

# We Had Everything



# But Money

*by Carl Albert with Danney Goble*

When I was a boy, I often heard my grandfathers speak of "territorial fever." It was a condition that had stirred my family for generations. My earliest Albert ancestors came from Germany's Rhine valley to Pennsylvania in the early 1700s. My mother's people were of Scotch, English, French, and German descent. Whatever their different origins, they were of common pioneer stock. Most of them reached America before the Revolutionary War; all were here by 1800. They fought in each of America's

wars from the revolution onward. All went west at early dates. All continued west, part of the human waves that settled the continent.

The particular "fever" that my immediate kin experienced occurred as the last of those waves swept across the nation's final frontier. As the nineteenth century ended, virtually all of the North American continent had been settled, its soil plowed, and its resources applied. Everywhere this was true, except for a large hole that most maps still labelled "The Indian Nations." Now Oklahoma, those lands lay as a patchwork of Indian domains, each assigned to a different tribe, each closed to all but a trickle of white pioneers, all ready for the next outburst of "territorial fever."

For the Choctaw nation, which occupied eight million acres in the southeast corner, the fever rose just after the Civil War with the discovery of coal. After 1872, when the Missouri-Kansas-Texas (MKT) tracks reached the coal fields, the fever became an epidemic. Within a generation, nearly fifty mining companies opened more than one hundred mines in the area. Rich veins of what was called the "best steam coal west of Pennsylvania" ran two to eight feet thick and produced three million tons of coal annually. The town of McAlester lay at the center of the bustling activity. Named for J. J. McAlester, a storekeeper and Indian trader who had opened the first commercial mine, the sleepy village of 646 people in 1900 was Oklahoma's first industrial city with 12,000 residents 10 years later.

My own family was part of that increase and typical of it. My grandfather, Granville Albert, had been a farmer most of his life. He had farmed in Kansas for a while but was living in Barry County, Missouri, when he heard about the Choctaw country. In the late 1880s, he took his entire family there. My mother's people crossed the Red River about the same time, coming north from Gainesville, Texas. The men on both sides did work related to mining. My mother's father, Robert Carlton Scott, and his brother, Charles, were carpenters who built houses and mining tipples for the coal companies. Grandfather Albert briefly fired the boiler at the Number Nine mine in Krebs, before he opened a hotel down the MKT line at Savanna. Mostly, though, they did what they always had done. They farmed, hoping to get better land, better crops, and better markets.

My father, Ernest Homer Albert, was my family's first to work underground. He began mining coal at sixteen and became a well-paid, highly skilled miner. An old Scotsman taught him to be a

## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

gasman, a job that fully earned him his pay and demanded his skills, for it was one of the most dangerous in the industry. Before the mine opened each morning, he would go alone into each dark entry and room. Armed only with a tiny lamp to register lethal gases, he would probe each cavity, checking for fire, air circulation, and accumulated gas. A good gasman could turn a potential tragedy into a routine day. On the other hand, a gasman's error could bring grief and disaster to an entire community.

That happened, not once but many times. There were no fewer than ten major mine disasters in the McAlester area before statehood. On the average, the blood of thirteen men stained every million tons of coal mined. One of those men was Lewis Durman, one of my uncles. He was the victim of a rock fall in the Number One Samples mine. After my uncle's death, Mr. Samples gave Aunt Minnie some leftover lumber. Some of her kin used it to build an extra story on the house she owned. With the added space, she could take in boarders to eke out a living for herself and her three small children. The only other thing Mr. Samples gave her was the right to dig around the slate dump for any scrap coal that might have fallen into the pile. He offered to pay three dollars per ton for what the widow and orphans could scrape together. That was her com-



*Albert's life began in the Bolen-Darnell mining camp where his father helped open the "Little Bolen" (above) in 1910 (Courtesy Carl Albert).*

compensation for a husband killed working in the world's deadliest mines.

My father was boarding with Aunt Minnie when he married my mother, Leona Ann Scott, on March 2, 1907. After their wedding, my parents moved into the Bolen-Darnell mining camp. They lived in a cheap, unpainted, four-room house. It was a company house, and it sat across the street from the company store. Beside it ran the MKT spur that carried coal from the big Bolen mine, which lay two blocks west.

It was in that company house in that mining camp that I was born on the tenth day of May, 1908. Those who recall the occasion better than I remember that it was about eight o'clock on a bright and beautiful spring morning when my father rushed to the company store to summon Dr. Virgil Barton. Three miners' wives helped the doctor, my mother—and me. I was named for my mother's father—Carl being a shortened form of Carlton—and my father's brother, Bert.

My earliest memories go back to the Bolen camp. Most are trivial, such as being sent across the street to buy a loaf of bread and returning from the company store with a sack of candy. Another was a horrifying event—the shooting death of a man near our front yard. Frank Miller had black, curly hair, and he was a great favorite of mine. He boarded with our next door neighbors. One morning the man of the house unexpectedly returned home early to find Miller in bed with his wife. The neighbor grabbed his gun as Miller dashed out the back door and headed for our house. The first shot missed as Miller passed through our yard. The second killed him instantly. My mother was looking through the window and saw the fatal shot. She was a witness at the trial. The jurors acquitted the neighbor.

More substantial events left less permanent impression. I do not at all recall the birth of my brother, Noal, in February of 1910. I do know that I and everyone else have always called him "Budge." Only later did I learn that the nickname came from my own babyish efforts to say "brother." Budge it is.

With two babies, my mother became very fearful of the dangers of my father's mining. Those fears were nearly realized while my father was working in a mine in Baker, a tiny community three miles west of McAlester. Working underground one day, my father was hit by a large, falling rock. Had not another miner been there to roll it off him, he likely would have died. My mother had had all

## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

she could take, so she laid down the law; my father had to get out of the mining business.

That is how I came to live in Bug Tussle.

Bug Tussle is not a city. It is not even a town. It is (or was until 1968) a rural school district. It lies along Gaines Creek, ten miles northeast of McAlester. It runs about four miles east and west, five miles north and south. When we moved there, my grandfather Scott already lived in the community with about fifty or sixty other families. Like other rural communities, its center and most important feature was the schoolhouse. Before statehood, there were no public schools in the Indian lands. Subscription schools, usually charging each pupil a dollar per month, were about all there were. There were at least two subscription schools in private homes before 1900, when parents volunteered to put up a schoolhouse. It, too, was a subscription school until statehood gave it public, tax-supported status. About 1912, it was replaced by a new two-room school built one mile to the south.

Both buildings were not only schools but community centers, sites of preaching, singing, and holiday festivities. The story is told that it was at one of these that the school and community acquired their memorable name. Thousands of insects would swarm around the kerosene lamps that lit the building for night use in the early 1900s. Particularly during the summers, the insects were fearsome. One resident—a rowdy young man whose name was Ran Woods—took to referring to the place as a real bug tussle. Bug Tussel it is.

Since all my father had ever done was mine coal and farm, if he had to leave the mines he had to find a farm. That was hard because the allotment of the Choctaw lands just before statehood left land difficult to buy for a farmer. Most were tenant farmers renting from landlords who had acquired the Indian allotments. For instance, Grandpa Scott's family was renting land owned by the country doctor who served the community. We initially rented a farm owned by Kyle Tennant, the doctor's daughter. After a year there, my father rented a large piece of bottom land a quarter mile east. Because it was too large to work by himself, he went in with his father and brother. The three of them rented and farmed the land for four years.

