

CHARLES NEWTON GOULD:
 "COVERED WAGON GEOLOGIST"

By Mildred Armor Frizzell*

The *Covered Wagon Geologist*¹ is the autobiography of Dr. Charles N. Gould, one of Oklahoma's early geologists, as he wrote it in 1946, three years before he died at the age of seventy-eight years. Looking back over the past Dr. Gould created a delightful word counterpane from the highlights of his family life and geological career—as homespun in style as the coverlets used by his mother, in the "little log cabin, with clapboard roof and open fireplace" on Duck Creek, Eastern Ohio, where he was born on July 22, 1868. He was the son of Simon Gilbert and Anna Arvilla (Robinson) Gould.

Lured by "the hope of better things to be" the Goulds moved west to Kansas in April, 1887 and settled on a farm in Kingman County, near Ninnescah². Like most of their happy and hopeful friends, the Goulds lived in a dugout. Although it leaked when it rained, still they found it to be a comforting and warm protection from Kansas winter blizzards and a cooling and refreshing relief from the blistering summer winds.

The heartbreak of seeing the results of a year's labor in the fields burnt to a crisp by the searing Kansas summer sun, in-

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¹ *Covered Wagon Geologist*. By Charles N. Gould. (University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1959. Pp. xi, 268. 16 Ills. 2 Maps. \$4.00).

² Mr. and Mrs. Simon Gould later bought a farm, a few miles east of town on the South Fork of the Ninnescah river where the old "Cannon Ball" Green's stage road forded the river. The Concord stagecoach owned by the Oklahoma Historical Society once belonged to Mr. Green.

fluenced young Charles to turn to teaching. Charles like his ancestors was religious, frugal, ambitious and persevering. At the age of nineteen, he realized that although he had only the equivalent of an eighth grade education, obtained from country schools, he was as well qualified to teach school as most teachers in his community. After attending the summer Normal Institute at Kingman, he was granted his first certificate to teach in the Hardscrabble District during the winter of 1888-89.

The thrilling conversion of Charles Gould to geology came the following summer. It was the geologic story of two slabs of red ripple-marked sandstone, from the banks of the Ninescah River, as told by Professor L. C. Wooster, to a group of aspiring young teachers attending Normal Institute. Although he heard the word geology for the first time, on that hot July night, it became the "polaris" of his life.

Charles experienced many hardships and privations, as a boy from the "raw" frontier plains of Kansas, trying to obtain geological training but he endured them all happily, with the loving help of his devoted family. Following graduation from Southwestern at Winfield, Kansas, Gould attended the University of Nebraska in 1900 when he received his Masters' degree and again in 1906 for his doctorate. Dr. Gould once said that he had set his goal early in life:

I set for myself three tasks, three objectives, to be attained. First, I resolved that I would some day occupy the chair of Geology in some state university; second, I hoped to become state geologist of some state; and third, I determined to know as thoroughly as one might know, in the course of his life, the geology and mineral resources of the southern part of the Great Plains and the Southwest.

Within ten years of graduation, I had achieved the first two of these ambitions. I had organized the Department of Geology at the University of Oklahoma and had been appointed state geologist of Oklahoma. The third objective, to know the geology of the great Southwest, has occupied my best endeavors for more than forty years.

Gould taught the first class in geology at the University of Oklahoma the fall of 1900 when the University consisted of "one lone building in a forty-acre field, with rows of little trees, waist high." What the University lacked at that time in the way of tradition and ivy-covered towers, was more than compensated for by the optimism, enthusiasm and dedication of the thirteen teachers of the University staff.

Dr. Gould drew up the instructions that "have served as the constitution of the Oklahoma Geological Survey" and handed them to Governor Haskell on the morning of July 25, 1908 following his appointment as the first director of the new Oklahoma Geological Survey which he guided and nurtured it for the next three years.

He tells with more than a tinge of sadness, of his resignation from the Oklahoma Geological Survey in 1911 and his ensuing thirteen years as a consulting geologist. Although Dr. Gould entered the consulting practice at a thrilling and opportune time, when there were many known anticlines in Oklahoma waiting to be drilled, still he was unfortunate in that the structures he drilled found only a "show" of oil, while some of the structures he mapped for his clients (for a small fee) made millions of dollars.³

At the suggestion of Mr. Frank Buttram, of Oklahoma City, Dr. Gould returned to the Survey in 1924 to serve a second "hitch" as director. Once more he struggled with the perennial financial crises that haunt a survey as well as the research and publications, until 1931 when Governor Murray vetoed the survey appropriation.

Following the death of his beloved wife, Nina in 1935 he joined the National Park Service, serving in the Southwest. This gave him an opportunity to pursue his third great objective of life until he retired in 1940. A student to the last—he spent his final years reading on the average of a book a day and visiting the families of his two affectionate and gifted children, Lois and Don.

Dr. Gould is known in history as "the Father of Oklahoma Geology," and his life story is long past due. Among other early geological contributions, he made the first geological reconnaissance trip across Oklahoma in a covered wagon, as provided by the Oklahoma Territorial legislature; he published the first article on the general geology of Oklahoma Territory, in the Oklahoma Territorial Geological and Natural History Survey (the first scientific publication issued by the University of Oklahoma); he started the first University field trips in geology to the Arbuckle Mountains; he started the underground water resources study of Oklahoma in 1903, and was the fourth geologist to enter the consulting practice in Oklahoma.

Dr. Gould became a prolific author, acting on the early advice of Professor S. W. Williston who said, "Whatever you do or do not do, Gould, begin early to publish. . . . It is the scientific damnation of any young person starting out in a scientific career to go five years without publishing." He published 251 geological reports for the National Park Service during his five years with the service from 1935 to 1940.⁴

³ It was through the generous contributions of some of the early geologists whom Dr. Gould had helped that the publication of his memoirs was possible.

⁴ Dr. Carl Branson, Director of the Oklahoma Geological Survey has published a bibliography of Dr. Gould's works.

Coming to Oklahoma before statehood stimulated in Dr. Gould a keen interest in Oklahoma history. He never missed an opportunity to weave some Oklahoma history into his scientific articles and field trips. Perhaps his most widely read book was *Oklahoma Place Names*, now a rare book which is to be republished soon by the University of Oklahoma Press.

Geologists and historians in years to come will note with increasing regret that those of us who knew and loved Dr. Gould, allowed so many of his experiences to remain in "his inkwell."