

PIONEER HISTORIAN: THE LIFE OF

JOSEPH B. THOBURN

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JOSEPH B. THOBURN

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PREFACE

Joseph B. Thoburn was a fascinating individual whose many interests led him to make important contributions in a variety of fields. Indeed, his diversity of knowledge and activities was reminiscent of men of the "Age of Enlightenment" such as Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson. Thus the very scope of Thoburn's activities caught my attention and caused me to investigate the possibility of chronicling his life. Hence I discovered that although Thoburn was the pioneer historian of Oklahoma, his life and activities had not been recorded in depth by historians. And his accomplishments certainly render him worthy of biographical study.

Thoburn was a very quotable individual and I have let him speak for himself in many instances throughout the text. He was a stickler for accuracy, yet he had his own peculiar way of spelling certain words--"partizan" for partisan, for example. However, I have not used the scholarly and somewhat pretentious "sic" to denote such errors as they are not numerous and do not cause misunderstanding in any instance.

It is a difficult task to enumerate the many people who assisted me in completing this project. Many who were not directly connected with this project were nonetheless instrumental in my efforts. Particularly important in this category are my parents, Mr. and Mrs. Floyd Lambert of Tishomingo, Oklahoma whose encouragement and support gave me the momentum to continue my education through the Ph.D. degree.

Also providing invaluable knowledge and inspiration have been numerous professors in history and other disciplines at Murray State College, East Central Oklahoma State University, and Oklahoma State University. Especially influential during my undergraduate years were Dr. Lloyd Goss and Dr. Palmer Boeger, both of East Central Oklahoma State University.

At Oklahoma State University, I was aided by many professors too numerous to enumerate. However, I owe special debts of gratitude to Professors Michael M. Smith, Thomas Kielhorn, Joe A. Stout, Jr., LeRoy H. Fischer, Bertil Hanson, George Jewsbury, and Homer L. Knight. Moreover, I shall be eternally grateful to the two men who guided me through my graduate program in history--Professors H. J. Henderson and Odie B. Faulk. Dr. Henderson's scholarship, guidance, and friendship were basic to my success as a graduate student. Dr. Faulk's inspiration and guidance were essential to the completion of this work.

My research in this project was assisted by many individuals. Particularly helpful was the staff of the Oklahoma Historical Society Library headed by Miss Alene Simpson. Dr. Kenny A. Franks, Director of Publications for the Society, also rendered vital assistance. Moreover, Mr. Larry Banks of the Army Corps of Engineers was particularly helpful in evaluating Thoburn's archaeological research and theories.

Stenographic work was done on various phases of the project by Jeanne Fusco, Jeanne Beaulieu, and Phyllis Whitten, and I am grateful for their assistance. Finally, my wife Judy provided not only stenographic and editorial work, but also inspiration and patience. Without her help in so many ways, this work would have remained unwritten.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

On May 3, 1934, a slightly built, balding man of sixty-seven years rode the elevator to the penthouse of the Colcord Building in downtown Oklahoma City. Soon he had nestled into an air-tight, soundproof vault where he proceeded to examine historically significant papers of the late Charles Colcord. He quickly became engrossed in his work. To his horror the light suddenly went out, and the door slammed shut. Joseph B. Thoburn, Oklahoma's pioneer historian, had been sealed in a death trap by an employee who was unaware of his presence.¹

After two hours of futile attempts at being heard, Thoburn found his oxygen supply was running low. He was exhausted. Just as the devoutly religious historian likely was preparing to meet his Maker, the door of his tomb was thrust open by the elevator operator, who remembered taking Thoburn to the roof. Thoburn again had survived a close brush with death. He lived an additional nine years during which he continued his activities devoted to preservation of Oklahoma's history and heritage.