The Bug Tussle community had few people of wealth. J. J. McAlester, himself, had a country home, large ranch, and several thousand acres of land. But that lay four miles north of us, in the community known as Reams Prairie. In Bug Tussle, itself, the



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*Carl Albert as a baby in 1908 (Courtesy Carl Albert Center Congressional Archives, University of Oklahoma).*

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resident gentry were families like Robert Sawyer's. Mr. Sawyer had a large ranch, cattle, a fine white frame house on Fish Creek, and the distinction of owning the community's first automobile.

Otherwise, most of the families there were like ours—poor dirt-farmers. John Virden, who grew up there with me, later described the place as "poor as gully dirt, the land and the people. Not just kinda poor, but real poor, the kind of poverty you can not only see, you can feel it, and taste it, and smell it." How we all made it I will never know. But because my father was the hardest working man I have ever known, we always had enough to eat. While our clothes were few and sometimes patched, my mother saw to it that they were always clean. Like Budge says, we did not think we were poor. We had everything but money.

One of the things we had was family in abundance. All of my living grandparents lived nearby. Grandpa and Grandma Albert lived on our place, and my father's only brother lived two hundred

## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

yards away with his own two children. Grandpa Scott and my mother's stepmother lived a quarter mile up the road. My mother's only full sister, Myrtle, lived in a town called Alderson, just a few miles away. Dozens of other relatives lived nearby. Our family ties were strong and deep.

The nearness of my grandparents was especially important to me because they provided a living link to my own roots. Grandpa Scott would tell me about his own parents, grandparents, and even great-grandparents. Grandma Albert—her name was Mary Jane, but everyone called her Mollie—was always pleased to have me ask about my ancestors. She loved to talk about her own childhood in Kentucky. One day she was washing dishes, and I wiped for her. She told me about her own father, a really bright man, small in stature like herself. Her mother's name had been Ash, and she told me that she had an uncle named Green Ash. Then she laughed.

Grandpa Albert hardly ever talked about his ancestors. His own grandparents had died before he was old enough to know them. Also, Grandpa Albert did not talk about much of anything. He was a very quiet person who always attended to his own business and never bothered anyone else. My brother and I would sometimes work with him in the field. He would never raise his voice, not even to his horses. Neither I nor anybody I have ever asked once heard him raise his voice to anything or anybody. He was a devoted Baptist, but he kept his religion and his politics to himself.

Grandpa Scott shared his own opinions—particularly on religion—with everybody. He was well read, very witty, and always talkative. He got religion late, for in his younger days he was very high tempered.

Not long after he had come into the Choctaw lands, he and his brother Charles killed a man in Krebs. In June, 1896, a man named Frank Newburn shot and killed their oldest brother. Grandad ran out with a shotgun, and Newburn started shooting at him. He tried to shoot back, but the shotgun was empty, so he hit him in the head and knocked him down. As Newburn started to get up, Uncle Charlie took the pistol out of his hand and shot him between the eyes. He lay there, next to their brother—two dead men lying two feet apart.

My grandfather and great-uncle buried their brother in the McAlester cemetery. A federal marshal arrested them at the graveyard right after the funeral. He also arrested their father, who was just an innocent old man. The marshal took my grandfather and



uncle over to the federal court in Fort Smith for trial. Because my grandfather had two little girls, the authorities let him post bond. Uncle Charlie had no children, so he stayed in jail until the trial. It was ten months before they were acquitted for acting in self-defense. After trial, my grandfather met up with the marshal who had arrested them all. He pulled him out of a store and offered to fight a duel with guns. He put a chip on his shoulder. He dared the lawman to knock it off, so he could kill him. He meant it, and the marshal knew it. My grandfather had to satisfy himself with beating the man senseless.

It was later that Grandpa Scott got religion and was "born again." He turned completely around. He sought a convert in every person he met. A Pentecost, he preached in nearly every church house and school building in the area, as well as many homes. He was an unrelenting missionary for the Lord.

His wife shared his zeal. My mother's own mother had died when she and her sister were children. My grandfather remarried and had three more children. His second wife was a small, dark-complected Texan whose maiden name was Mary Elizabeth Clark. Owing to her looks, everyone always called her Pedro. She had attended a college in Texas and was the only one in the family or the community with much formal education. But she was a literalist on the Bible, particularly in its prophetic and apocalyptic visions.

My grandfather's religious prejudices ran deep, but his own convictions were sure. I know that I was satisfied that everything he talked about was correct up until I was about thirteen. For instance, because he believed so strongly in divine healing, I believed it was almost a sin to take medicine. Once when I suffered from fever and chills, the only cure I wanted was Grandpa Scott's prayer.

Grandma Albert believed in Sloan's Chill Tonic. She most certainly did not believe in Grandpa Scott's prayers. Her own religious convictions were just as strong as my grandfather's. Her prejudices ran just as deep. She was a Baptist, and she rejected every doctrine and every belief that did not square with Baptist teachings. This including faith healing.

She tried to push her beliefs on to her own children. When they were young, she would haul my father and his brother to Baptist services twice on Sunday, as well as Wednesday nights. My father went no further in school than the fourth grade. He probably would



## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

have gone longer, but the family moved to Krebs. The only school there was operated by the Catholics. When he came home one day carrying a catechism, his mother jerked him out of school and never let him go back.

Aside from her religious prejudices, Grandma Albert was one of the most remarkable persons I ever knew. She and Grandpa Albert lived in a two-room log shack, but after they had lived there a few months one would have thought it had been touched by a fairy's wand. Tiny, quick, and industrious, she could do more for a run-down cabin and weed-ridden yard than anyone I ever saw; and she could do it with practically nothing. There were flowers all over her yard. There was never a stick or a tin can out of place. She had little money for niceties, so she made them. Her hands turned old rug strips into bright crocheted coverings. Her fingers knitted and sewed and made beautiful lace curtains to adorn the old windows. She dusted her furniture daily, and she scrubbed her wooden floors at least twice a week.

My father inherited his mother's zeal for work, though not for religion. It seems that my grandmother's passions had burned any significant beliefs out of him. Like most of my people, he was small in stature. His own father stood five feet, two; his mother five feet. He, himself, was a very stocky five feet, five inches. With muscles like pine knots, my father was known through the community for his wrestling talent. Even more was he known as a worker. With no education to speak of, he never doubted his ability to get his family through good times and bad. He never gave us cause to doubt it either.

I respected my father; I loved my mother. Where he gave strength, she gave love. She was small, too—about five feet, two and one hundred ten pounds. That hardly measured the love she gave her children. They were her life, her devotion. She would clean us for school, comfort our petty hurts, and worry over our mischief. Like my father, she had no more than a fourth-grade subscription school education. But she read books, particularly the Bible, to her children. She read it with the same fundamentalist convictions as Grandpa Scott, her father. Her concern for our welfare prohibited drinking, dancing, and gambling. If my father smoked, he would have to go off somewhere to do it. She would not allow anyone, including our father, to smoke in front of her children, and he respected her beliefs. We were nearly grown before any of us saw him use tobacco.

While we were on the farm that my father and his kin rented, we lived in a house typical of the Bug Tussle community. It was a double log cabin, two log rooms separated by a dog trot—an open breezeway—running north and south. Attached to the eastern room was a small lean-to that we used as a kitchen. A frame smokehouse sat to the rear, on the north side. Drinking water came from an old well near the house.

In the backyard stood the universal and indispensable instrument of life in rural Oklahoma. It was a huge, black, iron boiling pot, its three short legs resting on rocks. In the summer, it heated bath water for us shoeless children to wash our feet nightly. In the fall, it converted ashes and hog fat into lye soap. Year round, it boiled our clothes, which my mother then washed with the lye soap on a scrub board set in a number three wash tub.

