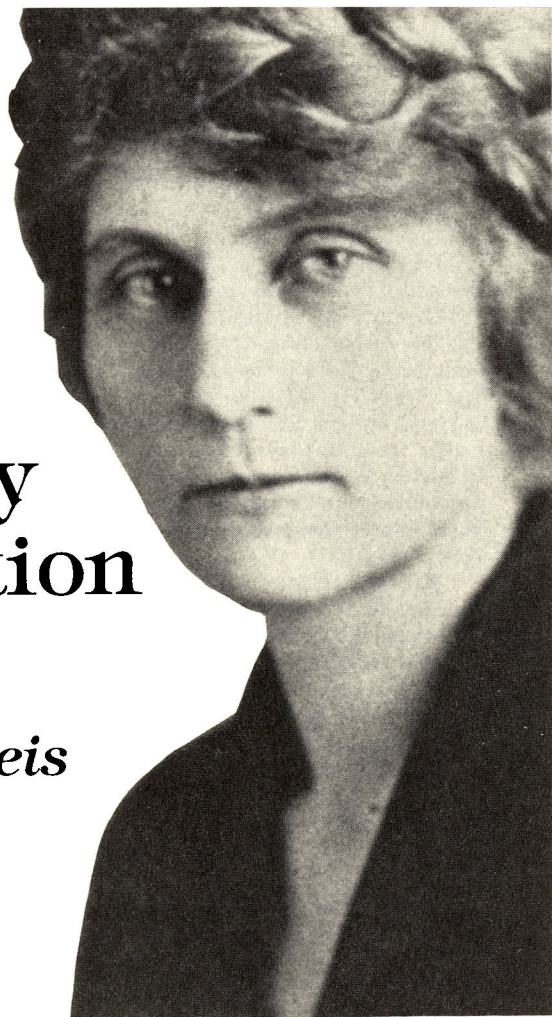


The First Lady of Education

*Oklahoman
Kate Galt Zaneis*



By James C. Milligan and L. David Norris

The Great Depression brought great personal tragedy to many in the Sooner State. With their stories depicted in famous novels and movies, “Okies” became the symbolic, tragic figures that most Americans associated with the “dirty thirties.” The Great Depression also adversely affected all aspects of state government. Certainly, Oklahoma’s educational institutions felt the brunt of drastically reduced state revenues. For Southeastern Oklahoma State Teachers College (STC), however, the fiscal dif-

faculties dramatized by “Black Tuesday” exacerbated the school’s long and shaky struggle for stability.¹

Prior to the country’s financial debacle, the primary source for Southeastern’s troubles had been much more political than financial. From the beginning of the commonwealth, all institutions of higher learning in Oklahoma had been plagued by inadequate funding. In this sense Southeastern’s story was not unique. But in another area of concern affecting the state colleges and universities—the long-standing, abusive tradition of politicians and their friends interfering in the administrative and educational affairs on the various campuses—STC had been particularly victimized.²

By 1935 the residents of Durant and southeastern Oklahoma deeply resented the fact that for far too long their institution had been characterized by an ongoing topsy-turvy game of presidential musical chairs. In this debilitating contest that had lasted for over a quarter of a century, STC had seven chief administrators who each served an average term of only two years. The only exception to this unnerving and disruptive situation at Durant came during the decade-long reign of Dr. Henry Garland Bennett (1919–1928).³

Under his management Southeastern became the eleventh largest teachers college in the Southwest and the leading normal (teachers) institution in Oklahoma. Unfortunately, as soon as Bennett left STC to become president of Oklahoma A. & M. (now Oklahoma State University), the institution again began to suffer the ill effects of political meddling with the governor’s office leading the way. In essence, the “parade” of presidents marched anew. Before long the rapid departure of campus chief executives, coupled with the economic consequences of the Great Depression, had a traumatic impact on Southeastern Oklahoma State Teachers College. By the spring of 1935 the greatness that Bennett had achieved at STC had been destroyed. Enrollment was dramatically down; the physical plant was rapidly deteriorating; finances were most often in arrears; and faculty morale was practically nonexistent. At best the institutional ship was barely adrift in very stormy waters.⁴

It was at this juncture that the atmosphere at STC began to shift dramatically for the better because of a woman named Kate Galt Zaneis. The tenure of the first female ever named to head a state college or university in not only Oklahoma but also the entire country had a dramatic effect on Southeastern and ultimately the entire state as well. Occurring at a time when women did not have

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the right to hold high state offices (changed by constitutional amendment in 1942), the effect of the meteoric career of Kate Galt Zaneis before and after she became president of STC is a remarkable saga in the state's history.⁵ When Kate Galt Zaneis officially became the ninth president of Southeastern Oklahoma State Teachers College on May 24, 1935, she broke ground that remained untilled after her until 1990 when Dr. Joe Anna Hibler became president of Southwestern Oklahoma State University.

Born on February 17, 1887, in Springplace, Georgia, Zaneis was the fourth child of James Edward and Miriam Otis Galt. Kate's parents actually lived in Ardmore, Oklahoma, where Mr. Galt was a carpenter, contractor, and rooming house proprietor. Mrs. Galt always went back to her home place to bear her children and returned to Ardmore after her newborn was old enough to travel. Taught at home at a very early age by her mother, a former teacher, Kate showed a remarkable propensity for educational instruction by the time she entered the first grade.⁶

In the following twelve years she recorded an outstanding career as a student, graduating from Ardmore High School in 1907. At the commencement ceremonies for her class, Dr. Charles Evans, the superintendent of schools for the community, revealed how highly he thought of Kate by awarding her "a special gift" for her academic record, extracurricular activities, and her general interest in all school-related events. After telling the audience that "teachers were born and not made and that Kate was most assuredly one of those born to lead," Dr. Evans, a man who would go on to greater achievement as president of Central State College, editor of *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, and director of the Oklahoma Historical Society, announced that he had hired her "without requiring her to enter college."⁷

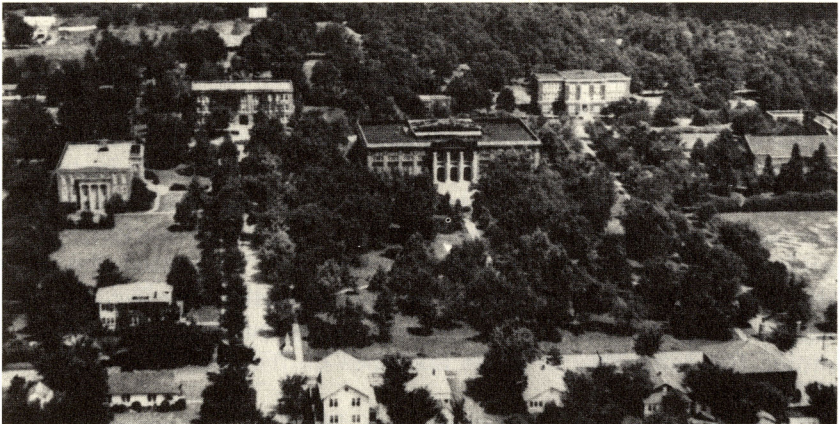
A contemporary of the new Ardmore teacher remembered her as a "tall, statuesque blonde with long hair arranged in a braid . . . who liked heavy blues that gave her the appearance of a 'flamboyant' model." Six years into her career, the attractive teacher met and married Herma Prince Zaneis, an oil field worker, in 1913 and moved to Wirt, Oklahoma. When the marriage ended in divorce two years later, Kate returned to Carter County as principal of Lincoln Ward School in Ardmore. In 1915 she accepted the superintendency of the Lone Grove High School, and it was during this tenure that she joined the summer teaching faculty at South-

