

American Farmers and Ranchers Oklahoma Farmers Union

“Beginning Roots”

The late nineteenth century was a time of unrest in many rural areas, as farm owners and tenants rebelled against what they believed were monopolistic practices of banks and railroads. The agrarian populist movement was especially strong in East Texas. In the 1870's, many farmers organized Granges, cooperative ventures aimed at bypassing the big city middlemen.

The following decade, a national organization, the Farmers' Alliance, attracted many local members and, while initially apolitical, the alliance became increasingly associated with the Populist Party.

By 1892, The Alliance was on the decline and soon ceased to exist altogether. The Alliance and other farm organizations failed because farmers lacked the capital to establish the cooperative ventures necessary to free themselves from middlemen. An attempt to merge the alliance with urban labor failed for lack of a common cause - higher prices for crops meant higher prices for food in the market. Nonetheless, farmers persisted in trying to collectively beat the system keeping them on the edge of poverty.

Then came **Newt Gresham**. Orphaned at age ten, Gresham and his four brothers had known nothing but hard times. Self-educated, he worked the land and became involved in the Farmers' Alliance as a field organizer for five years until the organization began to wane. Along the way, Gresham became the editor of a weekly newspaper which led to sharecropping and establishment of the *Point Times*.

With the fall of the Grange and the Alliance fresh in the minds of many who grieved for their demise, Newt's faith in arousing farmers to organize for another crusade was not diminished. Drawing upon his experiences in the other two organizations, he started to plan a new farmers' organization in early 1900.

His idea was not well-received, given the demise of prior efforts and the seeming focus of only one political affiliation of the organizations. Although he was active in politics, he maintained that the new Farmers Union should remain clear of political entanglements.

After much personal economic hardship and struggle to get his idea going, nine men of different political affiliations believed enough in his idea to sit down with Gresham, and they became the founders of the corporation. This ten-man corporation secured a charter for a farm organization from the State of Texas on Aug. 28, 1902, with the intent of spreading to other states. Believing partisan politics had destroyed earlier farm organizations, Gresham wanted to emphasize economic cooperation and avoid the same mistakes.

In essence, the Farmers Union was a resurrection of the Farmers Alliance, but it would go no further than lobbying to secure legislation to protect farmers' interests.

In 1903, he founded the *Password*, the organization's official mouthpiece

Territorial Organization

In late 1902, Judge Beckett of Warner, Indian Territory, traveled to Point, Tex., to obtain information about the Farmers Union that had been established earlier that year. While at Point, he became a member of the Union in Gresham's home. He returned to Warner where he and Campbell Russell began promoting the Farmers Union. The organization spread very rapidly and the Union was planted in both Oklahoma and Indian Territory.

An example of the organization taking hold was at Wakita, where a local was incorporated in Dec. 1902, receiving their national charter on Feb. 11, 1903.

As the Farmers' Union movement continued to grow, organizers were being sent from place to place to create local bodies. Although the Farmers Union was non-political and non-partisan, the organization advocated numerous things in its program, which inevitably developed the political aspect.

When an organizer came to the Emet, IT community, he failed on his first attempt. When a circular left by the organizer convinced William H. Murray it was a worthy cause, he invited the gentleman back. This time, Murray placed his influence behind the movement and one meeting resulted in the formation of four locals and a total of 700 members.

From that time on, Murray began to take part in the Union activities and his work became known throughout the two territories. Murray would later use his influence to impact state history in writing the state constitution and becoming its ninth Governor. Impressed by Murray during a visit, the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture offered him an Extension Department job. He declined, but persuaded the Secretary to help local farmers with problems. At the request of the Indian Territory Farmers Union, one of the first national soil surveys and the first in the soon-to-be state was conducted within a forty-mile square of Tishomingo, Okla.

At the time of the Texas state meeting at Fort Worth, Feb. 1905, there were 839 locals in Oklahoma and Indian Territory, with a total membership of 29,365. Neither territory had been organized into a state union division. At the Fort Worth meeting, delegates asked for the privilege of being organized into a state union. The twin territories were accepted and organized shortly afterward under the general name of Indian Territory.

S. O. Dawes, prominent in Alliance farm organization days, was elected the first president of the new state union, followed by J.A. West.

The first meeting after organizing the Indian Territory Union was held in Tishomingo, IT, July 18-21, 1905. There were 109 delegates attending this convention, plus countless visitors. Agriculture statistics, farmer's labels on all goods produced by union members, legislation, arbitration and education were all early discussions.

Early organization elections not only included officers and executive board members but the election of a business agent, organizer, chaplain, conductor and doorkeeper. The business agent took care of business activities on behalf of the organization.

The organizer helped to create locals and member involvement; the conductor was in charge of inspecting membership cards, receiving and introducing candidates and visiting members, tending to the ballot box and taking charge of property of the Union. The doorkeeper made sure everyone gave the password before being allowed to enter the meeting, which in the beginning was often "Ten Good Men and True – Watch Them!" The doorkeeper was a key job because many wanted to infiltrate the meetings to break up the union.

Although not an elected position, the lecturer was usually the individual who came to local meetings to fire up the membership. The organization was established early on as a fraternal entity. Members were referenced as "Brother." Correspondence was either addressed or concluded in the same manner. Ceremonial meetings and installations of officers was used in early meetings.

Having been postponed from an earlier Sept. 23 date because of a yellow fever outbreak, delegates from Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi and Louisiana met in Texarkana to organize a national union in accordance with laws of the State of Texas Dec. 5-7, 1905. Campbell Russell of Oklahoma was elected to the first NFU board of directors at that convention.

In 1905, Farmers Union inaugurated what may have been the first crop curtailment program in the nation. Trying to get higher prices, members were asked to plow up a certain percentage of their cotton and plant other crops. This took place about 28 years prior to the agricultural adjustment act.

The State Debate

Both territories operated under the combined name for quite some time until the question of adding the twin territories as one or two states to the United States brought much discussion and division, even among the Farmers Union. It was while this issue was being debated in 1906 that the Farmers Union divided, forming the Indian Territory Union, in addition to the Indian Territory Union. A.J. Malcom was elected President of the Indian Territory Union.

Leaders in Indian Territory, opposed to single statehood, took pre-emptive steps to prevent unification. In 1905, leaders of the Five Civilized Tribes issued the call for a constitutional convention. Delegates drafted a constitution and proposed the creation of

the State of Sequoyah. While the proposed constitution was ratified by voters of Indian Territory, Congress refused to grant the area statehood.

This convention would later impact the writing of Oklahoma's constitution in that it reflected the Progressive Era. It featured strict corporate regulation, humanitarian measures allowing the government to assist the underprivileged and almost every demand of the growing progressive cause. Farmers Union member William H. Murray was at the table serving as a vice president of the Sequoyah Convention.

Congress settled the issue by combining both territories into a single state. On June 16, 1906, President Theodore Roosevelt signed into law the Oklahoma Enabling Act. The Act stipulated the Twin Territories were to begin preparation for admittance into the Union as a single state.

Following the direction of statehood, in 1907, the two unions became one and were re-chartered as the Oklahoma State Union, allaying the bitterness and strife that had existed between members during the state debate. A compromise was forged when officers from both unions formed the new union board at the Aug. 20, 1907, state meeting in Shawnee. Membership totaled 50,000.

State Constitution Influence

Farmers Union was at the table during a meeting in Shawnee when the "Shawnee Demands" were drafted, reflecting membership goals to be included in a state constitution.

Shawnee Demand provisions included: (1) initiative and referendum; (2) recall; (3) vast authorization for the government to involve itself in industry; (4) limited work-day (eight hours) for certain professions; (5) government regulation of railroads; (6) elected officials to regulate labor and agriculture; (7) election of all state officials; (8) government ownership of utilities; (9) antimonopoly statutes; and (10) a ban on child labor.

Many of the demands were the basis of the Farmers Unions beginnings in fighting corporations.

Most successfully elected delegates adopted the Shawnee Demands.