Joseph B. Thoburn's place in Oklahoma history never has been appreciated fully. He was Oklahoma's first significant historian. His initial survey of Oklahoma's history appeared in 1908, a time when most Oklahomans were too busy building for the future to care

about the past. A self-trained historian, Thoburn realized that much of the state's history and heritage would be lost to future generations unless someone began preserving it immediately. Thoburn later wrote the first comprehensive history of Oklahoma in 1916, and with Muriel Wright expanded this effort in 1929. Most of the elements of Oklahoma history which students of the subject take for granted today were brought to light first by Thoburn.

Thoburn also performed yeoman service for the Oklahoma Historical Society during a critical period of its development from 1917 to 1931. During that span he served at different times as Secretary, Director of Research, Curator, and Director of Archaeology and Ethnology. His role in the development of the Society's museum, archival collections, publications, and membership under adverse circumstances was remarkable. Moreover, Thoburn justly may be considered the father of archaeology in Oklahoma for he was the first to delve extensively into the prehistoric Indian cultures of the state.

Thoburn's pioneering efforts were not limited to the fields of history and archaeology, however. Indeed, he was instrumental in the founding of Epworth University, the forerunner of present day Oklahoma City University. In addition, as Secretary of the Oklahoma City Commercial Club, Thoburn played a major role in the reorganization of that entity into the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, the most influential organization in the development of Oklahoma City over the ensuing decades. Thoburn also pioneered, while serving as the first secretary of the Territorial Board of Agriculture, by advocating navigation of the Arkansas River for commercial purposes; he proposed construction of

a canal from Oklahoma City to Webbers Falls which would give the capital city an outlet to the sea, and he pressed for a rational water conservation and flood prevention program.

Thoburn's life was not one distinguished exclusively by success, for he experienced his share of failure and more than his portion of frustration. Thoburn was no compromiser, and he twice became involved in controversies which eventually cost him his job. Moreover, he faced disturbing difficulties in his home life and experienced some disappointments in his literary efforts. Finally, he served the Territorial Board of Agriculture, the University of Oklahoma, and the Oklahoma Historical Society under conditions that few men would have endured, and he made lasting contributions to each entity.

Thoburn truly dedicated his life to public service. As a result, he never was able to accumulate much money; his estate at the time of his death was valued at less than \$2,000. Indeed, Thoburn ended his life with few material possessions but rich in personal satisfaction, for he recognized that "what one gets out of life is largely what he gives in the way of service rather than the things--the honors and emoluments--which he demands and takes."²

This historian did derive considerable satisfaction in his old age from knowing that he had given his best efforts in public service. He must have realized that all who would labor in the future to preserve the history and heritage of Oklahoma would be following in the footsteps of Joseph Bradfield Thoburn.

FOOTNOTES

¹"Thoburn Has Narrow Escape," The Daily Oklahoman, Thursday, May 3, 1934, p. 2; Mrs. Bert Moore to J. B. Thoburn, June 20, 1934, Folder TH-1, 1b, Thoburn Papers, Oklahoma Historical Society. Hereinafter referred to as TP.

²J. B. Thoburn to Irving Weinstock, November 25, 1932, Unfiled, TP.

CHAPTER II

EARLY LIFE

Joseph B. Thoburn was born at Bellaire, Ohio, on August 8, 1866. His parents, Major Thomas C. Thoburn and Miss Mary Eleanor Crosier, had married on September 26, 1865, only a few days after Major Thoburn was mustered out of the Union Army. During the Civil War, Major Thoburn had served with distinction, rising from the rank of enlisted man to a major in the 196th Ohio Volunteer Infantry. At the outbreak of war, he had recruited the greater part of a company for the 50th Ohio Volunteer Infantry and expected to be one of the commissioned officers; however, he was passed over through political maneuvering and entered the service with his company as orderly sergeant.¹

Major Thoburn's first taste of the glories of war came when he contracted a severe case of typhoid fever. While incapacitated in a hospital, he was captured by Confederate troops under the command of General John Morgan. He soon was paroled but had to endure months of wearisome waiting for an exchange so he could return to active service. Finally assigned to the Army of the Cumberland and promoted to the rank of lieutenant, he was in the thick of the fighting in the campaigns against Nashville and Atlanta. Late in the war came his promotion to major, but he saw no action at that rank.²