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eastern in 1917—a development which had tremendous influence on her future.⁸

After only a few weeks on the campus, the young educator became so impressed with the work being accomplished at the institution that she determined she must attend Southeastern to obtain her bachelor's degree. Moreover, her time on the college campus enlarged her horizons about needed reforms in Oklahoma if the educational level of the state was to be enhanced. Thus, Zaneis became a staunch political activist in the fledgling effort to consolidate the state's many small, one-room, rural schools. Running on a reform platform, in 1920 she won the race for superintendent of public instruction of Carter County and soon successfully consolidated many of the schools in her jurisdiction.⁹

In an era when most believed in local control, Zaneis' success at convincing parents of the benefits of consolidation required great courage as well as administrative ability. On several occasions when angry objectors threatened her life, sheriff's deputies guarded her home night and day. Her insistence that black schools be consolidated and upgraded also drew opposition because it was almost unheard of in that era for a white administrator to fight for better treatment of black children. But the female administrator was not dissuaded and as a result her name became well recognized in educational circles throughout the state.¹⁰



The serene appearance of Southeastern's campus in this aerial view belied the political turmoil to which it had been subjected for many decades (All photos courtesy the authors).

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As a young Carter County teacher (above), Zaneis successfully consolidated many small schools (opposite). A consolidated school near Ardmore was named for her.

Having accomplished her goals, in 1922 the young administrator resigned her position and entered Southeastern; four years later she graduated with honors. After leaving STC in 1926, she happily returned to teaching in Carter County. This phase of her career lasted only until 1934, when a circumstance occurred that so upset her she had to rebel—a move which eventually led to her presidency of Southeastern.

Because of insufficient revenues during the deepening depression, many schools began issuing pay warrants instead of checks. These “promises to pay” were redeemable only at banks, which normally charged a discount rate that lowered the amount the teacher received.¹¹ Angered after being issued such

a certificate, Zaneis denounced the practice in an impassioned speech on Main Street in downtown Ardmore. In a ringing tirade that reportedly attracted nearly 400 listeners, the irate teacher urged Ardmoreites to support education by electing E.W. Marland who was then running for governor on a platform which included planks calling for higher teacher salaries and the abolition of pay warrants. Informed of her remarks by a campaign worker, Marland soon contacted the female educator and “requested she join his political movement.” Zaneis not only accepted his offer, becoming his campaign manager in Carter County, but also often accompanied the candidate to make speeches on his behalf throughout Oklahoma.¹²

Following his successful campaign, Marland rewarded Zaneis by appointing her to the State Board of Education and to his specially-created five-member Citizens’ Committee on Education.

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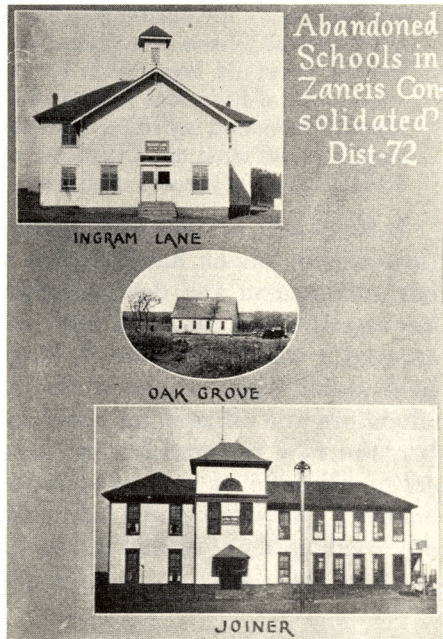
While serving on the committee, Zaneis was instrumental in writing and having House Bill 212 submitted to the 1935 legislature. Revised in 1937 and 1939, this measure established a school financing method that brought increased appropriations to the public educational system. Furthermore, the measure effectively destroyed the hated practice of issuing school warrants. As a member of the State Board of Education, Zaneis was very prominent in insisting that the state reestablish the practice of granting college faculty members sabbatical leave with pay to take advanced study and often to attain higher degrees, a reform that produced inestimable instructional benefits for the state's college students.¹³

While she crusaded for reform, Zaneis also began work on her master's degree at Oklahoma A. & M. Suddenly, in May, 1935, the female educator announced her resignation from the board of education. A few days before her graduation on May 24, Governor Marland, with the board's approval, named Zaneis to the presidency of STC. It was a historic appointment since no woman had ever served as president of a four-year state college in the history of the country. And, not unexpectedly, not everyone agreed about the wisdom of the governor's action.¹⁴

Regarding the appointment, the *Capitol Hill Beacon* said:

The state teachers colleges have always been dominated by politics. . . . The record of the State Board of Education and Governor Marland this year indicates that, no change for the better in operation of the teachers colleges can be expected . . . Zaneis has the doubtful distinction of being an original Marland man. . . . While the game of politics goes on, a serious situation faces the teachers college.¹⁵

Durant residents knew all too well that the Oklahoma City paper well might be right about the future.



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Nevertheless, when Zaneis arrived in Durant, people from both the town and the region reacted with enthusiasm. On May 21, for example, the first of several gala celebrations in honor of STC's lady president took place at the Durant Country Club. Organized by the Durant Chamber of Commerce, the afternoon reception started at 3:00 P.M. in a room decorated predominantly with cut pink roses and trellises of climbing roses. In the center of the tea table was a single Magnolia blossom floating in a punch bowl—a symbol of Southeastern State Teachers College and its famous Magnolia tree-lined campus. The guest list, headed by Governor Marland and President Bennett of Oklahoma A. & M., included the faculty, prominent Durant citizens, members of the State Board of Education, other college presidents, and many state solons.¹⁶

That evening at 7:00 P.M. a formal banquet was held in the Southeastern gymnasium, where the new president, “smartly dressed in a brown dress, a fingertip coat, and brown hat,” waited to shake hands with more than 500 people. After being praised in speeches by Governor Marland and President Bennett, who served as toastmaster, Zaneis inspired her audience when she told them:

This is the proudest moment of my life, as I stand between my first teacher, my mother, and the man who conferred my first degree and who will confer my master's degree. . . . I come to Durant to accept the greatest task I have ever undertaken. . . . Southeastern is not a new love; it is an old love which I have come back to renew. I have a conception of the great responsibility which I have accepted. I had already dedicated my life to education; now I dedicate it anew to the task imposed upon me. I dedicate my life to Southeastern to make it an institution of greater usefulness.¹⁷

E.M. Evans, editor of the *Durant Weekly News*, told his readers that Zaneis “shook hands like a man” and “inspired people with her enthusiasm and determination.” Outside the city of Durant, her appointment also was well received. In June President Zaneis enjoyed a warm reception in Hugo, where she attended a dinner held in her honor at the Webb Hotel. Thanking Choctaw County educators and citizens for their outpouring of support and faith in her, the new president demonstrated that she possessed a keen sense of humor as well as superior intellect. Jokingly she said, “I believe I can state that I will make the best woman president of any coeducational school in the United States, as I have no competition.” In a more serious tone, however, she quickly declared:

With your help, we'll put Southeastern State Teachers College back to its former level as the leading school of its type in the state. . . . I have a duty to perform to the women of the state. I cannot fail, for then, all could say, "the woman failed; a man might not." With your aid and cooperation, I won't. . . . Our school will again become the same leading college in the state that it was under the leadership of those two educators whom Hugo sent there—President A.S. Faulkner and President H.G. Bennett. I have a great job to live up to in filling their shoes but with your assistance, I'll do my best.¹⁸

The honors bestowed on the new executive extended beyond the area of southeastern Oklahoma. In the early fall at the annual state conference held in Oklahoma City, the delegates of the Oklahoma Education Association unanimously voted to name Zaneis the organization's vice president. Nevertheless, the general elation following her appointment did not last for an extended period.

President Zaneis soon became embroiled in many controversies which created opponents and eventually ended her career after two short but brilliant years. In fact the female president had managed to cause a furor even before she arrived in Durant. Learning of her confirmation while still in Stillwater completing her master's degree, Zaneis telephoned Dr. Everett Fixley, head of STC's education department and her favorite college professor, authorizing him to assume control at STC until she could arrange her affairs and move to the city.¹⁹

Subsequently, after her arrival on campus one of her first acts was to name Fixley as dean of the college. Unfortunately, although he was known as an accomplished teacher, Fixley's moral life often had been questioned by some in the community. The most widespread report was that he had met his spouse at a wife-swapping party in San Antonio. While there was never any evidence offered as proof, many citizens objected to his elevation to the deanship on the grounds that in any case he was too controversial. Nevertheless, true to her characteristic faith in her own deliberations, the new chief administrator refused to reverse her decision.²⁰

A second and even louder uproar in the community and on the campus came in late August when Zaneis announced her first faculty selections. Anticipating a new requirement by the State Board of Education requiring that all college teachers have a master's degree, she told the press that her faculty would be structured toward that goal. Consequently, within days eleven staff members found that they had not been rehired; two of them were especially well-liked in Durant. Professor E. Martin Haggard

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had taught foreign language at STC since his late teens, and Coach O.L. "Runt" Ramsey had produced winning Savage athletic teams. To make matters worse in the eyes of the most Durantites, she replaced these men by hiring two Ardmoresites. She hired additional faculty members from places "outside the state." Despite the president's publicly-rendered justification, the sweeping dismissals caused the remaining faculty to worry about what would happen if they somehow lost the support of the school's chief executive. Events soon proved there was real cause for concern along those lines.²¹

While presiding at her first faculty meeting, President Zaneis dropped a "bombshell" which had significant ramifications when she announced that due to inequities in the pay scale at the institution, especially regarding women, the school would henceforth have a base salary of at least \$150. For the female teachers that meant an immediate raise in pay. One male faculty member, "perhaps eager to impress his new boss, stood up and announced that he was behind Mrs. Zaneis one hundred percent." Had he known what the president would say next, the professor, one of the highest paid on campus, unquestionably would have remained silent. Continuing her comments, the new administrator declared that the reform policy would have to be carried out despite a \$12,000 cut in state salary appropriations. Consequently, implementation of her plan meant that some of the higher paid male faculty members would be forced to take a cut in their salaries.²²

Thus, in one day, the new administrator managed to alienate several male professors and put the female faculty members in a position "of being between a rock and a hard place." Despite immediate and vocal opposition by some, President Zaneis again demonstrated that she had made a firm decision. When one particularly outspoken man continued his objections in a nighttime phone call, President Zaneis finally lost her patience. The following morning she announced to the faculty that she had made a mistake. She had reconsidered the pay scale and determined that Professor T.A. Houston's salary would be \$180, not \$225 as she had stated at the first of the week. Naturally, this pronouncement assured the new president there would be at least one bitter faculty member, one who had powerful friends and who would be totally opposed to her tenure at the institution. Still, Zaneis had made her point. She clearly was the boss at STC.²³

Zaneis caused another stir in her first week on campus when she announced that faculty meetings would be held at 7:00 A.M. and that she expected the men to wear a coat and tie and the women to be properly dressed, all ready for an active day. Although some protested the early hour, within a few weeks the meetings became routine. Nevertheless, in the late fall when the new chief executive announced a meeting for a much earlier hour, several disgruntled professors decided enough was enough, and they agreed on a rather "radical" action to show their displeasure. Having called the gathering to discuss the serious problem of "donations for fire insurance," a practice of extracting money from teachers to line the pockets of politicians, the president entered the room at 5:00 A.M. to find several of the male members wearing their pajamas.²⁴

Instead of expressing her anger, President Zaneis showed her displeasure by "coldly staring" at the protestors, an action that managed to turn the mood completely toward her favor. She convinced the faculty, who had never complained against the practice for fear of being fired, that if they would sign affidavits avowing that such "donations" had been collected in the past, Governor Marland would stop the practice and, if possible, expose those responsible. The president got her evidence, and the governor kept his word. Through the years since, many have stated that her role in stopping this despicable practice, not only at Durant but throughout Oklahoma, was perhaps the greatest achievement of her life.²⁵

As a chief college administrator, Zaneis had some spectacular successes. When she arrived at STC the school was in debt to local merchants by several thousands of dollars. Seeking a solution, she immediately contacted John S. Vaughan, the state superintendent of public instruction, who advised the new president to submit a request quickly to the legislature; with his help in Oklahoma City the solons responded with an emergency appropriation. The effect on STC was immediate and beneficial. Her responsible and swift handling of the college's local debts restored the faith and credit of the institution with local business leaders.²⁶

President Zaneis also faced an athletic department debt of more than \$1,200. To meet this crisis, she took a different approach because she felt that it was inappropriate to spend state funds for extracurricular activity expenses. Determinedly, Zaneis went downtown "hat in hand" and convinced STC's creditors to extend