The delegates assembled in Guthrie on November 20, 1906. Demographically, of the 55 Oklahoma Territory seats, 30 were Farmers Union members. Thirty-four of Indian Territory's 55 were supporters of the Sequoyah Convention. These numbers combined with the fact that 98 were staunch Democrats, producing a vote which Murray had figured to the man well in advance of the convention.

Murray also served as draftsman and leader in the writing of the by-laws of the Oklahoma Farmers Union and went on to become the first Speaker of the Oklahoma House of Representatives and the state's ninth governor.

Following his election as convention president, Murray delivered an address outlining his views about important provisions that should be included in the state constitution. After urging the delegates to support the platforms that led to their election, which were mostly tied to the Shawnee Demands, provisions he endorsed included:

(1) prohibiting alien and corporate ownership of land; (2) a graduated land tax; (3) safety and health inspections of coal mines; (4) the eight-hour work day on railroads and public works; (5) fixed maximum rates for railroads; (6) the initiative; (7) the referendum; and (8) granting of utility franchises by voters.

Once again, many of the Farmers Union's issues had been included during the debate. After almost four months of work, the convention concluded. Oklahoma was on its way to statehood.

State Headquarters

The first headquarters of the infant farm organization was temporarily set-up at Durant. Later offices were moved to Shawnee, at the invitation of the Commercial Club of that city. The Shawnee location included furnished free office space at expense of the city along with a beautiful hall and offices for state meetings.

During World War I, offices were established in Custer County, remaining there until 1920. That year, headquarters was transferred to Oklahoma City where office space was leased in the Campbell Building, and later, the Oil Exchange Building.

In 1926, an office building was constructed at 18 North Klein in the capitol city. The top floor housed the insurance company and other organization administration. The first floor eventually provided hardware supplies with a desk in the corner used by State Secretary Zed Lawter. To the north, a cooperative grain elevator, feed store and supplies building was constructed.

A new and much larger office building was constructed at 4 North Klein in 1941 and later expanded as demands for space grew. During the next 20 years the organization experienced substantial growth, necessitating a need of an additional building to house the employees of the insurance organization and other personnel.

The original property at 18 North Klein in 1961 housed a hardware store and a lumberyard with a fertilizer warehouse across the street. Three large parking lots and a tire warehouse from which Saxon tires, batteries and filters were sold over Oklahoma and several adjoining states also occupied the site. In 1964 a new Farmers Union store was opened at 1601 South Agnew in Oklahoma City. The store featured general farm supplies, including fertilizer, fencing material, general hardware and animal health products. In 1967, 1977 and 1984 expansions of the existing headquarters building occurred. In 1989, Oklahoma Farmers Union acquired a modern structure and moved the corporate headquarters location to 6200 N.W. 2nd St. in Oklahoma City. In 2006, the employees moved into the current headquarters, The American Farmers and Ranchers Building located at 800 North Harvey in downtown Oklahoma City.

Newspapers

In 1906, The Indian Signal, the official publication of the Union, which had been started in Cordell, was moved to Shawnee. After a year at Shawnee, the Indian Signal had been rechristened the Farmers Union Advocate by its editor, H.H. Stallard. It and J.K. Armstrong's periodical entitled the Advocate and Union Review, was edited in Ardmore, espoused the Union's program of organization, cooperation and education. But by 1910 the two papers had declined in popularity and for financial reasons they combined into the Union Advocate Review. This effort also failed.

The Union had no official voice until after World War I when President John Simpson at the direction of the board created and published The Oklahoma Union Farmer on January 1. It remained as such until 1987 when the paper was rechristened the Farm News and Views

Editors along the way since Simpson, has included his son William B. Simpson, Tom Cheek, Homer Duffy, Ramon Martin, Gerald Dawkins, Orville S. Allard, Don Woolley, Lee Streetman and Mary Ann Nickens.

Symbols of Farmers Union

The symbol for Farmers Union consists of a triangle with the words "Cooperation, Legislation and Education" forming three sides. The triangle reflects the chief aims and purposes of the organization and how Oklahoma Farmers Union seeks to provide leadership for its members.

Its' insignia is the plow, rake and hoe, traditional tools of the early farmer.

The official colors of the Farmers Union are blue and gold. Blue represents the clear blue skies while gold represents the sunshine that gives warmth and light to the fields of growing crops.

OFU Early Historical Timeline

- Farmers' Educational and Co-Operative Union of America Chartered, September 17, 1902
- Request for State Division Charter, Fort Worth, Texas, February 1905
- Indian State Union Charter Granted March 23, 1905, (recognizing Oklahoma and Indian Territories together as one state charter)
- First Meeting of Indian State Union after charter, July 18-21, 1905, Tishomingo
- Indian State Union Division (Oklahoma Territory), 1906 – 1907
- Indian Territory Union Division (Indian Territory), 1906- 1907
- Oklahoma State Union, August 20, 1907 (re-merged Indian/Indian Territory)
- Oklahoma State Union of the Farmers' Educational and Co-operative Union of America, October 11, 1920

OKLAHOMA FARMERS UNION STATE PRESIDENTS

NEWT GRESHAM	Founder	September 2, 1902
S.O. DAWS		1905-1906
A.J. MALCOM	Indian Territory FU	1906-1907
J.A. WEST	Indiahoma Union	1906-1907
J.A. WEST		1907-1908
WILLIAM GARRISON		1908-19212
W.O. TAYLOR		1912-1916
JOHN SIMPSON		1916-1930
TOM CHEEK		1930-1945
HOMER DUFFY		1945-1956
GEORGE W. STONE		1956-1980
JIMMIE JARRELL		1981-1985
JACK KELSEY		1985-1992
PHILLIP KLUTTS		1992-2000
RAY L. WULF		2000-2009
TERRY DETRICK		2009-present

Cooperation, Legislation and Education

“Cooperatives”

Perhaps even more than legislative initiatives, the creation of cooperatives was the cornerstone for the Farmers Union organization. Initial actions to boost returns and lower expenses for producers were targeted at the creation of cooperatives and buying and marketing clubs. The debate over statehood during the early days of Oklahoma Farmers Union thrust the group into legislative activity that led to key members' involvement in writing the state constitution and being elected to the Legislature. Initially, national legislative activity took a back seat to the cooperative efforts of the organization.

At the first official meeting of the re-combined Indian Territory and Indian Territory Unions which created the Oklahoma Farmers Union organization in 1905, President J.A. West, in his address before the convention, said: “Perhaps no feature of industrial organization has been so exhaustively discussed as that of co-operative warehouses. The primary principles of the union of farmers was the control of the markets. The objects to be attained were profitable prices and stable markets. Our markets have been completely in the hands of cotton exchanges, institutions which have manipulated our markets up and down, regardless of supply and demand. These institutions have destroyed the stability of the markets for all farm products, impoverished the farmer and jeopardized the business interests of the entire country.

“We have adopted definite plans in the hope of destroying the mighty and tyrannical power of the Cotton Exchange. Beginning with the plan of locally bulking, which was soon followed by holding one-fourth or one-fifth of the cotton crop, and the establishment of a minimum price; but by this means, you remember we succeed in securing only partial co-operation. But through the warehouse system, we can revolutionize the present system and enthrone the farmer as absolute master in fixing the price upon his own products. The warehouse is now recognized as an indispensable addenda in stable and profitable marketing....”

And so, producers envisioned controlling their own destiny through cooperative buying and selling. The principal worked as long as there was a large number of cooperating farmers and ranchers, the marketplace was more local and not a worldwide competition, and membership loyalty remained. By the late Twentieth Century, even the large merged cooperatives struggled to remain in existence. All the mergers in the world did not allow them to remain competitive in many instances with private enterprise.

For the OFU organization, in 1907, membership declined from 40,000 to a few hundred because of state law interpretations allowing non-farmers to buy shares and participate in coops.

Although cooperative enterprises among the membership existed almost from the get-go, during the 1920s, there were 110 cooperatives organized. Most of them were cotton gins, but many were formed into a combination of cotton gins and grain elevators.

