

Early Directors Find A Way

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following is Chapter Seven of a thirty chapter volume currently being written by Ferdie Deering, retired editor of the Oklahoma Farmer-Stockman.

When the first board of directors met to elect officers and assume leadership in building the embryo Farm Bureau into a statewide organization, their first task was to get acquainted.

John I. Taylor and E. G. Jeffrey had met briefly but were still strangers to one another. None of the other directors had met prior to the delegates' session on Feb. 2, 1942.

"It's almost uncanny how well we organized that first board so far as people in key places were concerned," said Lewis Munn. "I didn't know John I. Taylor from anybody else. He had a bunch of law books up there and was reading from them. He was on the floor a lot, a big old cowboy out there looking up references and he looked pretty good to us as a leader.

"So we elected officers and, you know, if we had done it five years later, after becoming well acquainted, I truly believe the same men would have been elected to the same offices," Munn opined.

Was it divine guidance?

"You've got to think something was there, because I don't think we had that much wisdom," the former OFB president concluded.

John I. Taylor of Comanche County was elected president, Frank B. Trimmer of Bryan county was elected vice-president, Clyde Newberry of Kiowa county was named secretary, and E. G. Jeffrey of Canadian county was chosen to be treasurer.

Ray Howard of Harper county, Buster Brown of Tulsa county and Lewis Munn of Alfalfa county were the remaining directors. As this is written in 1980, three of the original directors are still living, all retired, Lewis Munn near Coalgate, Buster Brown near Phoenix, Ariz., and Clyde Newberry in Idaho.

Shortly after the first meeting, Trimmer resigned from the board because he had accepted appointment to a government job, and Ray Howard was elected vice-president. Charles Roff of Bryan county was elected to the board to succeed Trimmer.

Several months later Newberry moved out of the state and Lewis Munn was elected secretary. Harold Davis of Kiowa county was named to succeed Newberry as director from the southwest district.

Brown recalled that he and George Hail were delegates from Tulsa county. Brown felt that Hail should have been the director, but because Hail was busy as chairman of the Tulsa county draft board, Brown was persuaded to accept the position.

Likewise, Roscoe Keiffer had been considered as a prospective director, but he declined because he was on the local REA board, the county war board and other committees. Lewis Munn was chosen instead.

Bryan county was the only southeastern county that had qualified for delegates, so the director from that district had to come from its two dozen members. First it was Trimmer, then Roff. -16 lines

Ray Howard, who served as vice-president of OFB during its first years, was a respected rancher and farmer of the Selman community in Harper county. He was born at Toronto, Kans., in 1898, and his parents resettled 15 miles northeast of Buffalo when he was five years old. Ray married Vesta Vaughan in 1918 and they bought a quarter section near Selman. This eventually was expanded to 1,014 acres.

Their son, Wallace Ray Howard, is currently president of Harper County Farm Bureau. He says his father firmly believed in the "Pay as you go policy" and rarely borrowed money. Besides farming, Ray Howard operated an oil and gas business and an implement business until he retired in 1964. He died in 1972, but Mrs. Howard still lives in Buffalo.

The 38 members of Harper county Farm Bureau took out 20 charter policies when OFB started offering insurance in 1942 and membership tripled within a year. Ray Howard served as the first president and

in 1946 became agent for Oklahoma Farm Bureau Mutual Insurance. He was succeeded on the OFB board of directors by Wallace Anschutz of Beaver County in 1944. Harold Davis succeeded him as vice president.

When Oklahoma Farm Bureau was organized, it had less than \$5,000 in the treasury. Nearly \$2,000 of that was pledged to help in county membership activities and around \$500 would have to be remitted to AFBF for national dues.

All board members knew how hard dollars were to get together and there was no inclination to spend money recklessly. If one had tried, he would have found Treasurer E. G. Jeffrey holding a tight grip on the small OFB purse.

When times got tough, Jeffrey would say: "Boys, when we run out of money, we're going to close it down. We'll do it with what money we've got or we're going to shut the door!" Uncertainty about survival of the struggling young organization continued for at least a year and Jeffrey had no intentions of creating a debt for any reason. -9

Treasurer E. G. Jeffrey had helped to organize the Oklahoma Livestock Marketing Association to tide cattlemen over rough times in the early 1930s. He was experienced in organizational and personal hard times, and board members looked to him for counsel other than with the hard-pressed financial operations.

Jeff, as he was called by family and friends, was born in a dugout in western Nebraska. His son, Marion A. Jeffrey, recalled that Jeff's mother died, leaving his father with five small children. He married a widow who also had children.

Dry weather and low prices for farm products forced them off the farm. The family of 12 moved to Kansas City, where times still were hard. "One year on the farm they had hauled corn to town and bought coal," Marion Jeffrey said, "and the next year they just burned corn, because it wasn't worth the trip." In the city, they had no corn.

