THE FOUNDING OF OKLAHOMA A. AND M. COLLEGE: A MEMOIR

By Alfred Edwin Jarrell

Oklahoma A. and M. College could not begin operation without a few students, so Edward Francis Clark, Principal of the Stillwater City Schools, arranged to have our entire class report to the Congregational Church for the opening of the college on December 14, 1891. This was the site of the present United Brethren Church. There we registered as the preparatory class in the college without taking an entrance examination as later additions to the class were required to do. No one ordered us to turn in our firearms. For registration we lined up in alphabetic order in front of a desk.

The Minutes of the First Faculty show that at the first faculty meeting on record, March 17, 1892, twenty-two rules were adopted, the first of which reads: "Every student when he enters the college shall deliver to the president all arms and deadly weapons of any description which may be in his possession." This book is a most valuable record on college history but it must be understood in the light of existing conditions. The book was saved in 1901 by Samuel A. McReynolds, a student employed at the college. An administrator who was blind to historical culture directed him to burn it with certain other college records that had reached retirement age.

In my youth when I lived in Kansas and Oklahoma I never wore a gun belt, and I do not remember seeing any schoolmate carry a gun. All pioneers owned firearms but did not carry them in their daily duties. Firearms were carried by town marshals, federal marshals, and by the sheriff and his deputies in their regular duties. Should a sheriff or marshal organize a posse to capture a bandit, all went armed.

1 Alfred Edwin Jarrell of Bakersfield, California, is the only survivor of the first graduating class of Oklahoma A. and M. College, composed of six men in 1896. He witnessed the beginning of athletics, military drill, and other basic activities in the college. In presenting this contribution to The Chronicles, Jarrell says: "I am indebted to Dr. B. B. Chapman for verifying names and dates in early college records."—Ed.

2 The Minutes of the First Faculty cover the period from March 17, 1892, to June 2, 1899. About 1936 McReynolds brought the book to Dr. Henry G. Bennett who placed it in the vault in the president's office where it has been kept since. A microfilm copy of the book is in the Oklahoma State Library. For the history of the book see Oklahoma A. and M. College Magazine, Vol. XIX (March, 1948), pp. 6-7.

The college opened two years before the fight at Ingalls, September 1, 1893, between federal marshals and the Dalton-Doolin gang. The "arms and deadly weapons" rule may have been a protective measure of uniform application, designed by the faculty in case ruffians presented themselves at the college. For an excellent study of outlaws of that era see Glenn Shirley, Six-Gun and Silver Star.
As to how students felt about enrolling in a college class, I can speak only for myself. My parents were anxious to have us children enter the college classes because they believed we would have better instructors. I liked the college idea although I suspected that we would have a heavier schedule than in the city schools. Remarks made by neighbors and by the parents of my classmates indicated that they wanted their children in the college classes as soon as possible. When my school friends spoke of the new college classes that were about to be formed, it was always favorable.


Clark, age 25, taught the most advanced class in the Stillwater public schools. As I recall this was in the Southern Methodist Church. In accordance with Clark’s instructions, our class reported at the Congregational Church on December 14, 1891, at 9 a. m. In this building, just across the street from the present courthouse,