The organizational drive was under the leadership of John Simpson, president of OFU from 1916-1930. Simpson personally organized 55 cooperatives. Among these were the Farmers Union Exchange at Anadarko, the Farmers Union Cooperative Exchange at Binger, the Farmers Union Exchange at Isabella, the Farmers Union Produce Company at Eakley and the Farmers Union Exchange at Weatherford. Produce companies, exchanges, gins, elevators and creameries were all part of the Simpson legacy.

Simpson took particular pride in the coop at Hydro. He reported to his members that after only three months (figures included cream bought, eggs bought, poultry bought and hides bought,) the total purchased was \$75,754.87 and sold for \$80,604.16, giving a tidy profit to the newly formed cooperative.

Simpson selected Caddo as the first county to create the Oklahoma Cotton Association. OFU had 40 locals of the Union in the county, with nearly 20,000 members owning and operating 15 Farmers Union business institutions.

Early member enterprises prior to Simpson included grain warehousing, cotton gins, a cottonseed oil mill and an insurance company. In 1908, the Farmers Union Broom Corn Growers' Association was founded and future OFU State President Tom Cheek was named the manager. With his help, the association opened a warehouse at Sayre in Beckham County. The enormous growth of cooperative gins during the Simpson presidency was largely due to Cheek's work, although Simpson received most of the credit. Crops were not the only focus of help; the Union also organized a livestock exchange.

Perhaps the most unique cooperative effort was Cheek's August 1931 announcement of a Cooperative Health Association, which opened a new community hospital for Union members in Elk City. Dr. Michael M. Shadid's purpose was to cut the high costs of medicine and eliminate the "great evil" of modern American medical treatment — expensive "unnecessary surgical operations." The doctor persuaded the Union board to accept his proposal to charge members \$15 per year, plus three dollars per day for hospital stays. Equally important, Shadid proposed that all operations would be the same as private hospitals, less 50 percent.

From the start, the medical industry opposed the hospital. But Gov. William Murray protected the hospital during his tenure, and by 1935, the hospital had added two additional floors and increased the staff to include five doctors, making it a medical facility equal to any in the state. That same year, plans were made to open a second hospital in Snyder or Enid. Due to an organized effort by state doctors, the hospital was never built. In the end it did not survive as a cooperative effort, but still holds the distinction of being the first cooperative hospital established in the United States.

Equally as unique was a "planters cooperative," established by Farmers Union members including W.H. Kosanke, of Lone Wolf. This coop was not what you may think, since the only planting it took care of was of its members. This funeral home

cooperative continues to exist and thrive in a newly constructed facility and provides services throughout Southwestern Oklahoma.

The financing of most of these cooperatives was quite unusual.

W.F. Varnum, of Seminole, was a Farmers Union member and a strong believer in cooperatives. He organized and operated a cooperative store in Seminole. He came into considerable wealth due to oil production on his lands. With the money from the oil operation, he financed up to 50 percent of any cooperative that was organized in the state. The gin manufacturing companies financed the remaining half. This was before the formation of the Wichita Bank of Cooperatives, organized to finance cooperatives in 1934.

OFU, in cooperation with the local Farmers Union organizations, called meetings of the farmers. At these meetings, farmers were permitted to express their interest and need for a cooperative. Legal and technical information was provided by Oklahoma Farmers Union and the manner in which the cooperatives could be financed and operated was explained. During the 1920s, it was possible under Farmers Union guidance to organize, finance and build a cooperative gin within 60 days.

In the beginning, the by-laws of the cooperative required patrons to be members of the Oklahoma Farmers Union. This practice was discontinued during the late 1930s and 1940s when the by-laws changed.

Cooperative development steadily grew with an expansion of input supplies for producers. By 1935, the sales department was selling two million pounds of twine annually. Trainloads of bulk coal were ordered as rural families enjoyed savings through cooperative buying clubs.

In 1949, the state organization announced a new wholesale business and adopted an official seal of the letters "O.F.U." set in the middle of a shield for the purpose of positive recognition of Union products. Its goods included Gillette tires and batteries, K.F.U. hybrid seeds, Barrett roofing and asbestos siding materials, agricultural chemical fertilizers and sprays, farm machinery, steel and wire products and paints. A credit was established in 1949.

In May 1953, President Homer Duffy announced the purchase of Dobry Mills, Inc., in Yukon, which would be converted into a feed mill. In September, a "Fireside Store" offered mail order merchandise to the membership. More than 700 representative members were given a five-pound catalog filled with more than 8,000 sale items, including jewelry, furniture, clothing, gifts and housewares.

Oklahoma Farmers Union stores and cooperatives sold everything — from lumber, appliances, furniture, beds, tables and chairs to tin, fuel and tires. Private industry and the chambers of commerce fought against cooperative-owned ventures and eventually contributed to its weakened state as a service provider in many areas. Former

OFU President George Stone referred to the Mathis Brothers in Oklahoma City as a major competitor in the furniture industry.

Contributing to the loss of the Farmers Union identity among the various cooperative entities was the growth of the regional Farmland Industries Cooperative. To enhance name branding of the double-circle coop logo, there was an insistence by the regional entity to carry outside signage and products bearing the logo. This diminished the Oklahoma Farmers Union identity of the cooperatives and the managers' opportunity to shop for other non-double circle cooperative branded products.

With financial issues at the regional level, the trickle-down effect to local cooperatives resulted in costs that often were not competitive with other providers, putting an additional strain on local Farmers Union cooperatives. Tough times with commodity prices throughout the last 100 years have always impacted the success of local cooperatives, but perhaps no time has seen as great a farm crisis as in the 1970s — followed by the 1980s and 1990s that brought their own unique challenges. Throughout it all, some have maintained their financial viability through mergers and still fly the OFU flag.

In spring 1963, the cooperative cotton gins were organized with OFU's help and the Oklahoma Cooperative Compress Association was formed. By August, the entity started to receive cotton, which was simultaneous with the construction of the compress. The first year's efforts produced approximately 100,000 bales of cotton. The Cotton Compress remains a viable and key economic component to the state's economy in Southwestern Oklahoma.

OFU was also instrumental in the creation of the Producers Cooperative Oil Mill located in Oklahoma City, where for a number of years, it had direct representation on the OFU board of directors. The "producers" mill began operation in 1944, through the efforts of the OFU and 20 cooperative gins.

The membership reached 56 gins in 1968, including four in Texas. According to former OFU Legislative Director J.D. Fleming, if it involved the cotton industry, OFU was at its roots. Cotton gins and grain elevators across Western Oklahoma still bear the marks of their Farmers Union beginnings, through signage or legal documents bearing their namesake.

While it was rare the state organization owned any of them, OFU members were the founders, owners and leadership of these entities.

In keeping with our cooperative mission, today OFU is working on the organization of three new cooperatives: American Native Beef (ANB), a proposed beef processing plant; Oklahoma Farmers Union Sustainable Energy Cooperative (OKFUSE), a proposed ethanol plant; and Oklahoma Farmers and Ranchers Energy Enterprise (OKFREE), a proposed oilseed milling operation.

“Legislative & Farm Policy”

The early membership of the Oklahoma Farmers Union was active and involved in shaping farm policy and the State of Oklahoma even before the state existed. Early leaders were members of the territorial legislatures followed by heavy influence in the subsequent early state legislatures.

OFU was instrumental in writing the state constitution that was dominated by Farmers Union members which through virtue of numbers was able to elect the constitutional convention chairman – Alfalfa Bill Murray. This resulted in a very agrarian constitution that put government in the people’s hands and less in the hands of the executive branch.

At the time of its adoption, noted agrarian populist Williams Jennings Bryan called the Oklahoma Constitution the most progressive in the nation. Article 2, the “Bill of Rights” declared, “All political power is inherent to the people.” Article 5, “Initiative and Referendum,” stipulated, “people reserve to themselves the power to enact or reject laws independent of the Legislature.”

Between 1903 and 1907 Farmers Union attacked usury practices in both the excessive rates and the severe terms applied to farm credit and mortgages. These efforts resulted in interest rate reductions of from 8 percent to 24 percent in the Southern States. In the first five years of the organization, through cooperation, farm mortgage debt was reduced by 45 percent while at the same time succeeding in lowering interest rates.