The barn was about thirty yards to the west. Surrounding it were cattle- and horse-lots, pig pens, and chicken coops. My father usually kept ten to twelve hogs. Cows provided milk and a few calves to butcher. We always had horses for farm work and riding.



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*At the age of two, young Carl Albert became a brother with the birth of Budge (Courtesy Carl Albert Center Congressional Archives).*

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## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

Mine was that shade of grey that gave him the name "Blue." Adjoining the barn lots was a large garden that produced our vegetables. Fruit came from the orchard of trees and berry vines east of the house. My father kept the corn crib filled with corn, the shed with hay, and the smokehouse with hams and bacon.

Inside the house, there was no sign of luxury. A wood cook stove and family dining table occupied the lean-to. The children slept in the west log room. My parents slept in the east room. It was also our "living room," where we gathered around the potbellied stove that was our sole source of winter heat. Other than the Bible, there were never many books. Newspapers covered the walls. They were all we could afford for wallpaper.

All in all, that layout was about average in Bug Tussle. Few Bug Tussle people had more worldly goods than we. Several had much less.

We were living there when my sister was born exactly two weeks before my fifth birthday. As I left my bed and entered the breeze-way, I saw a strange horse and buggy in the front yard. They belonged to the community's doctor. He carried his black pill bag out of my parents' room. When I came in, I saw my mother lying in bed. Grandma Albert was washing the pink baby in a galvanized dishpan. My parents named her Kathryn, and she grew to be a beautiful girl with my mother's black eyes and black hair. She was to be the one girl in the family.

My extended family continued its nomadic ways. Grandpa Scott moved out of Bug Tussle to a farm near Adamson. In 1916, Grandpa Albert moved into the house where Grandpa Scott had been living. Uncle Bert followed his wife's people out west that same year to grow cotton in Beckham County. For a year, we were all that were left on the big farm that we once had all worked together.

In January, 1917, we moved, too. It was about a mile west. My father rented 120 acres from Guy McCulloch. Mr. McCulloch put up a barn on the place and hired a well driller to dig us a well. Grandpa Albert selected the site, as he did for most of the wells in the community. He always used a peach tree water witch. Good water came in at eighty feet.

Our new house was one of the Bolen camp houses that Mr. McCulloch moved on to the place. It was similar to the one in which Budge and I had been born. Two more Albert boys would be born there. Homer was born a month after the United States entered World War I. My youngest brother, Earl, was born on December 7,

1921. Thus, all four of us were born in unpainted coal mining camp houses. Only the last one was born in one that we owned. My father had bought the place from Mr. McCulloch in 1918.

Earl would always be the family's baby and precious for it. His birth was a blessing to all of us. Homer was a determined and fearless boy. He would often frighten our youngest brother by taking him through the little country cemetery. Even as a small child, the blackest darkness held no terror for him. His life was cut short by wounds suffered at Normandy on June 9, 1944. When I heard of his death, I remembered my mother's unusual sorrow after his birth. One day she had called me to her side. She said that she just could not stop crying. She had brought a boy into a world at war. She was consumed with dread at the sadness and horror that might await him. Her own early death spared her the knowledge of Homer's fate in another world war, the one that began on Earl's twentieth birthday.

All four of us kids called our parents "Mama" and "Papa." Their generation used "Ma" and "Pa"—the terms they, themselves, used to address our grandparents. Words like "Daddy" were unused until my own children's generation. To us, that term sounded babyish, and "Mother" and "Father" were too formal for ordinary speech. My parents were Mama and Papa to me as long as they lived.

While we all lived together in Bug Tussle, we shared the family's labor. Mama and Papa worked tirelessly. The home was my mother's domain. She kept her scant furnishings orderly and clean. She did the same for her children, too. From time to time, my father would add to the family's income by working in the coal mines. This occasionally meant that he would toil underground in distant mines through the week before riding the train home for weekends with the family. The farm, though, remained his major work. At times, Papa would hire an extra hand. Always, he made full use of ours.

Each of us worked before and after school. Daily we would collect and haul the wood and water that my mother would use for heating, cooking and washing. Budge and I usually fed and watered the animals. Milking was another of our daily chores, done morning and evening. Cows, unlike boys, did not mind cold weather. It seems that my hands were never colder than when on a cow's udder on a typical January morning.

Our seasonal work moved to the natural rhythms of the crops. Spring and summer meant chopping (weeding) cotton, an activity calculated to tire every muscle and blister every finger. Summer's

## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

hottest days seemed reserved for baling hay and threshing oats. In the 100 degree heat, it was all one needed to know of hell. But fall was worst of all. Then hell became real. It was cotton picking time.

The long rows of fleecy cotton plants stretching across a wide field made an awesome sight. The thousands of stalks must have been designed by Satan, himself, to remind us of the bottomless pit. The short plants would not allow us to pick from our knees. In a few hours they numbed, rendering us unfit to walk. Stooping merely transferred the agony to the lower back, quickly making it impossible to stand. The cursed burrs pricked my fingers until the blood ran. This surely was the temporal form of the eternal damnation of Grandpa Scott's sermons.

For all of the pain it inflicted upon us, the Bug Tussle farm made us a good living. A succession of good crops and decent prices had provided us the money to own at least a place of our own. When they continued, my father would actually have money in the bank. At a minimum, the farm sustained us.

All our basic food was homegrown. Gardens gave us the vegetables that Mama served fresh in season and canned for year-round use. In a wood-burning oven, she baked biscuits every morning, cornbread every two or three days. Wheat bread—what we called "light bread"—was a once-a-week luxury. The pig pens gave us our basic meat: pork, ham, bacon, and sausage, all of which we prepared ourselves. Without refrigeration, beef was less common. About once every three or four weeks, we or a neighbor would butcher a calf and divide it with the community.

In other ways, we had to meet our own needs. The swarming insects that gave our community its quaint name had no charm at all in the summer, when clouds of mosquitoes brought malaria. Most kids caught it every summer. It is a wonder more did not die. The only way we had to fight it was with tin cans of burning oily rags to keep the mosquitoes at bay. They were about as useless as old Doc Tennant's little bag of pills.

More routine childhood diseases also required home remedies. Doc Tennant's recommendation for mumps, for instance, was mare's milk. When I had the disease, we happened to have a mare nursing a new colt. I took one drink of the milk and declared that I would rather have the mumps. There was no cure at all for the "seven year itch" that afflicted the state during World War I. That common label was only slight exaggeration, since the malady persisted for months. Like others, my body was covered with sores

that I scratched until they bled. Even Doc Tennant could not treat it. All we ever found that would ease the suffering was sulphur. For a while, everyone smelled like a sulphur well.

The international outbreak of swine flu after the war stretched its deadly hand into our little community. For that, we had no defense at all. Several of our neighbors died. One was the brother of my good friend, John Virden.

Johnny Virden's family was poor, even by Bug Tussle standards. He had lost his mother at an early age, and his father was an old man to have such a young child. Several of his older relatives were already living in Bug Tussle when Johnny moved into our old log house on the Kyle Tennant place.

Years later, he would describe his first recollection of me. As he remembered it, I was walking down a country lane that ran due north of the Bug Tussle school. By then I was in school, so I was reading a book. According to John, I was oblivious to the world as I walked along, intently reading, my bare feet kicking up a great cloud of red dust. He recalls that I was dressed in the best Bug Tussle fashion:

blue and white striped overalls with mismatching blue denim patches on the knees. [I] wore a hickory shirt and a broad-brimmed straw hat that had "shot up to seed" from being rained on too many times. And that was all. . . . We said "howdy" and told each other our names, and shook hands with the one-pump handshake peculiar to country kids and fullblood Indians.