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payment of the debts over a period of two years. To avoid further expenses she severely “curtailed physical education classes and extracurricular athletic activities.”²⁷

As she walked around the campus in her first weeks, Zaneis reportedly was “shocked and depressed” by the leaky roofs, scaling paint, crumbling mortar, bare floors, and dingy painted walls that characterized the buildings at STC. True to her aggressive personality, the female educator wasted no time addressing the situation by adopting a “master plan” to return the campus to the beautiful state that existed when she had studied there during the Bennett years.²⁸

In an article entitled “Feminine Charm Touches Profs, Buildings, Campus,” *The Southeastern* proclaimed, “Spiderwebs and dust move out of Southeastern as feminine President Zaneis moves in with an abundance of flowers following her.” According to the paper, some of the first words uttered by the new chief executive were “let’s clean up this place.” Soon offices and rooms throughout the school overflowed with bouquets of fresh flowers cut daily. In less than a week she instituted a thorough housecleaning of the entire campus. Remarking about the changes apparent “in shining window panes, well-oiled floors and furniture,” one professor told the press, “My chair has been so well oiled that I haven’t yet been able to sit in it.”²⁹

The college’s budget for extensive repairs and renovation was only \$9,560, an amount much too small to cover Zaneis’ proposed projects. She decided the only solution was to seek assistance from President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s “New Deal.” Although competing against many other entities, Zaneis secured \$30,000 in PWA monies. Soon the science building had concrete floors, the library had several new walls, and many offices across campus had new paint, cabinets, shelves, and furniture. Additionally, the school’s athletic field and stadium underwent improvements, College Street from Seventh Street to Highway 69 was re-graveled, and a complete landscape renovation was begun.³⁰

The most important priority set by President Zaneis was to bring a rapid, substantial increase in STC’s enrollment; once more the president proved capable of accomplishing the task, beginning with a recruitment “blitz” from the moment she arrived in August. As a result the school recorded a one-year increase of 33 percent over the previous year. The trend continued until the accumulated figures for 1936–1937 showed an attendance of over 1,200. Accord-

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ing to *The Southeastern* the increase in students forced classes to meet in halls, on the auditorium stage, and even outside when weather permitted. And, while she rejoiced in the growth, Zaneis made sure everyone knew that students meant more to her than mere numbers. When it came to the welfare of the students, the new president left no stones unturned. When she discovered that exposed steam pipes were a health hazard to students taking classes on the third floor of the science building, Zaneis ordered them rerouted immediately. First arguing that such a move was impossible, school plumbers relented at her insistence and found a way to solve the problem.³¹



Improvements to administrative offices and other buildings during Zaneis' tenure brought a corresponding upswing in staff and student morale. Southeastern's archway was rebuilt and dedicated as a result of her efforts.

Similarly, the economic welfare of her students also was of great concern to the new president. To help ease the burden the depression forced on most college students and their families, Zaneis secured funds from federal work programs. She allocated the acquired monies into categories of work paying differing amounts per month so the most needy could earn a larger sum. In this manner Zaneis was able to assist nearly all of the two-thirds of the student body who had to have a job in order to continue their education.³²

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New programs instituted by Zaneis for students and the faculty included social outings and this celebration of multiculturalism.

But the president wanted far more, however, than just more students taking more classes while working their way through STC. Zaneis also expected the students to enjoy their life on campus as fully as possible in terms of “quality of life.” She knew that most of STC’s students had never been away from home and she wanted to make the campus a warm and supportive place. She undertook to create such an atmosphere by converting the library’s basement into a large student activity room named Senior-Alumnus Hall. There, students could gather to read, listen to the radio, play games, and visit after the classroom day ended. Additionally, she encouraged the organization of both scholastic and social clubs. As a result, fraternities, sororities, and other academic and social organizations came back into favor. Traditional festive events like homecoming and the Christmas Candlelighting Service were enhanced and the Lyceum Arts Program was expanded. Furthermore, she made a concerted effort to encourage alumni and residents of Durant and southeastern Oklahoman to come to the campus and help celebrate the days set aside for special events.³³

Zaneis also created a fully staffed Recruitment and Public Relations Office to increase enrollment and to help the general public identify with Southeastern. New mailing lists were compiled to insure that *The Southeastern* reached STC graduates, prominent citizens, and high schools in southeastern Oklahoma. Wisely, Zaneis reinstated Bennett’s policy of inviting area superintendents

to assist in summer school and extension classes, and with these people came their loyalty to the school. The president courted Durant's civic and business leaders by hosting frequent breakfasts on their behalf on the campus. At her residence she often entertained at formal teas for as many as 350 people.³⁴

As her first academic year ended, most observers agreed that President Zaneis had generated a "new spirit in the air" at Southeastern. According to area and state newspaper articles and a feature in *Harlow's Weekly*, the new "changed order" was reflected by a sense of increased contentment and security by most of the faculty and in the great pride in their college on the part of the student body. Besides instilling a cordial atmosphere on campus, Zaneis seemed to have been accepted by the Durant community at large. For instance, one particular event held late in 1936 indicated that the administrator had "gained the reputation of being a good sport." At a "roast" held to honor her "achievements" and "mistakes" on the campus, 300 people laughed as members of the Rotary Club used "a series of skits and songs to lampoon some of the more controversial events of her administration and personality." President Zaneis reportedly was "enchanted" by the evening, believing the program portrayed her as a strong president who was sincerely dedicated to the creation of "a vibrant campus."³⁵

From what she saw and heard, President Zaneis undoubtedly believed that this sentiment was widespread. She knew of course that her tenure was subject to the political climate in the area and the state. But with her benefactor still in the governor's chair and public sentiment seemingly on her side, the president set out in the 1936–1937 academic year to accomplish more of her dreams and aspirations. First, she announced that she intended to seek a change in the name and purpose of the institution. Accordingly, she asked the legislature and the State Board of Education to allow the school to drop the term "Teachers" from its name and to permit Southeastern to expand its liberal arts program—in essence, to revolutionize the mission of the institution by offering course work that prepared students for occupations other than teaching.³⁶

Zaneis found widespread support around the state for the proposition. The idea that the regional colleges would be permitted to train students in expanded liberal arts fields made sense to many who could not afford to send their children to Norman or Stillwater. Leaders at other "teacher colleges" quickly acted to support

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Zaneis and her “educational bandwagon.” Meanwhile, to add credibility to her request Zaneis continued her policy of upgrading the credentials of the faculty. Compared to other regional institutions, newspaper articles stated, she had already accomplished a great transformation in the qualifications of the Southeastern faculty. Furthermore, the “lines of responsibility both of persons and departments,” which were “formerly rather vaguely drawn,” had been more clearly established “along lines of demarcation” at STC.³⁷

