

The Remarkable Dr. Dale

*his pace has slowed only a little
since his "retirement" 12 years ago*



IN 1952, at the age of 73, Edward Everett Dale, research professor of history, retired after more than 30 years on the University of Oklahoma faculty. "I faced retirement without the slightest fears or regrets," says Dr. Dale, "because I knew I wasn't going to stop working." He didn't and he hasn't.

Since "retiring," Dr. Dale has taught a total of three and one-half years at the University of Melbourne, Australia, and at the University of Houston, Texas. At present, the indefatigable octogenarian is working on two books—his nineteenth and twentieth—and spends several hours daily in his Gittinger Hall office. Not much has changed—except maybe for a longer title. "I'm now," quips Dr. Dale, "a research professor of history *emeritus*. I'm not sure about that word 'emeritus' but I think it means 'has-been.'" What Dr. Dale *has been* is busy. To hear him tell it, much of his time has been spent in catching up. "I've been 10 years behind all my life," says he. "I didn't get my bachelor's degree until I was 32, my master's until I was 35 and my Ph.D. until I was past 40. Also, I wasn't married until I was 40, so I'm 10 years behind there, too. I just hope that when it comes time to die, I'll still be 10 years behind everybody else."

Dale the scholar started late because Dale the cowpoke didn't finally hang up his saddle until he was in his twenties. As an authority on the American Indian and the history of the West, Dr. Dale can draw on his own experience which has given him more than a nodding acquaintance with his field of interest. Much of the knowledge of the western frontier is first hand; E. E. Dale has been an eye-witness to the development of the West, growing up on the dusty, desolate ranges of Texas and Oklahoma as a cowpuncher, cowman and peace officer in the territory's infancy.

He was born in 1879 on a small Texas ranch, the son of a pioneer who had joined the rush to California for gold in 1850 and who had returned to the Southwest to raise cattle. When young Dale was nine, his family moved by covered wagon to Oklahoma, settling on a government claim near the tiny village of Navajo a short ride from the Kiowa Comanche reservation, about 10 miles from what is now Altus in the southwestern part of the state. Life was hard, and young Dale was reared in a

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the cowboy-scholar strapped on his six-shooter and joined the Boston police

most non-affluent society. "The children I grew up with," says the white-haired professor in his high-pitched voice, "might be called underprivileged today. We didn't know it, though. No one ever told us. We knew we were privileged to go to school if we had shoes to wear and privileged to stay home if we didn't." Young Dale had been to school for three short terms in Keller, Texas, before moving to Navajo. In his new home he attended a one-room prairie school made of foot-wide boards and stripped with two-by-fours. "Some of the boards had knotholes which the boys who chewed tobacco found very convenient and challenging." It was in this unlikely center of learning that he was introduced to books. "We were taught by a schoolmarm from New England, who had a pretty good library. I was the only kid in school who cared about reading, and she loaned me her books, one by one. I read all of Scott's novels, George Eliot, every book by Dickens except one and all of Bulwer Lytton's poetry and novels."

SCHOOL lasted only about three months a term, and while still croup-high to a cow pony, young Dale began to punch cows. In the winter he hunted and trapped—small game and coyotes, mostly. When he was 19, his father died, leaving the ranch to him and his brother. "We ran the ranch awhile before we decided that the old folks had been too conservative with it. My brother and I went up to Kansas City, borrowed some money at eight per cent interest and bought some younger steers at a time we should have been retrenching instead of expanding. Settlers were coming in and taking up the land; eventually the price of cattle began to drop. My brother and I kept those steers for about a year, and their price was getting lower and lower all the time. We finally shipped them to Kansas City and sold them for about what we gave for them. We were broke. I guess we had about \$15 and a horse and saddle apiece after we had paid our debts. I looked for a job, and the only thing I could find was work picking cotton east of Altus for six cents a hundred