Major Thoburn's parents had been Irish immigrants, who came to America in August of 1825. Matthew and Jane Crawford Thoburn settled in rural Pennsylvania near Pittsburgh. They were devout Methodists, and they instilled deep religious faith in each of their four children. For example, one of Major Thoburn's brothers was Bishop James Mills Thoburn, a renowned Methodist missionary leader, and his sister, Miss Isabella Thoburn, had a remarkable career as a missionary and founder of the Methodist College for Women at Lucknow, India. Major Thoburn's older brother, Colonel Joseph Thoburn, commanded the first division of the 8th Army Corp and was killed in action at the battle of Cedar Creek, Virginia in 1864.³

Major Thoburn's wife, Mary, could trace her ancestry to the American colonial period. Their first child, Joseph, in later years was proud to assert that his ancestry represented several nationalities, including those of Scotland, England, Wales, France, Germany, and Norway. Moreover, he was especially proud of his family's military heritage as represented by his father and by his Uncle Joseph. This would have a significant impact in later years on his outlook as a historian.⁴

Joseph's family remained at Bellaire for five years, during which time the restless spirit that drove thousands of others westward began to call. In November of 1870, his father journeyed to Kansas to locate a homesite. After inspecting several parts of the state, he selected a quarter section homestead in Marion County, Kansas, approximately six miles northwest of Peabody. In March of 1871, he moved his family, including Joseph who was four and one-half years old, to the new homesite.⁵

The trip to the new home was an adventure for little Joseph and his family. After a relatively uneventful trip by rail to St. Louis, they crossed the Mississippi River on a ferry boat as there was no bridge spanning the river at this time. Beginning a pioneering tradition that would remain with young Thoburn throughout his life, the family boarded the first passenger train ever to leave Emporia, Kansas, bound westward on the Atchinson, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad. Then a thirty-five mile ride in a farm wagon was required to reach the new homestead in the wilderness.⁶

When the family arrived at its new home, it found a virtually treeless prairie and not another human habitation in sight. Within a few days, a rough board shanty, which would be home for the family for six months, had been thrown together from a load of lumber that had to be hauled sixty miles. The family's isolation soon ended, however, for the area was being settled rapidly. Within a few weeks, new neighbors were established on each side of the homestead.⁷

This was an exciting environment for an impressionable and intelligent child such as Joseph. Near the homestead passed the famed Wichita Trail, much traveled by Indians and used by the Cheyennes on their last raid in that part of Kansas only two and one-half years previous to the family's arrival. Also near the Thoburn's home passed herds of Longhorn cattle being driven to the railhead at Abilene. Indeed, one of the last large herds of Longhorns bedded down for the night on the edge of the homestead not long after the family's arrival. The memory of this sight remained vivid with Thoburn throughout his life. Soon thereafter, the railhead was extended to Newton, Kansas, out beyond

the settled portions of the state, and the great trail herds were no longer seen near Peabody.⁸

Soon after the temporary shanty was constructed, the task of plowing the virgin prairie began, with the "breaker" drawn slowly by a yoke of oxen. There was much work to do, and during the ensuing years Joseph put in many hours helping his father with the day-to-day tasks involved in running a farm. There were pleasant diversions, however; hunting was a favorite pastime. Indeed, game of various kinds was abundant, and Major Thoburn and the neighbors occasionally went buffalo hunting. Large buffalo herds still ranged within a two-day drive to the west, and buffalo meat was a staple in the diet of every frontier family.⁹

Diversions of a less pleasant nature also swept the prairies during Thoburn's childhood years. In the first autumn after the family's arrival, a massive fire driven by a strong wind rolled relentlessly across the prairies. Little could be done to control the fire as only a few fields had been plowed. With little to impede its course, the conflagration terrorized brave men and courageous women and left charred desolation in its path. Fortunately, the Thoburn homestead was spared. During the coming years, the frontier family faced "hot winds" and droughts and "the devastating visitation of the migratory grasshoppers or Rocky Mountain locusts."¹⁰