3 The list of students in the Minutes of the First Faculty is not alphabetized and is somewhat at variance with a list of forty-five names in the Oklahoma A. and M. College Prospectus, December, 1891. The prospectus states that on December 14, 1891, the college was opened “with appropriate exercises, and the following students were enrolled.” The list includes the names of Alexander Campbell, Norris Tell Gilbert, Mollie P. Guthrey, and Juliana Lester, and omits the names of Wilber Bilyeu, Charles Duck, and Clinton Hueston. A further study of the subject is in the Oklahoma A. and M. College Magazine, Vol. XV (Dec., 1943), pp. 3-4. James Homer Adams, first student to enroll on the opening day of the college, wrote vivdly of the event; see Selections from the Record Book of Oklahoma A. and M. College, Vol. I, pp. 67-70. A copy is in the Oklahoma Historical Society. According to the Minutes of the First Faculty, thirty students were added “Jan. 4th 1892 or after”: Elisa Acord, L. H. Alleman, Royal E. Alleman, Winnie Arnold, May Barker, Mattie Bays, Lillie Bilyeu, Rola Broadwell, Alex. Campbell, William Costa, Banks Diem, Cortie (Gertrude) Diem, Cora Gould, Milton Gould, Gordon Guthrey, Mollie P. Guthrey, Lulu Hoh, Minnie Kinnebrew, Nettie Kite, John Lahr, Juliana Lester, Henry Miller, Clinton Morris, Oscar Morris, Lillian Maude Pierce, Thomas Smith, Eva E. Stitch, Mary Taylor, Etta Vaughn, Laura Young. It appears from the minute book that Etta Vaughn enrolled on December 14, 1891, and on January 4, 1892, or after.
the college was opened. I do not recall that any students other than those instructed by Clark in the public school enrolled on the opening day. There were scarcely more than a dozen of us. Clark kept our grades in a small black book which he carried in his coat pocket. Our names were in alphabetic order, so it was just common sense that he would ask us to line up accordingly. I recall that the Adams boys and Frank Elsworth Duck were just ahead of me in the line, and directly behind me were Erwin Green Lewis and Katie Neal.

I know there was nothing like a group of forty-four students enrolling on December 14, 1891, as shown in the Minutes of the First Faculty. It required only a few minutes to register and Clark, who was master of ceremonies, assigned seats to us and we went ahead with our lessons as though we had not registered as college students.

Neither the list in the minutes nor the one in the college prospectus includes the name of Arthur W. Adams as enrolling on the day college opened. It has always been my belief that Adams and Oscar M. Morris enrolled that day.

Clark had taught several grades in the Stillwater schools and he might have brought some of the lower grades to the college. If he brought them, I am sure they did not register with us the first morning. It is my belief that President Robert J. Barker directed Clark to comb the Stillwater schools for any students who, in his opinion could keep up with the college class he was forming. A college could not be run without students. I noted some students taking a written examination to enter our class. I do not think Clark bothered to give many of them an examination to enter the class, so long as he felt they could make the grade.

In the college catalog Clark was listed as "Professor of English Literature and Mathematics," and his public school students became the first preparatory class in the college. He conducted all our classes until relieved by instructors in specialized fields, thus leaving him to head only the department of mathematics. He was a member of the faculty until 1898. Among the first instructors were Dr. James Clinton Neal, Alexander Covington Magruder, George L. Holter, Frank A. Waugh, and W. W. Hutto. President Baker was "Professor of Moral and Mental Science."4

All my training in the Stillwater public schools was of the one-room type. When college registration was completed on December 14, 1891, students were assigned seats in the church, as was practiced in any one-room country school, the larger and taller students at the rear. The desk of the instructor was in a corner of the room, surrounded by a few seats so he could conduct a class recitation while the remainder of the students were studying for their next classes. Three or four small blackboards were mounted on rollers so they could be moved to the most favorale light. A carpenter usually was employed to make desks and blackboards.

---

There were four or five movable wooden partitions, about eight feet high and twelve feet long, mounted on rollers. The partitions set apart the instructor’s desk and the corner seats, thus making a small room with a blackboard or two. Persons in the improvised recitation room were not visible from the main room. The small room was lighted by windows and some light came over the partitions. In the Stillwater public schools partitions had been used in the same manner, especially when a teacher had more than one grade in the room. The college used only one church building the first year.

Parents bought all books, slates, and other supplies that we used in the public schools. When my class moved to the Congregational Church to enter college we brought our books along. This gave the college instructors a basis on which to complete our preparatory work so we could start a freshman class. Instructors promptly assigned in our books lessons which we had not completed under the direction of our public school teachers. We or our parents bought every textbook we used during our college course. We never used second-hand books, and we had no college bookstore. We handled our books carefully because most of us did odd jobs to help pay for them.