Johnny and I became fast friends, perhaps because we shared a capacity for innocent mischief. One occasion occurred down at the local swimming hole on Bucklucksy Creek. In the summer's drought, my father had rolled his farm wagon into the creek's shallow side. The creek's water would soak the wooden wheels to keep their iron tires snug. Johnny and I decided that it would be great fun to pull the wagon over to the other, deeper side. We did. We had a good laugh as it disappeared beneath ten feet of muddy water.

A week or so later, we smiled—to ourselves—when my father stopped by Mr. Virden's place to ask if he had seen his wagon. It seemed he could not find it, and he thought Johnny's father might have borrowed it. He had not. But he did have an idea.

With us boys in tow, Mr. Virden took Papa down to the creek. The men stripped and waded in. It was Johnny's father who found the wagon, when he stepped on its tongue. It took the two men and the

## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

two boys to pull it out. Only the boys saw the humor in it. John Virden can finish the story:

Once the wagon was hub-deep and snugged to a tree with a rope, each father cut a limb that looked as big as a hoe handle. For the next three minutes any passerby would have thought somebody was killing a yearling in that thicket, the hollering and bellowing was that loud.

In time, Johnny's father wandered away from Bug Tussle, taking him to the little community of Ulan. I lost track of him after that, only to meet him again when we were both students at the University of Oklahoma. He was studying journalism, but what he really wanted was an appointment to West Point. He could never find a

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*During Albert's youth, nearby McAlester was the center of southeastern Oklahoma's mining industry (Courtesy Western History Collections).*

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sponsor, so he went into the Army Reserves and built a career as a newspaperman. Eventually, he landed on Dwight Eisenhower's staff. He served as Ike's public relations officer when the general headed the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Since his Bug Tussle days, when ability counted, John Virden had it. He won several army citations for a superior performance.

John Virden was largely self-educated. As soon as he got near a



library, he started reading. He taught himself more about the Civil War than any man I ever knew. He knew strategy, tactics, and details by the thousand, particularly about the Battle of Gettysburg. His grandfather had been an unsung Confederate soldier there, and John became so expert on it that he laid the wreath honoring the Southern dead at the battle's centennial ceremony. It was U. S. Grant's grandson who laid the Northern wreath. In time, John Virden would be invited to lecture at the school he could never attend—West Point.

I always think of Johnny Virden whenever anyone wonders how a notable person could come from a place as obscure as Bug Tussle, Oklahoma. That tiny, rural community with the curious name had within it people who were just like Carl Albert and John Virden. They are people I have known and respected all my life. There was certainly nothing special about the two of us then or there.

Even our innocent escapades were typical. They helped lighten the heavy routine of farm work. Fishing and hunting helped, too. It seemed that every boy had a .22 rifle and single-barrel shot gun. Abundant quails and rabbits were our game. If there was a hunting season, we did not know it. We certainly paid no attention to it.

Staying overnight with a friend was always a great treat, particularly if that friend was Bill Anderson. Our friendship stretched beyond my memory; I cannot recall not knowing him. His mother was Mama's dearest Bug Tussle friend, and his family was almost as close to me as my own.

When he was a boy, Bill Anderson was loaded down with more names than any person I ever knew. For some reason, his teachers called him "Charlie." All of his friends called him "Mook." His father called him "Smook." When he finally got to high school in another community he ended the confusion—or maybe added to it—by declaring that his name was "Bill." His birth certificate gave his name as William Kitchell Anderson. If he was ever called "William" or "Kitchell," I never heard of it.

I loved staying over with him (under whatever name) and his older brothers, Roy and Ray. We were known to swipe watermelons in season and hunt out of season. Later, I enjoyed playing with his little sister Ruth and brother Howard—who was called "Happy" and now goes by the name "James."

More organized entertainment came in such special events as the annual Pittsburg County Fair. The fair was partly good-natured competition between folks for the best livestock and finest produce.

## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

To a country kid, it was also a special world of mechanical rides, thrilling side shows, and exotic foods. It was also the one time of the year that I could count on getting a dollar bill. "Folding money" just naturally made one feel rich, especially when earned by chopping a farmer's cotton for a day. I always hated to break a dollar bill, so I would survey the entire fair's offerings before doing it.

Bug Tussle afforded more frequent social events, but most were off-limits to Mama's children. Her moral disapproval of smoking, drinking, and gambling extended to dancing. Thus, we were spared the excitement of the occasional dances held at some of the farm houses. Sometimes those dances were exciting. Young rowdies, their blood heated by moonshine whiskey and local "Choctaw beer," often disrupted the dances with fights. Gunfire was not an unheard sound amid the country bands' tunes.

Religious meetings may have brought some of this type to repentance. To us, they were social events as well as spiritual gatherings. When I was a boy, I hardly knew that formal denominations even existed. Occasionally, someone would teach a Sunday school class—open to all—at the schoolhouse. Almost weekly, we would attend gospel singing conventions at the Bug Tussle school or in one of the nearby country districts. Without a preacher, Sunday night singings were our regular services. They were well attended and attracted the best singers from the entire area, even extending over into Arkansas. The local residents joined in enthusiastically through the aid of "shape note" hymnals. By reducing every possible note of any song into one of eight different shapes, these hymnals made it possible to create instant four-part harmonies.

Summers brought revivals. Some were held in brush arbors along Bucklucky Creek, just below our house. More often, we would drive up to Reams Prairie, just north of us. Country preachers—including Grandpa Scott—exhorted far into the night. Their congregation included no idle pew-warmers. The peoples' own testifying, singing, shouting, and praying for the sick were very much a part of the service.

The preachers expounded a holiness version of Christianity. Many believed in and practiced glossolalia. "Speaking in tongues" was the highest form of religious expression. It gave tangible evidence of the "baptism of the Holy Ghost" that followed salvation and sanctification.

The sinner's conversion thus marked only the start of that process. It, however, was both made manifest and celebrated by bap-

tism. A good preacher could get ten to fifteen baptisms at a time. The number would include repeaters, for many would redo the process from time to time. It seems that there were a lot of backsliders among us. The favored site was a big hole in a creek under a culvert near the highway.

Coal Creek was the scene of one quite memorable baptism. "Brother" Alexander was a Freewill Baptist preacher up at Reams. One of his converts was a little old lady who was raising a mentally retarded daughter. Beulah, the child, was a large girl of sixteen. She would walk faster than a horse, swinging her arms, looking neither left nor right. For church, she had her own seat in the Reams schoolhouse. If anybody got there first, she would just knock him or her right out of it.

As the crop of converts came down to the creek, Beulah rose on both legs, staring wildly. Every time Brother Alexander dipped one under, she would shout, "Oh!" Then came her mother's turn. The preacher blessed the old lady in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. As he put her under the water, Beulah yelled, "Damn you!" The girl pulled her mother out, threw her over her knee, and proceeded to beat the Devil out of her. Brother Alexander stepped in to save the poor woman. Beulah beat him, too.

I remember an even more notable conversion that occurred in a nearby community. It involved a woman who was fairly notorious for her activities not only with her husband but with other men of the town. Her husband was arrested for luring a small girl down in a cellar and taking indecent liberties with her. He was thrown in jail, due to be charged with statutory rape.

During this time, the town was holding a camp meeting. The wife was so upset that she sought solace in the Almighty. She went to the meeting, made her way down to the mourners' bench, and met the Lord. She said she was saved. She said that the Savior wanted her to confess all her sins, and she was ready to tell it all. She confessed that she had done many evil things with many men in the community. She promised that she would recount them all at the next night's meeting. Before the next night came, some of the community's men, including some of the county officials, released her husband and dismissed the case. The sinful couple quietly slipped away.