Young Thoburn was deeply influenced during these formative years by the religious training received at the hands of his parents. Major Thoburn was a leader in organizing religious services each Sabbath. During the early years, there was no resident clergyman or church

building. Services thus took the form of prayer meetings and Sunday School and were held in whatever building happened to be under construction at the time with seating improvised for the occasion. For a year the elder Thoburn walked six miles to and from Peabody to attend church. Throughout the following years, he was a staunch leader of the Methodist-Episcopal Church in Peabody. This early religious training made its mark on young Joseph and strongly influenced him throughout his life.¹¹

Major Thoburn also was instrumental in founding the first school in the area. Indeed, neighbors gathered in the Thoburn home to organize a school district. Soon the people voted bonds and a little frame school house was constructed. Young Joseph was among the first to be enrolled in the school and was educated through high school at Peabody. He rode to and from school on a bronco, studied hard, and continued to help daily with the work of the farm. He excelled in his school work and developed a confidence in himself and in the future that led him to confide to his friend, Howard L. Stephens, that he expected someday to be president of the United States and that when he became president he would make Stephens his secretary of state.¹²

Soon after graduation from high school, Thoburn studied printing as an apprentice in the print shop of a local newspaper. In later years he would recall the lasting benefits he derived from this experience. First, he noted that he had been somewhat deficient in the arts of spelling and in English grammar, but that his work as a printer greatly improved his skills in these areas. In addition, working as a printer helped him become much more meticulous in later life in his other work,

for "there can be no approximations in the handy work of a printer." Thoburn also believed that he benefited greatly as a writer from having started from the bottom up, so to speak. He noted that "in instances when the makeup of pages has been of particular importance I could go and have gone into the composing room to cooperate with the makeup man in a way that no writer who has not been a printer could have done." Finally, Thoburn noted that a knowledge of the "art preservative of arts" had "imparted to me a degree of resourcefulness that, otherwise, might have been lacking."¹³

Thoburn's witnessing of the passing of the frontier during his youth, as well as his experience in the print shop, helped in later years impell him toward a career as a writer and as a historian. In addition, his natural inquisitiveness and intelligence combined with fortuitous circumstances during his childhood also planted a seed of interest in archaeology in his mind which also would burst into full bloom in later years.

One day when he was about seven years old, Thoburn was walking across a field that had been plowed recently and then eroded by a torrential rain storm. He spotted a stone object "of brownish gray color--its edge, like its point, somewhat sharpened and its surface sufficiently smooth to reflect the light to a slight degree." Thoburn had found his first arrowhead. He immediately carried it to his father who dug into an old chest and produced ten or twelve similar specimens which had been found in Ohio. From that point on, the young boy was fascinated with Indian arrowheads.¹⁴

Arrowheads were not abundant in the Peabody area and thus were difficult to find. Thoburn soon developed a keen eye for observing ground as he walked or rode across a field. Indeed, by the time he had reached his middle teens, he was able to spot a piece of chipped flint while riding at a fast trot if it lay in plain sight on either side of the road. In later years, Thoburn recalled that as a youth he threw away some interesting specimens of prehistoric weapons and tools simply because they were not arrowheads. However, in 1882 he visited the Museum of the Kansas Historical Society while attending the State Fair at Topeka. There he observed specimens similar to those he had discarded. Fascinated with the objects in the museum, Thoburn visited the Kansas Historical Society each time he happened to be in Topeka. And when he returned home, he began collecting a broader range of artifacts.¹⁵

Several years later, a new railroad was constructed through Peabody. On the edge of town, graders in constructing the new roadbed tore into a prehistoric village or campsite. Thus exposed were numerous bones, various flint tools, a tomahawk, several arrowheads, and implements made of turtle shells which apparently had been used as hide scrapers. These finds fascinated Thoburn, but he was handicapped by the dearth of information on the stone age in the local library. Despite this, he often "tramped the fields" in search of artifacts.¹⁶