According to one of her contemporaries, as a corollary to providing a better life for STC students Zaneis also took steps to teach “the country folk the meaning of culture.” The president’s habit of inviting famous personalities and performers to the campus received widespread press coverage in her second year. The high point of her cultural program came when Eleanor Roosevelt consented to be the guest speaker on Senior Day, 1937. The reception given Mrs. Roosevelt was one of the most exciting and spectacular events in the history of the institution, the city, and southeastern Oklahoma. After Mrs. Roosevelt’s visit, which attracted over 2,000 high school seniors during the day and hundreds of adults that night, the newspapers of Oklahoma published many stories noting the remarkable similarities between the “First Lady of the Nation” and the “First Lady of Education.”³⁸

The excitement surrounding Mrs. Roosevelt’s visit in the spring of 1937 proved to be the apex of President Zaneis’ tenure at STC. On Thursday, May 20, in the very midst of various gala celebrations marking the conclusion of her second year at STC, without warning or explanation, word leaked from Oklahoma City that the State Board of Education would ask President Zaneis to retire from the presidency on June 30. With enrollments above the 1,200 mark and so many academic, social, physical, and psychological improvements apparent at Southeastern, the news “shocked” nearly everyone. Many individuals and newspaper editors statewide and nationally instantly reacted with speculation as to why the only woman ever appointed to be president of a state college had been removed. In truth, there was no one single answer; but some of the president’s programs, policies, and preferences had created diverse and powerful enemies.³⁹

While most of the staff had come to enjoy working for Zaneis, the ranks of the faculty still harbored a few powerful and persistent opponents. Several of the men had never liked working for a woman nor forgiven her for equalizing male and female salaries.

Ironically, some of the women on the faculty considered the president to be rather condescending. Further, many faculty members disliked being required to attend and to wear formal attire at presidential socials. For others, President Zaneis possessed an appreciation of cultural attractions that transcended acceptable standards. Actually, this reaction was caused innocently enough by one of the lyceum programs. On December 5, 1936, the internationally famous Frazer-James Dance Troupe appeared on stage “nearly nude.” In reality, the dancers wore costumes very similar to swimsuits acceptable in other parts of the country at that time, but many people—including Zaneis’ mother—reportedly left the auditorium shocked.⁴⁰

In the community Zaneis’ popularity suffered from adverse reactions caused by two specific policies that she had ordered implemented during 1936–1937. The first, which shifted the school’s printing business from the *Durant Daily Democrat* to the *Durant Weekly News*, cost her the support of the largest local newspaper at a critical time. Previously, the *Democrat’s* editor had always spoken out when a president had been removed for seemingly unjust reasons; this time, there was no such editorial.⁴¹

The second decision proved to be an even greater detriment to her future. Zaneis had caused immediate anger in the community when she decided to have two dormitories constructed at the institution. Because they derived rental income from students, many of the town’s residents fervently opposed the dorms. So vociferous was the outcry that State Representative Sam Sullivan warned her that he would fight her on the issue if it came before the legislature. Nevertheless, the president presented her plea before the solons in the 1937 session. Concerning her effort, *The Daily Ard-moreite* predicted, “She will get them . . . because she doesn’t know how to take no for an answer and probably wouldn’t if she could.” Another paper, praising both her plan for the dorms and the job that she had accomplished when many thought “it was not a woman’s job,” noted, “Many are saying: ‘It can’t be done,’ but it will be. The only word in the English language she doesn’t know is the word FAIL.”⁴²

Both editors were correct. In her address before the legislature Zaneis explained that STC “would always be crippled” in comparison to the other five regional colleges if campus-controlled housing were not available. Nor did she believe that local residents would lose money—two dorms could not house nearly all those

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wanting to attend. The student population had grown so rapidly that students were literally living "in attics, cellars, and even in Durant tourist cabins." Responding to her persuasive arguments, the legislature soon voted to approve the \$350,000 that she had requested.⁴³

Zaneis' legislative victory was destroyed nonetheless by her dismissal. The State Board of Education ignored the public outcry and remained adamant in their demand for her resignation. The president, having a strong personality and abiding faith in herself, refused. The board fired her after a marathon session on May 22, effective at the end of the month, but gave her leave with pay until July 1. Dr. William B. Morrison, professor of history at Southeastern and former president of Oklahoma Presbyterian College, was named acting president.⁴⁴

When asked what she thought caused her dismissal, Zaneis replied that she had been "caught in a cross fire" between one of her main political friends, State Senator John A. MacDonald, and the board of education. In fact the ousted female president was correct. As later revealed in the board's minutes, MacDonald had sponsored the bill for the dormitories in a manner that the board found offensive because it allowed Zaneis to exert control over selecting the architect and to share responsibility for supervising construction with the board. To A.L. Crable, the powerful state superintendent of public instruction, and the remainder of the male-dominated board, that was unacceptable and they balked at the agreement. In addition, the board opposed her choice of MacDonald's brother-in-law, Bryan Nolen, as architect. President Zaneis' response was that she chose Nolen because his credentials were the best and he was the only STC graduate who had applied for the position.⁴⁵

The board's accusations of possible conflict of interest effectively placed the president in an untenable political and possibly ethical situation that prevented Governor Marland from intervening on her behalf. When questioned later about what action he would take to protect his appointee, Marland meekly observed, "I am sorry to see her lose her position but we have a Board of Education whose duty it is to select these presidents and their judgment should be final." Because the governor had two more years in office, many were surprised that he did not react more vigorously.⁴⁶

In the end the opposition was too great and the governor was already in political trouble. By the middle of 1937 Marland's "New

Deal" administration had floundered badly; worse, the chief executive's unsuccessful campaign for the U.S. Senate in 1936 had vividly demonstrated that he no longer held a mandate from the voters of Oklahoma or the leadership of the state's Democratic Party. Governor Marland knew that he was powerless to help himself, much less Zaneis. Meanwhile, several prominent Durant political and business leaders had become vehemently opposed to Zaneis' continued administration.⁴⁷

The most vocal and persistent foe was C.C. Hatchett, a powerful figure in the Democratic Party in southeastern Oklahoma and a former president of the Board of Regents for the University of Oklahoma. In a public statement Hatchett declared that he was "only one of hundreds of southeastern Oklahoma citizens who asked the State Board of Education to replace the woman college president. . . . We feel her appointment here was a serious mistake. We have no real prejudice against Mrs. Zaneis, but we want a real school man to head our college."⁴⁸