Aside from such events, our family's relief from toil largely consisted of visiting its kin scattered across rural Oklahoma. Grandparents stayed close enough for regular visits. Other rela-

## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

tives wandered farther away—far enough away to make a trip an adventure, given the primitive transportation. Henryetta can be reached in an hour by automobile now. But in 1913, it required a farm wagon, two railroads, a rented hack, and an entire day. That was what it took to reach the home of my mother's only full sister and her husband, a man whose 1876 birthdate was commemorated in his name: Liberty Centennial Williams. That was an adventure.

It was adventure enough to whet my appetite for travel. Even in Bug Tussle, we had heard of the *Titanic's* sinking. I was fascinated by the gigantic ship and those like it. I thought of them as floating cities, moving across dark seas to strange lands. For hours I would sit holding to my ear some sea shells that Grandpa Scott had picked up in Galveston. I heard the ocean's roar, and I wanted to be on it. I wanted to be on one of those ships. I wanted to reach through a port hole into salt water. I wanted to meet different people. I wanted to see a world larger than I knew.

For the time being, though, I had to content myself with what came to us. A good crop and war-induced prices in 1916 gave us enough money to see some of the world at home. We went to Ringling Brothers Circus. It was a marvelous sight for a country kid. African lions, Asian tigers, Arabian horses, Indian elephants, Japanese acrobats, Chinese rope walkers—it seemed that the world had come to me.

Ringling Brothers came once. Gypsies came through every month or so. From as far back as I can remember until the time that I was grown, they plied their trades from Mexico City to Chicago along the old dirt trail that used to be the Texas Road. Later it was the Jefferson Highway. Today it is U.S. 69. It runs through McAlester, where the gypsies used to camp on a stream just outside of town.

They were remarkable people. They had strange accents, strange clothing. And they had cultivated thievery into an art.

I watched once as they worked over a store about a mile and a half from our house. The owner had stacked five cases of soda pop outside the store. Every bottle disappeared in fifteen minutes. Yet not one native had seen any gypsy take a single bottle.

While the band outside performed its magic, the gypsies inside were ravaging the store. I slipped in to watch. They alternated between predicting the owner's coming good fortune and prophesying his imminent doom. One old woman picked up a jar of pickles and asked the owner if she could have it. He answered bewilderedly that he could not just give things away. She warned that if he did

not his barn would burn that very night. He told her to take the pickles. I do not know if what the owner respected was the gypsies' habit of arson or their claim to prophesy, but they certainly had a gift for larceny. The barn did not burn. But the store was stripped.

They really were remarkable. I would have liked to visit their camp. But I was afraid. It was said that gypsies stole children, too.

The area's resident population was surprisingly cosmopolitan. The coal mining boom that had summoned my grandparents to the Indian Territory had been heard literally around the world. Especially after 1890, foreign immigrants came to make up a large share of the mining population. Italians were the largest single group; but Russian, Lithuanian, Scotch, British, Welsh, Polish, German, Irish, Mexican, Syrian, and Bulgarian accents were also common sounds to my boyhood.

A caste system—informal but real—had developed around the mines. Americans and some Englishmen generally managed the mines and held the highest paying jobs. The dirty and dangerous jobs of digging the coal usually fell to the “foreigners.”

This caste system also carried over to the social life of the miners and their families. I remember that some of the people in my community would not even vote for a well-qualified Scotsman for mine inspector because of his “funny” accent. I also remember visiting my relatives in the mining towns, where kids would make fun of other children whose parents could hardly speak English.

These habits, reinforced by the identification of different towns with different aspects of the mining industry, resulted in the concentration of definite ethnic groups into certain communities. At statehood, McAlester's population was one-quarter immigrant stock. But in the surrounding towns, where the actual mining occurred, immigrant families made up a much larger share. In both Krebs and Hartshorne, for instance, they comprised a majority of the population.

These ethnic identities have proved to be quite durable. To this day, Hartshorne has a richly diverse population. Late in my congressional career, I addressed its high school commencement. The senior class included several fullblood Indians, as well as graduates of Russian, Italian, Polish, and Mexican descent. A black girl was class valedictorian. Hartshorne also is one of the few places west of the Mississippi to maintain a Russian Orthodox church.

Thinking about these towns later in my life, I recall the time I got a call from Manlio Givonni Brosio, the Italian ambassador to the

## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

United States. He said he had been looking through a congressional directory; and it appeared that Krebs, Oklahoma, was in my district. I told him that it was, and he asked if I would accompany him to visit Krebs. "Nearly all the mail I get from that state," he explained, "comes from Italians there who want to bring their kinfolk from Italy to Krebs, Oklahoma." I agreed and contacted King Cappo, who lived across the street from me in McAlester. He was a prominent figure in the area's Italian community. He and his Italian friends planned to give the ambassador a regular Oklahoma "wingding."

I introduced Ambassador Brosio at a large reception. He began speaking in English; after a few minutes he shifted entirely to Italian. I was walking through the crowd to gauge its reaction. A small Italian man about seventy-five years old, with a visored cap on, came up to me. He asked in a strong accent, "Are you Carl Albert?" I said, "Yes." He said, "I knew your papa. I worked with him in the coal mine a long time ago."

"That big shot up there," the old man continued, "him your friend?" I said that he was. He said, "You know what, Carl Albert? Him atalka Italian better than me, I think."

Back in Bug Tussle when I was a boy, there were only a few Italian families living on farms. There were also some Choctaw families in the community. The largest ethnic minority was the blacks. Several families lived there, and there were more living across Gaines Creek. Quite a few lived to the north of us. One of them, Joe Thomas, was a frequent childhood playmate. Fletch Tilford and his family ran a garage and country store—the store ravaged by the gypsies—just down the road from our house. I used to play with his kids and with the Scott boys, whose father farmed in the community. Often I would start walking to school with Joe Thomas and the Tilford and Scott kids. When we would get to Kyle Tennant's meadow, I would angle off left to the Bug Tussle school. The black kids turned right.

Like every other school district in Oklahoma, ours had rigidly segregated schools. It was mandated by the state constitution. Joe Thomas, the Scotts, the Tilfords, and about fifteen to twenty other black kids went to a school about a mile west of ours. Like the law's demand, it surely was separate. Unlike the law's claim, it hardly was equal.

Theirs was a little old one-room schoolhouse on the creek bank. Its sessions were no more than six months, with school let out to



*As a Bug Tussel first-grader, Albert (first row, 9th from left) learned to read on the second day (Courtesy Carl Albert Center Congressional Archives).*

send the black kids into the fields to pick cotton. They had one teacher, a young girl whose only education was through the eighth grade in a similar school up in Reams. They could not do better. The constitution required that the black schools be financed by a different—and lesser—tax base than ours. They could pay only sixty dollars for each of the six months.

I was just a boy who was, himself, part of that world. But I knew even then that those black kids never had a chance. I felt that it was unfair, unhuman, and unChristian. I hoped that if I were ever in a position to do something about it, I would.

Our own school was blessed, not only compared to the separate black school but to most rural schools in Oklahoma. The Missouri-Kansas-Texas railroad was the largest taxpayer in Pittsburg County. About five miles of the track ran right through the Bug Tussle district, and we got a good share of its property tax. Ours was a two-room schoolhouse, quite enough for our needs, sturdily enough built that it is still used as a community center. We had a full nine months' term. We paid the lower room teacher—the one with the



## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

first four grades—seventy-five to one hundred dollars a month. The upper room—grades five through eight—had its own teacher, usually the principal. The job paid \$150 per month—a sizable sum at the time, equal to that paid in the largest city systems. In addition, a “teacherage,” a separate, well-built dwelling, adjoined the school and afforded the principal year-round, rent-free housing. Thus, while the black kids (and many rural white kids) had a poorly prepared teacher with, at best, a state third grade certificate, Bug Tussle could demand teachers with a first grade or lifetime certificate. The result was that all of our teachers were unusually well prepared. Most had normal school or four-year college training.