In the winter of 1889-90, Thoburn visited the eastern part of what is now Oklahoma, and noticed that "many fields, meadows, and even wooded areas were dotted with low, circular mounds of earth, shaped somewhat like that of a saucer turned upside down." Fascinated and puzzled by

these unusual mounds, he asked numerous local residents to voice their opinions regarding the origin of the peculiar formations. Most had no opinion, but Thoburn was intrigued when several asserted that they believed some prehistoric race might have been responsible for their creation. Thoburn's continued investigation of these mounds and other archaeological phenomenon would have to wait for more than twenty years, however, as he returned to Kansas to attend the Kansas Agricultural College at Manhattan. The training received at that institution started Thoburn's career in a direction entirely different from that of history and archaeology.¹⁷

Thoburn entered his college training with characteristic vigor, obtaining scientific and technical training in the field of agriculture. He was a serious student who apparently devoted little time to frivolity. One of his classmates, F. C. Schrader, recalled forty-six years later that he still remembered Thoburn for his physique and his "studious expression of face."¹⁸

During the course of his college training, Thoburn became increasingly impressed with the importance of reclamation and conservation of natural resources. During his college years, the first federal forest reserves were established. In addition, the National Irrigation Congress was beginning to call for the reclamation of arid and semi-arid lands, as well as the conservation and economic utilization of surplus storm and flood waters. Thoburn labored to improve his knowledge and understanding of these issues. During the summer prior to his senior year, he went to the High Plains of eastern Colorado to combat the malaria that had plagued him during the several preceding

summers. There he was especially impressed with the loss through runoff of surplus storm waters. Therefore, when he graduated from college, he felt impelled to speak and write on the subject of conservation.¹⁹

The launching of a career would have to wait, however, until he settled some unfinished business. While in college at Manhattan, Thoburn had met Miss Caroline Conwell. He quickly fell in love with this intelligent young lady who had served as a teacher in a Choctaw Academy in Indian Territory. Like her suitor, she was a devout Methodist. They were married on June 6, 1894. Joseph B. Thoburn had completed his education and had obtained a helpmate. He was now ready to launch a career which, over a period of almost twenty years, would lead him into the virgin fields of history and archaeology in Oklahoma.

FOOTNOTES

¹Muriel H. Wright, "Pioneer Historian and Archeologist of the State of Oklahoma," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, XXIV (No. 4, 1946), 397. Hereinafter referred to as "Pioneer Historian." "Major T. C. Thoburn," Peabody Gazette, Thursday, September 28, 1911, pp. 1-2.

²Ibid.

³Wright, "Pioneer Historian," 397.

⁴Ibid., 398; N. H. Lingenfelter, "Thoburn Is Passing From the Public Picture," The Daily Oklahoman, Sunday, June 28, 1931, Section C, p. 7.

⁵"Thoburn," Peabody Gazette; Joseph B. Thoburn had two brothers, John C. and Thomas R., and a sister, Blanche Isabelle. Wright, "Pioneer Historian," 398.

⁶Lingenfelter, "Thoburn," p. 7; Undated Biographical Sketch, Folder BI-1, TP.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Undated Biographical Sketch, Folder BI-1, TP.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹"Thoburn," Peabody Gazette.

¹²Undated Biographical Sketch, Folder BI-1, TP; Howard L. Stephens to Thoburn, November 2, 1920, Folder TH-1, No. 3, TP.

¹³Thoburn to Mr. Wall, April 23, 1938, Folder TH-1, No. 1, TP.

¹⁴J. B. Thoburn, "Notes on Archaeology," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, XV (No. 1, 1937), 109.

¹⁵Ibid., 109-110; Thoburn to William E. Connelley, November 3, 1927, Folder TH-1, No. 1, TP.

¹⁶Thoburn, "Notes on Archaeology," 110-111.

¹⁷Ibid., 112.

¹⁸F. C. Schrader to Thoburn, n.d., Folder BI-1, TP.

¹⁹Thoburn to ?, n.d., Folder MA-2, No. 1, TP.

