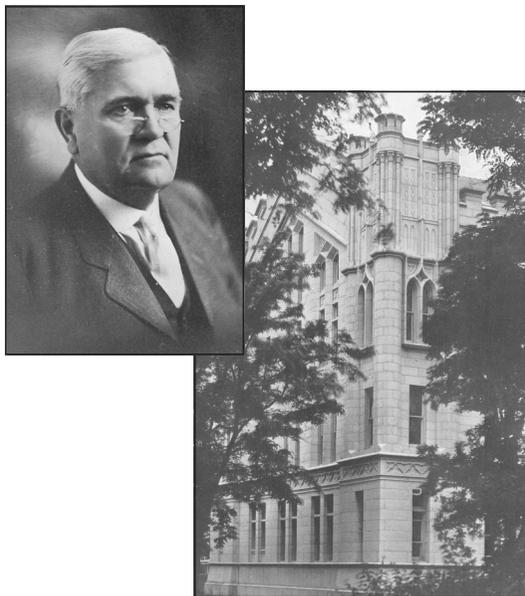


*The Rise and Fall  
and Rise and Fall of  
Edwin (“Daddy”) DeBarr*



*By: David W. Levy\**

Edwin C. DeBarr was, in many ways, a very remarkable man.<sup>1</sup> He is probably best remembered as having been one of the original four members of the faculty when the University of Oklahoma first began instructing students in September 1892. He taught (and lived) longer than the other three, and no other figure in the early history of the university—with the possible exceptions of David Ross Boyd, the school’s first president, and James S. Buchanan, who was to become its fourth in the mid-1920s—made such legendary and lasting contributions to the institution. He brought with him to Norman a remarkable range of interests and abilities, and these he placed at the service of the school he was to serve for more than three decades. But Edwin DeBarr also possessed some highly objectionable traits. And the manner in which

these characteristics, both the positive ones and the negative ones, played themselves out during his lifetime and after his bizarre death makes a fascinating and dramatic tale. The history of his roller-coaster career, moreover, is instructive for what it reveals about the social, political, and racial attitudes of the university at which he taught and the town and state in which he lived.



He was born in Ingham County, Michigan, on January 14, 1859, and was twenty-seven when he earned his degree at the Michigan Normal School in Ypsilanti. (There was, at the same time, another student on the Ypsilanti campus, ten years younger than he was, who was destined to be important to the University of Oklahoma and to DeBarr; he was Stratton D. Brooks, who was to come to Norman as the school's third president in 1912, twenty years after his fellow Michigan Normal alumnus.) DeBarr taught school in Michigan both before and after graduating from college—eight years in elementary schools and five years in high schools. In 1891 he earned a bachelor's degree from the school that was later to become Michigan State and was working on another bachelor's degree, this one in pharmacy, at the University of Michigan in 1892. Before he was finished, he had received a second degree from Ypsilanti (1892), a master's degree from Michigan State (1893), and a PhD from the University of Michigan (1899).<sup>2</sup>

During the winter of 1892 he received an offer to teach chemistry for a semester at Albion College in Albion, Michigan. By this time he had an invalid wife, Hattie, and a baby daughter, Helen. Before leaving for Albion he wrote in his diary, "Take Hattie and baby for a drive. This is baby's first drive. I shall miss Hattie & baby so much when I go to Albion." After a week he wrote, "I wish that I could see Hattie & baby to-night." And two days later, "It is a very lonesome day, and I wish I could be at home today."<sup>3</sup> Finishing his duties at Albion at the close of the semester, he hurried home to Ann Arbor where he found several job offers awaiting him. He had registered his name with the Albert Teachers' Agency in Chicago, a place where those who were in the market for instructors could apply and be linked with prospective teachers looking for work. One of those who used the Albert agency (although he used it secretly because he did not wish it known that he was recruiting college teachers from an agency that dealt mostly in placing high school instructors) was the University of Oklahoma's president, David Ross Boyd.<sup>4</sup> Boyd

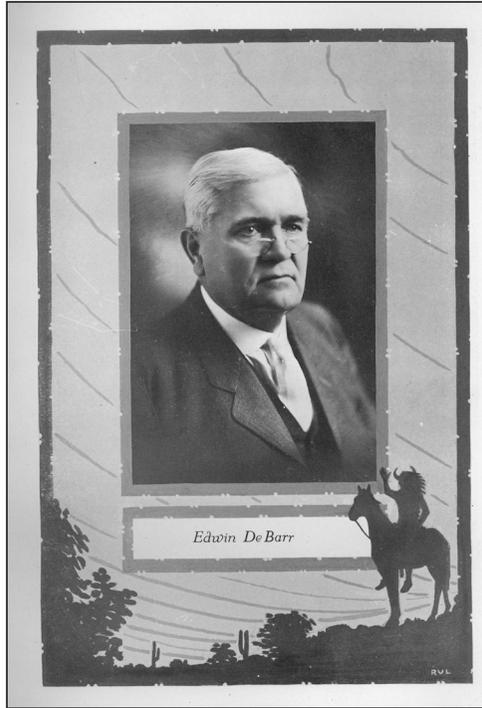
## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

had arrived in Norman on August 6 and was scrambling to find a faculty to teach the students who were to appear on September 15. DeBarr, hoping that the hot and dry climate of Oklahoma would be good for his ailing wife, agreed to take the position as the new school's science teacher. His salary was to be \$1,500 a year.<sup>5</sup>

DeBarr's diary gives a good account of how one got to Norman in those early days. He left on August 29. "Start for Norman, Ok. T[erritor]y from Battle Creek where I leave Hattie & baby Helen, the most precious things to me in the world. Reach Chicago at 9 pm." After a day in the city, "At 6 p.m. I start from Chicago. All the time I think of my darlings in Mich." Next day: "Arrive in Kansas City too late for my train but take the 2nd section of the 10:45 am train. Arrive at Florence [Kansas] to take the special train from Arkansas City to Norman." Next day: "Reach Norman at 3 am but get no bed till 4 am. I sleep till 8:30 am. Meet Pres. Boyd at 9 am and take dinner with him after going to the University grounds." Later in the week: "My first letter from Hattie comes. I wish it were she." The first Sunday in his new town he attended the Presbyterian Church on Gray Street with Boyd and Professor William Rice, another of the original four. After church, "Pres. Boyd, Prof. Rice & I take a 3 mi. walk towards the Canadian River."<sup>6</sup> Soon DeBarr and Rice were boarding together and getting ready for the opening of school. It did not take DeBarr long to put his finger on the central problem facing the school, a problem that would remain central throughout the history of the institution: "I feel somewhat blue over the finances, but will not let Hattie know it. I wish I could see her & baby Helen."<sup>7</sup> He then threw himself into preparing for the students who would be arriving in less than a week. He was thirty-three years old, short and stocky, packing almost two hundred pounds onto his five-foot-six-inch frame.<sup>8</sup>

Edwin DeBarr's rise to prominence at the University of Oklahoma (his first "rise") was meteoric, and his ascendancy rested on his contributions to the university, which were prodigious and monumental. He was one of those whom it is not a great exaggeration to call a renaissance man. He started the Chemistry Department and was its chair for the next thirty years. He was one of the founders of the College of Engineering and the director of the School of Chemical Engineering from the day it was started in 1911. He had a great interest in Pharmacy and was chair of the department from the beginning; when it became the School of Pharmacy, he was its first dean. He was one of the first to give instruction in the Medical School's program, and he began the university's her-

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*Edwin DeBarr's photograph from the dedication panel in the 1921 Sooner yearbook (image courtesy of the OHS Research Division library)*

barium in 1893. He taught chemistry, physics, pharmacy, botany, biology, mathematics, and engineering. In the early days of the university he taught German and French, two of the languages (along with Spanish) in which he read regularly well into his eighties. He played the organ and led the singing when the university still held daily chapel exercises. He laid out the university's first tennis court and supervised the construction of the town's first cement sidewalk. According to one legend, it was Professor DeBarr who brought that first, fateful football onto the campus.<sup>9</sup>

In 1905 Henry H. Harrington, a chemistry professor at Texas A & M, was elevated to the presidency of that school, leaving a vacancy in the department. DeBarr, after almost fourteen years in Norman, decided to apply for the position, and he rounded up letters of rec-

