



Always One Familiar Face



Emil R. Kraettli

1927 Administrative Council—(left to right) Registrar George Wadsack, Deans Ellsworth Collings, A. B. Adams, Fredrick Holmberg Julien C. Monnet, Edna McDaniel, L. A. Turley, President Bizzell, Vice President J. S. Buchanan, Kraettli, Deans D. B. R. Johnson, J. H. Felgar, Homer L. Dodge, S. W. Reaves, Roy Gittinger.

1937 Board of Regents—Eugene P. Ledbetter, Malcolm E. Rosser Jr., Lloyd Noble, George L. Bowman, Claude C. Hatchett, President Bizzell, Kraettli, Maj. Eugene Kerr, Judge J. C. Looney.

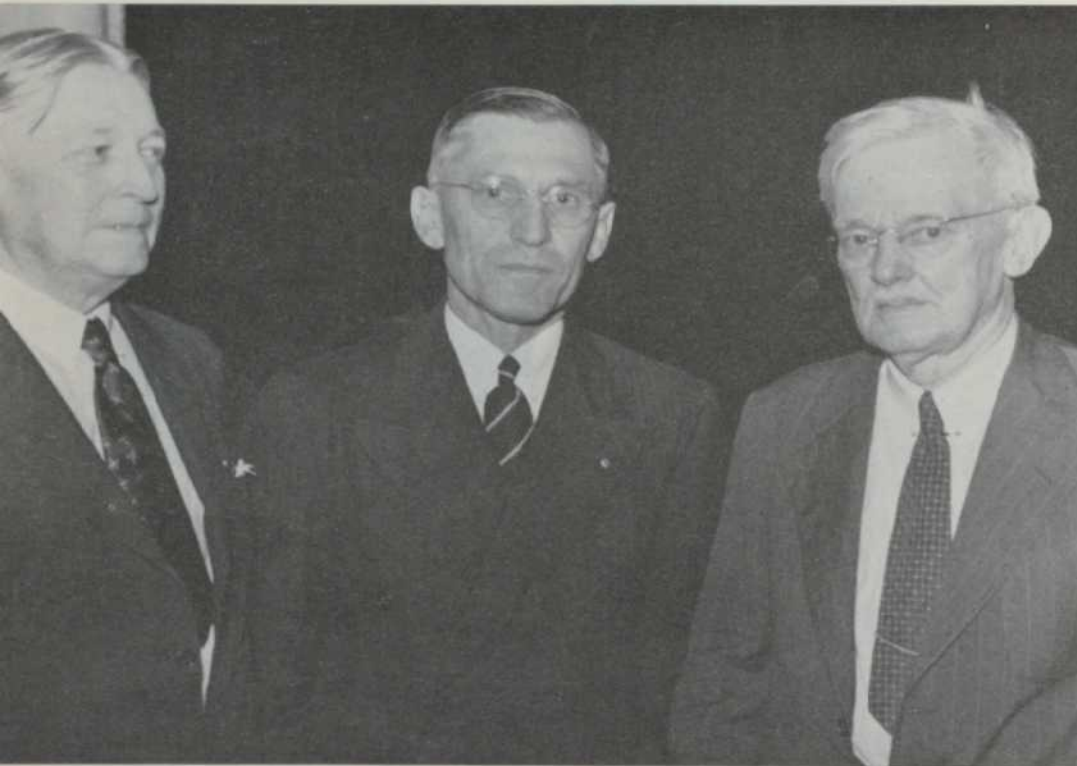
1943 Board of Regents—Joe McBride, Lloyd Noble, Kraettli, President Joseph A. Brandt, Harrington Wimberley, Claude Chambers, E. C. Hopper, Erl Deacon, John Craig.

1957 Board of Regents—Dave Morgan, Joe McBride, Quintin Little, Rayburn Foster, Kraettli, President George L. Cross, Leonard Savage, T. R. Benedum, W. D. Crisso.

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ALWAYS ONE FAMILIAR FACE

a partial retirement is all they will allow
the man who has life tenure as "Mr. O.U."



Three famous names in University of Oklahoma history are shown in this old photograph from the archives. Kraettli stands between two presidents, W. B. Bizzell (left) and Stratton D. Brooks.

“WELL, I remember the time—” he’ll begin and instinctively your ears perk up. The coffee table chatter ceases. Whether you are dean, regent, visiting alumnus or student, you listen. Chances are you’re about to hear a pretty good story.

Emil R. Kraettli has had ample opportunity to accumulate a most amazing repertoire of O.U. stories. In nearly half a century as secretary of the University and secretary of the Board of Regents, he has seen them all come and go—the greats and not-so-greats, the able and inept. He has served five University presidents, dozens of regents, thousands of students. He has seen a struggling school survive the uncertainties of the early days to finally emerge as a university worth the name. He remembers it all—the names, the dates, the places—and he has loved every minute of it.

Last spring when Kraettli announced his retirement from his several duties, many persons around the University of Oklahoma began to wonder if they could get along without him; the Board of Regents decided they would rather not try and persuaded him to remain as their secretary. He was not too difficult to convince. Emil Kraettli would never be completely happy far away from the administration building he first entered in 1913.

