"I have been lied on scandalously!" These words resounded from the lips of President Bradford Knapp of Oklahoma A. & M. College as he stood on the platform in the closing minutes of commencement exercises in 1928. Dr. Knapp was ending a four-year term as president, graduating as he said with the freshmen who had enrolled when he took office. Dr. Angelo C. Scott held the endurance record of eight years, and the names of ten other men graced the presidential roll since the college was founded in 1891.¹

I was assistant professor of history and I sat in a tense audience when the farewell remarks of President Knapp were made. Less than a year earlier he had approved me as a member of his faculty. Well do I remember when Dr. T. H. Reynolds, head of the history department, and Dr. C. H. McElroy, dean of the school of science and literature, took me to his office to secure my first college job. Dr. Knapp was an excellent president. Whitehurst Hall and the Dairy Building are among the landmarks of his administration.

A few weeks before his term ended newspapers carried a list of faculty members whose services were terminating. Among them were the dean of the school of agriculture, the dean of women, and a number of others including two of the five members of the history department.

The board of regents were Harry B. Cordell, Oklahoma City, president; Mrs. Ferne E. King, Kingfisher; R. B. Parks, Spaulding; L. A. Clinkenbeard, Alva; George Van Noy, Tishomingo. The board chose as president of A. & M. College Dr. Henry Garland Bennett who had graduated at Ouachita College at Arkadelphia in Arkansas,

¹ In presenting this contribution to The Chronicles, Dr. Berlin B. Chapman, Professor of History, Oklahoma A. and M. College, says, "This article is dedicated to students in 'Oklahoma History 162' whose enthusiastic assistance is my greatest inspiration in the subject. They read that the physical plant of Oklahoma A. and M. College increased from $3 million to $50 million during the administration of Dr. Bennett. They note that at the time of his death, December, 1951, nearly ninety percent of all degrees granted by the college was during his administration. I have come to realize that there is an increasing number of brilliant, youthful Aggies who will never know firsthand this distinguished president of the college. After having read published materials available, the response of students frequently is: 'You were in the college then—tell us about Dr. Bennett.' This article grew out of a segment of lecture notes I made in an effort to give the question a proper reply."

A good sketch of the life of Dr. Bennett is in Current Biography, 1951, pp. 33-35. There are sufficient newspaper clippings and other sources in the possession of his family to contribute substantially to a volume on his biography.
at the University of Oklahoma, Columbia University and who was serving his ninth year as president of Southeastern State Teachers College at Durant. Scarcely was the election announced until a whispering campaign began that Bennett was “too little for the job.” The rumor was answered by a still small voice emanating in part from “the Durant group” that the 42-year old president was dynamic and would stay at A. & M. College as long as he wished. I remember when it was rumored that Dr. Bennett had a cultural education, whereas A. & M. is a land grant college. How well he applied his cultural education to all fields, including agriculture, became one of the remarkable attainsments of his administration.

There was a June interregnum in 1928 during which Dean McElroy was acting president of the college. On a July evening the faculty gave a dinner in an upstairs room on Main Street honoring Dr. and Mrs. Bennett on their arrival in Stillwater. On tiptoe in that crowded room I got my first glimpse of Stillwater’s new citizens. The dinner was a gala affair, enlivened by the wit of Dr. Carl P. “Hog” Thompson.

The merit of this article rests on the fact that I knew Dr. Bennett in a very general way, just as the run-of-the mill faculty members knew him. I was not a close friend of his, I was in his home only once, and I am sure he never did anything for me that under similar circumstances he would not have done for any member of his faculty. Yet, he was a great flame for good in my life. The faculty from the least even unto the greatest came to know that he was smart enough to recognize merit when he saw it and honest and courageous enough to give it credit. He knew the difference between regimentation and education. And he never sold a student short.

I taught the first two years Dr. Bennett was president. His presence immediately won for him the admiration and respect of faculty and students. Those who had privately estimated “how long that man Bennett will last” stared in silent amazement when he began almost at once to outline a 25-year plan for the college.