My own parents had very little education. Their subscription school education had lasted only a few months a year, and none at all after four years. They hoped that their children could do better, but I doubt that they ever had any idea that any of us would ever go beyond high school, if that far. My parents never once required me to open a book. No one ever checked my school work. But they sent me to school. And I wanted to go.

I started school in the first week of September, 1914. For the first day, Papa drove me to the school house in a buggy, but he showed me how I could walk through the woods to and from school. I carried a brand new aluminum school bucket that Mama had carefully packed. I also had a satchel. I had insisted on taking it, although the only thing in it was one little red book that my father had bought the week before. It was the primer that we would use. I had been looking forward to this day for some time. Six years old, I expected it to be the greatest day of my life.

It turned out to be a disappointment. Mrs. Lottie Ross taught the first four grades; her husband, Charles C. Ross, had the upper room. Mrs. Ross helped me pick out a desk near the center of the room. She told us what we would be doing and what she would expect of us over the year. Then she dismissed us. I did not know what to do until Ray and Roy Anderson told me to go home. Bill Anderson went back with his older brothers. I started back through the woods alone. I made it home, and I remember that my mother met me, saying “Are you home already?” I started crying and said, “I went to school but they didn’t give me time to eat my dinner.”

I was not very impressed with my first day of school. The second day was one of my life’s greatest days.

I opened my primer to find a story about a little boy and a goat. I looked at the pictures a few minutes, then I went to Mrs. Ross’s desk

and asked her to read it to me. I stood by her, watching the words as she read them. She read the story slowly, carefully, and with great feeling. Every once in a while, I would look up at her and we would smile at each other. I went back to my seat a very happy boy.

When the morning recess came, the other kids ran out to play. I went to Mrs. Ross's desk and asked her to read the same story again. She did, pausing to let me talk about the boy and imagine what he was like. At my desk, I went over the story again and again, maybe fifty times in all. By the noon lunchtime, when I asked Mrs. Ross to read it for me again, she said, "I believe you can read the story to me now. Try and see if you can." I did, getting every word perfectly.

I took the book home and showed my mother and my father that I could read. Then I started going through the book's other stories. I found that I could recognize every word that had been in the goat story. With Mama's help on the new words, I could read those stories, too. At bedtime, I told my mother that I did not want to go to bed. I wanted to sit up and read.

I have never had quite the feeling that I had when I finished that little red primer. I know I cannot describe it. I had learned to read. I was so thrilled that I literally sat up and clapped my hands. I had discovered a new world. It was a world that stretched beyond Bug Tussle, beyond Pittsburg County, beyond Oklahoma. It was a world without boundaries and without end. And I had the key to open it.

Born that day was a joy and love of learning that would take me to three degrees in two universities. But I would never learn more than I had at Lottie Ross's side on the second day of the first grade at Bug Tussle school.

I was blessed with a succession of good teachers all through my Bug Tussle years. Mrs. Ross not only taught all of the first grade subjects but she also did the same for the second, third, and fourth grades, all of us together. The school day ran from nine in the morning to four in the afternoon. Fifteen minute recesses, one before and one after noon, helped break up the day. An hour gave us time to eat our home-packed lunches and run off some surplus energy.

Mrs. Ross was obviously an organized teacher, as well as an important one to me. She did, however, never get used to the school's most ungentle name. One fine spring day in 1915, she announced that Bug Tussle was an ugly name. Buttercups and daisies blanketed the little mound upon which the school sat. With

## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

meadowlarks and songbirds accompanying her words, she declared that henceforth the school would be known as "Flowery Mound." In time, that became its official name. Those who grew up there, however, still cling to the more rugged title that Ran Woods had first given it.

Lottie Ross taught the next year at Mountain View school, a suitably delicate name, though it was only the country district immediately south. Bessie Kelley replaced her. Hers was a remarkable ability to tell stories, long, involved fairy tales that kept our attention for weeks, until another would begin. Mrs. Ross returned for my third year. A fine Syrian girl, Salima Moussa, from Krebs started me on my fourth grade year. Halfway through it, I was advanced into the fifth grade. The teachers and my parents believed that the lower grade had little challenge for me. Though I was now in the "upper room," I found it not much more challenging.

Fanny Ross, stepmother to Charles Ross, taught that grade. She also served as the school's principal and was one of the first women to hold public office in Oklahoma. In 1918, while serving as my teacher, she won election as Pittsburg County superintendent of schools.

The sixth and eighth grades each had challenge enough. In those years, I had two of the finest teachers I would ever see. I would have distinguished professors who knew more than they, but I probably never would have better teachers—not even at Oxford—than Walter Gragg and Robert Craighead.

Walter Gragg was my sixth grade and first man teacher. He was proficient in all subjects. He was absolutely inspiring with language. I doubt that a better grammar teacher ever lived. He would have us parsing sentences and conjugating verbs for hours—and loving it. Later, I would learn Latin, Spanish, and Japanese. I never had to study their rules of grammar or the structure of their language. Walter Gragg had taught me all I would ever need to know of those.

Robert Craighead was a born teacher. He loved to teach children, especially those hungry for learning. He would stay after school; he would even invite a student to the teacherage at night to pursue a worthy idea.

He came to us after several years of teaching country schools in Missouri and Oklahoma. He brought a wide range of experiences with him. He had been a rail splitter in Texas. He had fought in the Spanish-American War. He had lived three years in Puerto Rico.

And he had attended a fine little college in Missouri.

Of course, he had long since mastered the subjects that he taught. He was in full command of all of the fundamentals of elementary education. He also knew and loved great literature. He was a fine speaker who often read poetry to us in his melodious voice. With his own money, he brought literary masterpieces into the school. He introduced me to the wealth of the English language. He taught me about those who spoke it and wrote it best.

It was just a little country school, and despite Lottie Ross's efforts, we persisted in calling it Bug Tussle. However, it provided a basic education exactly as excellent as any child might make it.

Its subjects were the universal ones. I enjoyed—and did well at—they all. I was especially fond of geography, for it opened the world about me. American history enthralled me. My best teachers always seemed to love it and teach it well. They taught it as a grand story, a pageant of heroes marching past for our inspiration and as our models.

I still remember the very first history lesson in our little American history text. It was about Columbus convincing Queen Isabella to finance his trip to India by sailing west. When he was confronted by doubters of his belief that the world was spherical, my history book said that he took out an egg and dared them to make it stand on its end. They could not do it and asked him how. Columbus cracked the egg on its point and sat it on the table with the end down. One of the ministers snorted that he could have done that if he had thought of it. Columbus answered, "Yes, but I thought of it."

History for me was full of such heroes—men who had thought of it and had acted upon that thought. I became a great admirer of men like Washington, Jefferson, Jackson, and Lincoln. After I had read every biography of them at the little school, my parents gave me more for Christmas. I read and reread them, moved each time by their bravery and achievement. Lincoln's story was especially inspiring. The boy who had read by a log cabin's firelight to prepare himself for the presidency meant a lot to a kid living in a log cabin—even if he was reading by kerosene lamps.