Kraettli came to Norman with his wife Eva and two small children, Virginia and Kenneth, as a 23-year-old stenographer in the office of Errett Newby, secretary-registrar. He became secretary to President Stratton D. Brooks in 1916. Newby left in



Emil Kraettli was already beginning to earn the title "Second President" when he occupied this desk just outside the door to the office of President William B. Bizzell in the late 1920's.

1919 and Kraettli was named secretary of the Board of Regents, then secretary of the University of Oklahoma.

While he kept the same titles and the same office for over 40 years, almost everything else about his job was in a constant state of change. He was secretary to five different presidents, for instance, and with each new one, Kraettli took on new responsibilities, gave up old ones. He remembers each man vividly, viewing each with affection but a certain amount of objectivity.

"They were different," he'll tell you with a smile. "Dr. Brooks (president from 1912 to 1923) was a fine administrator and a good businessman. Of course he came when the University was very small—less than a thousand students. The University actually started its growth under Dr. Brooks. Now, I don't know that it was *because* of Dr. Brooks.

"Walton was governor at the time Dr. Brooks went to Missouri," Kraettli explains. "The University of Missouri had tried to get him for several years. He didn't want to go; his family liked Norman. Then Walton was elected governor. There was a lot of trouble—he made things pretty bad. Missouri offered Dr. Brooks the job again and he accepted.

"I was very close to Dr. Brooks. I fished and hunted with him. Even after he left O.U., he would either come here to Norman or we would meet him somewhere like Raton, New Mexico, and we'd fish."

Then there was Dr. J. S. Buchanan, (1923-24) former chairman of the history department and dean of the college of arts

and sciences, who served one year as acting president and a year as president while the regents searched for a replacement for Dr. Brooks.

"Everyone knew him as Uncle Buck," Kraettli recalls. "He was well liked by all his students; he was a fine teacher. He knew that he was going to be president just until they could find another man. There was probably more disturbance among the board members then than at any other time because there were so many factions involved in finding the new president."

Kraettli still remembers the day he accompanied Uncle Buck to Oklahoma City to consult George Short, then attorney general and later a University regent, about using state appropriated funds to construct the building across from the present Memorial Union (which later housed the school of journalism). The law stated that appropriated funds could be used only for improvements, repairs and "temporary" structures. When Dr. Buchanan asked Short for a legal opinion. Short asked simply, "Well, now Uncle Buck, what kind of an opinion do you want? He eventually concluded that after all plaster was only "temporary" and brick was only "temporary" and O.U. could have its "temporary" building.

In 1925 Dr. William Bennett Bizzell was named president and Kraettli has nothing but fond memories of the 16 years of his administration. "Of course everyone knows that Dr. Bizzell was a fine gentleman, a scholar and a good administrator.

"He was in great demand to give high

school and college commencement addresses, in Oklahoma, Missouri, Arkansas. Of course we didn't have an airplane then, and Dr. Bizzell would always ask me to drive for him," Kraettli recalls. "I guess I drove thousands of miles for him. There'd be times when he'd give the commencement address at Woodward or Alva, come home that night and the next night go to Altus. And the thing that always made me feel bad about it was that he would feel sorry for me.

"He stayed until 1941. Red Phillips was governor then, and Red was pretty hostile. Dr. Bizzell's health began to fail during the last year or two of his administration. Then Joe Brandt was appointed."

Kraettli's friendship with Joseph A. Brandt dated from the latter's student days at O.U. "Joe always did give me credit for his being a Rhodes scholar," the secretary remembers fondly. "He was so discouraged he wasn't even going to appear for the interview until I talked to him about it. We were always good friends. I think I even suggested his name as director of the University press when Dr. Bizzell was looking for one."

Things were never too easy for Brandt as president and Kraettli saw his old friend through some difficult times. Kraettli recalls the day President Brandt dropped by his office unexpectedly to ask him to lunch.

"I didn't have the least idea what he had in mind," Kraettli says. "Nobody ever did. We went to the Copper Kettle, had our lunch and I sat back and waited for it to

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most of the regents he has known were dedicated men, but some were more severely tested than others

break. I thought he was going to fire me or something. Then he said, 'You've had a pretty tough job here with me and I want you to know that I appreciate what you're doing.' And I said, 'Well, Joe you know that I don't always agree with you, but whenever you make up your mind and you decide what you want—well, that's mine too. I'll do what you want, but I won't always agree with you.' And he said, 'You wouldn't be worth a damn if you did.' And that was the end of our lunch."

When George L. Cross came to O.U. in 1934 as assistant professor of botany, he arrived on campus without a contract or any other evidence of employment. "Emil Kraettli helped me get things straightened out a bit," Dr. Cross says, "and most importantly, he got my name on the faculty payroll." Eleven years later Kraettli was to welcome Dr. Cross to another new job as O.U.'s eighth president. He was Kraettli's boss for the next 20 years.

"After Joe Brandt left," Kraettli recalls, Dr. Cross became chairman of the committee to look for a new president. They searched far and wide for somebody to meet all the qualifications that everybody had in mind. Finally the regents decided that they had a better man right here in Dr. Cross than they had been able to find anywhere else."