Dr. Bennett saved Old Central. When he became president the doors were closed and the building was condemned. He said that sentiment and college tradition were essential in the building of A. & M. I was writing a few articles on the early history of the college and one appeared in the Tulsa Sunday World on December 9, 1928, just before the Founders Day anniversary. Dr. Bennett had the article reprinted in a four-page folder and it was distributed among guests at the Founders Day celebration. I substituted a closing paragraph in preparing the folder. My name was not on the folder, but things like that didn’t matter because observers knew that educational efforts were not being looked on with indifference. Thus from the first year Dr. Bennett never failed to appreciate a literary contribution of the faculty to the history of the college or state.
Dr. Bennett found means to restore Old Central, and the heart of Aggieland was just a little lighter. At the Founders Day reunion in 1929 paperweights made from wood in Old Central and capped with metal were given as presents to guests, of which I was one. The paperweights are sacred in the memory of loyal Aggies. They bear the college seal and these words: "Souvenir, Founders Day, Stillwater, 1929." Future celebrations on Founders Day came to have a special meaning to Aggies for the occasion was also the birthday of Dr. Bennett who was five years older than the college.

Perhaps because I am a Harvard graduate, I always appreciated the interest Dr. Bennett had in that institution. The wings of Cordell Hall and Bennett Hall have a resemblance to Massachusetts Hall at Harvard. Dr. Bennett remarked that Massachusetts Hall and Harvard Hall, in which soldiers of the American Revolution camped, were kept in repair and used along with Widener Library and other buildings of fine modern architecture.

Dr. Bennett became president in a lull between two political battles in the state capitol. Six months before he came to Stillwater, Governor Henry S. Johnston placed troops of the national guard in the doors of the capitol to prevent the legislature from convening in special session. Prior to the American Revolution the French philosopher, Jean Jacques Rousseau, wrote a couple of pages as timely as this: "The legislative body ought not to meet of itself." Before selling a slice of this red-hot history to the press, I consulted President Knapp who said it belonged in the world's best literature but that in the smoke of "the ewe lamb rebellion" it might be misunderstood. The time was out of joint and I agreed that silence was golden. But during the quarter of a century that Dr. Bennett was president I know of no occasion when any member of the faculty or of the student body could not openly probe the history of current events. He was a staunch supporter of educational freedom.

The second year Dr. Bennett secured a salary raise for the faculty. Mine was $200. The next year I received an honorary fellowship in history at the University of Wisconsin. I went there and completed the doctorate with a thesis on the Federal Land Policy in Oklahoma. In the meantime depression had swept down like a wolf on the fold and a formidable list of A. & M. faculty members received leaves of absence of questionable duration. To me this was an opportunity to do research in the government depositories in Washington which contain the world's richest collection of Oklahoma history. My articles began to appear in historical quarterlies. I also taught in Fairmont State College in West Virginia and in the College of the City of New York.
In 1938, I saw Dr. Bennett just after he had read in the *Chronicles of Oklahoma* my series of five articles on "How the Cherokees Acquired and Disposed of the Outlet." He urged me to prosecute the work vigorously for he said within two or three years an opportunity would be given me in A. & M. College to develop it. The five articles are today the historical basis for the Cherokee Outlet Case in the federal courts. The Cherokees are represented by Pierce and Pierce of Muskogee and five other attorneys, and the Justice Department speaks for the federal government.

In the great mass of business Dr. Bennett performed, he had a vivid sense of detail. In September, 1941, I returned to A. & M. College, at a reduction from the eastern salary, but with an opportunity to work in my chosen field and to join those who "Built with Bennett." It was the eve of the fiftieth anniversary of the college, a golden opportunity to collect college history.

In Great Hall of the College of the City of New York there is a niche and through the glass one can see a cup five inches high. By it is an inscription stating that the class of 1875 willed the cup to the class of 1975, signed the will and placed it under the cup. Sometimes between classes I strolled by the cup and it left an indelible impression on my memory. Instead of placing a cup in a niche, I suggested that the Aggies compile a history of three manuscript volumes and place it in the wall of the new college library for the centennial celebrators in 1991.

In my Oklahoma history class in the autumn of 1941 were 62 students who finished the course. Beginner’s luck sometimes has the blessing of Providence. So it was with that class. In it were Lorene Affholder of Blackwell, Emily Schwabe and John B. Tate of Tulsa, Harry V. Hines of Sapulpa, Francis Irvine of Stillwater, Vivian Cheatham of Edmond, A. Lawrence Crable of Oklahoma City, and other students who delved into the history project with a skill and enthusiasm that will enshrine their memory as long as the early history of the college is of interest. Tate is a member of the faculty, Irvine is an Oklahoma City attorney, and other students have shown like qualities of attainment.

Our group had the assistance of the Record Book Committee consisting of Thomas J. Hartman, Tulsa; Frank D. Northup, Oklahoma City; Norman Shutler, Kingfisher; Mrs. Harry B. Bullen, Miss Ruth Howard, and John W. Hinkel, Stillwater. We con-
tributed to the work of the Historical Packet Committee consisting of the following faculty members: C. H. McElroy, chairman; F. R. Bradley, J. H. Caldwell, R. E. Hartsock, C. E. Sanborn, A. A. Arnold, and R. O. Whitenton.