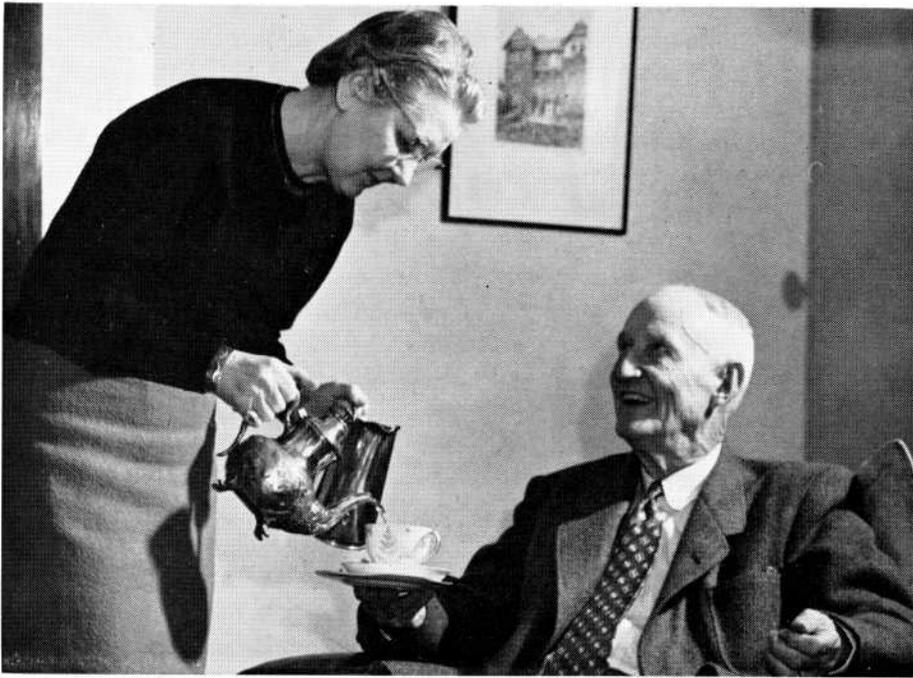
pounds and room and board. It didn't take me long to realize that there wasn't much future to it."

The cowman-turned-cottonpicker finally wrangled an indoor job. Armed with a certificate crediting him with an eighth grade education, he joined the teaching profession. His inauspicious first appointment was a small country school in the sand hills near Navajo—something less than the glass, steel and brick schools of today. "It wasn't much bigger than a box and more poorly constructed. The only furnishings were crude benches for the 50 students. A sheet iron stove provided us with heat. I taught in a few country schools like this for some time until I began to think about going back to school. Here I was, 26 years old with an eighth grade education, but it usually took four years to get through high school and four more for college. Eight years. Well, I thought that maybe if I worked hard, I could get through each in three years. That's six years. I'd be 32 years old when I finally graduated from college. I figured some more and came to the conclusion that I'd be 32 in six years anyway, whether I went to college or not. So I started back to school." Dr. Dale enrolled in the normal school at Edmond. "They immediately put me in what was very aptly called the sub-normal department." He rapidly rose to the normal department, finished the high school requirements in three years and was graduated from the normal school, with the equivalent of two years of college, in 1909. He then enrolled in O.U., receiving an A.B. in history here in 1911. Right on schedule. He was 32.

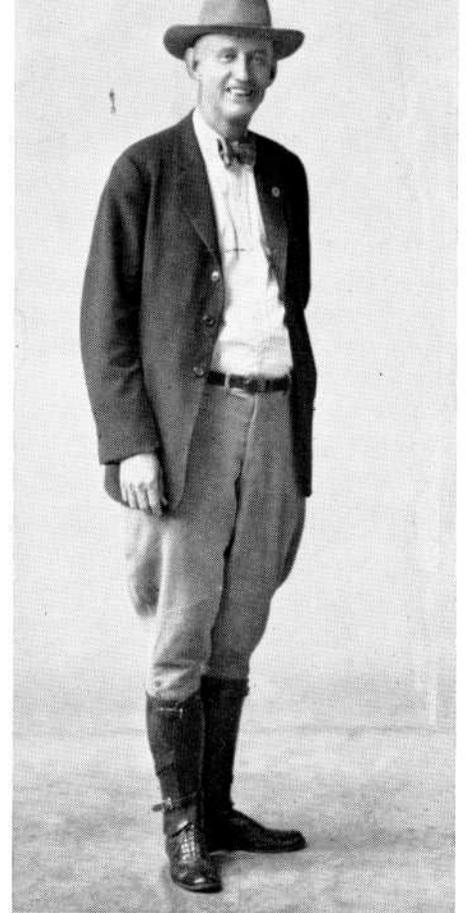
Dr. Dale returned to western Oklahoma after graduation, was a teacher and superintendent of schools at Blair for two years before winning a scholarship to Harvard College in 1913. The eastern culture he encountered in Cambridge, Massachusetts, may have been as different as cactus and calla lilies from the life he knew, but the tall cowpoke galloped smoothly through Harvard, gaining a master's degree in history in 1914. He returned to Norman and

