

Oklahoma Farm Bureau Organization: 1942

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following is Chapter Four of a thirty chapter volume now being prepared by Ferdie Deering, retired editor of the Oklahoma Farmer Stockman. For the next six months, the Oklahoma Farm Bureau Farmer will carry excerpts from the book in this space. The production will be released this Fall.

The letter calling charter members together to organize Oklahoma Farm Bureau was dictated by Clarence Roberts Jan. 22, 1942. It was a typical Roberts letter, one page, terse sentences, short paragraphs, precise, to the point, who, what, when and where.

"The Farm Bureau will be organized by delegates, which have been given full and complete power to set up the new organization," he wrote. Besides credentials and a list of paid-up members, delegates were asked to bring a cashier's check "for an amount equal to \$5.00 for each member listed, payable to the Treasurer, OFB."

Delegates met in the Huckins hotel all day Monday, Feb. 2, drafting a constitution and bylaws, and electing directors. Clarence Roberts presided at the beginning, and Roscoe Keiffer served as temporary secretary. The constitution and bylaws committee consisted of Keiffer, J.B. Cronkite, Clarence Reeds, John I. Taylor, John H. Kaney, Lyman T. Hickman and Clyde Newberry.

The meeting of members was held the following day in the Hall of Mirrors in the Municipal auditorium, a popular convention facility at the time. An announcement in The Farmer-Stockman noted that the meeting would adjourn in time for members from distant corners of the state to return home the same night. Help was scarce and farmers weren't accustomed to paying big city hotel bills.

An incident that happened at the first OFB convention the following November illustrates the point. Gleason Dudgeon and Clarence Cox, delegates from Kiowa county, checked into the Huckins hotel and were assigned a room that cost \$4 per night — \$2 each.

They decided that was too much to pay for a bed, so the next day they checked out and started walking with luggage in hand. After walking over the downtown district, they checked into a walkup hotel a few blocks north of the Skirvin, a smaller room with bathroom down the hall. "We still had to pay \$4 a night for the room," they recalled.

Although Comanche county had not been represented at the Ponca City meeting, Farm Bureau got off to a fast start there. By the time of the organization meeting, Comanche led all other counties with 105 members. Each county was allowed one voting delegate for each 25 members, beginning with one delegate for 13 members. Comanche county qualified for four.

The number of members by counties as of Feb. 2, 1942, and delegates registered at the first state session were as follows:

ALFALFA (38) Roscoe F. Keiffer, Lewis H. Munn.
BEAVER (25) C.H.V. Earl
BLAINE (24) Isaac Weber
BRYAN (22) Frank B. Trimmer
CADDO (21) Robert Dutcher
CANADIAN (28) E.G. Jeffrey
CIMARRON (40) Oran Kersey
CLEVELAND (53) Carl Jarboe, Mick Haynes
COMANCHE (105) M.P. Keleher, J.O. Lewis, Claude Martin, John I. Taylor
COTTON (17) Lucien Ruyle
DEWEY (40) Willis Espy, J.D. Hutton
ELLIS (27) John Barcafer
GARVIN (13) C.W. Grant
HARPER (38) Otis Howard, Ray Howard
JEFFERSON (38) W.B. Doyle, R.V. Howard
KAY (13) John H. Kaney
KINGFISHER (34) John H. Fuhrmann, Lyman T. Hickman
KIOWA (66) Harold Davis, Ray Goforth, Clyde Newberry
LOGAN (30) Edward H. Theimer
MAJOR (est. 5) No delegate

McCLAIN (14) H.A. Dunning
MUSKOGEE (23) J.H. Gawf
OKFUSKEE (13) Glenn E. Dill
OKMULGEE (est. 15) No delegate
PONTOTOC (20) Phil McLachlin
POTTAWATOMIE (14) John M. Cox
ROGER MILLS (14) Alex Inman
SEMINOLE (21) J.A. Patterson
TEXAS (39) A.P. Atkins, J.A. Norton
TILLMAN (36) Merle Crawford
TULSA (20) Buster Brown
WAGONER (28) Fred M. Combite
WASHINGTON (13) W.H. Mosley
WOODWARD (41) Thomas P. Stout, Earl Stuart

TOTAL 968 members, 45 delegates
TOTAL CASH paid in, \$4,735

Undoubtedly, Roberts and others had done some preliminary work to line up directors and officers. Roberts had talked with Lyle Hague about becoming president, but he already had a full schedule of activities. Roscoe Keiffer was on the REA board, county war board and several other committees that took him away from home. His wife had insisted he promise not to take on any additional responsibilities.

When Roberts talked with Keiffer about becoming a director, he firmly declined. Roberts then asked: "What about this young fellow who came with you?"

"He's a mighty fine fellow and I think he would be a good one," Keiffer said. Much to his surprise, this young fellow, whose name was Lewis H. Munn, was elected and he did prove to be a "Good one", because he rendered a lifetime of service to Farm Bureau.

There were no active candidates for any of the offices, and those elected had to be persuaded to take the difficult, unpaid jobs.

Elected to the board were Munn; John I. Taylor, Comanche county rancher; Ray Howard, Harper county wheat farmer and rancher; Clyde Newberry, Kiowa county farmer; Frank B. Trimmer, Bryan county peanut and cotton farmer; Buster Brown, Tulsa county dairyman. Average age of this first board was 43 years.

