DR. CHARLES EVANS, SECRETARY OF THE OKLAHOMA HISTORICAL SOCIETY, LAYS DOWN HIS WORK

By William S. Key, President

Oklahoma Historical Society

At the quarterly meeting of the Board of Directors on January 28, 1954, Dr. Charles Evans, who has served the Society as Managerial Secretary for almost a decade, startled the Board with the following announcement:

"I know at this time no reason why you would not honor me again as you have always honored me in my service of almost ten years, by re-electing me. No man has been treated with more courtesy and affection, and I reluctantly take the attitude and say to you, the Board of Directors of the Oklahoma Historical Society, I here lay before you my resignation as Secretary of this Society, to take effect on or about August 1, 1954. The pressure of years together with the desire to spend more time with my family, to do individual writing and to travel, are the reasons I hold for this action. I reach this decision with reluctance. I offer each of you my profound best wishes and that God may keep you blessed and happy to the end of your days. If you will oblige me, I would be glad to go on to this point of completion of service which you may mark out. I will discharge my duties as I always have until that time and under those conditions, Mr. President, I submit my resignation to you for consideration."

The Board expressed regret upon receiving Dr. Evans' resignation but after re-electing him along with the remaining members of the staff, agreed to release him from further service to the Society during the late summer in accordance with his request.

This action by Dr. Evans and his subsequent retirement was viewed by the Officers and Directors as an historical event worthy of special recognition. It was thought fitting that a brief story of his service to the State covering a period of almost 50 years should be recorded in The Chronicles of Oklahoma.

The writer has known Dr. Evans for a long time and has been closely associated with him in the work of the Historical Society.

He feels himself honored to sponsor this biographical sketch and record of achievement of this distinguished citizen.

Dr. Charles Evans was elected in October 1944 to perform the important duties of Secretary of the Oklahoma Historical Society, which duties include the management of the affairs of the Society including its program of research, collection and preservation of the history of Oklahoma. Also included in the Secretaryship, is the editing of The Chronicles of Oklahoma, and such leaflets, brochures and printed papers and documents sent out under the
Dr. Charles Evans Lays Down His Work as Secretary

direction of the Board of Directors. Dr. Evans was chosen for this work because he was an active force throughout the State in spheres of education, religion and historical research.

Coming to Ardmore in 1905, as Superintendent of City Schools, he built so well a modern system of schools from primitive beginnings that he attracted national attention. He represented Oklahoma Education Association as an appointed Committeeman to place before the State Constitutional Convention in 1906 the fundamental need of education in coming Oklahoma. This work called for such respect and approval that he was elected in 1908 the first President of Oklahoma Education Association.

In 1911 the State Board of Education called him to the Presidency of the oldest and largest of State Teachers' Colleges, the Central State Normal School, Edmond, Oklahoma.

He found an ill-defined and unaccented body of pupils of 550, with little impact on the State's thinking. Central State College, under his Presidency, grew to an enrollment of 3420, lacking but a few hundred of being the largest State Teachers' College in America. This unprecedented enrollment surpassed that of the State University. This attracted the attention of America and Dr. Evans was called to State and National conventions to explain it. Before the Southern States Education Association, Nashville, in 1914, he gave three reasons—Great Men, Great Measures, Great Movements. He inaugurated a program of bringing nationally-known leaders in education, business life and public service as lecturers to his students.

In 1916 he accepted the Presidency of Kendall College, now Tulsa University. At Kendall College he set up the same program as at Edmond and the records show that in a few months he increased the endowment fund by one half million dollars and quadrupled the enrollment.

Receiving a call for editorship and authorship from a publishing company, Dr. Evans left Kendall College in 1917 to make his home in Oklahoma City where he has since developed his authorship, lecturing and miscellaneous writing.

Believing that he could interpret the purposes, functions and service of the A. & M. College at Stillwater in the State's greater expansion in the rich growing years of the 1920s, the Board of Agriculture developed a special sphere of action by setting up a division of Educational Extension and Dr. Evans was made dean of this work. In his visitations, county surveys and lectures on the present service and proper support of a greater A. & M. College from June 1921 to July 1926, he entered every county and all leading cities and towns, meeting schools, churches, conventions of teachers, and civic clubs.
Called again by the publishing company that he had served, he spent the years 1926-1930 as Vice President and Educational Editor of Harlow's Weekly, placing that Journal in hundreds of school systems of Oklahoma, where his articles and current news column were read by thousands of Oklahoma High School youth.