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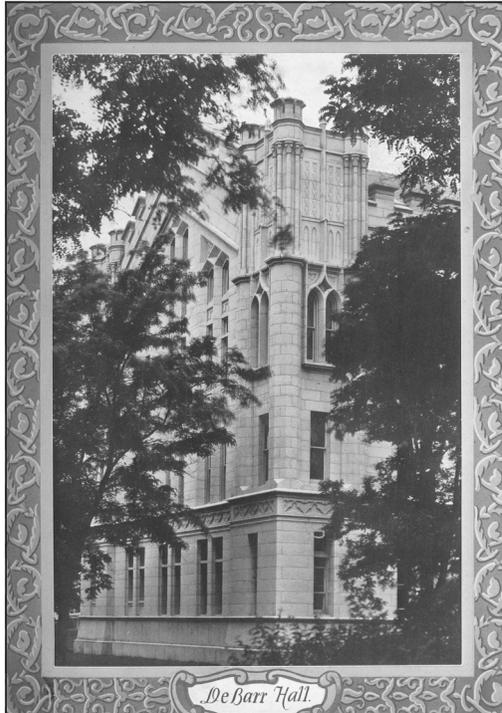
ommendation from colleagues and friends. Even when one acknowledges the extent to which such letters tend to exaggerate, it is clear that DeBarr had earned an enviable reputation in Oklahoma Territory. President Boyd testified that he was “a teacher of exceptional success and ability.” Despite his high and exacting standards, Boyd wrote, “the personal regard in which his students hold him is remarkable,” and despite his popularity with the students, “Doctor DeBarr has at all times had the confidence, cooperation, and respect of the whole faculty.” James Buchanan thought that not only had DeBarr, “next to the president,” been “the most potent factor” in the institution’s development, but that he had also “taken a high place in the business and social life of Oklahoma Territory. There is not a better known nor more favorably known man in Oklahoma and Indian Territory.” The well-known geologist Charles Gould believed that “he is one of the best, if not the very best, instructor on our faculty.” Vernon Parrington, professor of English and future winner of the Pulitzer Prize for history, marveled at “the hold which he has upon his students” and insisted that “I have only words of highest praise for him.” John W. Shartel, an Oklahoma City pioneer, reported that DeBarr “is considered by the people here generally as one of the strongest factors in the successful upbuilding of our university.” Anton H. Classen, another city pioneer, wrote that “he is certainly considered one of our best educators, and in the territory he is well known, his friends are legion.” Close to a dozen additional letters echo these claims, and without exception each of them asserts that if DeBarr were to leave, there would be genuine regret and sorrow throughout the university and the Twin Territories.<sup>10</sup> He did not leave Norman, however, and in 1909 he was appointed vice president of the university to be fully in charge of the institution whenever the president was absent.<sup>11</sup>

DeBarr had agitated for a chemistry building on the Norman campus for many years and finally had his wish granted. In 1915 the state legislature appropriated \$115,000 for a state-of-the-art building: the university’s *Catalogue* for 1916-1917 boasted that “in equipment and construction there is no more modern chemistry building in the United States.”<sup>12</sup> Its four floors and full basement contained everything the department needed: laboratories for students and faculty; classrooms, storerooms, equipment of the most advanced sort; and even an auditorium that could seat 220 students for the largest chemistry classes. Professor DeBarr took an active part in designing the building.<sup>13</sup> In its planning stages and in its earliest days, that structure was called the Chemistry Building or

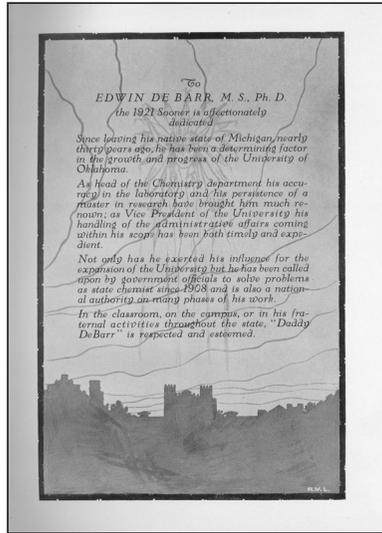
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Chemistry Hall, but the *Norman Transcript* gave voice to a sentiment that was widely shared: "The new chemistry building of the University of Oklahoma should be designated as the 'Edwin DeBarr Hall,' or some such a distinctive name that would give proper honor and credit to its builder and originator, for it is a monument to that gentleman. . . ."14 At the building's formal dedication on January 26, 1917, Superintendent of Public Education Robert H. Wilson announced that the building would be called DeBarr Hall, and by May the building was, in fact, being referred to by that name in the State Board of Education's "Minutes." And yet, there is absolutely no record of the State Board of Education having voted to bestow that name.15 The inevitable suspicion is that the name was given to the building by Wilson on his own authority and that there

*DeBarr Hall, as pictured in the 1921 Sooner yearbook (image courtesy of the OHS Research Division library).*



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*Dedication plate from the 1921 Sooner yearbook showing admiration for Edwin "Daddy" DeBarr (image courtesy of the OHS Research Division library).*

was some unspoken connection between Professor Edwin DeBarr and State Superintendent Bob Wilson.

There can be no doubt that Edwin DeBarr was extremely popular with the students, second in popularity only to James Buchanan of the History Department, the first dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. From early on the students called him "Daddy" DeBarr, and he was greatly admired. In 1921 the students who put together the *Sooner* yearbook gave formal expression to their admiration and "affectionately dedicated" the yearbook to him. "In the classroom, on the campus, or in his fraternal activities throughout the state," the students wrote, 'Daddy DeBarr' is respected and esteemed."<sup>16</sup>



It was precisely his fraternal activities throughout the state that led to his first great fall. Edwin DeBarr was also a proud and com-

mitted member of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) and an unashamed racist. In an interview that he gave in March 1935, he attributed his lifelong animosity toward black people to a traumatic experience as a little boy in Michigan. He claimed that he was "unused to negroes" and that the first one he ever saw scared him "into convulsions." He was sitting on a wooden fence when a rail broke under him. He recalled that "Uncle Dorsey caught me and I had convulsions. It took him [them?] a year to pacify me. . . . When I see a negro I still think of it." In addition, he thought that his feelings were also attributable to the fact that "a negro in Michigan gave me more trouble than all the other pupils put together."<sup>17</sup>

The Klan, as is well known, experienced a dramatic rebirth in the years after 1915. The old Klan of post-Civil War days, which consisted of night-riding vigilantes who devoted themselves to attacking, terrorizing, and intimidating African Americans in order to maintain white supremacy in the South, had all but disappeared by the end of the 1870s.<sup>18</sup> It survived into the twentieth century in highly romanticized portrayals of the KKK as a protector of white civilization in novels by Thomas Dixon<sup>19</sup> and especially in the popular 1915 film *Birth of a Nation* by D. W. Griffith. The old Klan had been southern, loosely organized, and directed entirely against African Americans. The new Klan was highly centralized with state and national officers, recruiters who worked on commission, newspapers, initiation fees, and official costumes. It still targeted African Americans who did not know "their place," but it also added to its hate list a host of other enemies of America: Roman Catholics, Jews, immigrants, labor leaders, Socialists, Communists, opponents of prohibition, the openly immoral (drunks, bootleggers, prostitutes, gamblers, adulterers), and those trouble-making whites who favored civil rights for black Americans. It caught on like wildfire in every section of the country, attracting perhaps four or five million members.<sup>20</sup> In several states the Klan exerted a substantial influence in politics.<sup>21</sup>

The Klan was flourishing in Oklahoma by the early 1920s.<sup>22</sup> Estimates of membership in Oklahoma vary, but the *Tulsa Tribune* guessed that seventy thousand Oklahomans had joined by the end of 1921. There were perhaps one hundred thousand members by 1924, some estimate even more. There were more members of the KKK in the state than members of labor unions; perhaps one out of every ten eligible Oklahoma males belonged. Danney Goble and J. R. Scales, two historians of Oklahoma politics, have written: "before its force was spent, the Klan's influence had reached into every

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courthouse, every state office, and the campaign headquarters of both major parties.<sup>23</sup>