joined the history department here, but love and learning interrupted his tenure in 1919. That year he married Rosalie Gilkey and the newlyweds, contrary to Horace Greeley's advice, went East, back to Harvard and work toward a Ph.D. for the professor. The Dales arrived in Cambridge before the fall term opened and found Boston in the midst of a crisis over a threatened police strike. "President Lowell of Harvard made a statement in which he urged the students to go to the aid of the city in event of a strike." The Boston police struck, and Dr. Dale joined the volunteers. "It was a bad situation. People were looting, gambling, openly defying the law. There was rioting in some areas of the city. I was assigned to the Irish district, as rough a spot as there was. When the precinct captain was issuing the little service pistols the police carried, I asked if I could wear my own weapon since I was used to it and felt better protected with it. He agreed, and I strapped on my Colt .45, which was quite a good-sized piece. The captain's jaw dropped, but he let me wear it. The word got out that a former cowboy and deputy sheriff from Oklahoma was a volunteer policeman, and the press made a lot out of it. I received a good bit of notoriety from the episode. The Hearst papers picked it up, and people down here in Oklahoma read about it. It took me a while to live the *Two-Gun Dale* story down."

After earning his doctorate from Harvard, Two-Gun Dale again returned to the O.U. faculty and began catching up. He became chairman of the history department. In 1924, he spent six months in Washington, D.C., supervising the compilation of a special report on the cattle industry. In 1926, he led a government commission in an extensive study of the nation's Indian tribes. In 1927, he helped to establish the Frank Phillips Collection and became its first curator (*Sooner Magazine*, February 1964). He was writing the first of his books on the West. And he was teaching. Dr. Dale was an outstanding classroom teacher; he left his brand on his students. "I can still remember many of



Mrs. Dale pours her husband a spot of tea during their stay at the University of Melbourne, Australia, in 1953. In the photo at the right, Dr. Dale, quite dapper in a pair of puttees, poses for the camera before embarking on a year-long study of the American Indian tribes in 1926.



the things he said in class," says Harold Keith, sports publicity director for O.U., who earned a master's degree under Dr. Dale's direction. "I recall, in particular, one lecture in which he was talking about the delicate balance of the Iriquois birch canoes. He said that the canoes were balanced so perfectly that an Iriquois brave had to part his hair in the middle and if he chewed tobacco, he had to keep the wad in the center of his mouth to prevent the canoe from tipping over. He was close to his students and liked to know them. He and Mrs. Dale had an understanding that every Tuesday evening he would bring a student or two home for dinner."

IN ADDITION to their family of students, the Dales have a son, E. E. Jr., a professor of botany at the University of Arkansas, and a foster daughter, Pearl Garen, now Mrs. J. Gordon Fechner. "She came to live with us while she attended the University. She had graduated from the Indian school at Chilocco, and she took an A.B. in government and a master's in history here. She's told me more funny stories than anyone I know. She has a wonderful sense of humor. She once told me, 'My father was a full-blood Mohawk and my mother was a full-blood Irishwoman. I don't have a drop of white blood in me.' She used to tell me she wouldn't mind going to the penitentiary so much—she imagined it