Taylor was elected president, Trimmer vice president and Newberry secretary. Soon afterward, Trimmer took a government job and resigned. Charles L. Roff was named to succeed him. A few months later Newberry left the state and Harold Davis succeeded him.

When the newly-elected, newly-acquainted board members went before the membership meeting the following day to report what they had done, apparently nearly everything was well-accepted. There was no argument about dividing the state into seven districts. The plan to have resolutions originate in county meetings and require approval by a majority of voting delegates at the state convention seemed to be just what was wanted. Other actions were approved.

But the bylaw provision that voting members must derive at least 60 per cent of their incomes directly from farming or ranching set off a spirited discussion. A delegate who owned some oil production and another who had a seed business argued that this could exclude some potential leaders who might not like being classified as associate members.

Buck Weller recalled that others were afraid "drug store cowboys" might take over Farm Bureau and make a plaything out of it. Buster Brown remembered that "Old Clarence Roberts just stood flat-footed and said 'If you're going to have a farm organization, you've got to have a farmers organization!'" This point of view prevailed.

Edward A. O'Neal of Alabama, president of AFBF, was the featured speaker. "Only through cooperative effort can farmers possibly meet the challenge to agriculture today," he declared. O'Neal defended the price control bill as it applied to farm products, accusing newspapers of publishing "tommy rot and plain bull about the greed of farmers and inflation" in this connection.

"Parity for farmers won't bring inflation," O'Neal said. "This is just the can tied to the dog's tail of industrial and labor prices."

R.W. Blackburn, AFBF secretary, also took a swat at labor unions. He asserted AFBF favored raising the working week to 54 hours "adding at a single stroke more than 25 per cent to the effective industrial power of this country." Noting that farm people were working 60 to 70 hours per week, Blackburn asked: "Why can't industrial labor work 54 hours?" to step up the war effort.

Oklahoma Farm Bureau was incorporated to conduct or promote cooperative enterprises, including insurance, marketing and purchasing cooperatives. The board was directed to work in coordination as far as

possible with all farm organizations "that formulate and sponsor policies for the betterment of the agricultural industry."

Delegates and members went on record in favor of legislation by Congress that would enable farmers to realize their fair share of the national income through the principle of parity prices. The board lost no time in contacting the Oklahoma congressional delegation.

"Asking no favors, we insist on being placed on the same footing as other protected industries," a resolution stated.

A one room office had been arranged for and immediately after W.A. Conner was appointed field secretary and manager, this office in the Livestock Exchange building was opened.

An insurance committee was appointed to study a proposal by Kansas Farm Bureau to write automobile insurance. In April, President Taylor went to Kansas for a conference and in May, Dr. O.O. Wolf, president of Kansas Farm Bureau and its insurance company, met with the OFB board, where a contract was signed.

Writing of insurance was delayed a few months because two men assigned to work out a rate structure were drafted for military service, one after the other, and it had to be started over. Because fire insurance could be obtained from existing mutual companies, directors deferred action on this type of coverage.

The first regular convention held by Oklahoma Farm Bureau convened in the Huckins hotel in Oklahoma City Nov. 4-5, 1942. Dedication to help win the war with highest possible production goals and endorsement of the parity principle for agriculture were featured resolutions adopted.

"Farmers do not want subsidization and above all do not want regimentation, but only a fair price in the market place," President Taylor said in his report. He was re-elected, as were Vice President Ray Howard, Secretary Clyde Newberry, Treasurer E.G. Jeffrey, and Directors Buster Brown, Lewis H. Munn, and Charles L. Roff.

It was at this meeting that the board hired Dan Arnold, a popular, enthusiastic motivator who carried the Farm Bureau message to every corner of the state. W.A. Conner had resigned during the summer and Arnold was appointed executive secretary.

Oklahoma was entitled to one official delegate with expenses paid by AFBF to its convention in Chicago in Dec. 1942. John I. Taylor was chosen. Buster Brown and Lewis Munn also attended, paying their own expenses. It was many years before OFB began paying expenses of directors to attend the AFBF convention.

The list of resolutions adopted at the first OFB convention was short compared to the scores considered by conventions in later years, but the tone was not much different. Curtailment of unnecessary government expenditures, including "such agencies and bureaus as have served their function," was demanded. It was recommended that new taxes be based upon the principle of ability to pay. Regulation of community sales to protect both buyers and sellers was proposed.

By convention time, certificates had been mailed to charter members. An honorary life membership was presented to Clarence Roberts at the convention; he died a month later. C.S. Steanson of Canadian county was presented a \$25 war bond for signing up the most members.

In general, the new organization was off to a good start, but there was disappointment that membership goals had not been met. At the February meeting a resolution was adopted appointing "every charter member a committee of one to secure Farm Bureau members."

At the November convention, Taylor said this had not been accomplished. He cited four reasons: Lack of information about Farm Bureau; Lack of confidence of members in their own ability; reluctance to take time from their own businesses; and lack of acquaintanceship with Farm Bureau leaders.

Taylor urged members to bestir themselves and get on with the task of building a strong voice for Oklahoma agriculture.

"There is one other factor in our economy which has been overlooked — lately, at least," he said after listing farm problems, "and it probably is most important of all. This is initiative.

"It involves attributes of hard work, thrift, brainwork, planning and scheming to get ahead in the world and being paid for doing the job better.

"It also involves raising the standards of our profession; to love the dirt as we love life itself; to analyze our own individual situations; to put ourselves on the plane with other businesses. We must maintain initiative if we are to remain free!"