Some have pointed out that in Oklahoma and other places the KKK shared some of the characteristics of other social and fraternal organizations and that many joined the secret society for entirely innocent motives of neighborhood sociability, male comradery, the attraction of secret rituals, or the prospect of economic or political advancement. But it will not do to ignore the violent and unsociable activities of the organization. The Klan in Oklahoma did the things that the Klan did everywhere else, but perhaps more of them. By one estimate, in fact, Oklahoma's KKK outdid all other state Klans in outright ferocity. That observer claimed that Tulsa County averaged one flogging by Klansmen every night in 1922.<sup>24</sup> Carter Blue Clark, a historian who has written on the Oklahoma Klan, documents in carefully constructed tables more than two hundred instances of outrages perpetrated by the Oklahoma Klan between 1921 and 1924. Flogging, beating, mutilation, tar-and-feathering, and even murder (by one estimate at least nine killings<sup>25</sup>) were the specialties of the KKK members. They burned buildings and issued threats, they went after bootleggers and gamblers and suspected adulterers.<sup>26</sup> By all accounts, the Klan in Oklahoma enlisted some of the most substantial and respected citizens in every community—businessmen, bankers, professionals, city officials and the police, ministers, and many members of the Oklahoma legislature. One prominent and outspoken Klansman was Robert H. Wilson, the state superintendent of education.<sup>27</sup>

No one should have been surprised when the meteoric rise of Klan activity became a hot political issue. At the national level, the KKK had a strong presence in both parties. The Republican leadership, unwilling to jeopardize the chances of its popular presidential candidate, Calvin Coolidge, was able to stifle the topic at their 1924 national convention. The Democrats were not so lucky; the question of whether or not the KKK should be denounced by name in the platform dominated the 1924 convention at Madison Square Garden and hopelessly divided the party.<sup>28</sup> In Oklahoma the Klan, with its obvious strength and visibility, also became an emotional issue. Governor John C. ("Jack") Walton, who had gained office by defeating Klansman Bob Wilson in the Democratic gubernatorial primary, launched a vigorous crusade against the KKK, and he paid the price. Walton's impeachment and removal after less than a year in office had many causes, but the forceful opposition of the Oklahoma Klan was an important element in his political destruction.<sup>29</sup>

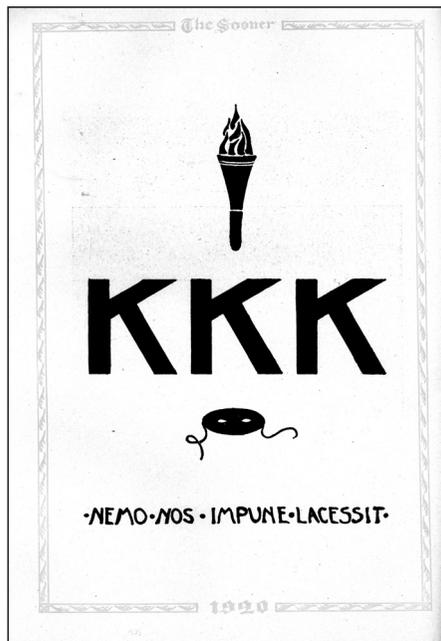
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The KKK was also a presence on the campus of the University of Oklahoma, although it is difficult to say how great that presence was. Astonishingly, in the 1920 *Sooner* yearbook the KKK was listed as a “club,” and an entire page was dedicated to it.<sup>30</sup> In his 1922 exposé of American higher education, the famous muckraker and Socialist Upton Sinclair wrote a stunning indictment of the state of Oklahoma and its university:

Here is a state of oil speculators and starving tenant farmers. One of the products of their degradation is the squalid frenzy known as the Ku Klux Klan; and the board of regents has just issued a decree, declaring that the university must “keep the good will of all factions and parties,” and therefore members of the faculty are forbidden to take

*This page from the 1920 Sooner yearbook can be found in the Organizations section. . . The Ku Klux Klan was listed next to other campus organizations, although no photographs were included (image courtesy of the OHS Research Division library).*

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part in the controversy over the Klan. . . . I am told on good authority that the president of this board is a member of the Klan, as also the vice-president of the university, and about two-thirds of the faculty!<sup>31</sup>

Sinclair's allegation about the university's faculty would be difficult to substantiate and appears to be an exaggeration. But he was right about the Board of Regents issuing a decree. At their meeting of April 20, 1922, the board made known its wishes, and it did not attempt to disguise the issue that led to its action: "Owing to the controversy that exists throughout the state in connection with the Ku Klux Klan and the Anti-Ku Klux Klan," and because of the advisability of maintaining friendly relations with both sides, the regents declared, "we believe it unwise for members of the faculty or employees of the University of Oklahoma to place themselves in a position where they will need to take active part in such controversy."<sup>32</sup> On September 16, President Brooks transmitted the regents' wishes to the faculty and staff returning for the opening of the school year, adding his personal admonition that "employees of the university refrain from active participation in politics."<sup>33</sup> Upton Sinclair had assumed that the regents' policy was meant to quiet the anti-Klan voices on the campus. In fact, their policy brought down the campus's most prominent pro-Klan partisan instead.

There can be no doubt that Edwin DeBarr was active in both Oklahoma and national KKK affairs. He was the grand dragon of Oklahoma until the spring of 1923, when, as a result of internal Klan politics, he was replaced by N. Clay Jewett of Oklahoma City. DeBarr was then elevated to the Imperial Klondilium, the national executive board of the organization, and he made frequent trips to the Atlanta headquarters on Klan business. In 1924 he was to be named imperial kludd, the Klan's national chaplain. He gave numerous talks around the country on behalf of the organization.<sup>34</sup> An article from the Klan's *Imperial Night-Hawk* loftily proclaims: "Klansman Edwin DeBarr, Genii, Grand Giant, Klan Giant and Klansman, is hereby vested with authority to promulgate and communicate the Kloranic Mysteries of the Order of the Knights Kamellia to all Genii, Imperial Representatives and Grand Dragons. . . . [and] is further instructed to organize a national degree team and to confer the second section of the Primary Order of Knighthood, Knights Kamllia, in its full form in Klan centers throughout the bounds of the Invisible Empire."<sup>35</sup>

A few months later the *Hobart Democrat-Chief* noted that "Imperial Kludd Edwin DeBarr led a party of twenty-one persons in conferring the K-Duo (Knights Kamellia) Degree on 310 Klansmen on

June 7, 1924, in Hobart. The party arrived in a special Pullman with an entire baggage car of paraphernalia. The events associated with DeBarr's visit included a performance at the city hall of [Thomas Dixon's] *The Traitor*, a three-act drama . . . and a thirty-minute lecture on Klancraft, which DeBarr delivered after the play." No sooner was his work in Hobart done than the imperial kludd and his companions left for Muskogee and Louisiana, "where they were to confer the K-Duo Degree on others."<sup>36</sup> It was good that DeBarr got to do the Hobart talk, because back in January he had to back out of a similar address at the First Christian Church in McAlester on account of being "called to the Klan headquarters at Atlanta." Fortunately, former state senator T. F. Hensley of El Reno was able to pinch hit for DeBarr on that occasion.<sup>37</sup>

DeBarr blithely ignored the regents' directive of April 20, 1922, and two incidents occurred that infuriated the board. On June 1, less than six weeks after the regents had spoken, DeBarr traveled to Okmulgee and, at the Orpheum Theater, delivered the commencement address to the town's high school graduates. The vice president of the University of Oklahoma took the occasion to launch a spirited attack on Roman Catholics and on Catholic schools. "The Catholic priest says give me the child until he is seven years of age and you can have him the rest of his life," DeBarr declared. "I say give me the child until he is seven years of age and I will make a patriot of him." DeBarr went on to assert that Catholic girls, "who have been kept in seclusion until 19 years old," are likelier to fall into immorality than other girls. He then ventured the view that no American child should attend a Catholic school, adding that even if he lived in the worst slums of New York City, he would send his children to a public, rather than a parochial, school. "When the Catholics want to take hold of our schools or when they want to take hold of our politics then we must say 'no.'"<sup>38</sup> Not surprisingly, some citizens of Okmulgee took strenuous exception to DeBarr's commencement speech and complained loudly to the regents through the summer.<sup>39</sup> And in case preaching the KKK's position on the Roman Catholic church in a public forum was not a sufficient flaunting of the regents' instructions, DeBarr went further. In early August, while President Brooks was away from the campus and DeBarr was acting president of the university, he organized support for one of the candidates in the Democratic gubernatorial primary: in his capacity as grand dragon, he issued a directive that Klansmen should vote for their brother Klansman Robert H. Wilson, the benefactor who had, five years earlier, apparently single-handedly decreed

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that the university's Chemistry Building henceforth be called DeBarr Hall.