A year later the work was completed and Edmon Low, college librarian, had it handsomely bound. It contains the history of more than sixty organized groups of the college, written by themselves. Former college presidents, faculty members, and a host of former students and others who had a vital connection with the college wrote firsthand accounts. There were classics such as the article by James Homer Adams, first student to enroll in the college and a member of the first graduating class. Chester Gould, former Aggie, drew a special sketch of Dick Tracy. Dean D. C. McIntosh of the graduate school wrote a description of the college curriculum as he pictured it in 1991.

A prize picture in my office is one taken when eight students who formed a presentation committee showed the finished volumes to Dr. Bennett. Since the historical material was too valuable to be out of circulation until 1991, we made Selections from the Record Book, consisting of two-volume sets. One set is in the College Library and another is in the Oklahoma Historical Society. The project involved much work, some of which was done by the students voluntarily long after the history course ended. But we had a sustaining confidence that if we were unable to complete the task ourselves and if other sources failed, Dr. Bennett would see us safely through.

On a page in the original set of three volumes of the Record Book, Dr. Bennett wrote a letter to the chief executive of the college whose duty it will be to open the historical packet in 1991. In December, 1952, a year after Dr. Bennett's death, the packet including the three volumes was securely sealed in the wall by the front doors of the College Library. Dean McElroy wrote the following inscription which is vividly carved on the stone that seals the packet: "Historical archives, Oklahoma A. & M. College, 1891-1941; to be opened at the centennial celebration, 1991."

The war years lay heavy on Dr. Bennett. A total of more than 40,000 navy and army students gorged the campus facilities and scores of temporary buildings were erected. College men of civilian status were so scarce that coeds rented fraternity houses and moved in. Oklahoma history students captured the spirit of the era and preserved it in a manuscript volume, A. & M. College in Wartime, copies of which are in the College Library and in the Oklahoma Historical Society. The history department was located on the floor over Dr. Bennett's office, but in the last years of the war I cannot recall an event in which I more than spoke to the president. The faculty were proud of the work he was doing and were happy to
conserve his energy for it. His public addresses were filled with practical and cultural knowledge. Almost without exception his addresses to the faculty dealt in part with basic social trends in history.

The end of the war enabled Dr. Bennett to devote his last five years on the campus to improving the college. Those were the finest years in my teaching experience. The size of my classes enabled students to do a high quality of work. The Research Foundation became a reality. I published articles in a half dozen historical quarterlies. I was granted a semester of sabbatical leave and published the book, *Founding of Stillwater*. In 1949 the Oklahoma Historical Society came to Stillwater for the first time, and the program was held in the auditorium of Old Central. Progress was made in collecting early historical materials concerning the college. I secured for the College Library four of the first six diplomas awarded to the first class in 1896. *The Sigma Literary Society*, a vital chapter in early college history, was written by Willa Adams Dusch. I edited it and the Research Foundation of the college published it in 1951.

Manuscripts were collected and placed in the College Library. Perhaps the best is the Angelo C. Scott Collection consisting of 294 items. Dr. Bennett spoke of the historic value of the collection, its fine literary qualities, and he arranged for Mrs. Catherine M. Thompson to assist me in preparing an inventory of it.

Under the auspices of the Research Foundation of A. & M. College I was writing the history of the Otoe and Missouria lands. A segment of the work concerning the reservation fourteen miles north of Stillwater had been published. I received an invitation to appear two days before the Indian Claims Commission in Washington to discuss as an impartial witness my 200-page manuscript on the subject. A study of this kind serves a lasting variety of interests in human society, one of which is the courts. I was granted college leave to prepare for the event in court. With two tribal attorneys on one side, two Justice Department attorneys on the other side, and three judges before me, I had one of the finest seminar experiences of my life. Activities of this kind make one

---


5 The Indian Claims Commission found that the Otoes and Missourias had a valid claim to more than a million dollars; Otoe and Missouria Tribe v. United States, no. 11. In an opinion of May 3, 1955, the United States Court of Claims sustained the commission and added: “The Commission also relied on and made findings on the basis of expert testimony by Dr. B. B. Chapman, a well-known historian in the field of American History, and a recognized authority on the land tenure of the Otoe and Missouria tribe. The Commission’s finding that the claimants actually occupied the area in question to the exclusion of other Indians is amply supported by Dr. Chapman’s evidence and other evidence.” This statement reflects the recognition courts give to careful and impartial history written under the auspices of the Research Foundation of the Oklahoma A. & M. College.
a better teacher, a better writer, and in the end pays the college a better dividend. I could not have contributed this study if Dr. Bennett's vision had been limited to college routine.