CHAPTER III

QUEST FOR A CAREER

Joseph B. Thoburn was twenty-seven years old when he graduated from Kansas Agricultural College in 1893. His formal education had prepared him for careers either in the realm of printing or of agriculture. Yet circumstances would lead him during the next twenty years through a myriad of positions and potential careers. Not until he reached the age of forty-seven in 1913 and joined the faculty of the University of Oklahoma did he settle into a life of historical research and writing. In many ways, however, this twenty-year period of young adulthood was the most exciting part of Thoburn's life, for he made many magnificent contributions to the development of his new state of Oklahoma and inadvertently prepared himself for his great life's work as a pioneer in Oklahoma history.

Little is known of Thoburn's activities during the five years immediately following his graduation. He apparently established himself in Kansas in the printing business and was a newspaper writer who focused on matters pertaining to agriculture and conservation. He had become especially interested in conservation during his college days, and wrote on that subject with such vigor and effectiveness that he was asked in 1898 to move to Washington, D. C., to serve as assistant to F. H. Newell, Secretary of the American Forestry Association. This he accepted.¹

Thoburn's duties were essentially those of the Secretary of the Association, for Newell primarily was a figurehead. Newell's principal concern was his position as Chief Engineer of the Hydraulic Section of the United States Geological Survey. Thoburn's duties in this job brought him into contact with professional foresters, American college and university men who had taken post-graduate courses in some of the forestry schools in Europe, and with Gifford Pinchot. As head of the Division of Forestry in the Department of Agriculture, Pinchot was a prominent conservationist and the best-known professional forester in America. In subsequent years he would become influential in motivating President Theodore Roosevelt to inaugurate a significant national conservation program.²

The principal issue which concerned Thoburn during his service with the American Forestry Association was the proposed establishment of a national forest service. He frequently discussed the matter with those professional foresters who met in Washington, advocating strongly that the National Forest Service be organized and developed under the auspices of the Department of the Interior. Pinchot, however, favored organizing the Forestry Service in the Department of Agriculture, perhaps "finding it the line of least resistance."³

Thoburn favored placing the Forest Service in the Department of the Interior rather than the Department of Agriculture because the latter had functioned primarily as an agency of investigation and experimentation. In addition, the Agriculture Department also consisted of many more bureaus than were under the Department of the Interior, and he believed that certain bureaus of the Interior Department would be

terminated in the near future when the need for their continuance had ended. He felt that in the ensuing decades the Indian Office and General Land Office of the Department of Interior would be discontinued. Finally, he argued that all agencies for reclamation and conservation of natural resources could be more effectively administered by a single executive department, rather than having them under the control of several different departments. He felt that the various agencies for forestry, arid land reclamation, water conservation, prevention of erosion, wildlife preservation, flood prevention, and others should be organized under the auspices of the Department of the Interior, and that branch of the federal government should be as carefully organized and as specifically qualified for the performance of its duties as the Army or the Navy.⁴

Thoburn likely was pleased to find a good reason to leave the nation's capital, for throughout his life he preferred living in a rural environment. Moreover, his roots were in the heartland of America, and he had decided to make his career in one of the nation's last frontiers--Oklahoma territory. He had visited the future state in the winter of 1889-90, and again in 1896. In 1899, he determined that the future looked best for him in Oklahoma City, a community born during the run of 1889. After a decade of development, the city was moving towards becoming the principal metropolis of the territory, and it offered interesting possibilities for an ambitious young family man. Hence, Thoburn resigned his job and moved his family directly to Oklahoma City from Washington, D. C., intent upon launching a new career in a frontier environment.⁵

As Thoburn admitted in later years, he had not achieved the distinction of success in any line when he arrived in Oklahoma City at the age of thirty-three. Moreover, he had not developed a high degree of self-confidence. He "was not conscious of possessing any capacity for leadership," a trait which he would not yet exhibit for several years.⁶