As I recall, the first day’s assignment in the college was a sort of hurried review of the material covered in our public school instruction. We went to work at once. The first method of instruction in the college was a continuation of the procedure used in the one-room school. Students who were not reciting were expected to study lessons. The college instructors made no change from this primitive method until they were ready to form the freshman class. In the preparatory department we had very little afternoon work, except for an hour or two of military drill and study.

A serious matter for students was a written examination held for almost a week in the latter part of May, 1892. On the basis of the examination about a dozen students were named early in June to form the first freshman class. In September the class took over the entire Congregational Church and occupied it for college purposes until Old Central was completed in 1894. Students who failed to pass the examination were placed in the preparatory department and moved to other buildings. They were the “goats.” Additional students to the preparatory department were recruited from time to time by faculty members who examined their credentials from schools or colleges of other states. Some students presented teachers certificates.

My five years in Oklahoma A. and M. College were divided into three parts. (1) From December 14, 1891, to June, 1892, I was

---

in the preparatory department conducted in the Congregational Church (2) From September, 1892, to June, 1894, I did freshman and sophomore work in this church building. (3) From September, 1894, to June, 1896, I completed the junior and senior work in Old Central, called the college building.

The college differed from the public school in that we had better instructors, some change in textbooks, and new subjects added. Work was increased to where home study was required to make passing grades and I found much evening study necessary. We took notes in class and did our study periods at home. The freshman class recited as a unit, and there was little need for movable wooden partitions. The instructor in his little black book listed our grades on a percentage basis.

During my freshman and sophomore years at the church the instructors came at stated hours to conduct their respective classes. Occasionally we had a few minutes between classes for a study period. Classes were continuous from 8:30 a.m. until noon. In the afternoon we had two or three hours of practice in agriculture, chemistry, or other science, depending on the requirements of courses in which we were enrolled. Since we had no shops, the most of our practice was in agriculture. Sometimes we worked all afternoon on tracts of land on which Magruder was conducting experiments, and for part of the time we were paid ten cents an hour.

Our instructor in horticulture and landscape gardening was Frank A. Waugh who after being removed from the college joined the faculty of Massachusetts State College and won national fame in his field. Under Waugh’s direction our class did the spade work or planting of nearly all the college orchards and vineyards. Some of our labor was paid for at ten cents an hour but most of it was given as credit for the B. S. degree. Since there were no large commercial nurseries near, we grew seedlings and then budded or grafted them with the best fruit wood from adjoining states. Stretching east and west near the site of present Morrill Hall were several acres of experimental varieties, mostly four trees of each variety. The effect of our experimental horticulture on the orchards of Oklahoma is a subject I have often pondered but never well understood.

When Old Central was occupied in September, 1894, a classroom was assigned to each instructor, and the students went there for recitations.

The six men who comprised the first graduating class at Oklahoma A. and M. College lived on farms close enough to hear the bell in the tower of Old Central. My classmates were Arthur W. Adams, James Homer Adams, Frank Elsworth Duck, Erwin G. Lewis and Oscar M. Morris. Stillwater had no highschool and I never attended one. Nor did Duck ever attend high school, for we
lived in the same school district in Butler County, Kansas, before we moved to Stillwater. If our four classmates attended high school, it was before they moved to Stillwater.

The question is sometimes asked if during our college days we went home for lunch. Positively no! We could not lose any of our precious noon hour filled with what we called townball, blackman, or a variation of Rugby football (when we were lucky enough to get a ball that would stay inflated or a baseball on which the cover was not entirely gone.)

Some baseballs sold in our stores were "dead" because they lacked a rubber center. If we could get a chunk of sponge or block rubber we used it for a center and applied the winding from the "dead" ball. If we needed more winding we used small strings sold at the grocery store. The cover was of buckskin, and some of us became quite handy with a needle.

