

## THE OKLAHOMA COLLEGE FOR WOMEN

By Anna Lewis\*

In the autumn of 1907 when the last American frontier was conquered and the new State of Oklahoma was created, a forty-sixth state took her place beside the old thirteen. Oklahoma's population coming from every state in the union was a heterogeneous group. The predominating political influence came from the South and the Southwest. When the First State Legislature met, the problem of establishing schools was one that perturbed the law makers, due to the fact that Oklahoma Territory had already established the University, the Agricultural and Mechanical College, and three normal schools, while the Indian Territory, richer in natural resources, had no state-supported school. There were several tribal schools. These had been supported by tribal funds; but now tribal government had ended and, to adjust this difference, the State Legislature was faced with the problem of establishing schools in the eastern half of the state, the old Indian Territory part, to offset the western half. Out of that situation the Oklahoma College for Women was created.

In May, 1908, the First State Legislature passed the act creating the college:

Section 1 of this act reads: "An Industrial Institute and College is hereby created for female students in the State of Oklahoma."

Section 2 gives the purpose: "The purpose of said college shall be to give instruction in industrial arts, the English language, and the various branches of mathematics, physical, natural, and economical science with special reference to their application in the industries of life, and to that end there shall be established a sufficient faculty for teaching the above branches and such arts and sciences as are related thereto."

Section 3: "The institution shall be known as the Oklahoma Industrial Institute and College for Girls and shall be an institution incorporated under the laws of Oklahoma, and the government thereof is hereby vested in a board of regents to be known as the Industrial Institute and College Board of Regents. Said board shall consist of the superintendent of Public Instructions of the State, who shall be ex-officio president of the board: The President of the Board of Agriculture and three others to be appointed by the governor and confirmed by the Senate, two of whom shall be women."

Section 4: "Such college, by its regents, may take title of real estate and enter into contracts, locate buildings and do all things necessary to make a college effective as an educational institute."

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**Section 5:** "The full course of study in the institution shall embrace not less than four years, and the college year shall consist of not less than nine calendar months, which may be divided into terms by the Board of Regents as in their judgment will secure the object for which the college was founded."

**Section 13:** "All white female citizens of Oklahoma between the ages of twelve and thirty-five, who shall pass a satisfactory examination in reading, arithmetic, geography, English grammar, and United States history who are known to possess a good moral character may be admitted to all the privileges of the institution."

Several influential members of Oklahoma's first legislature were from the South and believed in separate education for women. The school they had in mind to duplicate or in some respects model after was the Mississippi State College for Women. The Oklahoma College for Women was the fifth institution of its kind to be established in the United States, that is, it was the fifth tax-supported state institution for women.

The Second Legislature in March, 1909, located the new "Industrial School" at Chickasha in what was a part of the old Chickasaw Nation. The original campus consisted of twenty acres. This twenty acre tract reflects the early history of the Indian Territory. When the Chickasaws, along with the other of the Five Civilized Tribes, accepted land in severalty and dissolved their tribal government, Nellie Sparks, a Chickasaw girl, was given the land southwest of the City of Chickasha as her tribal inheritance. Nellie Sparks died while she was attending William Woods, a college for girls in Missouri. So in memory of her and in order that other Oklahoma girls might be educated nearer home, her father, the late J. B. Sparks, an old cattle man, gave twenty acres of her allotment for the establishment of the "Oklahoma Industrial Institute and College for Girls." The first dormitory on the campus was given the name of Nellie Sparks Hall.