During those five years my graduate work was at an all-time high, thanks in part to the Research Foundation, Dean D. C. McIntosh, and Dr. T. H. Reynolds. Perhaps my finest student was Amos D. Maxwell of Okemah whose thesis on The Sequoyah Constitutional Convention was published in The Chronicles of Oklahoma and also as a separate volume. The book received high commendation in the Mississippi Valley Historical Review. It serves a useful purpose in commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the convention in Muskogee this year. Dr. Bennett took an interest in the thesis, read it, and attended the public examination when Maxwell completed his graduate work.

This incident in the career of Dr. Bennett may be used to illustrate what manner of man he was. On January 15, 1950, before a crowd that overflowed the auditorium of Old Central, Maxwell took the first public examination for a graduate degree in the history of the college. On the examining committee were Muriel H. Wright, for twenty years a generous contributor to The Chronicles of Oklahoma, of which she was associate editor. She had co-authored with Joseph B. Thoburn the four-volume standard history of Oklahoma. These and other works in Oklahoma history had placed her name in Oklahoma's hall of fame.

Another member of the examining committee, Dr. Angie Debo, had entered Oklahoma's hall of fame by the history door. Among her books was Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic. On the Creeks she had written And Still the Waters Run, Road to Disappearance, and Tulsa, From Creek Town to Oil Capital. Chosen from the history department for the committee was Dr. Norbert R. Mahnken who taught Oklahoma history in A. & M. summer sessions and who currently was writing for the Nebraska Historical Society a study of the role of William Jennings Bryan in Oklahoma.

Maxwell and I sent a special invitation to Governor William H. Murray and Johnston Murray, secretary of the state land department, to attend the examination. The older Murray was the only living officer of the Sequoyah Constitutional Convention or chairman of a committee. He was a vice president of the convention. After the examination he was introduced and he selected points in the examination for further elucidation. As a highlight at the end of

---


the program he pinned on Maxwell’s lapel a badge worn at the Sequoyah Constitutional Convention. Johnston Murray brought the badge to the meeting. It was one his mother had secured and saved.

A few days before the meeting someone reminded Dr. Bennett that it was campaign year and that two Murrays at one meeting might be termed politics. I heard Dr. Bennett say: “This is an educational program. Give it full newspaper coverage.” With Dr. Bennett education came first, and nothing was hidden that could not be revealed. A policy of regimentation would have confined the examination to local talent and to the quietness of a quonset hut, and have left Maxwell’s study unpublished on a secluded library shelf.

In the Maxwell examination Mrs. Bennett had the brief but important role of bringing a copy of the thesis from the president’s home to Old Central. This was the last public program the Bennetts attended in that historic shrine, paid for by the pioneers of Stillwater. It was the last public program they saw the history department sponsor and was a proper climax for opportunities of attainment Dr. Bennett had extended to the department.

Occasionally I heard the expression concerning a long-time or recent colleague: “He is an old friend of Dr. Bennett.” The president profited by the Shakespearean advice: “Those friends thou hast and their adoption tried, grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel.” The Durant accent was noticeable on the campus. And it is not strange that Cordell Hall was so named.

During the last five years of the administration of Dr. Bennett I was promoted to full professor. About the time he left the campus I was elected a member of the board of directors of the Oklahoma Historical Society, a recognition resting on opportunities that Dr. Bennett made possible for the faculty. The good name that he left as director of the Point Four Program was a helpful influence when in 1953 I was named historian by the Intercollegiate Tours of Boston to conduct a group of 29 eastern students to the coronation in London and for a month through Europe.

Dr. Bennett was one of the few great educators it has been my privilege to know. Great men conquer great obstacles, and no A. & M. president encountered greater obstacles than those faced by Dr. Bennett. When he proposed to build the first big dormitories, he was confronted with the “bedroom bonds” case which
he won in the Oklahoma Supreme Court. When he proposed to close Washington Street to place the College Library in the quadrangle, it was necessary to carry a case through the same court. Nor did his personal integrity escape attack. Once when I was in Oklahoma City, I paused for a few minutes in the courtroom of the Criminal Court of Appeals and I heard Dixie Gilmer contend that Dr. Bennett had perjured himself.

