

The Exceptional Mr. Tappan

By John Wagoner, '50

If you were to call Frank Girard Tappan an unusual man, you would be making a gross understatement. But how else can you describe a man who has an answer to what the flying saucers are, his own theory concerning the fourth dimension, the ability to read half a dozen languages plus being one of the top educators in electrical engineering in the United States?

Among the distinguished titles attached to Tappan's name is that of David Ross Boyd Professor of Electrical Engineering. The Boyd professorship is given only to a faculty member who "has demonstrated over a period of years his vigorous performance and leadership in teaching, counseling and guidance of students." That offers an explanation of what Tappan has been doing most of the time since he joined the O.U. faculty in 1917.

His unusual interest in languages stems from the A.B. and M. A. degrees he has. Most engineering professors have science degrees, but Tappan started his academic career in the liberal arts and later moved into engineering.

Born in 1882 at Mt. Pleasant, Iowa, where his father was a Presbyterian minister, Tappan acquired his early schooling in that state and in Ohio. Then he spent two years at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, where his father had begun a term as university president. In his sophomore year at Miami he won the Latin Prize and decided to continue his education at Washington and Jefferson College. He won the German prize there in his junior year and received the A.B. degree *cum laude* in 1904.

His interest in engineering then took him to Cornell where he received the M.E. degree in 1907. He stayed at Cornell as an instructor in electrical engineering until 1917 with time out to acquire an M.A. degree at Washington and Jefferson in 1909.

Unusual Mr. Tappan was enrolled in the graduate college at Cornell during most of the years he was an instructor there. He plunged into psychology, philosophy, mathematics and experimental physics. He worked out a doctor's thesis in experimental psychology and another one in experimental physics. But he didn't take a doctor's degree

for a very good reason. "In those days a Ph.D degree was a blackball for an engineer," he recalls. So the unusual man did the work required for two such degrees and retained the respect of his fellow engineers by not acquiring another sheepskin.

In the summers between 1905 and 1917 Tappan acquired what he calls his "practical experience." Jobs included machinist for the Norfolk and Western Railroad, operator of small power and electric plants at New York summer resorts and conducting electrical tests for Westinghouse Electric Company. In the summer of 1917 he worked as an electric engineer in research for the Rochester Railway and Light Company conducting electrolysis surveys for the

cities of Rochester and East Rochester, N.Y.

While he was working in Rochester he heard about an opening on the University of Oklahoma engineering faculty. L. W. Morrow, one of Tappan's first students in engineering at Cornell, was teaching on the O.U. staff, and he was eager to have him come to Oklahoma. Tappan landed the job and came to the University in 1917 as associate professor of electrical engineering.

One of his first jobs at O.U. was to serve as educational supervisor of classes in radio and auto mechanics for World War I enlisted men assigned to the University. About 700 men were trained during the war by Tappan and his staff.

The most significant changes Tappan has



Frank Girard Tappan, David Ross Boyd Professor of Electrical Engineering, has not gone out to pasture. Now in his 34th year in the College of Engineering, he still teaches and finds time to investigate flying saucers and his own fourth dimension.

observed in the College of Engineering since his arrival in 1917 are in equipment for training and the shift of emphasis from electrical power training to electronics.

"The University catalog said our laboratories were admirably equipped," Tappan recalls. "Perhaps they were for their time, but they certainly were far short of present standards." The change from electrical power training to electronics was due largely to the development of radio and other electronic devices.

In 1920 he was promoted to the rank of professor of electrical engineering and became director of the School of Electrical Engineering. He held that position until 1947 when he became David Ross Boyd Professor and was retired from the directorship.

He served one year (1935-36) as acting dean of the College of Engineering, and has filled numerous committee positions within the college.

Extending his activities outside the college, he served as director of the annual Oklahoma Interscholastic Meet from 1920 to 1942 and was once assistant secretary of the Oklahoma Utilities Association.

He was a member of the committee which drew up the engineer licensing law for the Oklahoma state legislature, and he holds Registered Engineer Certificate Number 15 in the state. "We who served on the committee were issued the first certificates," Tappan recalls. He also helped erect another milestone in Oklahoma engineering by serving on the committee which wrote the constitution and by-laws for the Oklahoma Society for Professional Engineers.