We played town-type baseball. Suppose twenty-four students wanted to play. We would let the leaders make alternate choices of players until each leader had a twelve-member team. Frequently we rotated the nine players, allowing all students to participate in the game. We used the same method in choosing members of our Rugby-type of football. There were special rules. The ball could not be carried by players but must be drop-kicked or advanced by being kicked as it bounded along the ground, as long as the ball stayed within bounds. If the ball went out of bounds, the side making the recovery would drop-kick it toward the goal posts of their opponents. Using these rules provided plenty of exercise for all (there were no bench-warmers) and we had a whale of a lot of fun.

Prior to graduation of the first class in 1896, Oklahoma A. and M. College had no athletes in the modern sense of the word. We knew no more about a pep meeting than most people know about the Einstein theory. We had no gym, athletic coach, athletic association, or sports equipment and no money for such things. If a college student played baseball or entered the sports races at a picnic or Fourth of July celebration, he entered as an individual and not as a representative of Oklahoma A. and M. College. If he played on the Stillwater ball club against a neighboring town, it was understood that he represented Stillwater, not the college. This situation did not curb our full enjoyment of sports. We scraped off a diamond in the buffalo grass, divided players into two evenly matched teams and a faculty member, usually Holter or Harry E. Thompson, would referee the game.

There was no malicious damage of church property used to house college students prior to the dedication of Old Central on June 15, 1894. We students wore heavy shoes and quite often long hair, but all of us had been taught to respect the property of others as if it were our own. Church walls and benches were not damaged.
by students, nor were the windows except for an occasional broken pane when a baseball went wild.

If the college paid a church rental, the sum must have been nominal. Church people were working to get the college in operation as soon as possible. The merchants, school board, in fact the entire community cooperated to get better educational facilities for children, just as my parents gave land and others donated time and paid their expenses on committees as they worked to organize the college.

In the Run of '89 Frank Elsworth Duck who had just passed his twenty-first birthday filed on a claim of 160 acres. On June 13, 1891, he commuted his homestead entry to cash, and on November 25 he gave the northwest 40 acres as a part of the college campus. The 40 acres is between Knoblock Street and Washington Street, and extends from College Avenue almost to Athletic Avenue. This portion of the campus was nearest Stillwater, and on it were erected the first college buildings, including Old Central.

I believe the first structure of a permanent nature erected on the campus was the college horse barn just northwest of Old Central. It was a two-story wooden structure. There Professor Magruder kept the first team of mules owned by the college. One could drive a wagon the full length on the ground floor. One side of the second floor was used for storing hay and grain, and the other side was a carpenter shop.

Shortly after the erection of the barn, a residence was completed for Dr. Neal, first director of the experiment station. It was a two or three bedroom house located northeast of Old Central. About the same time a little frame shack was erected southeast of Old Central for an experiment station. It was Professor Holter's chemistry laboratory. There Andy Caudell, a student who later attained distinction as an entomologist, kept his insect collection, and helped with soil analysis. These three buildings were on the tract Duck donated, and were erected before Old Central was.

On the campus there were no sheds or temporary buildings used as classrooms before we moved into Old Central in September, 1894. Prior to that time at the horse barn there was a small lean-to shed that served as a greenhouse. Our agriculture class visited it occasionally in the afternoon in our experiments in grafting and budding. A dirt road, nicely graded and used by wagons, came south on present Washington Street, crossed the campus near where Old Central stands and connected with Main Street.

On November 25, 1891, my parents, Alfred and Elizabeth Jarrell, deeded 40 acres of their homestead for college purposes. On this tract is Theta pond, Whitehurst Hall, and most of the College Library. The second college barn, the “cattle barn,” was erected near present Whitehurst Hall, and was used in livestock experiments, mostly cattle and hogs, and a few sheep and poultry. The
VOLUNTEER ENLISTMENT.

STATE OF

Indianapolis

In the State of Kentucky aged twenty-two years and by occupation a farmer.