The verdict of history may well be that Dr. Bennett's finest contribution was not the erection of great buildings of bricks and steel, but recognition and inspiration he gave to meritorious effort in every field of worthy human endeavor. He said that Oklahoma was the campus of A. & M. College. To my knowledge no speaker with an educational message was screened from the college. Rather the college was a mecca for men of future action or of historical accomplishment. A history club heard Alexander Kerensky relate his experiences as head of the Russian government; Pearl Buck told of life in China; and one evening I chanced to drop in on a meeting when Roscoe Dunjee, NAACP leader, was outlining to students the policies on which a segregation case from Oklahoma was later carried to the United States Supreme Court. What education in the social sciences could be more dynamic and of more practical value to college youth?

That Dr. Bennett's policy in education was practical as well as academic, is illustrated in the loyalty oath case. Toward the close of the presidential term, Professor Robert Morgan Wieman of the philosophy department and a half dozen other A. & M. staff members refused to sign in its entirety a loyalty oath passed by the state legislature, and they were removed from their positions. The A. & M. chapter of the American Association of University Professors with

8 J. W. Baker v. Frank C. Carter, 165 Okla. 116 (1933). In 1931 the legislature authorized the issuance of bonds in an aggregate amount not to exceed $450,000 for the construction and equipment of "a dormitory or dormitories" (Murray Hall). In an opinion of a dozen pages the Oklahoma Supreme Court by a vote of 5-3 sustained the act. Chief Justice Fletcher Riley wrote a three-page dissent. Oklahoma A. & M. College was not a stranger in court. In the completion of Old Central ("the main college building") a controversy arose in which the district court of Payne County gave a judgment against the college for $610.31 and costs, with provision that execution should issue after thirty days. On appeal to the Supreme Court of Oklahoma Territory it was held that the college is a public or quasi corporation, created and existing under and by virtue of the laws of the Territory, and could not in the absence of express statutory authority therefor, be sued; Oklahoma A. & M. College v. Charles F. Willis and William Bradford, 6 Okla. 594 (1898).

The question as to what fees the college could charge its students arose in the case of James H. Connell v. J. T. Gray, 33 Okla. 591 (1912).


10 State v. Henry G. Bennett et al., 81 Okla. Cr. 206 (1945); Bennett v. District Court of Tulsa County, 81 Okla. Cr. 351 (1945).

11 Ada Lois Sipuel v. Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma, 199 Okla. 56 (1947); 332 U. S. 631 (1948).
the support of a like chapter in the University of Oklahoma desired to test the constitutionality of the legislative act. So far as I know Dr. Bennett made no effort to deny faculty members the right, at their own expense, to be heard in open court. The Oklahoma Supreme Court sustained the oath unanimously. The United States Supreme Court in 1952 by a vote of 5-0 held it unconstitutional. Justice Hugo Black said: "The Oklahoma statute is . . . . aimed at coercing and controlling the minds of men. Test oaths are notorious tools of tyranny. When used to shackle the mind they are, or at least they should be, unspeakably odious to a free people. Test oaths are made still more dangerous when combined with bills of attainder which like this Oklahoma statute impose pains and penalties for past lawful associations and utterances."

My last visit with Dr. Bennett was in August, 1951, in the Washington office where he was directing the Point Four Program. On the walls around his desk were maps of foreign countries marked with pins of different colors showing the location of Point Four activity. He told me of interesting work in that capacity, but there is little doubt that A. & M. College remained the subject dearest to his heart. I remember when he beamed the pride of a great president and said: "That public examination by Amos Maxwell was good enough for a doctor's examination."

Such was the vigorous and courageous president and yet the gentle and kindly man as I knew him and profited by his leadership. Although he had the friendship and admiration of his fellows, his life illustrates the principle that opposition stands before him who would make progress. With his vision the college increased in wisdom and stature. When the president's home where Dr. and Mrs. Bennett had lived for a quarter of a century was being torn down for the erection of a chapel to the memory of them and the war dead of the college, I paid a last visit to the house. There I found covered with dust Dr. Bennett's masonic diploma issued to him at Hugo, and I delivered it to his children. I found a copy of Bennett, American Literature, which I confiscated for my office, and I salvaged a piece of wood for a classroom pointer. For future Aggies the name of Henry Garland Bennett may center about the chapel, and it is fitting that it should. But for us who saw him in action, who were enlivened by his inspiration and encouragement, and who profited by his vision, the chapel will be only an emblem of his great work not defined by geographic limits.

---