The Cross years have been the booming post World War II years. Jobs which Kraettli handled almost singlehandedly for the fledging school of the '20s came to require full scale staffs. More administrative officers were added to the President's staff. In Kraettli's early days with the University there were three people in an admissions office that now employes 32.

"At enrolment time, we all pitched in," he says. "Everything was done by hand; there was no machine work. We worked 24 hours a day writing those class rolls by hand—but the teachers had the rolls by Monday morning. Of course, we were only enrolling 876 that first year." Last semester O.U. enrolled 13,396.

Many former students remembers Kraettli best as the man in charge of the student loan fund, a project which started in 1918 with a \$200 gift from Dr. Brooks and grew to such proportions as to require a separate office of financial aids in recent years.

Kraettli did his best in past years to accomplish the difficult task of keeping the students as personal friends even while loaning them money. "I always had the feeling that we weren't doing them a favor if we let them borrow more than they absolutely had to have to get by," Kraettli explains. "They appreciated it when they graduated if they didn't owe us much. It's a lot harder to pay back than to borrow."

Kraettli is especially proud of the students' remarkable record of loan repayment. "One former student paid in full from Africa after a lapse of 30 years," he says. "But he paid. It's hard to remember the few who don't. During the Second World War we administered some government loans to students in chemistry, engineering and physics. The restrictions were pretty tight and only 65 of the loans were made—but every single one of those 65 repaid his loan. I have a letter from the Washington office telling us that we were the only institution at that time where every loan had been repaid.

"Many times former students would write us about their loans and say, 'We've had sickness' or 'We had a new baby and

I can't make the payment this month' or 'I'll start paying in July' when it was due in January. Well, that was all right; sometimes we'd have to reduce their payments because of hardship. We didn't fuss with them so long as we could just keep them in contact with us. I didn't want them to go down a alley to keep from meeting me."

And the former Sooners certainly never avoided Emil Kraettli. His office is traditionally one of the first stops for alumni visiting the campus. His office is also the gathering place for another important University group—the Board of Regents. Many of the regents first received counsel from Kraettli as students and it seemed natural to them to depend on him for information and guidance as they became new regents.

Kraettli has a storehouse of memories of the many regents he has known. He remembers most as dedicated men with a sincere desire to serve the University's best interests. Some had to meet more severe tests of strength than others. Kraettli is fond of recounting the trials faced by the late Charles Wrightsman, president of the board during the Walton administration.

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When the last interurban ran between Norman and Oklahoma City in 1948, Kraettli (left), the late O.U. treasurer J. L. Lindsey and Dr. Edward E. Dale decided to lend the motorman a hand.

Emil Kraettli—Always One Familiar Face

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"I remember a meeting we had in the Skirvin Hotel," he'll begin. "Boy, that was a ruckus. A couple of the members of that Walton-appointed board got a pretty obstreperous and wanted to fire some people down here at the University and hire a certain man as president. They even went so far as to ask this man, but fortunately he turned them down. Finally at noon Wrightsman asked me to get Walton on the phone. He told the governor what was going on and reminded Walton that before he had accepted the appointment as regent he had told Walton he would never do anything to hurt *our* University—and if the governor interfered with what was best for the University, he (Wrightsman) would resign. Then he told the governor he was through if Walton didn't fire the two members who were causing the trouble. The governor said 'Call them to the phone' and when they got on the phone he said 'You're fired.' That was all there was to it."

If Kraettli has fond memories of the regents, they have an equally warm affection for him. At a special regents luncheon this fall past and present board members

gathered to honor the man they called "Mr. O.U." and the "Second President" as well as Friend and Counselor. They presented him with a bound volume containing letters of congratulations from dozens of former regents.

One of the letters recalled the time a past board president by-passed the re-election of the secretary at the annual election of officers under the impression that Kraettli had life tenure by legislative enactment.

Another regent confessed that "during my tenure I was struck by his efficiency by receiving minutes of a regents' meeting one day prior to the meeting. When I called this to the attention of the secretary of my corporate employer as a practice he should follow, he said 'ask Mr. Kraettli how he does this.'"

"I brought back Emil's quiet and quieting explanation that such minutes were not supposed to have been mailed until after the meeting but were actually written before the meeting because they pertained principally to two classifications—a necessary recognition of things that already had transpired (he supposed the regents would take cognizance of things that had already

transpired), and the authorization of conduct necessary to keep the doors of the University open (he assumed the regents would be willing to keep the doors of the University open).

"My business associate said that he could not make the same charitable tentative assumptions about his board that Mr. Kraettli made about this board."

Still another regent speculated, "I wonder what it would have been like to be a regent without a Kraettli. In fact I wonder what the University would have been like without a Kraettli."

The letters go on with words of praise that few men could boast in several lifetimes. On rereading the book after the luncheon, Kraettli's typically dry comment was that he had difficulty remembering who all these people were writing about. But aside from the obvious pleasure Kraettli takes in this collection of tributes, he also has found another use for them.

"I find it very useful to remind Mrs. Kraettli of some of the things that someone has said," he explains. "If she gets after me about something, I just let her read that book."

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