This was too much for Henry Lowndes Muldrow, chair of the Board of Regents and a power in the Democratic Party (at the time, chair of the Democratic Congressional Committee for the Fifth District).<sup>40</sup> Despite the fact that Muldrow and DeBarr were both citizens of Norman, despite the fact that they were both 33rd degree Masons and had campaigned together for the creation of the Masonic dormitory at the university,<sup>41</sup> Regent Muldrow was outraged by DeBarr's lighthearted indifference to the directive of the Board of Regents. He asked President Brooks to return to the campus at once, and on Saturday morning, August 5, the two men had what must have been a fairly intense private meeting. Almost no one on campus realized it, but, as earlier noted, Professor DeBarr and President Brooks went back a long way. The two had known each other for more than a third of a century, long before Brooks's arrival in Oklahoma. They had both grown up in Michigan and probably first met in the mid-1880s, when both were at the Michigan Normal School in Ypsilanti. In 1922 Brooks told one correspondent, "I have known Dr. DeBarr intimately for thirty-seven years and I have known his wife since my early childhood."<sup>42</sup> Thus it seems likely that both President Brooks (DeBarr's friend since his own college days) and Regent Muldrow (his fellow Mason) must have felt embarrassed and betrayed by Professor DeBarr's flagrant disregard of the regents' policy.

That very day, after leaving his meeting with President Brooks, Muldrow released an angry five-paragraph statement that referred to DeBarr's "alleged activity in the recent democratic primary in connection with [the] Ku Klux Klan" and announced that he was calling a special meeting of the Board of Regents to discuss the whole troubling business. President Brooks issued a "severe reprimand."<sup>43</sup> DeBarr's curt response probably did not help his case much. He claimed that he had been "greatly misrepresented" in Regent Muldrow's written statement, and then he added: "If thirty years of living and doing in Norman and in Oklahoma is not sufficient defense, then I have none other to make."<sup>44</sup> There were doubtless some who thought that DeBarr's statement was, in fact, *not* sufficient and some who probably felt it might have been a little on the arrogant side. The day before the special meeting of the regents, President Brooks had a private talk with DeBarr during which he advised his vice president, a man ten years older than himself whom had known since he was twenty, to "resign from the Univer-

sity and give your entire time to your other work."<sup>45</sup> DeBarr rejected the advice, and the stage was set for the meeting of the regents.

That meeting took place on August 15, at the office of the superintendent of the University Hospital in Oklahoma City. There was only one item on the agenda. The regents began by listening to the complaint of some citizens of Okmulgee and Tulsa about DeBarr's commencement speech back on June 1. The board then "took under consideration this complaint and the alleged participation of Dr. DeBarr in active politics," and Regent George Bowman of Kingfisher offered a strong resolution that did not hesitate to mention the culprit by name: "WHEREAS it is generally reported that Dr. Edwin DeBarr, during his administration as acting president of the University of Oklahoma, in the absence of the president, was aggressively engaged in political activity, THEREFORE be it resolved, that we condemn such action and request that in the future no teacher or employee shall engage in such political activity and in so doing shall be subject to dismissal from the service of the institution."<sup>46</sup> Five regents voted in favor of the resolution. Two others, however, voted no and insisted that their joint statement be included in the record. "It is our belief," Regents Muldrow and Frank Craig of McAlester stated, "that Dr. Edwin DeBarr should not retain his position as Vice-President." (This was actually a moderation of Muldrow's original view. In his written draft Muldrow had called for DeBarr's complete dismissal from the university, but he crossed out those words and settled for merely demanding DeBarr's removal as vice president.<sup>47</sup>) The two dissenters gave three reasons: his "pernicious political activity while Vice-President," his "public utterances attacking certain classes of citizens," and his "active violation" of the regents' April decree about political activity.<sup>48</sup>

If DeBarr hoped that he had escaped with that severe warning, he was destined to be disappointed. Unfortunately for him, the Democratic primary was won not by his friend and fellow-Klansman Bob Wilson but by Wilson's anti-Klan opponent, Jack Walton. And once Walton went on to win the general election in November, DeBarr's fate was sealed. The new governor was inaugurated on January 8, 1923, and in May he appointed five brand new regents—abruptly dismissing four old members of the board outright and replacing a fifth whose term had expired in the usual course. Only one regent from the old board (George Bowman) remained on the new one. The new board met a few weeks later on June 5, 1923, and it quickly and without elaboration dispatched Vice President DeBarr: "It was moved and unanimously carried that Dr. Edwin

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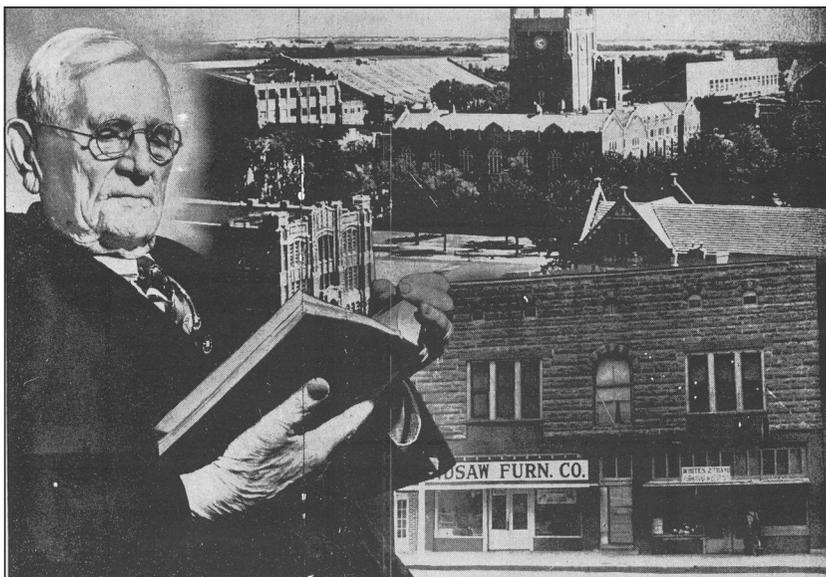
DeBarr, Vice President, Director of the School of Chemical Engineering, Professor of Chemistry, be and is hereby removed from tenure appointment and that he be given leave of absence without pay for the term of one year from July 1, 1923. It was moved and unanimously carried that the office of Vice President of the University be abolished as of this date, June 5, 1923.<sup>49</sup> Everyone understood that DeBarr was not to return to the university after his unpaid “leave of absence.”



Edwin DeBarr continued to live in Norman. But it must not be assumed that he lived in isolation and disgrace. After all, Norman was a town that up until World War II openly boasted that no African American had ever spent the night within its limits.<sup>50</sup> DeBarr’s Norman neighbors appeared to have been entirely indifferent to his Klan activism and his racial and religious views. He rose steadily in esteem and veneration over the next decades. He resided quietly at

*A tribute to Edwin DeBarr for his eighty-ninth birthday featured in the Daily Oklahoman on January 11, 1948 (OHS Research Division).*

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his home at 507 Chautauqua and was a familiar figure on the campus and a frequent visitor to the building that he had helped to design and that continued to bear his name. Even though he was no longer connected to the university, he was allowed to conduct experiments and analyses for private clients in the building's laboratories. From 1930 to 1937 he was the "health officer" for Norman, his duties consisting principally of inspecting the town's dairies, sanitary facilities, paving, and garbage disposal. He was the inspector of sanitary conditions for campus sororities, fraternities, and boarding houses.<sup>51</sup> One of the streets leading to the campus was named for him. He was an honored Mason, Elk, and Odd Fellow and was a bank director. On the occasion of the university's fiftieth anniversary in 1942, DeBarr was officially recognized with other pioneer teachers at the institution.<sup>52</sup> When Stratton Brooks's daughter returned to Norman for a visit, she was hosted by the DeBarrs.<sup>53</sup> In 1937 President William Bennett Bizzell referred to him as "my friend" and "a distinguished scientist and highly respected citizen,"<sup>54</sup> and when DeBarr and his wife set out on a trip to Europe, the Bizzells went down to the train station to bid them farewell.<sup>55</sup>