The Bug Tussle school not only served to educate the community's children, it also was the center for community festivities. Particularly at Christmas, it was the site of a grand community-wide party. The children received small gifts. Children treated the parents with skits and recitations. My talent for memorization landed me such prize assignments as "The Night Before Christ-

## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

mas," the one sure favorite in those days. Under Mr. Gragg's and Mr. Craighead's influence, I also recited such memorable orations as Theodore Roosevelt's "The Strenuous Life" and Woodrow Wilson's speech recommending war. More forgettable was the occasion in which the school children dressed as fruits and vegetables. I sang out, "I am a little onion. O!" It was not all serious.

We made our own playground games with minimal equipment. Baseball, basketball, and blackman were favorites. Track—races of every distance and variation—was common. I inherited some of my family's wrestling ability. I was also a pretty good runner but only a fair baseball player. Layman Polk, a full-blood Indian boy, had us all beat. He was our local Jim Thorpe. He could outrun and outhit any other boy in the school.

Bug Tussle's one prosperous family provided me my first boyhood crush. Ruth Sawyer was a sparkling child with black eyes and black hair. I was convinced that she just had to be the prettiest girl in the world. It took no small act of courage for me to bid on her pie at a community pie auction. I kept enough courage to stay in the bidding until I won the pie and the right to share it with her. That was my bravery's limit. We ate the pie silently, neither daring glance at the other.

My school work came easily for me. Sometimes it came too easily. In a few minutes I could grasp any assignment good enough to get by. Only when I had an excellent teacher—and I had some—did I reach for excellence, myself. I suppose that it was precisely their ability to make me better that made them the best.

I also came to appreciate the teachers' likes and dislikes. On through high school and college, I seldom saw a teacher without a personal slant, prejudice, or theory. I would instinctively give them and the class their own views when I answered questions. In other words, I told them what they wanted to hear.

This was a trait that was to serve me well all my life. As a young congressman, it helped me win the attention of men like Sam Rayburn. Later, it helped me gather the support and good will of powerful legislators. I have not always been sure that it was the most intellectually honest approach. On the other hand, I have seldom seen reason in the ordinary course of affairs for a person always to bow his neck and insist on his own point of view. After all, I have never known a mule to get very far in life.

For whatever reason, my teachers always seemed to be especially fond of me. Lottie Ross once confided to my mother, "He's going to

make a great man someday." She remembered that Mama laughed and replied, "He'll have to. He's too lazy to work."

I was not lazy and Mama knew it. But I did learn early on something of the tangible value of an education.

Perhaps the only thing that ranked below my affection for farm work was my ability at it. In particular, I was one of the sorriest cotton pickers that ever lived. Papa had a rule, though: "Don't come in until you pick a hundred pounds." Budge could almost do it by noon; I was lucky to get there by sundown.

My father usually hired pickers to help. During World War I, these were two little black boys—Joe Scott and Nathaniel James—who lived just down the hill from us. They could pick even faster than Budge. So every morning we would line up, each assigned a row. They raced ahead while I straggled farther and farther behind.

Then I started to tell them stories about the war. I would start one as soon as we got going. I might tell them that I had read that the government was going to draft little boys. We were going to have .22 rifles, but instead of lead bullets, we would shoot cotton seeds. That way we would not kill the little German boys, but we would keep them back. Another was that the government was going to build a big lake and put little ships on it. Boys would serve in the navy, wear blue uniforms, and sail the ships.

Every time we lined up to start our rows, I would start my story. They got ahead of me, but they kept listening. Then I would talk in a lower and lower voice. When they stopped picking to hear, I would stop talking. I told them I could not talk loud enough for them to hear me; I would have to quit until I caught up with them. But they wanted to hear the story. So all three of them—Budge, Joe Scott, and Nathaniel James—would turn and pick back to me in my row. The only trouble was they were putting the cotton in their own sacks. I explained that that would not do. Papa would wonder why my rows made so much less cotton than theirs. They would have to put it into my sack. Their fingers ablut, they would pick and put it in my sack so I could keep up with them. I stretched that story out the whole season.

That is how I picked my hundred pounds.

That may have been my most immediately valuable use of education. The most enduring came in 1914, my first year in Bug Tussle school. The Honorable Charles D. Carter, Member of Congress from the Third Congressional District of Oklahoma, came out to Bug Tussle in a buggy. He was a mixed-blood Chickasaw Indian and our

## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

district's original congressman. He was also one of the most handsome men I had ever seen, the most articulate I had ever heard. I had seen and heard some of our county's politicians but never anything like him.

He spoke to the student body at Bug Tussle school. He told us about meeting with President Wilson. He talked about Congress and how it worked. Then he said the words that burned into my soul, leaving a life's fire: "You know, I'm an Indian boy, and it's wonderful in this country that a man who's a member of a minority can be elected to Congress. A boy in this class might someday be the congressman from this district."

I was sitting in the same seat where I had just learned to read. And I knew. I had no doubt. Mr. Carter was talking to me. I was that boy.

That was in the fall of 1914, the same school year in which the same student body assembled again for its group portrait. I stood exactly in the center of the front row, with the other first graders. My hair tousled, my head cocked to the side, I knew that day what I would know every day of my life thereafter. This little boy was going to Congress.

I told nobody. They would probably laugh and shrug me off. But that is why I studied history so intensely, finding inspiration in the lives of great public men. That is why I loved and worked so hard at language, grammar, and oratory. Those were the tools of public men. That is also why Robert Craighead was so important to me.

Mr. Craighead was from Callaway County, in Missouri's Ninth Congressional District. He was a constituent, admirer, and friend of Champ Clark, the district's congressman and the current Speaker of the House of Representatives. He told us of Champ Clark's life, the life of a poor boy, born—like Lincoln and many of us—in an unpainted log cabin. He told us of his devotion to the House, how he had turned down appointment to the Senate after the incumbent's death. He told us how close Clark had come to winning his party's presidential nomination and certain election, only to have them snatched away by Wilson in the 1912 Baltimore convention.

Perhaps because of his devotion to Champ Clark's career, Mr. Craighead knew a lot about the office of the Speakership. He explained how Clark and the great Republican rebel George Norris had led the fight to smash the rule of Speaker Joseph Cannon, the "czar" whose power nearly reduced the democratic body to one-man rule. As Speaker, Champ Clark modernized the House of Represen-



tatives. He used his power, but he did not abuse it. He was a Speaker who respected the rights of the minority and of individual members. He made legislative policy in the Democratic caucus, not in the Speaker's Rooms. He had done more to make the House of Representatives the people's branch than had any man since the Constitutional Convention.

Robert Craighead convinced me that Champ Clark was a great man. He convinced me, too, that being Speaker of the United States House of Representatives would be a great goal. That ambition, however, was tempered by Champ Clark's own counsel: "The Speakership is the hardest office in the world to fill, and the hardest to get."

I later learned just how right he was. Even at the time, I sensed it. Politics had already cost me one of the finest teachers I had ever seen.

John Perteet headed one of the biggest families in the community. His father had lived there since the original land allotments, and the old man's many children had families there, too. John Perteet's eight children attended the Bug Tussle school, about two hundred yards from their home. One was Henry, a boy a little older than I. Henry was the school's champion speller. He also was crippled, and sometimes Henry Perteet would have to crawl to school.

For some reason, John Perteet came to dislike Mr. Gragg. He maneuvered to get himself elected to the school board. He was determined to fire my sixth grade teacher. In fact, he came by our house and talked to my parents about it. He even asked me if I would not want to have Mr. Charles Ross back at the school for my seventh grade. I did not answer. I adored Mrs. Ross, but I loved Mr. Gragg.

We all did. But it counted for nothing. The school board dismissed Walter Gragg at the end of the year. Mr. Ross—stepson of Fanny Ross, county school superintendent—took his job.