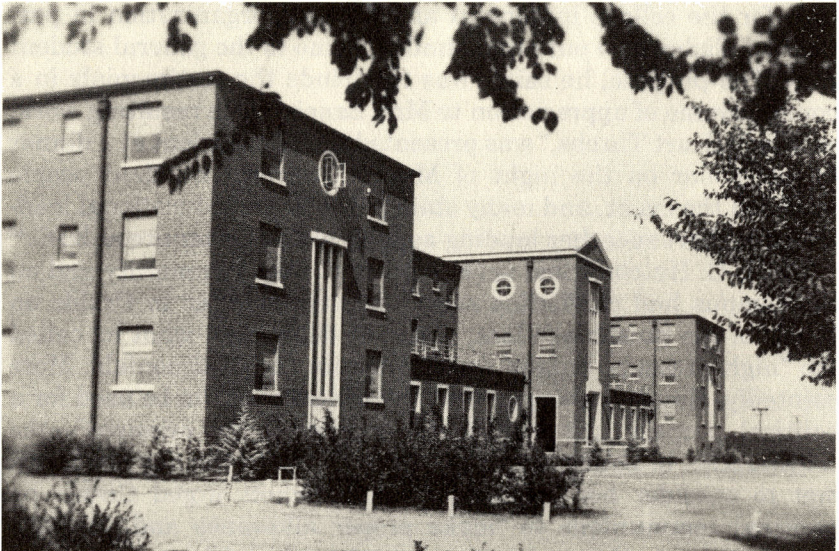
In early May Everett Fixley, dean of the college, and H.S. Bates, the chairman of Zaneis' anniversary committee, had written a letter to leaders of campus organizations, faculty members, and alumni, asking them to submit sketches of "what seems to you to be the outstanding accomplishments of Zaneis' administration both for the college in general and for your organization in particular." Fixley also put out a similar memo to the general student body. The purpose, he said, "was to include the testimonials in a bound volume of appreciation to Mrs. Zaneis." The resulting work, entitled "Heart Throbs," was presented to the president at a dinner in her honor on the night of May 20. Several hundred people attended the event, and many state political and educational leaders gave short speeches lauding aspects of Zaneis' tenure at STC.⁴⁹

But C.C. Hatchett and several others in the community and on the campus had conflicting sentiments. In a letter to Crable on behalf of the president's foes, Hatchett denounced what he called the "high pressure tactics" used to obtain the testimonials. More pointedly, Hatchett charged that the letters were "to be used for a political purpose unknown to those writing the missives"—the continuation of Zaneis as president at STC. On the day the board met to consider her reappointment, Hatchett urged Crable by personal communique to "make proper allowance and give due consideration to the circumstances under which [the testimonials] were written." Hatchett knew there was little doubt that Crable,

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already angry over the dorm issue, would listen to powerful local politicians and educators who disapproved of the female administrator. As expected, after the meeting he made it perfectly plain to the press that the “woman at Durant” and her “political friends” would be ignored in their outcries for her retention. He personally agreed with Hatchett that “the school needed a man to run it.” The board had reached a decision and the matter should have been concluded.⁵⁰

But despite Crable’s declaration the issue was not over, and it soon moved to another interesting and very revealing plane. As turmoil reigned at Southeastern in the latter part of May, 1937, stories concerning Zaneis’ dismissal continued to be published on the front pages of many newspapers in the state and the nation as STC loyalists demanded to know just who was really responsible for the terrible state of affairs at their institution. Charges and countercharges among state political and education leaders further fired the controversy. In one major blast, State Senator John A. MacDonald, who had sponsored the Southeastern dormitory bill, accused H.G. Bennett of causing the entire controversy. In a press release MacDonald charged, “An educational clique domi-



Controversy over the construction of these dormitories contributed to Zaneis’ dismissal from the presidency of Southeastern.

nated by Dr. Henry G. Bennett is responsible for the removal. . . . Three presidents have been removed at Southeastern in the last four years. No school can stand that sort of treatment." In reply Bennett avowed to the press that he "had studiously avoided interference" in Southeastern's affairs since he had resigned from the presidency at STC. However, many papers correctly surmised that the new president would be Professor Hugh Vance Posey, "a Bennett protege."⁵¹

Meanwhile, students at STC renewed their threats to protest the forced departure of another president as well as the subsequent resignations of several popular faculty members who left in "disgust over the newest political manipulations." The most prominent person to depart STC was the dean of the college. In his letter of resignation Fixley managed to fuel the controversy further by declaring, "I have watched with growing disgust the activities of the political-educational ring which has long sought to control the administration of higher education in this state." Among other faculty members who followed Fixley's example and resigned were C.F. Daily, head of the teacher training school; George F. Cotten, head of the speech department; A.L. Porterfield, head of the economics department; and Miss Marie Taylor, the dean of women.⁵²

Remarks made by all four departing faculty members received wide attention in the state press. As to their reason for departing, Porterfield and Taylor declared that they "had gone through two shakeups at Durant and preferred more stable positions outside the state." Cotten's and Daily's pronouncements were much more pointed and bitter. According to Cotten, "If a person of her unquestioned ability and performance cannot retain a position well earned, then I do not care to remain in an institution governed by a board that does not recognize academics or ability but is actuated by political expediency." For his part on behalf of the president, Daily told the press, "I believe the charge against you [Zaneis] is that you have succeeded even against the wishes of the political clique. It grieves me very much to see the school system of the state run for and by the greatest political machine ever to get its clutches on the state."⁵³

The feelings expressed by Zaneis' supporters were echoed by newspaper editorials across the Sooner State. For one, the *Sapulpa Herald's* editorial page declared:

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As a matter of fact, members of the state board were not much concerned as to whether Mrs. Zaneis had saved her face or not. They were interested only in trying to save their own. She was under no necessity for face-saving as they knew only too well, whereas in attempting to dismiss her they were in a very bad spot, and realizing that, they hoped they could save theirs.⁵⁴

But there was much more involved in the Zaneis case than the issue of the ill-treatment suffered by the female president. In the words of the state's largest circulated newspaper, *The Daily Oklahoman*:

[T]he wrong done to Mrs. Zaneis is hardly comparable to the wrong done to 1,200 students at Southeastern or to the school in its corporate capacity. When a highly competent and extremely popular college head is removed summarily without explanation or excuse, the students are compelled to conclude that competency pays no profits and that nothing but a political pull has any value. And when president after president is fired almost at the beginning of their tenure, the students are led to believe that nothing but political considerations govern the educational system of Oklahoma. If the students of Oklahoma conclude that the state's educational institutions are nothing but hospitals for political strap-hangers, the governing authorities are entirely to blame.