Alfalfa Bill Murray as a spokesperson for the Farmers Union asked the Secretary of Agriculture James Wilson to help local farmers with problems. So, at the request of the Indian Farmers Union, a soil survey was made within a forty-mile square of Tishomingo, Indian Territory, during the winter of 1905-1906, for the purpose of ascertaining the different types of soil, studying their characteristics, and learning their adaptations to various crops. This was the first in the future state and one of the earliest in the nation.

In 1905, Farmers Union inaugurated probably the first crop curtailment program in the nation. In trying to get higher prices, members were asked to plow up a certain percentage of their cotton and plant other crops. This took place about 28 years prior to the federal Agricultural Adjustment Act.

That same year, Farmers Union went all out in the elections and 43 farmers were elected to the House of Representatives and as a result was successful in passing bills for graduated land tax and to restrict usury. They were also successful in passing the Blair Bill which set-up the State Board of Agriculture and succeeded in getting one of their own, J.P. Conners, OFU Vice-President elected as the first President of the Board.

When the original Sherman Anti-trust Act was before Congress in 1890, it contained a provision exempting farm cooperatives from the law. The provision was

dropped from the bill as being unnecessary when the bill received final passage. Almost immediately, farmers began to be challenged under act for forming agricultural marketing cooperatives. By 1906, Farmers Union was calling for cooperative enabling legislation to protect farmers from business-driven nuisance suits. Some of the early battles to form and operate cooperatives often make the public policy advocacy work of the Union pale by comparison.

Farmers Union also proposed the adoption of a federal parcel post system in 1906 that was achieved in 1913.

In 1910 Farmers Union advocated the principle of a federally graduated income tax that was authorized in 1913.

In 1911 Farmers Union urged election of U.S. senators directly by the people instead of state legislatures. It was adopted in 1919.

Farmers Union demands for a program of low-interest, long-term credit resulted in the enactment of the Federal Farm Loan Act of 1916, establishing 12 Federal Land Banks to offer farm loans over a long repayment schedule.

In the 1920s, Oklahoma Farmers Union worked hard for the passage of the Capper-Volstead Act and other legislation allowing farmer-owned cooperatives a stronger voice in marketing. It became law in 1922.

In 1921, Farmers Union successfully lobbied for adoption of the Packers and Stockyards Act.

In 1922, the organization won federal regulation of grain marketing under the grain futures act.

Led by former state legislator, newspaper editor, former banker and lawyer, President John Simpson, the Oklahoma Farmers Union pushed for such legislation as a free textbook law; official sampling, grading and classification of cotton; and an amendment to the cooperative law to permit cooperative banks. He also led the effort to secure passage of a law that enabled a farm organization to insure the properties of its' members without outside control by the Insurance Commissioner. With that done, the company organized the Oklahoma Farmers' Union Mutual Fire and Lightning Insurance Company.

Nationally, Simpson supported the 1924 McNary-Haughen bill that created a two-price system for wheat, the plan was designed so that farmers could sell more on the international market and still enjoy protected prices at home. Farmers got a protected price for the domestic market and world price for the foreign market. While Congress passed the concept, U.S. President Coolidge vetoed the bill twice. Today, the concept still is discussed but with growing globalism interdependence the idea increasingly falls on deaf ears.

There were sharp divisions over options for federal farm policy during the Dust Bowl and Depression years. In 1929, some members supported the cost-of-production advocates, headed by Oklahoma State President John A. Simpson and soon to be national president, while others supported the Roosevelt Administration farm approach favored by Agriculture Secretary Henry A. Wallace which resulted in a Federal Farm Board that was authorized to buy commodities to bolster prices. The Board also pushed to curtail wheat and cotton production to curtail “overproduction”. The idea as part of the Agricultural Marketing Act was opposed by state Farmers Union members. Simpson was convinced the AMA was only another means by which middlemen and bankers burdened farmers with debt. As national president Simpson pushed through his “Domestic Allotment” plan which asked the federal government guarantee farmers the cost of production for those crops they sold domestically. Simpson advocated a public works program. He also opposed the Hawley-Smoot Tariff. He believed that exporting countries would continue to increase production while importing ones intended to raise tariff walls. By 1932, he had become an outspoken, recognizable advocate for family farmers with a monthly program on the National Broadcasting Company. One such radio address resulted in more than 18,000 letters of support being sent to Simpson.

Simpson as national president voiced his disapproval with a “Farmers’ Holiday,” a strike by farmers in the manner of withholding farm products from the public market until such time as farmers received a cost of production from Congress. Simpson defeated its’ approval by the NFU but organizers continued and 600 members were organized in Oklahoma to participate but it eventually was called off in hopes that a new Administration in Washington would make a difference.

At home in Oklahoma, new state president Tom Cheek, faced with the mounting Great Depression, Cheek called for a public works program to employ people to build roads, flood control, deep waterways, reforestation, etc. to put people to work. Cheek was ahead of his time. President Hoover opposed the concept.

By 1932 most agriculture leaders were moving to support a domestic allotment plan that promoted acreage restrictions. Simpson opposed the forced reductions and consulted with future President Roosevelt at Hyde Park to convert him to his cost-of-production ideas. Roosevelt publicly support the Simpson plan but privately leaned to the allotment plan. Following the election, Simpson was courted as agriculture secretary and he was happy with the President’s election. Unfortunately, Simpson didn’t get the nod and the President chose the allotment plan for the farm policy. Simpson vowed to fight the “New Deal” and he did.

Cheek supported the election of Roosevelt and he gave a ringing endorsement of the AAA and the National Recovery Administration that addressed labor issues and a minimum wage unlike Simpson and other Oklahomans who opposed the New Deal.

In 1932, the Farmers Union, the Grange and the Farm Bureau issued a joint statement calling for cost-of-production and an equalization fee. These same groups

months later proposed a farm program based on production controls, parity prices and a processing tax. These positions would become components of the Triple-A farm program that emerged in 1933.

The year of 1933 was a cornerstone for farm policy with the election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Actions included adoption of the Agricultural Adjustment Act, the Emergency Farm Mortgage Act, the Farm Credit Administration became an independent agency, the Farm Credit System was reorganized, the Soil Erosion Service was created and the Commodity Credit Corporation put into place.

Farmers Union objected to the assignment of farm program supervision to the Federal Extension Service and advocated instead the use of farmer-elected committees. More recently these committees have been called ASCS and FSA county committees.

In 1933 corporate farming was prohibited at Oklahoma at Farmers Unions urging.

Past state president and NFU President John Simpson established a rapport with presidential candidate Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1932. The following year, he wrote President Roosevelt: "The money question is the biggest and most important problem that you will have to solve. You cannot balance the budget. You cannot save the banks, the railroads, the insurance companies and other commercial and industrial enterprises with a dollar that buys four bushels of wheat from a Kansas farmer, ten bushels of corn from a Nebraska farmer, or twenty pounds of cotton from a Texas farmer." The Roosevelt Administration took several steps with Farmers Unions backing that began to restore financial order in the countryside. It decreed a bank holiday, emergency farm credit legislation and in 1934 the Frazier-Lemke Farm Bankruptcy Act that saved thousands of farmers temporarily from bankruptcy. Simpson served until he died in 1934 while lobbying in the Senate Office Building in Washington, D.C.

Continuing the rush of legislation that carried strong Farmers Union fingerprints, Congress provided federal assistance to school lunch programs in 1935. With a "black blizzard" hitting the East Coast, making the Dust Bowl conditions understandable to most Americans, Congress approved the creation of the Soil Conservation Service.

In May of 1935 Cheek rallied 1,200 farmers to support passage of bills by the state legislature to establish a graduated land tax and to create a state social security system. Governor Marland submitted initiative votes on both as well as for a homestead exemption. Cheek became a member of the first Old Age Pension Commission when the vote succeeded because of the OFU's leadership in getting it passed.

That same year, the U.S. Supreme Court declared the AAA unconstitutional and OFU leaders headed to Washington to meet with the Secretary of Agriculture. A stop-gap measure continued the policies and payments of the AAA.