By that time, I had also learned something of politics on a larger scale. We had greeted the news of Europe's World War with initial indifference. The immigrant miners must have felt loyalty to their homelands, as well as concern for their relatives there. Most people in our community, however, had no direct stake and little personal interest in the fighting. Our inconveniences were slight. For instance, we could not get German-made blue dye. But aside from the steady bleaching of our overalls and chambray shirts, Europe's war was not Bug Tussle's.

## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

Germany's sinking of the *Lusitania* in 1916 did stir up considerable indignation. It was a principled resentment: a German submarine cowardly had attacked an unarmed British passenger ship. Our concern, however, was neither immediate nor personal. Though Americans had died, none were our neighbors or relatives. Still, many greeted America's final declaration of war in April, 1917, with relief. At last the indecision of our country's role was resolved. Now, American forces would quickly settle the score and permanently resolve the issue. They would make the world safe for democracy.

We boys were certainly ready. Our newspapers told us that the Germans were a cruel and evil people. Their soldiers bayoneted Belgian babies and machine-gunned French civilians. Their wicked Kaiser plotted to rule the world. General Pershing's doughboys must return the help of Lafayette's brave men who had won us our own freedom. We sang with the departing troops, "Goodbye Broadway, hello France, we are going to pay our debt to you."

We only regretted that we could not go, too. We all wanted to be soldiers. In fact, the youngest boys formed ourselves into a military company. We marched through the woods, the fields, and the school yard, our chins high, our backs straight, sticks firmly held to our shoulders. Because one of Papa's hired hands had taught me the commands of his national guard drills, I was their captain; and I put them smartly through their paces. For Christmas, 1918, I received the grandest present I ever had—a tiny toy cannon that shot a rubber shell. Budge got a set of soldiers. We played that winter with my cannon blasting away at his charging infantry.

Otherwise, the war's immediate effect on my family and most of the community was economic. War demand ran cotton prices up to forty cents a pound, three and four times their customary level. We all wore better clothes. My father's bank account climbed, for the first time, to four figures. Papa bought a new horse-drawn hack, a "poor man's surrey," and a great improvement over the secondhand buggy and Springfield wagon. Mama finally decorated the house with store-bought wallpaper.

Then the bodies started coming home.

The first was Claude Tedrick's. He had been one of those young men—Claude was about twenty—who had come by the farm, looking for work. My father had hired him, giving him meals and a roof until the crop work began and his pay started. Claude was like a lot of people there. He could neither read nor write. He told me once

how much he admired Doc Tennant. Claude said that he did not "know 'A' from a pig track," but the doctor "could make all them little crooks" without even looking at the paper.

He wanted something better and bigger than farm work, so he joined the army and served on the Mexican border. He went to Europe with Pershing's troops, one of Bug Tussle's first men to enter the war. Claude Tedrick died in a French ditch.

By the time another of Papa's hands went to war, we did not hear as much about our debt to Lafayette. Carrying their draft orders, boys were leaving every week. There was crying, not singing, when we drove our new hack into McAlester and put Dave Williams on the train for Camp Robinson.

We boys, too young to fight or to understand, kept our war fever high. I was one of them. But it was obvious that war weariness was rising. People resented war time regulations. Abstract principles gave way to fear for our sons and our friends and the future. My mother was not the only one to feel it. A rebellion of antiwar sharecroppers and tenant farmers erupted not far north, in the Canadian River valley.

The self-styled patriots were alarmed. Maybe they had cause to be. Oklahoma's governor, Robert L. Williams, created a state council for defense, and county councils appeared in most of the state. These councils were nearly hysterical where the foreign-born population was large, where poverty had eroded community bonds, and where patriotism had lost its lust.

Pittsburg County was just that kind of place.

Our county council sought out the rebellious, and we had some. It vigilantly searched for "slackers," and we probably had a few of those, too. The trouble was that the council could not tell the difference, and it did not know how to handle either.

Grandpa Scott, as independent and as opinionated as any man who ever lived, was no slacker. But the local patriots thought any man so contrary just had to be one. They called on him, demanding that he nail a flag to his house to prove his loyalty. He showed them that he already had one flying from his mailbox. He also showed them the medal that his own father had won as a Civil War soldier fighting for that same flag. Grandpa invited them to nail up all the flags they wanted. They left.

They came back. This time, they wanted him to sign a card swearing loyalty to the president and everything it took to go into a war. They asked this of a man who had stood trial for murder, a

## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

man who had beaten the officer who arrested him, and a man who had found apocalyptic religion. He would sign no card. He would give his country his loyalty. But he would not swear to any man. In fact, he would not swear at all. In his view, swearing violated the Commandments, and that card was the Mark of the Beast, Revelation's symbol of fealty to the anti-Christ.

So they arrested him and threw him into the Pittsburg County jail. There, a gang of patriots—joined by common drunks and thieves—bound him. They whipped him, two hundred lashes in all. Grandpa Scott asked the Lord to forgive him. He signed the card. He did it with his soul's reservation that he would recant if the Lord asked it of him. The Lord must have understood.

Through such experiences, I came to know and understand something about my community. Nature had blessed it abundantly. Beneath its soils ran the rich coal veins that had called our people forth. The hills and valleys received the gentle rain that nourished the daisies, buttercups, wild roses, and lilies of our fields. Spring sparkled with their brilliant color. Red oaks, hickories, sweet gums, maples, and evergreens renewed nature's palette in the fall.

Yet, for all of nature's wealth, most of our people were poor. Only a few owned their own farms or had any hope of ever owning them. For many miners, life was dirty, brutal, and short. Few country kids had decent clothes. Most went barefoot until winter. Some of the adults did, too.

McAlester, only a few miles away, was the area's metropolis. Many of the city's founders still lived there. Most of the coal companies had their headquarters there. Its local promoters had built a school system that was envied across the state. They also had won for it the state institution that gave the place a reputation and the community a large and steady payroll. It was the Oklahoma State Penitentiary.

Most of our people believed in the old-time religion. They also believed in the old-time politics. In what was already called Oklahoma's "Little Dixie," that meant the Democratic party. Two hundred Democrats were registered to vote in our precinct. There were six Republicans, though no one knew why.

Outside our immediate area, a good number of people were turning to Socialism. Socialists governed Krebs, and a Socialist represented the working class section of McAlester on the city council. Pittsburg County gave Eugene Debs, the Socialist nominee, exactly one-fourth of its presidential vote in 1912. From the year of



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*Carl Albert, 1972  
(Courtesy OHS).*

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my birth through 1914, Socialists controlled the United Mine Workers.

Though my father was a union man, he was never a Socialist. He continued to believe in a man's hard work, not the overthrow of society. Considering what he had achieved with so few advantages, it was a reasonable belief, one that I could share.

That was, perhaps, the greatest lesson that I learned in Bug Tussle. We lived no differently from most of the people there. I never thought myself any better than anyone there. Yet I knew that there had to be something better than growing cotton or mining coal for a living. My family and my life had given me the means to see that. A visiting congressman traveling in a buggy had defined what it was. My teachers had shown me the path to it.

That was why I took so hard the news of 1922. In the spring, my father grew a good crop of cotton and our little class passed the county examinations with ease. We had a fine and moving graduation ceremony at the schoolhouse, for the Bug Tussle school went no higher than the eighth grade. If a student went to high school he or she would have to go away. McAlester, only a few miles away, had a splendid high school. But cotton prices collapsed in the summer, and Papa could find no way to get me there. He could not afford a car. It was too far for me to ride Blue. There was no money to board me. So when other kids were ready to go to high school, I went to the cotton patch. I could not yet leave Bug Tussle.

In a sense, I never would.

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