Not all of the schools of the state system are shaken up ever biennium by the abrupt dismissal of their presidents. The presidents who are supposed to be identified with the pedagogical clique which is nearly universally believed to be dominant in educational circles are able to serve year after year without any challenge to their tenure. But the sheer outsider who acknowledges no allegiance to the governing clique is of few days and much trouble. It is not surprising that Mrs. Zaneis lasted only two years at Southeastern: in view of her freedom from clique domination it is almost surprising that she lasted as much as two years.⁵⁵

Zaneis' successor was a man and no woman after her was chosen to be the chief executive at any state college in Oklahoma for over half a century. It must be said, in conclusion, that the example set by the female president was not the reason for this circumstance. No one could question that Zaneis had served Southeastern energetically and effectively. In all respects except politics, she left STC far better off than she had found it. And, eventually, all of her dreams for the college were realized.⁵⁶

The outcry and controversy over her firing helped speed a "soul searching" review of Oklahoma's system of education. The negative publicity Southeastern received at the time was balanced by



Bold headlines of the May 23, 1937, issue of The Daily Oklahoman reported the latest politically-motivated ouster at Southeastern.

the growing awareness of the need for reform in Oklahoma’s educational standards, policies, and the relationship between “Gown and Politics”—an awareness that directly resulted in the establishment of the system of constitutional boards of regents.⁵⁷

Following her tenure as president, Zaneis held various important state positions for the next quarter of a century. Thus, in a sense her dismissal also paved the way for women to demand full citizenship in Oklahoma politics. Disgusted at the board of education, Mrs. Donnelly Reid, president of the Oklahoma City Jeffersonian Club, declared that Zaneis’ termination “would inspire the organization of a state federation of women to do things in politics.” As Reid pledged, a federation of Democratic women’s clubs was formed that instantly began a successful campaign “to remove the constitutional barriers against women holding major state offices.”⁵⁸

Given all her accomplishments, it would be impossible to summarize the full significance of the life of Kate Galt Zaneis in a few short sentences. But, given that restriction, perhaps Dr. Charles Evans best succinctly expressed Kate Galt Zaneis’ valuable contributions to Oklahoma and its residents:

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In the oil boom days when black gold fever was running high, she reminded us [that] oil is not Oklahoma's greatest wealth, but its children, for whom oil is helping give them their birthright of educational preparation for the responsibilities of good citizenship. . . . Kate Galt Zaneis devoted her life to community and State welfare work. If a Statesman be one who builds for the future good of his community, State, and Nation, then, certainly, it may be said of Mrs. Zaneis that her life was one of splendid Statesmanship!⁶⁹

ENDNOTES

* James C. Milligan and L. David Norris are Professors of History at Southeastern Oklahoma State University, Durant.

¹ James C. Milligan, *Oklahoma: A Regional History* (Durant, Oklahoma: Southeastern Foundation, 1985), 172–182; L. David Norris, *A History of Southeastern Oklahoma State University Since 1909* (Durant, Oklahoma: Southeastern Foundation, 1986), 1–135, 142–209; James Davidson Morrison and L. David Norris, "A History of Southeastern's First Fifty Years," unpublished monograph, Southeastern Oklahoma State University Archives, Department of Social Sciences, Cabinet A.

² James Davidson Morrison Papers, Miscellaneous Document Collection, Southeastern Oklahoma State University Archives, Department of Social Sciences, Cabinet A (hereafter cited as SMD and file number); James Davidson Morrison, "A Short History of Southeastern," in *Let's Orient Ourselves* (Durant, Oklahoma: n.p., 1948), 1–8; *The (Oklahoma City) Daily Oklahoman*, May 25, 1937.

³ President Henry Garland Bennett File, SMD, Cabinet A, file 11; Norris, *A History of Southeastern*, 129–177; "And Still Southeastern Prospers," Southeastern Newspaper Clipping, Cabinet B (Many newspaper articles concerning the institution's history in this period are in the archives. Unfortunately, the name and/or date of the papers were often not recorded. The file number used to identify where the article may be found in a particular cabinet corresponds to that year in the institution's history. Hereafter cited as SNC and date or n.d.).

⁴ Philip Reed Rulon, *A History of Oklahoma State University Since 1890* (Stillwater: Oklahoma State University Press, 1974), 219–230; Interview with Dr. James Davidson Morrison, September, 1974. Dr. Morrison was a much respected professor of history, dean of the college, an author and acclaimed authority on the history of Oklahoma, and a member of the Board of Directors of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

⁵ Charles Evans, *A Brief Review of the Life, Educational Activities and Public Service of Kate Galt Zaneis* (Oklahoma City, Oklahoma: n.p., 1963). Copies are located in the Ardmore Public Library Reference Collection and in President Kate Galt Zaneis File, SMD, Cabinet A, file 27; *The Denison (Texas) Herald*, September 11, 1973; Mac McGalliard, "Mrs. Zaneis Was a Fighter," *The (Ardmore, Oklahoma) Daily Ardmoreite*, March 11, 1973; *Walters (Oklahoma) Herald*, January 16, 1936; *Elk City (Oklahoma) News*, February 6, 1936; *The Daily Ardmoreite*, May 23, 1937.

⁶ Jim Killackey, "Southeastern College Chief Reviews Year," *The Daily Oklahoman*, February 16, 1992; Linda Arlene Beach, "Kate Galt Zaneis," (M.A. thesis, Southeastern Oklahoma State University, 1976), 1–3; Evans, *A Brief Review*.

⁷ Evans, *A Brief Review*; Robbie Pitts, "Battle For Education Life-long Occupation," *The Daily Oklahoman*, March 4, 1973; Morrison interview.

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⁸ *The Denison Herald*, September 11, 1973; Beach, "Kate Galt Zaneis," 4-5; Employment Records, Vice President of Academic Affairs File, SMD, Cabinet B.

⁹ *The Tulsa (Oklahoma) World*, May 23, 1973; *The Daily Oklahoman*, November 18, 1936.

¹⁰ Kate Galt Zaneis, *Journal of Carter County Schools* (Dallas, Texas: Hargreaves Printing Co., 1923); Kate Galt Zaneis, "A Proposed Plan to Reorganize and Reference the Public Schools of Oklahoma," (M.A. thesis, Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College, 1935); McGalliard, "Mrs. Zaneis"; Robbie Pitts, "Kate Galt Zaneis," *Ardmore Shrine Club's 11th Annual Rodeo Program* (Ardmore, Oklahoma: n.p., 1973), 28, Ardmore Public Library Reference Collection and Zaneis File, SMD, Cabinet A, file 27; *Valliant (Oklahoma) Tribune*, May 1, 1936.

¹¹ Norris, *A History of Southeastern*, 210-211; Morrison interview.

¹² Morrison interview; Evans, *A Brief Review*; Pitts, "Kate Galt Zaneis," 28; *The Daily Oklahoman*, May 11, 1935.

¹³ *The Daily Oklahoman*, May 11, 1935; *El Reno (Oklahoma) American*, April 30, 1936; Evans, *A Brief Review*; Pitts, "Battle for Education"; Norris, *A History of Southeastern*, 210-211; Pitts, "Kate Galt Zaneis," 28.

¹⁴ *The Daily Oklahoman*, May 11, 1935; *Holdenville (Oklahoma) News*, May 23, 1937.