The Oklahoma Industrial Institute and College for Girls opened its doors, or its borrowed doors to students September 7, 1909, but few came. For the first two years the I. I. & C. had no home. The Act creating the College in 1908 carried an appropriation of \$100,000 for the erection of a building, but since the Legislature did not decide upon a location that year, nothing could be done in the way of a building. As soon as the College was located in Chickasha, enthusiastic citizens of the City and the newly appointed Board of Regents believed that the best interests of the school would be served by opening the institution at the earliest possible date, though the Legislature had made no appropriation for teachers' salaries. But with the aid of the citizens of Chickasha and the Chamber of Commerce the college opened. A special session of the State Legislature was called in January, 1910, at which time funds were appropriated. The high school building and the city churches of Chickasha offered class rooms and they were accepted. The

students, most of them, came from Chickasha anyway so no dormitory was needed. In September, 1911 after two years of pioneering, I. I. & C. began its third year in a building of its own, the building which is now known as the Administration Building. This one building was the "College." It was dormitory, laboratory, and administration building until December, 1913. In that year the first dormitory was completed but it was not occupied until 1914.

During the first years of the College it was difficult for the authorities to decide just what should be the character of the institution. This was the age of vocational schools and colleges. The trend of education was toward the practical and useful. The aims of the institutions outlined in the first catalogue are:

"The aim of this school is to give to the girls and young women not only a literary education on a par with a University course but also such an industrial education as will make them useful, economical, scientific queens of our American home.

"The high mission of this institution demands high standards—The college will seek not only to improve the intellect and morals of the girls, but will strive in every way to prepare them for home makers, leaders in social, civic, industrial, and educational affairs. Through the influence of this literary and industrial education combined, through the cultivation of the useful arts and esthetic graces the I. I. C. hopes to bring to the home with their future arbiters, not only economy, comfort and convenience but harmony, culture, and refinement."

In September, 1911, when the I. I. & C. moved into its own quarters, a new President was in charge, James Alexander Moore of Alabama having succeeded H. B. Abernathy, the first President. The curriculum was reorganized, or organized on a Junior College basis. The Prospectus for students in 1911 gave the purpose of the institution:

"Education must be both General and Specific:—General, in qualifying each individual for his common destiny and preparing him for participation with all mankind in the heritage of human experiences:—Specific as fitting each individual for the particular sphere he shall occupy.

"It may be said that every phase of life that concerns women, every office and service that may need her, the Oklahoma Institute and College seeks to open to her, to fit her for. In the University, the Oklahoma girl has the opportunity of rivaling her brother in advance work along broad lines: in a normal school she may prepare herself for teaching: in the Industrial Institute and College she is offered the means of fitting herself for the perfect home maker, the efficient office woman, the trained worker, the expert artists, and the Cultured Woman."

Institutions are products of experiences and must invariably change as conditions change, if they are to achieve their purpose and the college authorities attempted to adjust the institution to these changes.

The first three years the College struggled under many handicaps, political and financial. As in all other new states and new

institutions political influences were hard to keep out. The Board of Regents was discontinued in 1910 by legislative act, and the Institute was placed under the State Board of Education. The Legislature was, after having established the school, not very generous in its appropriations. The name "Industrial Institute" attached to a college was a handicap, the word "Industrial" having been applied in some states to institutions of correction. The college administration labored long trying to make it clear to the public that the school was both a college and an Industrial Institute, "Institute" in the sense of an educational institute. In one of the early catalogues the following explanation and apology are made for the name:

"Aside from this being a college, it is an industrial institution. The training is industrial in that it is vocational, practical and helpful as a means of livelihood. Only girls of the highest moral character are admissible to this splendid industrial training. Other institutions have no monopoly on the word 'Industrial' and instead of being a humiliation it becomes the I. I. & C's chief glory."

But even this was not convincing and the name was considered by many to be a serious hindrance, especially after some incorrigible girls were sent to the institute by county judges who did not know that it was a college.

So as early as 1912, the governing authorities decided that the name should be changed to "The Oklahoma College for Women," and after that time all catalogues and publications used this name. But not until 1916 was the change made official by an act of the Legislature.

In 1912, also when the name was changed to Oklahoma College for Women, the course of study was revised provision now being made for a four year college. There were two courses of study, one leading to an academic degree, the other to a technical degree. Along with the college work there was still a four year preparatory school which continued to be the most important part of the college as far as numbers. With the new school year came a new President, J. B. Eskridge of Texas.