Nine years later, President George Lynn Cross told him "you have lived a full life and you leave a rich heritage to those of us who follow after you."<sup>56</sup> Oklahoma colleges and universities did not give honorary degrees in those days, but President Cross told one correspondent that "I agree heartily that no one could be more worthy of this honor than Doctor DeBarr."<sup>57</sup> In 1948 DeBarr's picture adorned the cover of the *Sooner Magazine*, and he was the subject of an affectionate article. Although the writer of that article had been on the campus when DeBarr was denounced and fired, she delicately referred only to "his retirement."<sup>58</sup> For the big Homecoming Parade of 1950, he was a marshal and was invited to ride in a convertible at the head of the procession.<sup>59</sup>

On October 10, 1950, when DeBarr was ninety-one years old, his granddaughter's husband, Robert Rose, fleeing California authorities who had charged him with sexually molesting a little girl, stopped at DeBarr's house and demanded money. When the old professor refused, Rose beat him severely with a tire iron and stole his car. The old man, bleeding profusely, dragged himself to a next-door neighbor's house and was rushed to the hospital. While recuperating from the assault, having been moved to Ellison Hall, the university's infirmary, DeBarr died of a heart attack on December 18, 1950.<sup>60</sup> His funeral had to be moved from his own Presbyterian Church to the larger McFarlin Methodist Church in order to accom-

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moderate the 250 who wanted to attend. All the banks in Norman were closed for the occasion. President Cross issued a statement: "He possessed qualities of heart and mind which endeared him to all who knew him,"<sup>61</sup> and the minister delivering the eulogy at the Masonic service spoke of him as "a citizen of the highest type who never shrank from his duty."<sup>62</sup> History was not to be so generous or deferential to the former Klansman.



The final fall of Edwin DeBarr came more than three decades after his death, and it came in two stages. At the end of the 1981-1982 academic year, a group of students, led by a freshman named Bill Stanhope, launched a major effort to remove DeBarr's name from the building on the campus's north oval. Stanhope had somehow discovered DeBarr's Klan affiliation and was outraged that a university building should bear his name. He was soon joined by the Black People's Union, the campus and Oklahoma City branches of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Oklahoma City Urban League, and a substantial number of students and faculty, both white and black.<sup>63</sup> First, the protesting students brought their case before the university's Student Congress. After an hour of debating the question, the Congress, by a vote of twenty-six to fourteen with four abstentions, rejected the resolution demanding a name change; the headline in the student paper next morning read "DeBarr it stays."<sup>64</sup>

Despite the defeat representatives of the organizations and others were determined to press forward. They were permitted to present their case before the university's Board of Regents on June 10. By the time the issue came before the regents, the controversy was being widely noticed in state newspapers. In late April the issue was debated by two of the university's most prominent and respected individuals. Former-president George Lynn Cross issued a statement opposing the name change, which, he said, was based on emotion, not logic. While Cross did not defend DeBarr's activities ("[I]t is difficult for me to understand how he could participate in the activities of the KKK"), he believed that the Klan should not be judged by the current standards and that it should be remembered that in the 1920s it was "accepted by many, even respectable Oklahomans as a useful adjunct to law enforcement agencies." But whatever one thought about that organization, Cross was certain that

"DeBarr's contributions to the university greatly outweigh his controversial affiliation with the KKK."<sup>65</sup>

Three days later, George Henderson, the Goldman Professor of Human Relations and the third African American faculty member hired by the university, issued a sharply worded response: "Shame on you, Dr. Cross." The view of the Klan that Cross expressed, Henderson insisted, was "the view from the White side of the hood. . . . The Klan was wrong in the 1920s, it is wrong in the 1980s and—unless it embraces our democratic principles—it will be wrong in the 2000s."<sup>66</sup> Division over the issue existed even in the black community. Oklahoma City's *Black Chronicle* published the editorial "DeBarr Hall—Major Cause for Concern?" arguing that, given the many serious problems African Americans were facing, the effort to change the name of a building was a case of misplaced priorities. Naturally other voices arose to dispute the editor's position.<sup>67</sup>

The meeting of the university's regents was tense, but decorous and polite.<sup>68</sup> Speaking on behalf of a name change were students Stanhope and Rodney McCowan of the campus NAACP. Also advocating change were Richard Thompson of the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance, Leonard Benton of the Urban League, and state legislators Kevin Cox and Freddy Williams. The university's president, William S. Banowsky, then read a lengthy and carefully worded statement. Asserting that he had "spent more time on this issue with students than any other matter" since becoming president, he called the issue a genuine ethical dilemma. Banowsky reviewed DeBarr's illustrious career at the university and the history of the building. Then he acknowledged the professor's Klan activities, admitting that "the entire university community readily appreciates what the continuing presence of this building symbolizes to our black students and other minorities. . . . While the sensibilities of blacks and other minorities may be the most seriously offended, the issue itself runs to the very soul of the University. The question cannot be avoided."<sup>69</sup>

After a detailed review of the incidents of 1922 that led to DeBarr's firing, Banowsky finally came to the point: "Today, I will recommend to the Board of Regents that the chemistry building . . . continue to be known as 'DeBarr Hall.' Perhaps it was not completely wise for the building to have been so named in the first place, nor is it completely wise for us to leave the name on it. Our choice today is between two evils. I am recommending what I believe to be the lesser of those."<sup>70</sup> There were more than three hun-

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dred facilities at the university that had been named for particular individuals, Banowsky pointed out; if the flaws of Edwin DeBarr were to cause his name to be removed, would it initiate and encourage a search for flaws among the others, and where would that inquisition end? (The school's athletic dormitories, for example, were named for George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, two men who had owned and sold slaves.) Finally, after an eloquent reaffirmation of the university's dedication to equality and diversity, Banowsky announced that he was appointing a committee to study the issues raised by the controversy and to recommend ways to "reaffirm the school's commitment to affirmative action and equality for all without regard to race, color and creed."<sup>71</sup> The regents voted unanimously to accept the president's recommendation.<sup>72</sup>

It was a tribute to President Banowsky's diplomatic skill that he was somehow able to mollify and contain the strong feelings released by the issue, particularly among African Americans on the campus and around the state. The typical response to the regents' action by proponents of changing the building's name was disappointment, but a willingness to see what the new committee would do. "I disagree with the resolution, but out of deep respect for Dr. Banowsky, I will wait for the report," said Representative Cox.<sup>73</sup> That report was supposed to have been presented to the regents at their July meeting, but the matter was postponed.<sup>74</sup> In any case, the issue was entirely overshadowed at that meeting by the bombshell announcement that President Banowsky was resigning to head the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce.<sup>75</sup> Banowsky's resignation was temporary, and he was reinstated as president at the regents' October 14 meeting,<sup>76</sup> but it fell to the interim president, J. R. Morris, to present the report of the committee, which he did on September 9.<sup>77</sup> The report consisted of two recommendations—one simple, bland, and easy to implement, the second, more ambitious than the university was willing or able to carry out. The first recommendation was that the regents pass a resolution reaffirming their commitment to an institution free of bigotry and inequality. Interim President Morris presented such a resolution at that very meeting, and the regents passed it unanimously. The second recommendation was to create an Institute for Social and Cultural Relations to be named for Martin Luther King, Jr., and whose purpose would be to study race and ethnic relations. Although the proposal was sent to the Academic Program Council with the "understanding" that the council would report no later than December, the matter conveniently vanished into thin air and was never heard of again. Thus