In 1936, when commercial power companies declined to get involved in electrifying rural America, Congress approved the REA Act, authorizing the development

of patron-owned co-ops to distribute electric power. Cheek and OFU had been some of its' loudest supporters. Farmers Union had pressed for the cooperative approach while many others still looked to the profit-type utilities. That same year OFU members rejected a second AAA because they considered crop reduction principles too radical.

In 1937, Cheek continued his fight calling for legislation to insure graduated land taxes, homestead exemptions and low interest loans to a national radio audience over NBC. While some Oklahomans opposed the New Deal, Cheek continued relentlessly.

The Federal Crop Insurance Program became law in 1938.

In 1940 Tom Cheek testified in Washington, D.C. for a Farmers Union proposed Cotton Income Certificate program. Before year-end Cheek returned to Washington to take credit recommendations from a 20-state emergency credit meeting to the Senate Banking and Currency subcommittee. Cheek's testimony reported that farm tenancy rates had climbed to 61 percent in Oklahoma. That same year, he testified before Congress on the issues relative to "why Okies were leaving the state."

In 1941 Congress raised price supports on major agricultural commodities to 85 percent of parity and Cheek again testified before the House Committee on Agriculture. On December 8, one day after Pearl Harbor, Cheek sent a wire to President Roosevelt: "Oklahoma Farmers Union pledges our unwavering support to this war against Japan." In 1944, Farmers Union chiefly advocated creating a rural telephone program within REA and became reality in 1949.

Homer Duffy became state president and in 1945 took to the national airways on a CBS radio broadcast to support President Truman's federal budget proposals that called for not reducing expenditures or shifting to a military build-up.

Duffy and state secretary Zed Lawter worked aggressively for Farmers Union objectives including support for the Brannan Plan farm program, and for 100 percent of parity supports for all major crops.

In 1945, OFU launched bus trip campaigns to Washington, D.C. to engage in grassroots lobbying, three years prior to the national organization. In 1948 the group recommended a two-year extension of price supports at 90 percent of parity which was adopted.

At home Duffy summarized successes of the union in recent years include state legislation sponsored OFU to secure tax exemptions for gasoline used in tractors and farm machinery, homestead exemptions, a graduated land tax to exempt 640 acres of cultivating land, no taxes on land used for grazing livestock and the passage of a bill to establish rural telephone cooperatives.

The 1950 OFU convention proposed a TVA-type river development plan for Oklahoma, urged extension of Social Security to farmers and advocated parity of living conditions for rural people.

OFU celebrated when a fourteen-year old battle to get feed, seed, fertilizer, and farm machinery exempted from the state sales tax was accomplished in 1951. In Washington, Duffy and other state presidents were successful in stopping the taxation of cooperatives.

Anti-corporate farming for most of the last century was a keystone in the Farmers Union policy book. Alfalfa Bill Murray led the charge in the writing of the State Constitution. Later when the issue came up, Homer Duffy, state president; Zed Lawter, state secretary, and employees Joe Riggins and Rex Miller would put loud speakers on their cars and on a Saturday morning go out to the small towns, play a march music or two, draw a crowd and then speak to the issue of why corporate farming should not be allowed in Oklahoma and that the Constitution should be followed.

In 1952, Duffy advocated continuance and the one-cent gasoline tax to finance the farm-to-market road program under the auspices of the county commissioners. By 1953, Duffy had appealed personally to U.S. Agriculture Secretary Benson to maintain a price support level at ninety per cent parity at least given the low prices of cattle and a drought. Benson did not respond. U.S. Senator Bob Kerr introduced a price support program but it too fell on deaf ears. By August about the only major farm organization left supporting the fixed price supports for agriculture was the Farmers Union. Even a "Cattlemen's Caravan" to the national capitol could not convince the Secretary of Agriculture. The Eisenhower Administration was committed to a balanced budget and the politics of Washington were no longer controlled by one political party. It was the beginning of the end for success at parity legislation.

An OFU bus was purchased for the program in 1955 for the purpose of youth trips and lobbying activities. After a couple of trips to the east Coast and considering time of travel of the used bus and cramped conditions, long trips were abandoned for use of the bus. The first Eastern Tour to Washington, D.C. was April, 1956 lead by Lawter. The 50 people attending combined both business and pleasure on the trip. By 1965 Farmers Union had shifted from bus trips to legislative fly-ins.

The organization marked the first 50 years of legislative victories and accomplishments with a celebration at the 1955 annual convention and at a barbecue later in Tishomingo, the site of the first state meeting in 1905. Duffy continued to maintain that success would be achieved for a sliding scale system of parity. Change was in the air, too much politics and changing politics would soon make a directional change in the legislative efforts of the Oklahoma Farmers Union in shaping the next 50 years.

Legislative Action from Farm Roots

In addition to cooperative organization, the need for legislative action ranked as an equal in accomplishing the goal of helping struggling farmers. Organizers and lecturers were dispatched across the countryside to carry impassioned fiery speeches to distraught rural people of the benefit of communicating as one voice to accomplish both objectives. With enough people interested, a local organization was formed to meet. In the beginning of Farmers Union, legislative action began with the discussion of issues, development of farm policies and planning for implementing with local meetings held under shade trees, in barns, homes, schools and churches.

These local meeting often provided humor as they sought better lives under economically depressed conditions. One night about 1938, a group of Farmers Union members met at the Luther Hill schoolhouse in Ellis Co. Shattuck, OK. The members of the local brought oysters and fresh milk. They put the milk and oysters in a pressure cooker on a kerosene stove before the meeting started. They were going to have oyster stew for supper after the meeting. A preacher from the community of Laverne was guest speaker. He talked too long, the audience got tired and everyone was trying to be polite. Soon they began to smell the scorched oyster stew. They debated about eating it, but decided to go ahead as they were all hungry by the time the meeting ended.

In addition to local meeting, county meetings, district and statewide meetings were held. Not only legislative issues were central to any gathering but also the opportunity for recreation. Food was always a motivating force for getting folks to attend, first with potluck and later with catered meals. A box of fruit provided by speakers from the state office was a real treat for members attending early meetings. During the 1950's, the Roger Mills County home of faithful Farmers Union members Augusta Metcalfe, renowned pioneer artist and her son Howard played host to a large Farmers Union gathering. George W. Stone, in his first term as OFU President, selected the site, known as Metcalfe's Grove, to host a Farmers Union picnic on July 27, 1956. The Union had electric lines run down to the grove on the Washita River so that lights and microphones could be used by the speakers that included Stone and Zed Lawer, State Secretary. More than 400 people from around the state attended the Old Settlers and Farmer's Union Picnic. The event included an old timers fiddlers contest, horseshoe pitching, children's contests, prizes for the oldest couple, prizes for the youngest baby and a prize for the longest membership in Farmers Union. The map to the location was drawn and signed by artist Metcalfe.

In addition to local contact, primary communication with members was by newspaper. *The Password* was the first publication territorial members would have received followed by a series of other territorial and state organization publications that became central to spreading the organization's legislative issues among the rank and file members. Resolutions were adopted at the local level and sent to a county convention. Passed resolutions and elected delegates were sent to the state convention – the first held July 1905 in Tishomingo. If the resolution passed muster with the Committee on

Resolutions, state delegations considered it. This became the directive for the legislative program to be passed on the state and national levels.

The organizational effort resulted in members lobbying at the state and national capitols. Lobbying first meant walking, riding horses, a wagon, a buggy, by train, bus and finally by plane. Communication of issues was one-on-one, by letter, telegram and later by telephone, fax and e-mail.

The political influence of the Union was great. Leonard Sherrer, father of former Commissioner of Agriculture Gary Sherrer, recalled to current OFU board member Billy Perrin, that Farmers Union was quite influential during the election process. In Pushmataha Co., the county organization would hold a meeting in the courtroom in the county courthouse and have candidates speak and then vote whom they would support. The candidates they chose to support always won.

