

## THE OLD NORTH TOWER AND CHIMES AT EDMOND

*By Charles Evans*

The pioneer life of Oklahoma did not permit much exercise of the aesthetic. While the love of the beautiful is innate in every heart, still it takes years of preparation and frequently that preparation seasoned and sweetened by wealth to bring that basic element of all art to its fullest bloom. The first days of Oklahoma life were spent in breaking out the stubborn sod, fashioning rude places of abode and conquering harsh and unyielding environments. So, no wonder that even after statehood came into being, bringing with it the necessity for broad expansion; no wonder when necessity compelling the state to erect buildings of large proportions and set them in grounds that permitted the use of the landscape artists with tree, shrub and flower to give the character that was needed, there was no will or desire or understanding and so the public grounds of schools or colleges and other public buildings appeared desolate and neglected.

Stern necessity seemed to exact such harsh and cruel economy that most all of the public buildings of the state were built of cheap material or if the material was good the form used was straight, narrow and barren of any ornament. The University of Oklahoma in 1907 had one building, that of the central administration building that was pretentious and somewhat attractive. It was set in a broad flat prairie stretch and though one discerned a thoughtful and commanding hand had shaped an outline of drives, walk-ways and approaches that presaged a splendid future development, still, the small elms, the scant shrubs and waste of uncultivated weed-grown lawn gave nothing of interest to a cultured mind to enjoy. The A. & M. College at Stillwater had an old central building of quaint design and away from it walk-ways across the grass led to a few other buildings that were repelling to the eye because of their lack of interesting columns or arches on pleasant lines. All revealed that time must be the approach to culture.

The Capitol building of Oklahoma, begun in Governor Cruce's administration, was finished after several years of construction in Governor Williams' administration. Again economy betrayed art and a building that could have been in a proper setting, a revelation to the thinking citizen and the discerning traveler that here a commonwealth had been erected in the twentieth century with heir of the best values that centuries past had given to the Anglo-Saxon race; this economy had set this great building down in a slice of land fifty or a hundred feet from a highway and with borders on east, west and south so restricted that it would not have proved

a fitting site for a handsome country school building. This record and criticism, if criticism it be, is not offered as a challenge to the wisdom and the worth of the early day founders of Oklahoma. It took Rome more than 700 years to shake off its mud and ugliness and reach the splendor and culture of the Caesars. It took more than 500 years for Athens to move from the harsh building of Draco's Era to the beneficent beauty of the epoch of Pericles and when we look upon the finer things that now in architecture and in other arts adorn many centers of this new state, we rejoice that Oklahoma has done in fifty years what it took Greece and Rome to do in 500 years. It may be said that in a few years after the Capitol was erected Governor R. L. Williams obtained enough land on the south to permit the Capitol an approach and a setting commensurate with its dignity.

In 1911 a campus and buildings of the State Teachers College at Edmond, the oldest and largest institution of its kind in the state at that time, appeared a small tract and buildings of apparent waste and neglect. Sage grass appeared here and there; the lawn was pitted with holes and a few dwarfed or at least neglected elms traced in spectral form the edges of the side-walks leading up and around the buildings. There were just two buildings, the larger one of brick, meant to be strictly utilitarian was in design a splendid definition of the word. The other, sitting on the northern edge of the campus, known as the north building was interesting in detail. It seemed that some workman in stone, desiring to express his inner spirit said to himself, "In spite of blueprints or plans and beyond what the constructor may give me to work with, I have this stone with which to build a tower and under God I shall build it to please myself."

Thus, the building stood in 1911 a thing of beauty and shall be a joy forever as long as the cultivated eye at search in those parts for something artistically wrought in stone may look upon it. He had taken a firm close grade of red sand stone, gathered from a quarry some six miles away and with dextrous stroke had set out a tower not surpassed nor seldom equalled in the southwest. In the shaping of this tower someone making the plans must have conceived the hope for a clock in the pinnaced top of the tower, but there in a beautiful circle of stone rested a white painted board for almost twenty years with a clock's hands painted in black tracing out a certain time of day.

On June 5, 1911 a newly elected president of the college made inspection of the buildings. It was disclosed that the properties of the institution were very much in decay and disorder. As the central feature of any institution where teachers are trained there was needed a Training School. The old north building had wings of brick attaching to the central stone, of which the north tower was

a part, and this brick was fast falling away and making condemnation of the whole building essential. Here was a challenge that ought to be met at once but no money seemed to be in sight for essential repairs and building. Search was made into the appropriations and it was discovered that some \$35,000 was to be turned back June 30, 1911, because no need was in sight for its use in developing a better state teachers school!