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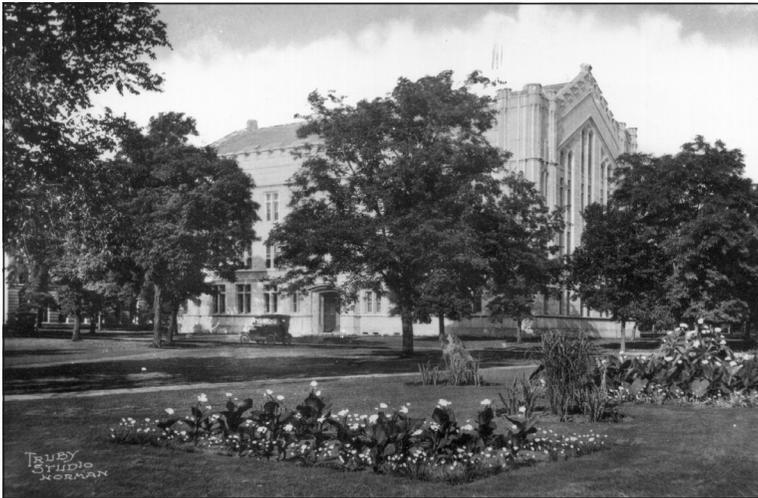


*This photograph appeared in the Tulsa Eagle on April 28, 1988 with the caption "OU students protest the name of DeBarr Hall, named for Edwin DeBarr, a former vice president of OU and Grand Dragon for the Ku Klux Klan. DeBarr was suspended, without pay, for one year in 1923 for his involvement with the KKK and now students want no mention of his name on campus. (Photo courtesy of Steve Boyce.)" (OHS Research Division).*

did the issue of Edwin DeBarr's name on that building seem to disappear.<sup>78</sup>

But the question somehow continued to fester, and it arose again with considerable energy six years later in 1988. The immediate cause of the revival was the formation late in the 1987-1988 academic year of a campus branch of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). At a large campus rally held on April 21, SDS spokesman Davis Slemmons made a fiery, if somewhat overwrought, speech: "This is not an issue of yesterday. This is an issue of now. But, more importantly, it is an issue of tomorrow. It is here in the university that we build tomorrow. Will that tomorrow be built with bricks of self-destruction and mortar of hate? Shall we say to those who have climbed the mountain . . . There is no promised land?"<sup>79</sup> A Confederate flag was burned, appropriate civil rights songs were sung, and the protesters marched to the site of the building itself. The SDS claimed to have gathered a thousand signatures on a petition to remove Edwin DeBarr's name from the chemistry building.<sup>80</sup>

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*DeBarr Hall, undated photograph (Albortype Collection [18827.451], OHS Research Division).*

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The fundamental question, debated in the spring and summer of 1988, was the same as it had been six years earlier: Did DeBarr's admitted contributions to the early history of the University of Oklahoma outweigh the fact that he had been an active member of an organization characterized by bigotry and violence? No one defended the KKK, but some argued that it was wrong to judge it by modern standards, and besides, many highly regarded individuals (like those slaveholder Founding Fathers) fell far short of the perfection that the protesters seemed to be demanding. Proponents of change argued that the university should not honor the sort of activities with which DeBarr had been associated and that an institution truly committed to racial justice and truly welcoming of diversity could not have one of its principal buildings named for an exemplar of intolerance, racism, and intimidation. But if the arguments were the same as before, this time the outcome was different.

This time the effort succeeded, and it succeeded for several reasons. Critical was the fact that this time a large number of prestigious campus entities urged that the building's name be changed, until there was a rising chorus demanding that DeBarr's name be removed. On April 20 the Graduate Student Senate voted unani-

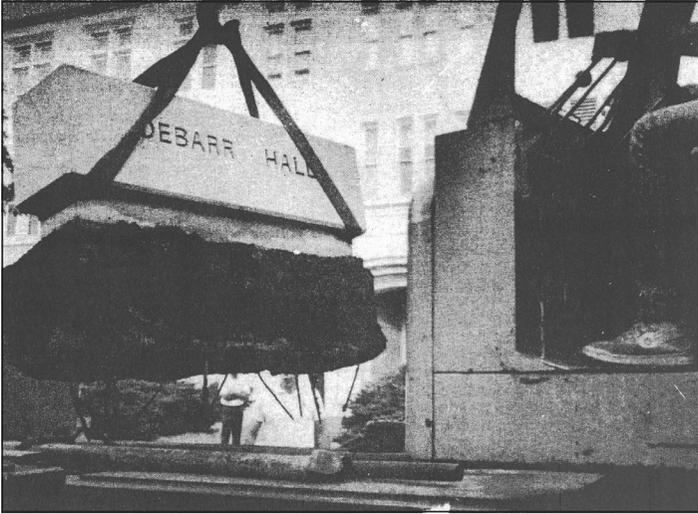
mously in favor of the change. In the same week, the faculty of the Chemistry Department discussed the issue and unanimously resolved to "strongly support efforts to rename DeBarr Hall."<sup>81</sup> On the same day that the chemistry professors spoke, the Student Congress passed a resolution advocating change. In the following week the Faculty Senate adopted a resolution asking for a name change,<sup>82</sup> and the week after that, the university's Equal Opportunity Committee. The Campus Planning Council weighed in on June 23,<sup>83</sup> and the Association of Black Personnel on July 6.<sup>84</sup> In addition to the substantial support for change from various campus constituencies, the university now had a different Board of Regents and a different president. One of the new regents was Sylvia Lewis, an Oklahoma City native, former dean at Langston University, and the first African American ever appointed to the board. On May 6 Regent Lewis issued a statement calling for the removal of DeBarr's name: "We shouldn't be perpetuating discrimination at one of our flagship universities," she said.<sup>85</sup>

By the time the regents met on July 20, President Frank Horton was convinced that it would be in the best interests of the university to accede to the change, and he recommended that henceforth the building be simply called the Chemistry Building. The regents heard a review of the issue from Lori Ann Sharpe, president of the university's Student Association, and with almost no discussion, they voted six to one to remove DeBarr's name. The only comment came from the lone dissenter, Regent Sam Noble of Ardmore. Calling the action "a travesty" and a "tempest in a teapot" and "a very dumb thing to do," Noble said, "Dr. DeBarr has been dead for 40 years, has not been connected with the University for 65 years, and is not harming anyone anymore." He predicted that the regents might come to regret dishonoring "a fine man and a fine teacher."<sup>86</sup> When Noble had finished, the chair declared that the motion had passed.<sup>87</sup>



Early on the morning of August 8, 1988, a large crane lumbered down the west side of the university's north oval. It stopped in front of the Chemistry Building and secured hoisting straps to the large limestone block bearing the words "DeBarr Hall." Levers were pulled and the stone was yanked out of the ground. Ben Kinder, the director of the university's physical plant, was asked what would become of it. It all depends, Kinder replied. If it comes out without

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*The DeBarr Hall marker is removed from the Chemistry Building. This photograph from the Norman Transcript dated August 8, 1988, ran with the caption, "An unidentified worker this morning at the University of Oklahoma hoists the marker bearing the name of Edwin C. DeBarr from in front of the structure now known simply as the Chemistry Building. (Transcript Photo by Janice Higgin Blunck)" (OHS Research Division).*

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its breaking up, "we could possibly use it again. We'd hire a professional to rout out the letters, make a groove there, and inscribe the other side. That wouldn't be hard to do." Of course if the thing came apart in the process, it would "be of no value to the university, and we'd haul it off for scrap."<sup>88</sup>

### ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> The principal sources for Edwin DeBarr's life are his Personnel File, Office of the Provost, University of Oklahoma, and "DeBarr, Edwin," Vertical Files, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma. For brief summaries of his career, see *Who Was Who in America* (Chicago: Marquis, 1968), 4 (1961-68): 238, and obituary notices in *Norman (Okla.) Transcript*, *Oklahoma Daily* (Norman), and *Daily Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City), all on December 19, 1950.

<sup>2</sup> *Who Was Who*, 4:238.

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<sup>3</sup> Edwin DeBarr, "Diary," March 19, April 3, 8, and 10, 1892. The diary is in the Edwin DeBarr Manuscript (MSS), Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Box 4.

<sup>4</sup> David W. Levy, *The University of Oklahoma: A History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005), 39-40, 54, 67.

<sup>5</sup> Roy Gittinger, *The University of Oklahoma: A History of Fifty Years, 1892-1942* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1942), 9.

<sup>6</sup> DeBarr, "Diary," August 29-31 and September 1-4, 1892.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, September 6, 1892.