Tappan's interest in languages is one of the most interesting facets of his life. He knew Dr. Roy Temple House, who is now editor emeritus of *Books Abroad*, O.U. international literary quarterly, when he and House were both at Miami University. When Dr. House founded *Books Abroad* on the University campus, he utilized Tappan's knowledge of languages by having him review foreign language books for the quarterly. He also reviews French and German books for *Electrical World*, a publication for electrical engineers. "I guess I have reviewed around a hundred books," Tappan estimates.

It was his interest in languages coupled with his knowledge of science that enabled him to work out his answer to the flying saucers. When the flying discs were reported to be almost filling the sky, he put his solution to the puzzle in a letter to Fred Tarman, '10ba, editor of the *Norman Transcript*:

"You know the old Romans twenty-five hundred years ago had a name for them (flying saucers). They called them Muscae

Continued page 30

A Modest Artist

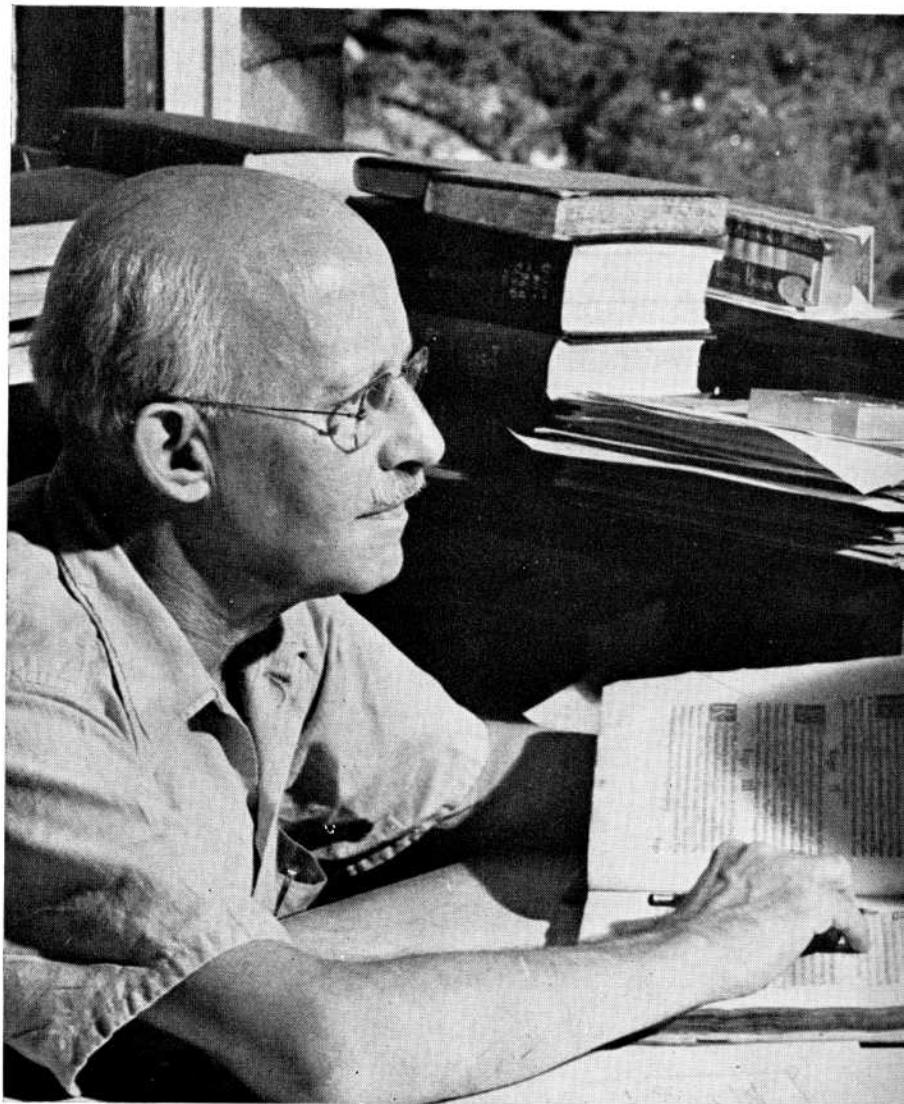
Will Ransom, "the dean of book producers," has seen books he designed listed among the 50 best designed books of the year from 1945-1949. A musician, lecturer, writer, artist and scholar, Ransom considers his job as that of the supporting actor.