As an author Dr. Evans enriched not only the fields of history but those of philosophy, pedagogy and the world of newspapers and magazines. In the first State adoption of textbooks for public schools, July 1908, his "Oklahoma History and Civics" was adopted for six years; in 1912 he wrote "Growing A Life", a treatise on child growth. This, published by Rand McNally & Company of Chicago, was adopted by thirty-five States for teachers' reading circles. The Oklahoma City Public Libraries recently placed this work among recommended reading in Philosophy. In 1920 his "Lights on Oklahoma History" was adopted by the State Text Board for reading in Junior High School grades. His "American Patriotic Reader" was issued in 1916-17 and reached eleven State School adoptions. It told the story of World War I. His contribution to the biography of such leading Oklahomans as Senators R. L. Owen, Thomas P. Gore, Ed Moore; Governor Robert L. Williams, Judge Thomas H. Doyle and others, has won the highest praise over the State and Nation as they appeared in The Chronicles of Oklahoma.

His contributions to the religious and club life of Oklahoma and Kentucky were almost as full and far-reaching as his educational work. From his 27th year when he entered the lecture field, he became noted for combining pedagogy with Christianity. In Oklahoma, as early as 1905, he was placed as a State Board member of the Y. M. C. A., serving 19 years. Because of this devotion and service he appeared in the pulpit of nearly all of the leading churches of Oklahoma.

On leaving Kendall College in 1917 Dr. Evans was induced by the First Presbyterian Church of Oklahoma City to take charge of its Men's Class. In a short time this class outgrew its quarters and a tabernacle was erected for its use. The attendance averaged 400 or more over a period of years and it was rated as the second largest Men's Bible Class in America.

As a lecturer from his early career in Kentucky where for eight years from 1897 to 1905 he spoke annually in counties embracing most of the area of western Kentucky, to the present hour, he has been a commanding figure in Kentucky, Oklahoma and across the Nation. His speech before the teachers in Tulsa elected him the first President of the Oklahoma Education Association (1908) though he had been in the Oklahoma country less than three years. His speech that same year at Cleveland, Ohio, before the National Education Association brought him a Vice-Presidency of that great national body of teachers.
So, in the fields of education, religion, masonry, civic clubs, government and business, this man has perhaps spoken to more people from Miami to Mangum, from Idabel to the Panhandle, than any other citizen of our State. Some men had larger contacts in politics, some in church or education, but Dr. Evans held a high place of leadership in all these and more.

These days, though in his 84th year, he drives his own car, addressing Masonic bodies in leading cities and centers over the State, churches, schools, historical societies, anywhere and everywhere. He asks no quarter of age and he gives none.

Honors have been heaped upon him. Who's Who in America, where he has been recorded longer, perhaps, than any living Oklahoman, (35 years), tells this in a plain way. In 1953 the Ardmore Board of Education, upon building a $250,000 school, named it the Charles Evans School. In dedicating it on December 10, 1953, Dr. Evans told his people, for he has always called Ardmore home, he held this honor as the dearest of his life.

When, in 1932, the Federal Emergency Relief Association was set up by Governor William Murray, he called Dr. Evans to organize and direct Federal Relief to thousands in Oklahoma City and County who must find work or starve. For some eighteen months this organization which embraced thousands of workers and received over $1,000,000, was directed by Dr. Evans with a skill that received strong tribute from Governor Murray and the public.

