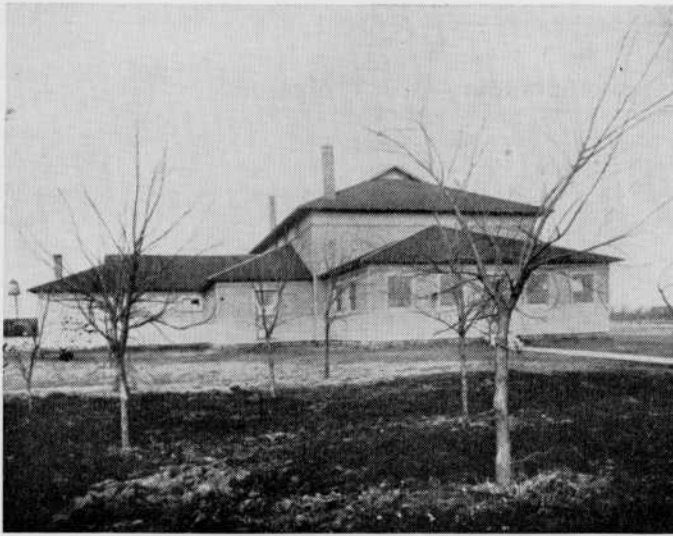
was destroyed by fire in 1907. The new University Hall, now known as the Administration Building, was not ready for occupancy until the end of the 1911-12 academic year. The new building still dominates the North Oval and houses administrative offices of the University.

Life at the Territorial University was a reflection of the life of people in the Territory, for it was the area from which the new school drew its students. In the 1912 *Sooner* one of the members of the early faculty described the University in 1892 as he remembered it:

"In comparison with the magnificent plants of older and wealthier states, it seemed a gross exaggeration to call that stone building and its modest contents a university. Only three rooms without ornament, barely comfortable, cheaply furnished with tables for teachers' desks and with chairs for the students; no libraries, laboratories, traditions; a toddling present, a hope for the future, but no past.

"Recall the scene that opening morning in September, 1892, three and a half years after the 'run.' Up the steps of the old stone building come the university students to enroll. All are very quiet, some painfully bashful, and not a few extremely awkward. Most of them are the unspoiled products of pioneer life, without pretension and without conventionalism. But, best of all, they are in dead earnest . . .

"Passing from vision to the unadorned facts of memory, I am constrained to admit



The above wooden building was the first men's gymnasium on the University campus. Used in recent years as an annex to the Liberal Arts Building, it was dismantled in the spring of '49.

that the work was very elementary. Many found it necessary to take a course in reading, spelling, arithmetic and history of the United States. . . . As there was scarcely a well-organized highschool in Oklahoma, it was the policy of the university to take the young people as it found them, to accommodate itself to existing conditions. We were building the future, and, for the sake of the thereafter, it seemed better to grow up than to blow up. I am not disposed to blush as I record these humble beginnings."

By the turn of the century the University had begun to smooth out a few of its early-day hardships, and Norman was acquiring some of the trimmings of more up-to-date cities. An outstanding public improvement was a new cement sidewalk which replaced the boardwalk along Uni-

versity Boulevard in the summer of 1903. One of the Norman newspapers pragmatically observed: "the enraged girl with the torn skirt may bid farewell forever to the nails which have bobbed up so incessantly."

And the young ladies, no longer hobbled by nails in the boardwalk, were having a fling at athletics when the new library building was completed. The university library occupied only the main floor and the second floor; the women's gymnasium was located in the basement. Explaining the exercises which took place in the gym, the author of the 1906 catalog wrote: "work is carried on for the most part in the class, accompanied by music." "Women's gym suits," the statement continued, "require four yards of dark blue serge or flannel." "They consist of two pieces, a blouse and bloomers."

When Oklahoma became a state, the University had a scanty past but a great hope for the future. The same Mr. Parrington who was displeased with his first impression of the 1-building university concluded his article in the 1905 annual, eight years after he arrived on the campus:

"We are coming in bravely and although we may not be a University yet, we are making solid progress towards that end. Perhaps in another eight years—but who knows what may take place in that time?"

Forty-five years have passed since Professor Parrington asked that question. The answer is simple: a lot can happen.

In 1907 the University Library housed books on the two upper floors, and female athletes in blouses and bloomers worked out in the women's gym in the basement. Today the building, erected in 1903, houses the University's College of Education.

In 1903 work began on new Science Hall, which was financed from insurance received after the first University building was destroyed by fire. Completed in 1904, the structure now is occupied by the University's School of Home Economics.