By Dr. Roy Temple House

One of the most remarkable of all the publications of the University of Oklahoma Press was Albert Johannson's two-volume reference work called *House of Beadle and Adams, and Its Dime and Nickel Novels*, an encyclopedia of the publications of a famous book house during the roaring

"dime novel" period of the second half of the nineteenth century.

Published in May of the last year, the most amusing of encyclopedias and most scholarly of all works on the Wild West novel, was received by the book reviewer with enthusiasm amounting to excitement.



Will Ransom, University Press book designer, examines a sample of the printer's art in his office in the Press Building. Known as the dean of book producers, he is the leading American authority on private presses in this country and England.

Consider Their Function . . .

quired to any committee or member of the State Legislature."

President Cross also discussed the statement that "There is one employee at the University for every four students."

"This statement is quite misleading," he said. "It should be remembered that the University does much more than merely instruct students. We not only provide classroom instruction, but we house and

Number of Employees, January, 1951, Payroll

Total employed for Instruction, Research, Libraries and Administration			
Permanent, full-time	804		
Student assistants	538		
Other part-time and temporary	83	1,425	
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Total employed for public services (Extension)			
Permanent, full-time	55		
Student assistants	37		
Other part-time and temporary	5	97	
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All other employees, including dormitories, dining halls and other self-supporting activities			
Permanent, full-time	495		
Student assistants	378		
Other part-time and temporary	210	1,083	
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Grand Total			2,605
Consisting of:			
Permanent full-time	1,354		
Student assistants	953		
Other part-time and temporary	298		
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			2,605

provide food for a substantial portion of our student body. We provide medical service and hospitalization. We have been called upon to provide kindergarten and nursery schools for the children of our students. Of course all such activities are self supporting. In addition, there is the University Press, the Research Institute, the Bureau of Community Development, various institutes and clinics, all of which require per-

sonnel and some of which are partially or entirely self supporting. There is the problem of maintenance of buildings and grounds.

"For the job we do, I believe that the number of our employees will compare favorably with any similar institute in the country insofar as economy is concerned. Certainly the fact that we have only 523 faculty members means that we have a student-teacher ratio somewhat higher than that approved by the accrediting agencies of the country.

"Last fall, we reduced our full-time faculty and part-time teachers by 104 and our nonacademic employees by 84. In order to do this, personnel, especially part-time help in certain departments, had to be reduced beyond the point where efficient service is possible."

President Cross submitted the above statement on the number of employees on the University payroll for the month of January 1951.

Mr. Tappan . . .

Volitantes or Flying Flies. You will find this in almost any unabridged dictionary. Due to impurities in the vitreous humor of the eyeball or to scars on its surface, one can see small discs, saucers, cylinders, beads or strings of beads. They are particularly noticeable when seen against the background of a clear sky. They may drift about in the eyes, or which is more often the case, they are seldom in the center of the field of vi-

Hal Muldrow, Jr.

'28

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Norman

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sion and the eye turns automatically to bring them into the center of the field. Naturally they move still further ahead and the eye follows. If one imagines he is seeing something external to the eye and far out in space, he decides they are moving at a tremendous speed across the sky . . . I believe 99 per cent of the "flying saucers" can be explained by (this) phenomenon; one per cent may be balloons, planes or meteors."

Tarman printed the letter and its content was snapped up by the news wire services. Tappan didn't know how far his statement on the saucers had gone until he received a letter from a woman in Montevideo, Uruguay. She sent him a pamphlet, printed in Spanish, with illustrations of the "spots" which are seen by the human eye. They coincided with the word picture he had found in his dictionary.

An unusual man like Tappan would have to have an unusual hobby. And he has. It's the fourth dimension. He spends a lot of his after hours working with cryptoanalysis—the deciphering of codes—and playing an occasional game of billiards. But the fourth dimension has been interwoven with his life ever since he read the book *Flatland*. "I read that book 40 years ago, and I've been interested in the fourth dimension ever since," he says.