After spending some five years (1937-1942) in travel in the United States, Canada, Mexico and the Caribbean area, he was called in 1944 to take the Secretarieship of the Oklahoma Historical Society. On October 1944 Governor Robert L. Williams presented him to the Board of Directors composed of: Judge Robert L. Williams, Judge Thomas H. Doyle, Dr. Emma Estill Harbour, Gen. Charles F. Barrett, Hon. George L. Bowman, Judge Harry Campbell, Mr. Thomas G. Cook, Dr. E. E. Dale, Hon. Thomas J. Harrison, Judge Robert A. Hefner, Mrs. Frank Korn, Mrs. Blanche Lucas, Hon. J. B. Milam, Hon. R. M. Mountcastle, Mr. H. L. Muldrow, Judge Baxter Taylor, Mrs. John R. Williams, Gen. William S. Key, Judge Thomas A. Edwards, Mrs. Jessie E. Moore, Dr. James H. Gardner, Mr. Jim Biggerstaff, Mr. W. J. Peterson, Mrs. J. Garfield Buell and Mr. Edward C. Lawson. Governor Williams said, “We know you are in your 74th year. This demands a brief time of service—the war is on—and at its end, perhaps, a younger man will take your place.” Dr. Evans, in his reply of acceptance, said, among other things, “Something has been said here about my age and length of service. From my first job, some fifty-eight years ago, to this hour, I have not been concerned for one day as to how long I may serve; my whole service has rested upon the firm foundation of how well I shall serve. It shall be so in this position. When I feel at any
time my health or happiness demands, I will turn this work back to you—you will be given immediate notice."

So, after a long stretch of service as Secretary, during which Judge Williams, General Barrett, Judge Doyle, Hal Muldrow, Judge Campbell, James Biggerstaff, Mrs. John R. Williams, Mrs. Blanche Lucas, J. B. Milam and Dr. T. T. Montgomery, Directors, have passed on, Dr. Evans asks not for retirement but a release that he may travel, study and write in other spheres.

The Board of Directors was surprised by this decision. Motion was made that he with members of the Staff, be elected for two more years. This carried unanimously. Dr. Evans thanked them for this great trust and honor and stated that after a few months, when the Board had time to choose his successor and he had rounded up his work, he would move out on a journey to other fields of endeavor.

The Directors expressed regret upon his going. A few of these remarks are appended hereto:

**REMARKS OF JUDGE GEORGE H. BOWMAN**

Mr. Bowman then arose and said he had been a member of the Board of this Society for a long time and Dr. Evans and he had been as close friends as any of the Board and he knew the splendid work Dr. Evans has performed for this Society and the great influence he has had in the building of it. "He talked to me about it and said he was going to rest a while and I do not blame him for that; but I want to express in the Minutes, our great appreciation of his efforts as Secretary of this Society and I move we concur in the wish of Dr. Evans in the resolution and make a motion that his resignation be received on those terms."

**REMARKS OF R. M. MOUNTCASTLE**

R. M. Mountcastle said, "It is with reluctance that I second the motion of Mr. Bowman. I was on the Board when Dr. Evans came on and I think there is no question but that he has made it one of the outstanding societies of its class in the country. He is the one the Society, its President and its members depend on; we know nothing of the details that arise and decisions that must be made from day to day. Through almost ten years of service, he feels in fairness to his family and to himself, he should have some time to devote to them and do the things he wants to do. Since he became Secretary, he has been burdened with details and innovations which has bound him to the Society, the Board and the State, and the Oklahoma Historical Society owes him a great honor for serving it the way he has. I want to express my appreciation along with others, for his unselfish service and for himself as a man. He is one of the finest gentlemen I have had occasion to meet and Oklahoma has been better by his having passed our way and with reluctance I second the motion of Mr. Bowman to permit him to resign as set forth in his letter."

**REMARKS OF M. R. G. MILLER**

Mr. R. G. Miller took the floor and stated, "The resignation of Dr. Evans should be changed to request for retirement. He has done a good job in the two or three years I have been here and if he had had the firewood and where-with-all to do this job, he could have done it twice as well; let him retire instead of resign."

Mr. Bowman said he would accept that amendment.
REMARKS OF JUDGE EDGAR S. VAUGHT

Judge Vaught then arose and said he wanted to reiterate all the things that had been said here; "Dr. Evans has made this Society—he has done a wonderful job, and the only reason I have in my mind to vote for this motion is because it is his own request. I hate to see Dr. Evans leave us."