A New Day – The Next 50 Years of Legislative Influence

While internal politics had always been part of the Union from day one, partisan politics had grown at a feverish pace in the first five decades of the Farmers Union. It had done what President S.O. Daws warned against in his message to the delegates to the first Indian State Union in 1905 in Tishomingo – it had either become partisan or had an appearance of partisanship. Daws, a member of the forerunner Alliance movement, had a historical memory of what caused the demise of the Farmers Alliance – partisanship. Newly elected President George W. Stone recalled that the Union had little activity in Washington other than Secretary Z.H. Lawter's bus trips and little testimony was being presented. He blamed the officers and board for this situation. They disliked the growing influence of Republicans but farmers needed the Republican votes in Washington. It was time for change of the status quo and Stone led the way away from partisanship. His leadership would shape the direction for the next fifty years with his involvement lasting until well past the 100th year celebration.

During his first month in office in 1956, Stone was pictured in *The Oklahoma Union Farmer* writing to President Dwight Eisenhower. Urging his members to do the same, he entered the controversy of a new farm bill idea that contained only a 90 percent parity clause. He urged its' passage rather than lower price support freezes being advocated by the Administration. From 1956 to 1957 Stone was active in the state and in Washington, especially testifying for peanut and cotton price supports. U.S. Sen. Robert S. Kerr spoke at the southwest Oklahoma regional picnic on April 28, 1956. Kerr often spoke to OFU gatherings and favored FU programs, favored a high parity level and was an outspoken foe of Eisenhower's Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Taft Benson.

With the new Kennedy Administration proposing a new farm program to cut corn and feed grain production but provide for increasing price supports, OFU rallied around the new proposal that promised raising farmers' incomes by 10 to 12 percent. Stone went on the offensive promoting the idea at every local and county meeting. However, initially with the Johnson Administration, Stone took on the president because of a Farm

Bill advocated soil bank that he said would “help no one but the doctors, druggists, lawyers, and big business.” He softened a bit when Johnson called for an extension of current government commodity programs.

Back at the Legislature, Union members Rep. Bill Briscoe and Senator Byron Dacus pushed through H.B. 508 that created a Wheat Commission for the state. The bill allowed the commission to conduct research and market development for wheat utilizing a levied two and one-half mill per bushel promotion fee on Oklahoma marketed wheat. Equally successful with SB 110, Stone gladly watched Governor Henry Bellmon sign the bill into law exempting fertilizer from sales tax – primarily an OFU initiative. The bill was estimated to be worth \$640,000 in savings to state farmers each year in taxes.

In 1967 the Union was finally successful in getting a bill passed which exempted farm machinery from sales taxes. Governor Dewey Bartlett signed the bill into law. Corporate farming reared its head that same year as legislation began to move in the state legislature and the Union was there to fight invoking the work of former member Governor Bill Murray.

Always willing to cross party lines under Stone’s presidency, Union members were happy with the Nixon Administration’s announcement of the Agricultural Act of 1973. The idea was from an earlier Farmers Union proposal. The approach by Harry Truman’s Agriculture Secretary Charles F. Brannan supported farm incomes rather than prices. A “target price” would be established by law for the basic crops of wheat, feed grains, and cotton and the farmer would sell his crops for whatever the market would bring. If the average prices fell below these established targets, the government would give the farmer a check for the difference, with a limit in the bill of \$20,000 per farmer. In 1977, Stone and other agriculture leaders told President Jimmy Carter their plan to cut both acreage and prices unacceptable. Producers were willing to make a reduction in plantings, but the reduction in price supports to 55 percent of parity over a four-year period would be damaging in light of production-cost increases expected during that time. As National President Stone continued his dialogue with Carter. He tried to change the President’s mind on the grain embargo imposed on trade with the Soviet Union. The freeze had dramatically driven grain prices down. When the President refused, Stone decided that Carter was a “one-termer” and told him so. Farmers Union continued its’ fight with President Ronald Reagan when he proposed the elimination of target levels that guaranteed the assured prices that farmers received on their products.

With the election of Jimmie L. Jarrell to succeed Stone, issues such as inflation, energy shortages, and the “off and on again” Russian grain trade deal occupied his time. In 1980, Jarrell and other OFU members lobbied for relief from royalty owners taxation at a windfall profits tax hearing. End the grain embargo was the battle cry of the Union in Washington while at home estate probating relief was achieved in the legislature. In 1981, a support level of \$600 per ton was achieved for peanuts and national debate over grain elevator bankruptcies and farmers stored grain in those elevators ensued and the Union applauded Senator Robert Dole’s efforts on the issue. Testimony was delivered in Washington on the continuing high interest rates and the new national farm bill signed by

President Reagan would lead to a deepening economic depression in farm country. Grassroots rallies for legislative action occupied much of the members' time but failed to get critical farm credit legislation passed in 1982. The Union was successful and assisted in writing a new state law for promoting beef with producer check-off funds of .25 cents per head. With no other game in town, the Union reluctantly supported the Payment-in-Kind program (PIK). Under PIK, farmers could idle up to 50 percent of their production acreage but still receive up to 95 percent of their wheat farm yield from surplus stored grain whereby projected to reduce surpluses and drive up grain prices.

The farm crisis hit full steam during the service of Jack Kelsey's presidency and one of the first actions of his administration was to load members on buses to attend a rally in Ames, Iowa. It was an all out war in opposition to the Reagan farm policies which called for a "free market" but the Union opposed the idea seeing it favored large corporate conglomerates. Financing and income for farmers was the battle cry and fly-ins to Washington, D.C. became frequent. At the legislature, the issue that the Union had fought since the beginning of its' organization became reality as corporate agriculture legislation was passed and signed into law.

The 1990's and a new century has brought equal challenges and opportunities for the Union. Farm policy is inseparable from trade agreements, budgets are tighter, the farm sectors' political influence continues to shrink and the world continues to change and move further from the influence of the land. In 100 years the issues really haven't changed that much and neither has the Oklahoma Farmers Union as its' members continue to carry the banner to help the membership legislatively.

“Youth & Education”

Early-on youth activities were fairly limited, given that most young people were critical to helping on the farm and making a living with limited transportation. Early corn clubs were started in the state around the date of statehood by Farmers Union advocate “Alfalfa Bill” Murray in Johnston County. This beginning is commonly recognized as the forerunner of the 4-H Clubs within Oklahoma. But the Farmers Union organization was destined to create its own history of youth activities over the course of the next century.

In a 1920 printed constitution and by-laws of the Young Folks Auxiliary of the Farmers Union, the preamble and purpose of such an affiliate was “to promote the mental, moral, physical and industrial welfare of our nation; to teach organization and cooperation among our members.” Membership was limited to those under the age of 16, and whose parents held membership in the Farmers Union. Yearly dues for the youth program were set at 25 cents.

At the 1931 national convention, NFU President John Simpson, who was also a former OFU president, provided time for speeches and orations by young people from around the nation on subjects such as cooperation, democracy and world peace. At the conclusion of their addresses, Simpson awarded prizes of \$40 each to the winners as judged by the officers. This was the origin of the later speech contests by state unions, including Oklahoma.

In August 1933, OFU President Tom Cheek and State Secretary Zed Lawter introduced a new idea to revitalize the membership rolls. While offering new members a discounted membership price of 75 cents for the balance of the year, it was announced that trips would be offered to one boy and girl, whose parents were members, to participate in an annual state oratory contest. The two state winners would be awarded free trips to the national convention in Omaha in November.

The contestants’ first subjects were to discuss “Cooperative Marketing” and “The Money Question.” Designed for youngsters between the ages of 12 and 18, the speech contests consisted of 15-minute oral presentations. State winners would go on to participate in the national contest at the convention. Thus began the speech contests for younger members that have been held annually to the present day.

The state was divided into four districts to expand the speech contests in 1935. Male and female winners from each district were selected to give four-minute speeches, with the winners awarded trips to the national convention in Chicago. The state winner, Robert Dickerson, of Claremore, represented Oklahoma at the national competition. A contest for the best essay written by a youngster was also instituted for a time. In 1935, Lorena Powers, of Walters, was selected to present her essay on “The Machine Age” at the national convention.