In the catalogue for 1912 the aims of the institution are restated as follows:

"The Oklahoma College for Women is offering a combination of both classic and technical education designed to meet the particular needs of women alone. Training for both head and hand is the dominant idea, and the object of every endeavor is to give young women of Oklahoma a well-rounded education that shall equip them for usefulness in every walk of life."

The college authorities realized now that there was nothing new in the fundamental problems which confronted women. They were the same now as in the past and would continue to be the

same—that is, an adjustment to the world in which they lived in order that life might yield a maximum of satisfaction and development.

An old idea that was inherited or handed down from the Female Seminaries of the eighties and the nineties was that of "uniform dress" which was required for a few years. The catalogue gave this explanation, "In order to promote safe and sane ideas in matters pertaining to dress, a uniform will be worn on Sunday. The uniform will be neat and attractive, of good material but not expensive. The right is reserved to require a uniform for week if deemed wise." This regulation was later deemed wise and in 1914, the catalogue gave as the main purpose of the change, "democracy", on the campus: "The richest girl cannot be distinguished from the poorest by her dress". For a few years dress regulations were emphasized but that phase soon passed.

The most important period in the history of the College in the matter of growth and development came between the years 1914 and 1926. It was during these years that the college developed into an accredited and recognized Liberal Arts College. The first step in this development was the coming of a new President in 1914, G. W. Austin. He was a man with vision. He believed in the education of women; he wanted to build a woman's college, a college in fact as well as in name which was in accordance with the trend of public opinion of the day. He believed that economic independence for women was most desirable and believed that a college education was an important asset in obtaining that independence. There was now less political influence in the College, and its administration was given a free hand in raising the standards. In order to bring the quality of instruction up to meet requirements, the preparatory school was organized with a separate faculty, and the four year college course was reorganized and strengthened. The faculty increased in number and in academic training. The student body grew also in number and came to college better prepared to do college work.

The first degrees were given in 1915. The class was small, of course, only two students having sufficient faith in the future of the College to continue the four years' work. But the College had granted a degree. This gave encouragement to others.

The President, in 1915, sought the recognition of the North Central Association of Universities and Colleges, and each year thereafter until 1919, when recognition was obtained, a petition went in to the Association asking either for an inspection or for definite information on steps to be taken next in order to obtain the rating of an accredited college.

In President Austin's report to the committee on recognition he states that in 1917 the legislature "appropriated \$100,000 for buildings and the school was so much appreciated that not a single vote was cast against the appropriation," and that he was sure the coming legislature, 1919, would be equally generous. The appropriation made in 1917 was used to enlarge the one dormitory, Nellie Sparks Hall, and to build a central heating plant. In 1919 the legislature was as generous as the President had anticipated; a Fine Arts building, another dormitory, Frances E. Willard Hall, and the President's home were erected.

The Fine Arts Department was now becoming one of the important departments of the college. This part of the College has fulfilled the aims and ambitions of its founders. Not only has it trained public school teachers in music and dramatics, but it has given the state an uplift in the appreciation of music and dramatics. As Oklahoma was a pioneer state, music and art had been neglected. The "sooners" and the "89'ers" had no time to give to culture; they had been too busy building up a state, now they were ready to accept it.

Along with this new growth and recognition, a separate Board of Regents, some members of which were women, was created by the Legislature in 1919. The creation of a Board of Regents for the college aided materially in the development of the College. Such a Board had more time and felt more interest in the College. The State Board of Education had more than a dozen schools and it was not always willing to distinguish between a college, a normal school, and a preparatory school.

As the College grew, the preparatory department decreased in number. Since Oklahoma now had more and better high schools there was no demand for the preparatory school and after 1926 it was abolished altogether.

President Austin died in the autumn of 1926 but the College was fortunate in having as his successor another able administrator, President M. A. Nash. Dr. Nash continued the work of building both internally and externally. Since the Oklahoma College for Women was the chief institution for women's education in the state, college authorities sought and obtained recognition of the American Association of University Women; this was obtained 1929 and in the same year the College became a member of the Association of American Colleges and Universities. The alumnae of the College are working with the American Association of University Women in all parts of the State with gratifying results for themselves and for the College.