¹⁵ *Capitol Hill (Oklahoma) Beacon*, May 13, August 6, 1935; miscellaneous undated newspaper clippings, SNC, Cabinet B, files 27 and 28; *Durant (Oklahoma) Weekly News*, January 22, 1937; *The Daily Oklahoman*, n.d., SNC, Cabinet B, file 27.

¹⁶ *The Southeastern*, May 29, 1935 (hereafter cited as *SE*); "Gov. Marland Lauds Mrs. Zaneis As He Asks Support of People," "Many Tributes Are Paid New President," and "Hundreds Pay Tribute to Mrs Kate Galt Zaneis at Reception," n.d., SNC, Cabinet B, file 27.

¹⁷ "Hundreds Pay Tribute"; *SE*, May 29, 1935.

¹⁸ *Durant Weekly News*, February 3, 1937; "Mrs. Zaneis Is Honored at Hugo Wednesday Night," n.d., SNC, Cabinet B, file 27.

¹⁹ *SE*, May 22, 1935; *Antlers (Oklahoma) Democrat*, February 4, 1937; *Oklahoma City (Oklahoma) News*, February 6, 1936; *Altus (Oklahoma) Democrat*, May 24, 1937; *Lawton (Oklahoma) Constitution*, May 24, 1937; *Duncan (Oklahoma) Banner*, May 24, 1937.

²⁰ "Dr Fixley To Be Named Dean" and "College Dean Will Continue in Pet Job, Teaching," n.d., SNC, Cabinet B, file 27; *Ada (Oklahoma) Morning News*, August 12, 1935; *Shawnee News*, August 12, 1935; *Tulsa Tribune*, August 14, 1935; *Boswell (Oklahoma) News*, August 16, 1935; Morrison interview.

²¹ "Runt Ramsey Is Ousted As Savage Coach," n.d., SNC, Cabinet B, file 27; *Boswell News*, August 2, 8, 1935; *Okmulgee (Oklahoma) Times*, August 13, 1935; *Muskogee (Oklahoma) Phoenix*, August 13, December 29, 1935; *Enid (Oklahoma) News*, August 14, 1935; *Bartlesville (Oklahoma) Examiner*, August 14, 1935; "11 Southeastern Faculty Are Dismissed," n.d., SNC, Cabinet B, file 27; *Idabel (Oklahoma) Gazette*, September 11, 1936; *Durant Weekly News*, September 13, 1936.

²² Morrison interview; Interview with Dr. Eugene A. Slaughter, 1984. Dr. Slaughter, a former chairman of the Department of English and Humanities at Southeastern, was just beginning his distinguished career at the time. Beach, "Kate Galt Zaneis," 25; Minutes of Faculty Meetings, SMD, 1935-36, Cabinet B; *Muskogee Phoenix*, December 29, 1935.

²³ Norris, *A History of Southeastern*, 214-215; Morrison interview; Slaughter interview.

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²⁴ Morrison interview; Beach, "Kate Galt Zaneis," 34–35.

²⁵ Beach, "Kate Galt Zaneis," 34–35.

²⁶ *Ibid.*; Affidavits and letters in Southeastern State Teachers College File, State Department of Libraries, Archives and Records Department, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma (hereafter cited as SSTCF, DL).

²⁷ Kate Galt Zaneis to John S. Vaughan, October 1, 4, 1935, SSTCF, DL; (Oklahoma City, Oklahoma) *Harlow's Weekly*, n.d., SNC, Cabinet B, file 27.

²⁸ *Literary Digest*, February 13, 1937, 32–36; *The Daily Ardmoreite*, May 21, 1937.

²⁹ *SE*, September 18, 1935; Beach, "Kate Galt Zaneis," 24.

³⁰ *The Daily Ardmoreite*, August 15, 1935, November 23, 1936; *Durant News*, August 23, 1935, January 10, 1936; *Hartshorne (Oklahoma) Sun*, November 14, 1935; *SE*, December 11, 1935, February 5, April 15, 1936; *Holdenville News*, January 10, 1936; *McAlester (Oklahoma) Democrat*, August 15, 1936; *Durant Daily Democrat*, November 8, 14, 1936.

³¹ *SE*, September 18, October 2, 1935, January 22, 1936; Beach, "Kate Galt Zaneis," 31–32; Enrollment Statistics, SMD, Cabinet B, files 27 and 28.

³² *Tulsa World*, August 18, 1935; *Durant News*, August 23, 1935, November 14, 1936; *Holdenville News*, January 10, 1936; *Hartshorne Sun*, November 14, 1936.

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³⁹ *Bristow (Oklahoma) Record*, April 24, 1937; *Guthrie (Oklahoma) Leader*, April 25, 1937; *The Daily Ardmoreite*, May 17, 21, 23, 1937; *Oklahoma City News*, May 22, 1937; *Pawhuska (Oklahoma) Capitol*, May 23, 1937; *Coalgate (Oklahoma) Register*, May 27, 1937; *Shawnee American*, May 28, 1937.

⁴⁰ *SE*, April 15, 1936; Beach, "Kate Galt Zaneis," 37–38.

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⁴² *The Daily Ardmoreite*, December 10, 1936, January 27, 1937; *Wilson (Oklahoma) Democrat*, January 2, 22, 1937; *Bennington (Oklahoma) Journal*, February 11, 1937.

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⁴⁹ H.S. Bates to Presidents of Campus Clubs, Everett Fixley to Students of Southeastern, and Everett Fixley to Friends of Southeastern, May 14, 1937, SSTCF, DL; *The Daily Ardmoreite*, May 17, 21, 23, 1937; “President Zaneis To Be Honored on Second Anniversary,” n.d., SNC, Cabinet B, file 28.

⁵⁰ C.C. Hatchett to A.L. Crable, n.d., and Minutes of Meeting of the State Board of Education, May 22, 1937, SSTCF, DL; *Anadarko (Oklahoma) News*, May 23, 1937; *SE*, May 26, 1937; *Durant Weekly News*, May 23, 1937.

⁵¹ “An Editor Looks at Southeastern,” n.d., SNC, Cabinet B, file 28; *Henryetta Free Lance*, May 24, 1937; *Holdenville News*, May 24, 1937; *Ponca City News*, May 24, 1937; *Hollis News*, May 27, 1937.

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⁵⁴ *Sapulpa Herald*, May 25, 1937.

⁵⁵ *The Daily Oklahoman*, May 25, 1937.

⁵⁶ Norris, *A History of Southeastern*, 220–263.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 246–248.

⁵⁸ *Oklahoma City News*, May 25, 1937; *Muskogee Democrat*, May 25, 1937; *Shawnee News*, May 25, 1937; *Oklahoma City Times*, May 25, 1937; *Enid News*, May 25, 1937.

⁵⁹ Evans, *A Brief Review*, 4, 8.