The youth contests represented the beginning of the Junior Farmers Union in the state, a phase of the Farmers Union movement that was being promoted by the national Union at that time. Because there were only a few regularly organized junior Unions in Oklahoma, the board agreed to encourage more of them. Prior to this time Oklahoma Farmers Union had worked and promoted 4-H Clubs, rather than separate organizations. The state president of 4-H, B.A. Pratt, had previously conducted the speech and essay contests through its organization with Union support.

The first effort devoted to youth activity reporting occurred when OFU President Cheek appointed Henry Osborn, the former 4-H state president and a member of the Junior Farmers Union, as a junior editor. Osborn wrote monthly columns of interest to younger members with the hope of recruiting more young people into the movement.

The Union did increase its young members in 1937, after the board and Cheek sponsored the first Farmers Union local at the college level. Under the leadership of B. A. Pratt and Dr. Henry G. Bennett, president of Oklahoma A & M., a local was organized on campus for students and faculty. An initial membership of more than 200 joined the first day.

In November 1937, the national convention was held in Oklahoma City at the invitation of then-national Secretary J. M. Graves. State leaders organized a number of contests for the delegates, and offered hundreds of dollars in prizes for the winners. Youth also were invited to participate in cow calling contests.

In 1939, "Uncle Ed" Reger, board member and organizer, devoted more of his time to the organization of Farmers Union Juniors in the state. Only eight counties had these types of organizations when he started, but Reger, along with Walter Smith, the secretary of the Barnes local, placed more emphasis on the movement and the numbers increased dramatically. Smith's wife, who was appointed Junior Instructor, also helped organize the first All-State Camp for Juniors at Price's and Turner Falls. The Juniors were brought by pickups and cars to the recreational area for a two-day camp in August 1939. During the course of their stay, campers participated in study lessons in the mornings, and hikes and sightseeing in the afternoons.

In 1941, Dora Barney went to work for the Union as education director, and soon started the camp programs. At first they were family camps held at the Methodist campgrounds near Turner Falls. Board member Jimmy Hayes taught a class on cooperatives. Board member Bill Dolezal and family never missed one. Barney took the leadership role in 1944 to begin the state speech contest. Barney was truly the "mother" of the youth programs we know today in Farmers Union, and is credited for pushing the efforts to prominence and growth.

In the 1940s, both youth and adult winners were rewarded with educational, business and pleasure trips to the nation's Capitol, other East Coast cities and national convention meetings, primarily made by bus.

Barney remained in charge of youth programs until resigning in 1949 to resume her teaching career, protecting her teacher retirement. She returned in later years. As education director, she worked for years with hundreds of young people in junior classes around the state. She had been instrumental in reactivating old locals, promoting Union programs, aiding conferences and supervising camps, thereby earning the respect of the entire membership. She became the first viable candidate to oppose State Secretary Lawter, but withdrew when she realized she did not have the necessary support to win.

Differences with the administration at the time had played into her leaving, and was the first shot over the bough that would soon set the course for the next 50 years. She was replaced by Ima Cheek Bromley, Tom Cheek's daughter, who had served as secretary for her father and for President Duffy. Another true believer in the program was Melva Pancoast, education director in Payne, Pawnee, Logan and Noble counties, who also assisted in Barney's absence.

Youth work, which required completing tasks and filling out a workbook similar to 4-H record books, resulted in the highest youth award of Torchbearer status. Youth were required to attend local meetings, study the issues of cooperatives, corporations, lobbying and farm problems and complete a workbook. When they completed their courses, they were given a triangle pin with a torch attached to it. Currently, it is earned by completing five years of senior youth work.

An interesting new part of the 1952 state convention was the Torchbearer's ceremony. Five young people were awarded pins signifying they had completed five years of work in the Junior Farmers Union program. It was the first time the awards had been presented in the state. The winners were Nancy Stolz, Kingfisher; Delvin Jech, Kingfisher; Joyce Oldman, Spencer; Freddy Kadavy, Kingfisher; and Janelle Miller, Spencer. Dora Barney and Stanley Vogt, directors of education, assisted NFU Director Gladys Talbott Edwards in conducting the ceremony.

In April 1952, an effort to increase junior participation resulted in *The Oklahoma Union Farmer* presenting a special feature about the field workers who helped organize young people around the state. Supporters profiled by the paper included Dora Barney, the English teacher from Ft. Cobb who had served as director of education. She again directed the camps at Turner Falls in 1952.

Another leader recognized in the feature was Mrs. Roy A. Cook, of Kingfisher, a former teacher and stenographer who conducted classes once a month for both junior and junior reserves in her local. Also recognized was Olive E. Latta, of Fargo, a teacher and one of the northwest's most capable fieldworkers.

Mrs. J. H. Coffman, of Spencer, an active member in 4-H and Women's Clubs and a former teacher, was also spotlighted, along with Beatrice Nichols, of Marlow, a graduate of the School for the Blind at Muskogee. The handicapped home economics major was known for working with juniors in the Starr-Beaver local. Her maternal

grandfather, J.T. Armstrong, had been an active organizer in Oklahoma Territory, and was appointed a district organizer in 1904. Armstrong would later edit and publish the *Union Review* newspaper in Ardmore, Indian Territory. Her father, M. A. Nichols, had joined the Farmers Union in 1903. Also active on the Starr-Beaver local was Anna Nichols, a widowed mother of six, who farmed 230 acres, served as publicity director for her local and taught junior classes.

Other ladies who always helped organize and conduct camps were: Pauline Peters, Yukon, the director of the Mayhew Local in Canadian County; Eunice Stejskal, Yukon, who served as publicity director and taught classes; and Ruth M. Wood, Grimes, a member of the Rose Hill Local where Tom Cheek maintained his membership.

Other early outstanding local youth leaders included: Gertrude Flesher, Cheyenne; Geneva Clemons, Duke; Dorothy Bailey, Watonga; Katy Silzer, Tulsa Co.; Flo Burtnett, Shattuck; Evelyn and Ed Preble, Norman; and Maxine Kastl, Perkins.

In addition to Torchbearer status, another reward for involvement in youth activities was to attend All-States Camps, which, in the 1950s were held in Evergreen, Colo., at an old Civilian Conservation Corp camp.

Rosemary Eaklor, Yukon, daughter of OFU Vice President Bill Dolezal, came through the youth program, and eventually went to work for NFU in Denver. One of the accomplishments she listed was to find property in Bailey, Colo., where present camps are held.

In 1954, Lawter was successful in convincing board members to purchase a 50-passenger bus to transport members and youth to national conventions and lobbying trips. Free trips were also provided to those who won the state speech contest, signed 60 new members per year or organized new locals. The bus ownership was short-lived; in a few years, it was sold.

With the 1956 election of George Stone as OFU President, Barney was persuaded to return on a full-time basis, and take charge of the entire youth movement. That year's summer camps were nine days with 249 campers. A one-day leaders' conference saw 32 attend. In October 1956, 194 people attended the OFU camp for "Teen-agers at Turner Falls," a new record.

Although Farmers Union had been involved in sponsoring speech contests earlier with Lawter as state secretary, December 10-15, 1956, was the first OFU contest that resembled the current contest. Lawter was in charge of the contests. A five-minute speech on "My Organization – the Part it Plays Toward Keeping the Family Farmer on the Land," was the topic. Participating organizations included FFA, FHA, 4-H, home demonstration clubs, Junior Farmers Union, Soil Conservation and Rural Electrification.

A new board of directors elected in 1960 also marked the beginning of a new youth program. The board established 20 OFU college scholarships for young members.

The \$200 scholarships went to any state college or university for the following year, and were made available to applicants who had attended at least one junior camp, and whose families were Union members. Thereafter, the awards were increased in amounts over the years.

The John F. Kennedy Administration asked the Oklahoma Union to help sponsor one of its programs in 1962. The director of the Agricultural Division of the Peace Corps asked Barney to serve the state region on an informal basis. She immediately began recruiting farm youth to serve as volunteers for the program.

Arvle A. Haire, a former vocational agriculture teacher, was hired in 1965 to assist President Stone and youth programs. Seven youth camps were conducted that summer.