The fourth dimension of which he speaks is a dimension which would make life crystal clear if it were understood. It's all wrapped up in science and philosophy and sounds shockingly profound when he talks about it. He has started writing on the subject, but he hits a snag when he starts to push ahead into what he is writing. "Everytime I pick it up, I find that each idea already there suggests more ideas, and it just goes on and on," he says.

Listed in *Who's Who in Oklahoma*, *Who's Who in Engineering*, *Who's Who in America*, *Who's Who in the Western Hemisphere*, and *American Men of Science*, Tappan's name is in just about every book published in English which lists people of note.

Another distinguished title attached to the Tappan name is father of five children. Married to Mary Jenks in 1911, Tappan has sent four daughters to the University and one son to the University Highschool. The daughters are Mrs. Mary Tappan Garrison, '34ba, '35ma; Mrs. Helen Nina Lobelich, '35bs, '36ms; Mrs. Ruth Kreneck, '41bs, '41arch; and Mrs. Francis Lois Henderson. Frank Girard, II recently graduated from the University Highschool and is now serving with the Airforce.

Tappan was the only Oklahoman who held a fellowship in the American Institute of Electrical Engineers until recent years. Other organizations to which he belongs are S.P.E.E., Sigma Tau, Tau Beta Pi, Al-

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pha Sigma Delta, Eta Kappa Nu, Beta Theta Pi, Oklahoma Academy of Science and the Oklahoma Society of Professional Engineers.

When he was named David Ross Boyd Professor, Tappan didn't go out to pasture. He is still teaching. And he is still pondering over the fourth dimension.

Sooner Scene

Hodges, both families from Bartlesville.

From Kingfisher came that old pharmacy wheelhorse Ralph Enix, '36pharm. Dudley Culp, '34Law, and Mrs. Culp were present from Wewoka, sitting next to the parents of the Alumni Association president, Dr. and Mrs. W. E. Grisso, Seminole.

It was good to see Paul, '21, and Mrs. Reed, Sulphur, since Paul has been serving in the army as a Lieutenant Colonel for nearly a year, and just returned home in time to bid Paul, Jr., '50geol, farewell on his trip to Japan with the 45th Division.

From Madill were state senator Raymond Gary, Mrs. W. H. Colby, Richard D. Phillips, '49bs, and Mrs. Phillips, Mr. and Mrs. James Parker, and Miss M. E. Norman. W. L. Peterson and Bill Marsico, '40ms, along with several others were here from Denison, Texas.

Cushing was ably represented by A. B. Imel, '14ba, and Mrs. Imel (Hazel Kelly, '15-'16). This story would not be complete without including the fact that forty-two special guests, relatives of Mr. Puterbaugh from several states, held a two-day reunion in Norman in honor of the occasion.

Mr. and Mrs. Dial Currin, Shawnee, were present as were George Hann, '36m. ed, and Mrs. Hann (Irene Agabright, '26), Ardmore.

The University faculty was well represented as was the city of Norman. A few of those present from Oklahoma City included George Shirk, '35ba, '36Law, Mart Brown, '29Law, Richard L. Virtue, '44ba, Herbert Branan, '32ba, '38Law, and Mrs. Branan (Elizabeth Trumbo, '29bs), Frank S. Cleckler, '21ba, Frank Buttram, '10ba, '12ma, and Mrs. Buttram (Merle Newby Buttram, '06mus, '12ba), Lee B. Thompson, '25ba, '27Law, and Mrs. Thompson (Elaine Bizzell, '24), Errett Newby, '07mus, '08ba, and Mrs. Newby, Dr. Mel A. Nash, '19ba, '27ma, Grover Strother, '20ba, and Mrs. Strother (Alice Truesdell, '17ba) and Robert Shelton, '29ba, '29Law.

Mr. and Mrs. M. S. Morris, El Reno, and Mrs. Ruth Vaught Thompson, '31ba, Oklahoma City, accompanied their father, Judge Vaught.

And with the names of J. Phil Burns, '27ba, and Mrs. Burns, Oklahoma City, I bring this report to a close while I can still think of twenty or thirty omissions.