Do hereby acknowledge to have volunteered this eleventh day of February 1862, to serve as a soldier in the Army of the United States of America, for the period of THREE YEARS, unless sooner discharged by proper authority. Do also agree to accept such bounty, pay, rations, and clothing, as are or may be established by law for volunteers. And further swear, that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the United States of America, and that I will serve them honestly and faithfully against all their enemies or opposers whatsoever; and that I will observe and obey the orders of the President of the United States, and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to the Rules and Articles of War.

Sworn and subscribed to at Indianapolis, Lewis J. Darnell
this eleventh day of February, 1862.

I CERTIFY, ON HONOR, that I have carefully examined the above named Volunteer, according to the General Regulations of the Army, and that in my opinion he is free from all bodily defects and mental infirmities, which would, in any way, disqualify him from performing the duties of a soldier.

[Signature]

I CERTIFY, ON HONOR, that I have minutely inspected the Volunteer, previously to his enlistment, and that he was entirely sober when enlisted; that, to the best of my judgment and belief, he is of sound age; and that in accepting him as duly qualified to perform the duties of an able-bodied soldier, I have strictly observed the Regulations which govern the recruiting service.

This soldier has [height and weight specifications].

[Signature]

Certificate of the first military service of Lewis J. Darnell, appointed Commandant of the Cadets at Oklahoma A. and M. College, 1891.
famous Field "O" for wheat experiments was on land donated by my parents, until moved a decade ago for the erection of Stout Hall.6

I do not recall whether President Barker participated in literary programs.7 In the public schools we usually had Friday afternoon programs consisting of readings, recitations, etc., and always had a big program on the last day of the school term. The first Oklahoma A. and M. College faculty followed pretty much the same system. President George Epsy Morrow taught our class in psychology and as I recall he was the only president who was one of my regular instructors.

The first drill instructor at the college was Captain Lewis J. "Jeff" Darnell. Some facts about him can be gleaned from war papers in the National Archives.8 He was born in Lewis County, Kentucky, about 1839. At Indianapolis, Indiana, on February 11, 1862, he enrolled as a private in Co. H, 2nd Cav., 41 Regiment, Indiana Volunteers for a term of three years. In October in a skirmish with Confederate soldiers at Crab Orchard, Kentucky, he received a gunshot wound in the right foot. In early December he was captured at Hartsville, Tennessee, but was paroled a few days later. He then reported to Camp Levi Wallace. On June 20, 1865, he was promoted to 1st lieutenant, and was mustered out July 22.

At Prairieton, Indiana, on June 25, 1866, he married Miss Rachael Clark. To them were born one son and five daughters. The family came to Indian Territory from Silverdale, Kansas. On July 20, 1889, Darnell made homestead entry for a quarter section of land thirteen miles west of Stillwater. He was elected register of deeds of Payne County and took office March 9, 1890. On July 27, 1891, he qualified for a veteran's pension of eight dollars a month. He received a temporary appointment as tactician and commandant at Oklahoma A. & M. College on November 25.

In memory I can see him as he stood in a dust storm on an unimproved Stillwater street near the church where the college was organized. He wore his Civil War uniform with army belt, cap, and huge square-toed shoes that he used with great skill as he tried

---


7 The best study on early literary activity at the college is by Willa Adams Dusch, The Sigma Literary Society, 1893-1897, published by the Research Foundation of the college in 1951.

8 In 1892 Darnell was post commander of the G. A. R. post in Stillwater. He proved up on his homestead in 1893. Papers concerning him are in National Archives, War Dept., Lewis J. Darnell, No. 512, Co. H B, 2 Indiana Cavalry; NA, Gen. Land Office, Guthrie, Final Cert. 169; NA, Int. Dept., 7322 Lands and R. R. Div. 1892; NA, pension file of Rachael Darnell, widow of Lewis J. Darnell, box 46478, cert. No. 520345.
to teach a band of long-haired farm boys to execute, "About, face!"