<sup>8</sup> DeBarr described himself in his application form: see DeBarr MSS, Box 1, Folder 8.

<sup>9</sup> Harold Keith, *Oklahoma Kickoff: An Informal History of the First Twenty-five Years of Football at the University of Oklahoma and of the Amusing Hardships That Attended Its Pioneering* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1948), 6-7.

<sup>10</sup> The letters are collected in the DeBarr MSS, Box 1, Folder 10.

<sup>11</sup> Levy, *University of Oklahoma: A History*, 212-13.

<sup>12</sup> *University Catalogue, 1916-1917* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1917), 34.

<sup>13</sup> For DeBarr's influence on the design of the Chemistry Building, see Carolyn S. Sorrels, "Eight Early Buildings on the Norman Campus of the University of Oklahoma" (bachelor of liberal studies paper, University of Oklahoma, 1985), 85. Sorrels cites a letter of November 20, 1915, from the State Board of Public Affairs, authorizing DeBarr "to act as Superintendent and Architect of the new science building. . . ." For an enthusiastic floor-by-floor description of the building, see *Norman Transcript*, February 1, 1917.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> The building is referred to as the Chemistry Building in the "Minutes" of the State Board of Education for August 24, 1916, 597; the first mention of DeBarr Hall occurs in the "Minutes" for May 15, 1917, 684.

<sup>16</sup> *The Sooner, 1921*, yearbook (n.p.: n.p., 1921), 2-3.

<sup>17</sup> Lida White, Interview with Edwin DeBarr, March 1935, in Lida White Papers, Western History Collections, Box 9. See also Levy, *University of Oklahoma*, I: 50.

<sup>18</sup> Allen W. Trelease, *White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).

<sup>19</sup> Dixon's sensational trilogy was *The Leopard's Spots: A Romance of the White Man's Burden, 1865-1900* (1902); *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* (1905); and *The Traitor: A Story of the Fall of the Invisible Empire* (1907).

<sup>20</sup> There is a vast literature on the Klan, including numerous local studies, but useful general surveys include David M. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1981); Patsy Sims, *The Klan* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996); and Nancy MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

<sup>21</sup> Arnold S. Rice, *The Ku Klux Klan in American Politics* (Washington, DC: Public Affairs Press, 1962), chaps. 2-3, 5.

<sup>22</sup> For graphic contemporary denunciations of KKK activity in Oklahoma, see W. C. Witcher, *The Reign of Terror in Oklahoma: A Detailed Account of the Klan's Barbarous Practices and Brutal Outrages against Individuals; Its Control over Judges and Juries and Governor Walton's Heroic Fight. . . .* (Ft. Worth, Tex.: W. C. Witcher, 1923); Aldrich Blake, *The Ku Klux Kraze: A Lecture* (Oklahoma City: A. Blake, 1924); and Howard A. Tucker, *History of Governor Walton's War on Ku Klux Klan, the Invisible*

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*Empire* (Oklahoma City: Southwest Publishing Co., 1923). These were written by partisans of the anti-Klan governor John C. ("Jack") Walton and must be used with caution. An invaluable history is Carter Blue Clark, "A History of the Ku Klux Klan in Oklahoma" (PhD diss., University of Oklahoma, 1976). See also, Charles C. Alexander, *The Ku Klux Klan in the Southwest* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995); Sheldon Neuringer, "Governor Walton's War on the Ku Klux Klan: An Episode in Oklahoma History, 1923 to 1924," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 45 (Summer 1967): 153-79; Michael M. Jessup, "Consorting with Blood and Violence: The Decline of the Oklahoma Ku Klux Klan," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 78 (Fall 2000): 296-315; and Brad L. Duren, 'Klanspiracy' or Despotism? The Rise and Fall of Governor Jack Walton, Featuring W. D. McBee," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 80 (Winter 2002-2003): 468-85.

<sup>23</sup> James R. Scales and Danny Goble, *Oklahoma Politics: A History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982), 108.

<sup>24</sup> This was the claim of Aldrich Blake, *Ku Klux Kraze*, 15. Blake was Governor John C. Walton's secretary and close adviser, and he may have exaggerated Klan activity.

<sup>25</sup> Jessup, "Consorting with Blood and Violence," 297.

<sup>26</sup> Clark, "A History of the Ku Klux Klan in Oklahoma," 147-51.

<sup>27</sup> For Robert H. Wilson's connection to the Klan, see Alexander, *Ku Klux Klan in the Southwest*, 131-35; Clark, "A History of the Ku Klux Klan in Oklahoma," 175; and Thomas D. Isern, "John Calloway Walton," in *Oklahoma's Governors, 1907-1929: Turbulent Politics*, ed. LeRoy H. Fischer (Oklahoma City, Oklahoma Historical Society, 1981), 119.

<sup>28</sup> Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism*, chaps. 28-30. See also David C. Burner, *The Politics of Provincialism: The Democratic Party in Transition, 1918-1932* (New York: Knopf, 1968), chap. 3. The final vote at the Democratic National Convention was 542 3/20ths to 541 3/20ths, and the proposal to condemn the Klan by name was defeated.

<sup>29</sup> Isern, "John Calloway Walton," 115-46; Scales and Goble, *Oklahoma Politics*, chap. 7; Neuringer, "Governor Walton's War on the Ku Klux Klan."

<sup>30</sup> *The Sooner 1920*, yearbook (Iowa City: Godschalk and Hilles, 1920). Unfortunately, the yearbook for 1920 appeared without pagination.

<sup>31</sup> Upton Sinclair, *The Goose-Step: A Study of American Education* (Pasadena, Calif.: Published by the author, 1922), 336.

<sup>32</sup> University of Oklahoma Board of Regents, "Minutes," April 20, 1922, 129.

<sup>33</sup> By this time, the matter was gaining some national attention; see "The University of Oklahoma and the Ku Klux Klan," *School and Society*, 16 (October 7, 1922), 412-13.

<sup>34</sup> Bill Campbell to Horace H. Bliss, August 3, 1982, in DeBarr's Personnel File. In connection with later attempts to remove DeBarr's name from the Chemistry Building, a great deal of excellent research, most of it, unfortunately, anonymous, was done on DeBarr's career and Klan affiliation. That research was deposited in the University of Oklahoma Archives, Vertical File: "DeBarr, Edwin." Some of the assertions in my account derive from that collection of materials. I regret that the anonymity of the research prevents my acknowledging, by name, the authors of it.

<sup>35</sup> "Knights Kamellia Kloran Adopted," *Imperial Night-Hawk* (Atlanta, Ga.), February 27, 1924.

<sup>36</sup> *Hobart (Okla.) Democrat-Chief*, June 12, 1924.

<sup>37</sup> *Pittsburgh County Guardian* (McAlester, Okla.), January 10, 1924.

<sup>38</sup> This account of DeBarr's commencement speech is taken from the *Okmulgee (Okla.) Daily Democrat*, June 2, 1922.

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<sup>39</sup> For the furious Catholic reaction, see "Moroney Scores Dr. DeBarr for Catholic Attacks," *Okmulgee Daily Democrat*, June 4, 1922; and "Catholic Men Make Protest to School Board," *ibid.*, June 6, 1922.

<sup>40</sup> For a flowery tribute to this prominent Oklahoman, see Charles Evans, "Henry Lowndes Muldrow," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 29 (Winter 1951-52): 394-400. Muldrow is not to be confused with his son, Hal Muldrow, who was destined also to play a prominent part in the affairs of the university.

<sup>41</sup> *Muskogee (Okla.) Phoenix*, August 6, 1922.

<sup>42</sup> Brooks to C. F. Rogers, August 10, 1922, in DeBarr's Personnel File. Rogers had written to ask why Brooks was persecuting DeBarr, "that grand old man without spot or blemish." The wife referred to was not DeBarr's first wife, Hattie; always frail, she had died shortly after arriving in Oklahoma. In 1900 DeBarr returned to Michigan to wed Cora Belle Reid of Port Huron. The couple remained together until Mrs. DeBarr's death on October 31, 1948.