Oklahoma Torchbearers took an active role assisting at the national convention in 1968. In September 1968, young adults attending Southwestern State College in Weatherford adopted a charter and formed the Southwestern State Farmers Union Collegiate Club. Barney helped to organize it at the initial meeting, and the local manager of the farm cooperative was named as the sponsor. To encourage the students, Barney distributed copies of "The Corporate Invasion of American Agriculture" for the students to study.

With much fanfare, Barney retired in 1972. As a Farmers Union employee, she proudly remembered she had listened to more than 3,000 contest speeches, supervised 6,000 young people at summer camps in Oklahoma and Colorado (national camp) and worked with more than 300 Farmers Union scholarship winners. She toured the East with speech winners 12 times, and each year conducted a series of leadership training programs around the state. She received hundreds of letters and cards from former youth expressing appreciation for her guidance and advice through OFU.

Following Barney's retirement, Joan Bailey, secretary to President Stone, assumed additional responsibilities to direct the young people.

OFU President Jimmy Jarrell worked to increase the amount of scholarships offered by the Farmers Union. Soon the scholarships were increased from \$200 to \$400 per year. A few years later, the amount was increased again to \$500. Currently, the amounts range from \$650 to \$1,000, depending upon the level of involvement by the youth.

In June 1983, Jarrell named Greg Williams, a participant in the youth program for many years, as full-time director of education. He was the first full-time director since Barney's retirement. In 1985, Lee Streetman, newspaper editor, was given additional duties as education director.

Bailey, former education director, passed away of cancer in April 1985. OFU established a memorial youth scholarship in her honor to recognize her commitment to OFU and the youth program.

Kris Ann Weidner Moyer, former state youth participant, joined the NFU as the national education director in 1986. OFU President Jack Kelsey appointed Weldon Schieffer as assistant director of the youth and education program, to work with farm programs director Burton Thompson, and to sponsor the youth camps.

In 1988, a Japanese agriculture exchange program with the Prefecture of Japan, coordinated through the Lieutenant Governor's office, began. The program had been in operation since 1985, but OFU did not become part of the effort until 1988. Young people were selected through an essay and interview process. That same year, a new youth textbook was authored and published by Flo Burnett, and new youth director, Jim Bates, was added to the staff.

A short time later, the Farmers Union Foundation, designed to fund youth and education programs, was established in Oklahoma City. Its function was to fund scholarships, speech contests, summer youth camps and young farmer programs.

With the April 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, word came that one of the bombing victims was Woodrow "Woody" Clifford Brady, who had won the 1971 state championship speech contest. The 41-year-old was the first African-American ever to win the state title. Brady had been a customer of the Federal Employees Credit Union at the moment of the explosion.

For many years, OFU has supported the state's youth, even outside the organizations' own programs, by investing in state and county premium auctions for livestock exhibited by 4-H and FFA youth.

Recent youth program leaders have included Kerensa Darnell, Melissa Sharp, Mandy Driskill and Shelly Bilderback.

In recent years, adult education programs have included women's breakfasts and luncheons at state conventions. Women's conferences have become part of the annual activities as well, including both educational and entertainment activities. Leadership development programs also have been added to the list of activities.

In addition to speech contests, current youth activities include poster contests, scholarships, camps, judging contests, livestock achievement contests and livestock handling events. Each activity involves hundreds, and sometimes thousands, in terms of youth participation. Many of the current youth activities include both OFU members and non-members.

“Meeting the Insurance Mission”

In 1919 delegates to the OFU state convention directed the organization to form the Oklahoma Farmers Union Mutual Fire and Lightning Insurance Company to serve rural areas in covering farm buildings, household goods, farm implements, farm products and livestock. A tornado clause and a death benefit were added later.

Using its’ political strength, the organization secured passage of a law that enabled a farm organization to insure the properties of its’ members without capital or outside control by the Commission of Insurance. The legislation meant that the Union could make its own rules, fix its own rates, and settle its own losses.

Z.H. “Zed” Lawter, OFU President John Simpson’s neighbor and Farmers Union member in Custer County, moved to Oklahoma City to take charge of the newly formed insurance company. Before being chartered, however, Lawter had to find 1,000 members who would apply for a policy, and no policy could be less than \$500. With only 284 policyholders the company began January 1922 and was delivered through the farm network of local organization secretaries.

Each agent received a policy fee of \$1.00; plus, upon delivery of the policy a further fee of twenty-five cents per \$100 of its face value. It was a small sum, but the agents worked hard and by 1921 the membership rolls for the state were 23,000.

Coverage of Mr. W.A. Stone of Byars for \$675 of coverages for his home, livestock and equipment in January 1922 cost \$4.35 and provided coverage for five years. His policy number was 69.

As time passed more coverages were offered by company policies. A tornado clause was soon added, followed a few years later by a death benefit policy. Simpson calling the latter program “Helpers,” introduced a plan to provide up to \$200 in burial expenses at a cost of ten cents for each member of a family. The “Helpers” plan moved slowly in the beginning, but Simpson’s continuous pleading and cajoling got the program underway.

The unusual luck that several years passed before a loss had to be paid assuredly helped the plan survive. The “Helpers” listed Oklahoma Congressmen Jed Johnson, Will Rogers and Wilburn Cartwright all as participants in 1940. Over time members were assessed when a member died to assist the families but this voluntary effort would ultimately cause the demise of the effort when members failed to send their contributions.

The first beneficiary did not actually receive the full \$200. On February 27, 1922, the family of W.A. Townsend of Broken Bow, who died at the age of eighty-six became the first recipient of the death benefit clause. At the time only 243 members had registered, which meant that the family was paid \$24.30, the total fund in the treasury. State officers added another seventy-five cents to the amount.

The first loss for the Mutual company came only a few months later. Brother Ed Roesley of the Cottonwood Local, No. 298 in Custer County filed the first claim when a

heavy windstorm unroofed his barn on April 10, 1922. After a proof of loss was verified, Lawter sent a check for \$55, the full amount of the loss assessed by them.

In the beginning local agents or secretaries would sell the policy, adjust a claim and often do the repairs on the loss. The growth in the insurance business resulted in moving the headquarters from rural Custer County to Oklahoma City. By 1924, fifty percent of the members participated in the insurance company. In 1935, the insurance department reported \$45 million in force and over 13,000 policyholders.

In 1938 a contract with Lloyd's of London was negotiated to underwrite Union insurance policies. That same year the Hail-Crop Insurance Department was created as was the Union Mutual Insurance Company, instituted to insure churches, schoolhouses, community halls and lodges.

The company began writing automobile insurance in 1945 with the Farmers Union Automobile and Casualty Co., a national mutual company operated as a cooperative by the National Farmers Union.

With new requirements for insurance reserves, the groups' fraternal role toward operating the business changed in the mid-1950s' with a well-capitalized objective to meeting claims and operational needs. In 1956 the company began documenting insured's property by cameras and the Union Mutual Company set-up shop next door apart from the OFU.

OFU began in 1959 the Union Casualty Co. writing its' own automobile insurance separate from the National Farmers Union Automobile and Casualty Co. In this same timeframe, a new property company began and a major interest was acquired in a life insurance company – Farmers and Ranchers Life Insurance Company.

A controlling majority was achieved in this company by 1966 and later was sold in 1988 with Farmers Union agents continuing to write business for the company. The company was reacquired in 2000 and brought back to the state.

In 1982, the State of Oklahoma eliminated the historic exemption to the insurance code and required the Oklahoma Farmers Union to form the domestic Oklahoma Farmers Union Mutual Insurance Company. Most recently the company has expanded outside Oklahoma by acquiring Twin Falls Mutual, a property insurance company in Idaho, and reopened as American Farmers and Ranchers Mutual.

In 2007, delegates at the 102nd State Convention voted to change the name of the insurance company from Oklahoma Farmers Union Mutual to American Farmers and Ranchers Mutual Insurance so that expansion into other states could continue and prosper. Although the name changed, the company still has the same officers, directors, agents, home office, products and services that our customers have known and trusted for years. Many of the agents and officers in the company and organization are multi-generational resulting in customer loyalties and trust.