In consternation and resentment the president went immediately to the Governor, Lee Cruce and State Board of Affairs composed of E. B. Howard, Lon Frame and Gene Morris and begged at once that this money should be put in use at once for repairs and restoring to genuine service the old North Tower building. They responded at once and architects were set to work on taking away the wings of brick and replacing them with the same type of stone that composed the north tower. The interior of the old north building was thrown out and plans for a modern training school on the first floor and classrooms on the upper developed, and by June 30, contracts were let and work had begun.

With all this restoration of the north building, it was evident that the white board with the clock hands on the top of the tower would make the building appear, even with its splendid restoration, a sort of hall of mockery. By throwing the board away still the tower would have a blind, forbidding and vacant stare. The president went to the Board of Public Affairs and begged them for enough money out of the appropriations in the next biennium for a clock with chimes. The simplest of chimes ringing across the campus would speak to hundreds, and even thousands of prospective teachers in Oklahoma and constantly tell of the innate desire of the soul for harmonious sound. Chimes would remind them of historical buildings, of great cathedrals and wonderful memorials throughout the world where men had placed bells of music to tell a story of devotion and high faith.

When a request for purchase of chimes to the Board of Affairs was made, it provoked much mirth even to the point of raucous hilarity. One member shouted to the other, "Come here, boys and hear this! Here's a good man gone crazy. He is asking for \$1200 or \$1400 for clock and chimes. What is a chimes?" So the president went away knowing that he would have to turn elsewhere for a while for his chimes and clock. There is always one unfailing source of support to the American teacher. It is to the youth, the pupil life which surrounds him; they never fail. So, in plain terms the plan to complete the old North Tower building by placing a clock with chimes in it was placed before the assembled pupils of the Central State Normal. They responded with unbounded enthusiasm. They were poor, they had little money but they had the will to work. So through suppers, candy sales, campus fairs and many other phases of money-getting and with the help of the pro-

gressive forces of Edmond citizenship, some \$550 and a petition from the student body and faculty were laid before the Board of Public Affairs, that the remainder of the money, some \$750 to be given for the purchase of the clock and chimes. The Board of Affairs responded with a splendid spirit. On June 12, 1912, the Old North building with its new wings of sand stone, with its modernized training school quarters was finished with the clock in the tower, after twenty years of waiting; the chimes rang out while more than a thousand teachers upon the campus cheered.

Of course, the Old North Tower building with its chimes and new dress would not look very pleased or pleasing from any point of a campus so barren and repulsive as that afforded by Central State Normal of 1911. So, as these brick wings were being replaced by attractive stone and the clock and chimes about to be lifted to the tower, the pupils of the institution were called upon to assist in making the lawns and walk-ways into a proper setting. Money was sought for horses and teams to break the sod or workmen to spade up beds for flowers and shrubs and the fertilization of the ground. "No money was to be had from the state funds," said those in authority at the Capitol. Again the students were told the story and were asked if they would furnish plows and the power. They laughingly and quickly responded. Some of them secured the plow; others found ropes to act as harness; and upon the campus in a little while appeared twenty or more young men pulling at ropes and with the plows turning over the sod. Others were using spades and hoes in development of flower beds; still others were finding means to bring upon the campus fertilizers that would permit flowers, shrubs and grass to grow. Professor Fred C. Ives, teacher of agriculture in the college with the help of the pupils made up large and essential hot beds and in the spring of 1912, thousands of petunias, marigolds, zinnias, snapdragons and other plants were ready for the beds and borders. The students, young men and women alike, did the planting and by June 12, 1912, as the chimes in the tower rang out for the first time, the campus presented a scene unlike anything that had been attempted in the state before. Thousands of beautiful blooms and massed verdure gave a setting to a smooth lawn of fine grass and the old North Tower had come into its own.

Out of this coming of the chimes and lawn development, steps leading toward the enrichment of a pleasing environment for teachers and students at Central State Normal, grew a movement as was planned by such work, that spread over this state and gave to hundreds of town, city and country schools, a setting of color and culture which the child-life in and about all schools must ever have to do proper work. It has been found by close survey that a large percent of pupils in the rural schools of America and even in small towns, leave school because they dislike and despise their barren and repulsive surroundings.