<sup>43</sup> *Daily Oklahoman*, August 6, 1922.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> This was Brooks's recollection of the conversation three years later. See Brooks to DeBarr, September 4, 1925, in the DeBarr MSS, Box 1, Folder 8. DeBarr's "other work" included surveying, chemical analyses for the state (particularly regarding poisons), the examination of suspicious fires, certain autopsies, and, during Prohibition, analysis of liquors. He also did assays and chemical and geological analyses for private clients. See the "Inventory" to the DeBarr MSS and "First OU Teacher, 89, Going Strong," *Daily Oklahoman*, January 11, 1948.

<sup>46</sup> Regents "Minutes," August 15, 1922, 141-42. For a newspaper account of the August 15, 1922, meeting, see *Daily Oklahoman*, August 16, 1922.

<sup>47</sup> Muldrow's original draft, with the changes in pencil, is in DeBarr's Personnel File.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* There were, in addition, rumors that the regents were irritated with DeBarr for serving as a hired witness, at \$100 per day, whenever the Oklahoma Natural Gas Corporation sought a rate increase before the Corporation Committee (see Bill Campbell to Horace Bliss, August 3, 1922, in DeBarr's Personnel File). In the original draft of their statement, the two dissenters listed a fourth reason: "For inattention to official duty and repeated absence from his post of duty." That paragraph, however, was crossed out by Muldrow.

<sup>49</sup> Regents "Minutes," June 5, 1923, 11-12. The office of vice president was reinstated two years later.

<sup>50</sup> For background on the town's long history of racial exclusion, see George Lynn Cross, *Blacks in White Colleges: Oklahoma's Landmark Cases* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1975), 5-10.

<sup>51</sup> See William Bennett Bizzell to Edna McDaniel and to J. F. Findlay, both March 8, 1934, in DeBarr's Personnel File.

<sup>52</sup> "First OU Teacher, 89, Going Strong."

<sup>53</sup> Brooks to DeBarr, September 24, 1925, DeBarr MSS, Box 1, Folder 8.

<sup>54</sup> Bizzell to "To Whom It May Concern," January 9, 1937, DeBarr MSS, Box 1, Folder 8.

<sup>55</sup> DeBarr to Bizzell, January 15, 1937, DeBarr Personnel File.

<sup>56</sup> Cross to DeBarr, September 18, 1946, DeBarr MSS, Box 1, Folder 8.

<sup>57</sup> Cross to Mary Jo Turner, February 26, 1948, DeBarr Personnel File.

<sup>58</sup> Mary Jo Turner, "Dr. DeBarr—Spry, Happy at 89," *Sooner Magazine* 20 (January 1948): 11.

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<sup>59</sup> Graham B. Johnson (Homecoming Parade Committee) to DeBarr, September 26, 1950, DeBarr MSS, Box 1, Folder 8.

<sup>60</sup> Rose was first charged with assault, but because DeBarr was too weak to testify against him, Rose was extradited to California. But he escaped from the train and was not apprehended for another eight years. The day after DeBarr's death, the charge against Rose was changed from assault to murder. Returned to Oklahoma after his recapture, Rose was convicted and sentenced to death, but he appealed on the grounds of insanity and escaped the electric chair. Rose died in prison in 1969. See the excellent detective work in the article by Ben Fenwick, "DeBarr Remains Problem: Controversial Scholar's Ashes in Storage 30 Years," *Daily Oklahoman*, August 8, 1988.

<sup>61</sup> See his obituary in the *Daily Oklahoman*, December 19, 1950, 6, and accounts of his death, tributes, and funeral in the *Oklahoma Daily*, December 19, 20, and 21, 1950. DeBarr left one-half of his estate to the university's Research Foundation. He was cremated and his ashes stored in a funeral home in Norman. Neither of his daughters ever claimed the ashes. See *ibid.*; and Larry Nemecek, "Workmen Remove DeBarr block," *Norman Transcript*, August 8, 1988.

<sup>62</sup> *Norman Transcript*, December 21, 1950.

<sup>63</sup> For the opening of the campaign, see *Oklahoma Daily*, April 19, 1982; *Oklahoma City Times*, April 20, 1982; *Daily Oklahoman*, April 30 and May 6, 1982; or *Norman Transcript*, May 9, 1982.

<sup>64</sup> *Oklahoma Daily*, April 28, 1982. Among those voting in favor of retaining DeBarr's name on the building was freshman Brad Henry, future governor of the state.

<sup>65</sup> Cindy Ferrell, "Former president Cross defends DeBarr," *Oklahoma Daily*, April 27, 1982.

<sup>66</sup> *Oklahoma Daily*, April 30, 1982. In his book, *Race and the University: A Memoir* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010), 12, 139, 207, 218, George Henderson gives a much more favorable verdict on President Cross's views on race and advocacy of integration.

<sup>67</sup> *Black Chronicle* (Oklahoma City), June 10, 1982. See also *ibid.*, June 17 and 24, 1982.

<sup>68</sup> For a full account of the meeting, see Regents "Minutes," June 11, 1982, 17015-20.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 17017.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 17019.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 17020. The committee consisted of five individuals, four of whom were respected members of the campus's African American community. They were Hiwatha Towers, president of the Black People's Union, Rodney McGowan of the campus NAACP, Norris Williams, coordinator of Black Student Services, and Walter Mason, the university's Affirmative Action officer. The fifth member was Anona Adair, vice president for Student Affairs.

<sup>72</sup> Brief notices of the results of the meeting appeared in numerous Oklahoma newspapers on June 11, 1982. For a few examples, see *Morning Press* (Lawton, Okla.); *News Star* (Shawnee, Okla.); *Tulsa (Okla.) World*; *Tulsa (Okla.) Tribune*; *Daily Ardmoreite* (Ardmore, Okla.); *Daily Eagle* (Enid, Okla.); *Daily News* (Ponca City, Okla.); *Ada (Okla.) Evening News*; *El Reno (Okla.) Tribune*; *Examiner-Enterprise* (Bartlesville, Okla.), June 13, 1982; *Journal Tribune* (Blackwell, Okla.), June 13, 1982. For somewhat fuller accounts, see *Norman Transcript*, June 10, 1982; *Daily Oklahoman* and *Oklahoma City Times*, June 10, 1982; or *Tulsa World*, June 11, 1982.

<sup>73</sup> *Oklahoman*, June 11, 1982.

## EDWIN ("DADDY") DEBARR

<sup>74</sup> *Norman Transcript*, July 21, 1982.

<sup>75</sup> Regents "Minutes," July 22, 1982, 17086.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, October 14, 1982, 17292.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, September 9, 1982, 17221-17224.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> Quoted in *Tulsa (Okla.) Eagle*, April 28, 1988; see also *Oklahoma Daily*, April 22, 1988.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> Roland Lehr, chair of the Chemistry Department, to University Board of Regents, April 28, 1988; see also Linda Kay Sakelaris, "Faculty favors name change," *Oklahoma Daily*, April 29, 1988.

<sup>82</sup> Gary Cohen, chair, Faculty Senate, University of Oklahoma, Norman Campus, to Frank Horton, May 4, 1988; see also Cohen to Donald DeWitt, May 26, 1988, Vertical File: "DeBarr, Edwin"; and for an account of the debate in the Faculty Senate, see Steve Jump, "Faculty Senate supports new name for DeBarr Hall," *Norman Transcript*, May 3, 1988.

<sup>83</sup> *Norman Transcript*, *Tulsa Tribune*, or *Daily Oklahoman*, all on June 24, 1988.

<sup>84</sup> All of these petitions for change were laid before the regents at their July meeting; Regents "Minutes," July 20, 1988, 20403-20405.

<sup>85</sup> Jim Killackey, "Regent Joins DeBarr Foes," *Saturday Oklahoman and Times* (Oklahoma City), May 7, 1988. See also *Norman Transcript*, May 7, 1988.

<sup>86</sup> Larry Nemecek, "DeBarr name to be taken off OU chemistry building," *Norman Transcript*, July 21, 1988.

<sup>87</sup> Regents "Minutes," July 20, 1988, 20305. For newspaper accounts of the July 20 meeting, see *Oklahoma Daily*; Jim Killackey, "DeBarr Scratched from OU Building," *Daily Oklahoman*; *Black Chronicle* (Oklahoma City); *Norman Transcript*; or *Tulsa World*, all on July 21, 1988.

<sup>88</sup> Nemecek, "Workmen remove DeBarr block."