would be a good deal like Chilocco. Of course, that was a long time ago. One of my favorite stories was about a girl friend of hers at Chilocco named Mandy. Mandy was a big Creek girl who was continually in hot water with the authorities at the school. She stayed on year after year, never graduating, and all the time she was there, she was campused. She always had so many demerits that she was never permitted to leave the campus. Well, there was a missionary there— don't know his name but the kids called him Brother Ether because his sermons put them to sleep. Brother Ether would bring in an evangelist each spring to hold a revival. One year Mandy conceived of the great idea that she would join the church at this time and demand that she be taken to Arkansas City to be baptized in the Arkansas River since there were no facilities for baptism at Chilocco. Well, she joined and they let her have a trip to Arkansas City where she was baptized. The trip was wonderful for her; she got to go to a movie and walk up and down the street. When she got back to the school, however, she immediately backslid, dancing Indian dances, singing Indian songs, cussing. But the next year at the revival she was converted again, and again demanded to be taken to Arkansas City for baptism. This went on for some years. The last time it happened, Pearl said she was standing on the bank of the river when

Mandy was baptized for the fifth straight year. The preacher lowered her under the water, brought her up, and Pearl saw Mandy's lips move and the preacher look startled. When Mandy returned to school, she was given 75 demerits. My daughter asked her how she got all those demerits: 'Don't know.' What had she done? 'Nothin.' Well, what had she said? 'Never said nothing.' You must have done something to get 75 demerits; they don't give them for nothing. 'Well, when the preacher lifted me up, I just remarked to myself, I wasn't talking to him . . . I said *Seems like the damn water gets colder every year.*'"

In talking about the early days of the West, an inevitable question always pops up, and it seems as if there were more Chesters than there were Jimmy Ringos. "Yes," says Dr. Dale, "this business of the gunslinger has been greatly exaggerated. I never knew more than two or three cowhands who were very good with a gun; moreover, there wasn't much gunplay because after 1892, carrying a gun was prohibited by law in Oklahoma Territory. The Colt .45 six-shooter weighed about three and a half pounds and you left it in the wagon when you were working on a roundup or branding cows. Of course, you took it with you to town. You might need it there. Town was sort of an unsafe place; you were a lot safer on the

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Dr. Dale

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plain. And the Colt .45 was a pretty poor weapon, really. It was all right indoors or at night, but it wasn't much good in open country. A man was committing suicide if he went out with only a Colt six-shooter in pursuit of an outlaw armed with a Winchester rifle. In spite of what a good many people said, it wasn't the Colt .45 that tamed the frontier as much as it was the Winchester rifle.

"The officers of the law were the ones who were quick with a gun—their lives depended on it. When I think of a good man with a gun, I think of my old friend J. M. Ferris down at Navajo who was a peace officer most of his life and was expert with a pistol. He could put five shots out of six—or five out of five for that matter—60 or 70 feet away in a spot the size of a dollar with a .38 Colt Army pistol. The only outlaws I met were Bill Doolin, who I ran into once at a dance in the old Cheyenne Arapaho country pretty soon after it was open to settlement, and Tulsa Jack, a pretty well known outlaw at one time. But most of the legends of the gun-fighters are simply that—legends."

What advice would Dr. Dale offer to today's young people? "Although you might be too old to set a good example, you're never too old to offer advice. A person should, so far as possible, seek an objective and follow it steadfastly to the end—to go as far as he can with what he started out to do. I believe a person should live primarily for service to others rather than service to oneself, because in serving others, one also serves himself.

"I had my doubts when I was younger about what my profession would be. I thought of studying law; I thought of going into business. But I decided on a career in teaching, and I've never been sorry for it. Along with it, I would expect to be a writer. I've had a lot of fun writing the 17 or 18 books I've written. The greatest satisfaction I've had is that while I've taught maybe 10,000 students in the classroom, I have taught from a half-million to three-quarters of a million young people in the state through my textbooks.

"Oklahoma has been good to me. Its people have been good to me. I love Oklahoma, because we were children together."

—PAUL GALLOWAY

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