While recognitions were being obtained from these college rating agencies for its educational standing, the material side of

the College, also was growing. In 1925 a Science and Home Economics building was erected. This building was later designated as Austin Hall, as a memorial to the former president, G. W. Austin. Then followed an Infirmary, a Home Management house, a Physical Education building, and four additional residence halls. These residence halls were built with self-liquidating bonds. The College had outgrown the original twenty acre tract and additional land was purchased. The student body continued to grow in number and now nears the thousand mark.

One of the aims of the college authorities has always been to keep the College democratic, recognizing the fact that expenses of an education should be kept within the range of the girls of Oklahoma. For that reason board and room have been exceedingly reasonable and fees have been kept at the minimum. This is one way in which the College had justified its existence. Education has been placed within the reach of all the girls in the state that have the will to accept it.

After these forty years of an existence which has not been exactly pioneering, but has been that of adjustment to meet the needs of the women of Oklahoma, the College has made a definite place for itself. It is not an easy matter to give a clear and unbiased estimate of what the college has contributed to the educational and cultural life of the state, or to know to what extent the aims of the founders are being fulfilled. The College has furnished its share of teachers to the state, in both the high schools and the grade schools. Though not primarily a teacher's training institution, teachers are trained. The teaching profession being one of the oldest professions for women, naturally many of the graduates of Oklahoma College for Women entered this field and some have achieved distinguished results. Some graduates from each class have gone on into graduate school in the University of Oklahoma and other universities. Their achievements have reflected honor upon their Alma Mater. Then in the field of scholarship the College has not fallen short of the aim of its founders.

In 1943 when President M. A. Nash was chosen by the Governor of Oklahoma as Chancellor of the Board of Regents for Higher Education in the State, Doctor C. Dan Proctor became President of the College. President Proctor has continued well the work started by the last two presidents. The College now has a campus of seventy-seven acres with a total of 21 buildings on the campus proper, a golf course and stables. The College lodge to which students go for outings and picnics is located upon the college farm which is about two miles from the campus. Also the Department of Biology maintains an experiment station there for the study of Oklahoma animal and plant life.

When the government disposed of its war properties at Borden Hospital the College obtained several additional buildings, including a speech clinic, ceramics building and several small buildings which were moved to the campus. Several buildings and nine acres of land belonging to the government at Borden are also a part of the college property. These buildings used by the College are for conferences and group meetings off the campus.

The two newest additions to the campus are the Student Union and the Library building. The Student Union was built with self-liquidating bonds. This building is the most beautiful on the campus. The Library which has been needed for many years will add greatly to the efficiency of the college. Under the leadership of President Proctor, the College has reached such a place in its development that its future is assured as one of the leading women's colleges in the country.

To an increasing degree we are witnessing today what seems to be a new woman with new interests, new responsibilities, and new ways of doing things. Since the establishing of the College woman has been given the franchise, and is taking a more active part in the political and social problems of the state and nation; and in order to accept this responsibility she must be prepared. The training for leadership in civil life is not a matter of knowledge alone but of morals, of habits, of attitudes, of standards and ideals. College authorities, in giving the aims of the institution from the time of its beginning until the present, have assumed that mind, body and soul have been admitted to college, and that the extra-curricular activities of the student are important matters and are to be directed and guided. The problems of student life on the campus are controlled by student government, and leadership has been encouraged and advanced.

Possibly no single contribution to the State has been more marked than the ideals of leadership and independent thinking sponsored by this college. In a woman's college leadership become the natural accomplishment of women. It is a leadership that carries on into the economic and political field beyond college.

So in scholarship, in home training, in leadership and in the fine art of living, the institution is giving back to the State of Oklahoma good interest on the money which has been invested in the Oklahoma College for Women.