So after a severe winter's work caring for dray horses, 14-year-old Jeff came to Kingfisher, OK, where he farmed and got into the horse and mule business. Later he moved to Oklahoma City.

When tractors displaced mules, Jeff and young Marion got a farm near El Reno, Canadian County, where by hard work and careful management they put together a spread that is now managed by the third generation Jeffrey, who is also a third generation Farm Bureau county board member.

For a time during the dry 1930s, Jeff helped Fred Merrield administer a land listing program to combat soil throwing in northwestern Oklahoma. The program had only about \$100,000, but it helped save the soil and it helped to save many farmers.

Later, Jeff refused appointment to a regional job in the program headquartered at Dallas. "I'd rather have my own peanut stand than the best salary check in the world," Jeff said, and he went back to running his own farm, probably for less money.

"Dad didn't serve as president of Canadian County Farm Bureau," Marion noted. "He would say he couldn't vote if he was chairman. He would maneuver around and count votes or opinions and he was nearly always among the winners." -10

Francis W. Kannady, long-time board member from Tulsa County who succeeded Buster Brown as director, recalled that it was confidence in his neighbor which attracted him to join Farm Bureau.

"I knew Buster Brown and I knew what he stood for," Kannady said. "If he belonged, I felt like I should belong, too. We lived not too far apart and I knew him real well."

What kind of man was Buster Brown?

"Well, he was small of stature, but a great man to me, and I learned a lot from him," Kannady said. "He was a dairyman but he hired very little extra help before he went on the State Farm Bureau Board. He was real conservative, hardworking and he expected everyone involved with him to work hard, too."

Kannady said Brown appreciated our country and wanted to preserve our liberties and "other good things we have."

Lewis Munn described Brown as "the workingest little cuss you ever saw," outspoken and independent. "If he was sitting here right now, he would take off his shoes and put his feet up on the table," Munn said. "He sat in Farm Bureau board

meetings more with his shoes off and his feet on the table than with his feet on the floor."

Munn emphasized that Brown made a great contribution to OFB and that he was loved and respected by all those who really knew him. -10

Another rugged individualist on the early Farm Bureau Board was Charles L. Roff. He was born in 1894 at El Reno, Oklahoma Territory. He grew up on hard work and earned a law degree from the University of Oklahoma. He practiced law for 15 years before he became Osage County attorney during the oil boom days of the 1920s. In "Boom Town Lawyer," one of several books he wrote, Roff described his Osage County days.

Roff moved from there to Oklahoma City and a few years later to a ranch east of Durant, where he lived the remainder of his life. That is where he was when the young OFB needed a working director.

"Charley Roff had a good head on him," said C. E. "Buck" Weller of Canadian County, who served as OFB vice president part of the time Roff was on the board. "He was serious about serious matters and he had a lot of fun along with it."

Weller recalled that on one occasion the OFB Board was considering a request from Gov. Roy J. Turner to nominate someone for appointment to a wildlife and recreation board.

"We were probing around in our minds to find somebody we could suggest," Weller said. "Everybody was really serious about it, except Charley Roff. He had that broken-stemmed pipe with tape around in his hand and he was sitting back there in the corner.

"Charley got the president's permission to speak and said in his deep baritone drawl, 'Well, Mr. Chairman, I don't know anything about flowers and birds and stuff, but I used to be considered quite an authority on wild life. If I was a little younger, I might like to take that job myself.' -9

Just as members of the original board of directors were not previously acquainted with one another, farmers in various parts of the state were to a large extent strangers, also. Lewis Munn believes that OFB was an effective force in unifying Oklahoma agriculture by bringing about a better understanding between people living in different areas.

Most of the original settlers in Southern Oklahoma had come from Texas and other states of the old South. The majority of the original settlers of Northern Oklahoma had come from Kansas, Missouri, and other states to the north and east. The people of these areas had little direct contact and really did not understand each other.

"There was a Mason-Dixon line across this state that was so pronounced you could find it anywhere," Munn remembered. "People in the south just couldn't accept most of those damnyankees up north and some of those in the north said the only reason they had to pay so much taxes was to help feed those down in the southern counties."

Munn said these differences were apparent in the first two or three Farm Bureau state conventions, but all at once, after the members began working together, the boundaries melted and then disappeared.

After Munn had made a trip into Cotton and Jefferson Counties to help with membership drives when OFB was young, John I. Taylor said to him: "You ought to be careful going down into those southern counties."

"Why, John?" Lewis asked.

"Well, you don't speak those people's language," John replied.

"I don't know what language I speak, but I can get along with them," Munn responded. "You don't need to worry about that."

That was all there was to it, and Munn said after he retired that he had as high a percentage of friends among Farm Bureau members in southern counties as he did in northern counties, and he felt that they were just as loyal.

"There still are differences between the areas, of course," he observed, "due to different types of land, farming, rainfall and other factors, but the counties and the people are not as different as they were 35 years ago."

Munn is convinced Farm Bureau exercised good influence to help improve this relationship among farm and ranch people.