REMARKS OF MR. H. MILT PHILLIPS

Mr. Milt Phillips was acknowledged by President Key and said, "I was on the Board when Dr. Evans was employed; I think I might speak as one of the 'new members' of the Board but as one who has had the opportunity to witness the internal working of this Society in recent years and the great esteem in which this Society is held throughout Oklahoma in educational as well as informative and civic leadership. I want to say that Dr. Evans has rendered to us a service that is beyond expression and the means to express our appreciation to him. I am going to vote for that motion wholly because it is the request of Dr. Evans, my dear friend and friend of my father."

REMARKS OF DR. EMMA E. HARBOUR

Dr. Harbour stated, "No one loves Dr. Evans like I do; he started me on my teaching career and I have loved him ever since."

REMARKS OF MRS. JESSIE R. MOORE

Mrs. Moore took the floor and remarked, "I was elected to this Board of Directors in 1920, that is 34 years ago this month, and I have seen many Secretaries come and go; they all have been fine gentlemen; They all had admirable qualities that fitted them for the job or position, it is in truth a job, and I think it is my opinion after all these years, that Dr. Evans is the best Secretary this Society has ever had; as they say when they decorate a soldier 'he went beyond the call of duty;' that is what Dr. Evans has done. He has instituted proceedings in this Society that we never had before and he has extended the influence of this Society all over the state of Oklahoma in a most gratifying way. We are very proud of the work that he will be leaving us to carry on. I do not know who we will have as Secretary, this is all news to me, but I feel it is going to be a hard matter to get anyone to take the place of this fine gentleman and teacher. As you will recall, about a month or so ago, Ardmore honored him by dedicating one of its fine schools to him and I feel that was a great honor to this Society. As to his years, I will be 83 years old tomorrow and so I know what that means, he is ten years 'younger' than I am in actions, though some months older in years, I feel he has served us well."

REMARKS OF MRS. ANNA B. KORN

Mrs. Korn remarked that Dr. Evans came upon this Board and into the Society through her. Judge Williams wrote her a letter and said that Mr. Moffett was resigning to take over as dean of a girl’s school in Tennessee and the Society needed a Secretary immediately and asked for suggestions. She wrote and told him "of Dr. Evans, who lived on a street near her and with his qualifications, she felt he would be the man if they could secure him to take over this work. Judge Williams wrote he would like to see Dr. Evans and she immediately wrote Judge Williams, giving him the address, etc.: "Judge Williams was very gratified and wrote me, thanking me for my interest and that is how Dr. Evans came as Secretary in 1944. I think it is very nice that he intends to retire but he may still help the Society. There is no one more qualified than this man," concluded Mrs. Korn.
REMARKS OF DR. B. B. CHAPMAN

Dr. B. B. Chapman was recognized by the President, who said he would not speak as a member of the Board, but as a member of the faculty of Oklahoma A. & M. at Stillwater, where he has what is called the 'Doctor Evans Lectures.' "Every year he comes and spends a day or two with us; he usually comes to us in the afternoon and speaks that night and early in the morning at 8 o'clock he is on the job in Old Central lecturing to a class on the Oklahoma Historical Society and we all bring up questions in every class he meets. The students never fail to ask 'what was done from 1911-1916 while you were President of the College at Edmond, when that State School led the University and A. & M. College in enrollment?' He lectures at 8, 10 and 11 o'clock classes and then makes a recording; then he drives back home and continues with the splendid work he has been doing here. Members of the Board, I want to express appreciation for the work this educator has done and I hope he goes on for another 50 years. To you Dr. Evans, Dean of Extension of A. & M. College from 1921-1926, I want to say: words cannot express the high regard I have for you.""

REMARKS OF JUDGE REDMOND S. COLE

Judge Redmond S. Cole of Tulsa rose to remark: "I cannot add anything to what has been said here, but I do not want this occasion to pass without expressing my personal appreciation. I think I can brag of being the oldest life member (1911), becoming one when the Society was in its infancy; I watched it grow; I have been a member of this Board fully half that time and I say to you that this Society has made tremendous progress while this man has been Secretary. Maybe I am getting the cart before the horse; should we not elect the officers and staff for another two years along here and it is our thought now to elect all staff officers and I suggest in line with what has happened, that we re-elect Dr. Evans with the understanding we accept his resignation as he suggests." Upon the motion of Col. Shirk this was done.