Did you ever see a pair of red-topped boots with copper toes? I had a pair which I prized more than any other footwear I ever owned. When I entered the college heavy, square-toed shoes were highly prized, and several members of our class had them. This kind of shoe was excellent for our type of football.

We had no military uniforms the first two years, and anyone who has visited a one-room country school on Friday afternoon knows how we dressed. Military drill was a new experience for us. We drilled one or two hours on regular school days and sometimes we had an extra drill on Saturday. According to modern standards each of us belonged in the awkward squad. The college could not draw funds from the government unless it was reported that a certain number of students were attending military drill. In the infancy of the college there was a "battalion of girls" because the law provided that all able-bodied students should take military training. There was strict construction of the law.

About the third drill year, men in my class were measured for cap and gray uniform trimmed with black braid, and we thought we were getting up in the world even if we had to rustle the money to pay for uniforms. I think it was in the senior year that we were issued some discarded army rifles and then we practiced the manual of arms, but we had no firing practice. We had no band instruments or instruction, and no experienced army officer to teach us the ways of a modern army. Darnell taught us different forms of marching in single and double file.

Memory holds a remnant of those first lectures given at the college. Professor Holter came to us in April, 1892. He had graduated at Pennsylvania State College and had done post-graduate work in German universities, the world's leading institutions in science. He read German textbooks and had quite a large private library of scientific books. The first Aggies could not speak or write much without mentioning Holter. He was worth a hundred ordinary instructors. He gave us vision and inspiration and did all that a great teacher could do—he led us to the fountain of science where it was up to us to drink.

In his first lectures Holter did not seem to realize that he faced a class of long-haired country lads and that his position was not unlike that of one speaking to a tribe of Zulu head-hunters. I am glad he told us those fundamental truths on which all our progress is based, even though not one of our class ever grasped the full import of his words.

---

Holter said “Every thing that moves and breathes on this earth is powered from a beam of light.” Among many axioms he taught us were these: “For every action there is an equal and opposite re-action.” “We have not the power to destroy any element.” Among basic things he taught was that by changing the temperature and pressure, we can change some substances from solid to a gas, where they are invisible.

The six men who comprised the first graduating class should all be classified alike in one respect. We all attended the same classes and passed the same written examinations. We specialized all through college in theoretical and practical agriculture and horticulture, and theoretical science, and took as much practical science (chemistry and electronics) as our time and limited equipment would permit. Our correct listing was science-agriculture.

After graduation my classmates tended to drift away from agriculture. Sometimes I am asked why I went into industrial work and eventually railroading. On the Stillwater homestead we were growing first-class Concord grapes which much of the time would not sell for a cent a pound at the vineyard. I did not see how I could become very prosperous growing fruit when Hale peaches would go begging at two or three cents a pound, and perfect apples only a cent or two more. Other products of the farm faced the same market difficulty. At threshing time wheat was thirty or forty cents a bushel, fat corn-fed hogs one or two cents a pound, fryer chickens and hens about fifteen cents each with no market at those prices most of the time. Eggs were two or three cents a dozen in trade at the village grocery. In short, we could produce the food but we could not market it at a profit.

I was inclined to be somewhat lazy. There was too much hard work sighting down a rope line to a pair of long-eared mules as one followed a walking plow. My father gave me one of the best agricultural apprentice courses any boy ever had, and with adequate market and farm machinery I probably would have remained in agricultural work. I refused to fight the market problem with the 1896 horse and buggy equipment, but I still operate a commercial acre near Bakersfield, California.

A recent change at Oklahoma A. and M. College is the conversion of “hell week” to “help week.” When I was a student no member of my class believed in hazing in any form. Had a member of the class taken part in hazing I surely would have known it.

There is a marked contrast between the college I knew and the present college with its fine library and similar facilities. We had no shops where we could learn the working of wood or iron. We had no typewriter at school or home. Our instructors had few books and very limited laboratory facilities. They were teachers of sterling qualities and their attainment was such that I have often wondered how they did so much with so little.