REMARKS OF DR. T. T. MONTGOMERY

"I want to express my personal appreciation to Dr. Evans of his splendid service to this organization and the State of Oklahoma. I agree with all that has been said and I am glad to hear so many fine things said about Charlie Evans and of his work past and present. I had hoped to see him go on and serve this organization for another ten years. I don't think he is so old but what he can serve effectively a long time. A man who can get in his car and drive to Kentucky alone and make a series of addresses and drive back as he did last May, is certainly not old. Recalling what someone said, 'as we go through this world, I think is all too true; we do not express to our friends the appreciation for them that we feel.' It is said that 'flowers on the grave cast no sweetness back over life's weary way.' So I think our congratulations ought to be brought out, while the individual still lives so he can enjoy these friendships; that is my feeling at this time. Knowing Dr. Evans since he was Superintendent of schools in Ardmore, which was not day before yesterday, he has filled with distinction many positions in this State; he has filled each position with dignity and integrity; he is a gentleman, a fine scholar and a fine friend to have and through the years I have been most happy to call him my friend. I like you, would not even consider this proposition except as it comes from him and I am willing to go along with him in this Society or out of it because he has done a wonderful work for the State and Society. So I salute him and congratulate him; I am happy with him in his successful life of splendid achievement."
REMARKS OF MR. BAXTER TAYLOR

Judge Taylor rose and addressed the Board, saying, "I think it is timely and proper that those who know Dr. Evans on this occasion give kind expressions to their feelings and to their estimation in proper eulogy. His attitude and his desire was a surprise to me. I had resolved in my mind that as long as I was a member of this Board and I was here, never to consent for him to leave. I don't believe in retirement. Here (pointing to Judge Vaught) is an estimable Christian gentleman and an outstanding member of the Judiciary of the United States, whom I have known for all the years since I have been here. I say to him every time I see him 'don't retire, keep up, don't admit your age.' I was 25 again on the 20th of this month! There is something that touches the heart as you go down the road, to see this one and that one retire and then the next thing, his retirement into eternity. I have known Dr. Evans since he came from Kentucky and I came from Tennessee. I have known this man for almost fifty years; he is delightful to associate with, and about the greatest educator a people could have; and we all should deem it an honor to talk to some person who can talk to us and tell you something of his life. He has always been that sort of man. It hurts my heart to see that the time has come when he decided to step aside and I hope he will be spared for many years. God Bless him and God bless such men."

REMARKS OF DR. EVANS

Dr. Evans arose and asked for a few minutes time which was granted. "Words cannot express my appreciation for all the fine things spoken of me here. You could have kept me from speaking further if you had kept still, but this is a serious occasion in my long life. I know I am not worthy of the honor you pay me," he said. "You have said my service has been good. I can say you will never know how I appreciate all that has been spoken here today."

REMARKS OF GENERAL W. S. KEY—PRESIDENT

General Key remarked, directed to Dr. Evans, "I, too, appreciate along with you, these testimonials to your work and life by members of the Board. You and I have been very closely associated in this program of the Society for several years."

LETTER WRITTEN BY DIRECTOR H. B. BASS

General W. S. Key
Oklahoma Natural Gas Bldg.
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
Dear General:

It was with the most profound regret that I listened to Dr. Evans read his letter of resignation as Director of the Oklahoma Historical Society. Even though our firm put in a bid for the construction of the Historical Building in the late '20s, the Society meant little to me until I began visiting with Dr. Evans in the Lobby of the Skirvin Hotel. Through him I became interested and I gained an interest which I know will remain close to my heart all the balance of my days.

Dr. Evans has served well his Country, his State, and our Society. He deserves everything that was said about him yesterday. I was glad the eulogies were stopped before it became my turn. Such "eloquence expressed was beyond my capacity and the poor remarks I might have made would have measured up poorly with those uttered by so many masters of oratory. I heartily concur in everything that was said and only hope Dr. Evans will have many years to enjoy the retirement he has so justly earned.

Most sincerely yours,
/s/ Henry B. Bass
I conclude this article by repeating the statement made at the beginning, that the retirement of Dr. Charles Evans from a half century of public service in Oklahoma is no ordinary historical event.

I join the other Officers and Directors and the Staff of the Historical Society in wishing Dr. Evans an abundance of good health and good fortune throughout many more happy and fruitful years.