Accordingly, Thoburn, in line with his experience in Kansas, engaged first in the printing business and in newspaper writing for two years. Then came a step which would launch him into positions of leadership, enable him to make numerous personal contacts, and introduce him to the history of a part of the Southwest. In 1901 he became editor and secretary of The Last Frontier, an interesting magazine devoted to publicizing the resources and history of the Kiowa-Comanche Country. His success in this enterprise helped him develop the confidence he would need to strike out in new directions.⁷

Also during these early years in Oklahoma City, Thoburn began developing his interest in poetry. In later years one of his most exciting projects would be the development of an anthology of verse about the Great Plains. Motivated by the murderous attack on President William McKinley by Leon Crolgosz in 1901, Thoburn penned two poems which appeared in the Oklahoma Saturday Post in September of that year. Written in the tedious language in vogue in poetry of the times, Thoburn offered a poetic prayer entitled "Confession and Petition." The final stanza is a good example of Thoburn's poetic style:

God bless the nation's stricken chief;
 In healing love look down,
 And, if it be Thy will, we pray
 Spare him more useful years,
 Bless her who waits beside his couch
 And give her loving heart its hope.
 Bless all thy people in their prayer,
 And make them strong in faith.

Amen

The stricken president soon died, and Thoburn was motivated to an even higher level of poetic intensity. In "The Duty of the Hour," Thoburn urged his countrymen to banish the spirit of greed and hatred from the land.

O sons of sires who wrought of old to wisely build the nation;
 O ye whose kinsmen who dared the death of battles hurtling
 hail;
 By faith of fathers grounded well upon the rock of ages;
 By love of home and kindred ties; by pride of native land;
 By grave of martyred chieftans swear to do your duty well;
 Nor rest til Home and Church and State are safe from this
 foul foe.

While Thoburn had little opportunity in the ensuing years to enlarge his talents at poetic expression, he had developed a love of poetry which remained with him throughout his life.⁸

Unexpectedly, Thoburn was offered an opportunity to exercise his developing skills as a writer as a member of the Oklahoma National Guard. Early in 1902 he was commissioned a captain in the Guard, and soon thereafter he heard talk about an agreement supposedly made between the War Department and the Department of the Interior whereby the Chiracahua Apaches were to be assigned permanent allotments on the military reservation at Ft. Sill. Ft. Sill would thus be abandoned as a military operation. At the time, Geronimo and members of his band were being held at Ft. Sill as military prisoners.⁹

Thoburn's family background disposed him to be friendly toward the military, and he also sensed the potential importance of military installations in the territory and the future state's economy. Of course, closing the base would have a direct economic impact on the Lawton area, the section of the state Thoburn had promoted as editor of The Last Frontier. Finally, the closing of Ft. Sill would mean the abandonment of one of the few surviving military stations which had dotted the plains in earlier times. Moreover, Oklahoma would have no permanent military post if Ft. Sill were closed. Thus Thoburn decided to oppose the closing of Ft. Sill more on economic and sentimental grounds than on the military necessity of the outpost.¹⁰

Thoburn's first step in saving Ft. Sill was to persuade Colonel Roy Hoffman, Commanding Officer of the Oklahoma National Guard, to call a meeting of a board of National Guard officers to convene in Oklahoma City. At this meeting Thoburn outlined the situation and was authorized to prepare a letter stating the military reasons why there should be no change in the status of Ft. Sill. Thoburn's letter was signed by the officers and sent to Secretary of War, Elihu Root, with a copy to President Theodore Roosevelt.¹¹

Thoburn's principal argument was that it was likely that a military camp the size of Ft. Sill, with its natural resources and varied terrain, would be needed some time in the future. He noted that it was the most suitable facility in the central West for the encampment and maneuvering of a large body of troops. Thoburn's appeal "to Rooseveltian impulsiveness" was successful. Ironically, his prediction as to the military usefulness of Ft. Sill came true within a few years

with the onset of World War I. Moreover, Ft. Sill has become one of the largest military installations in the United States, and it has played a major role in the economic development of southwestern Oklahoma.¹²

Another of Thoburn's lasting contributions in these early years was the major part he played in the establishment of Epworth University, the forerunner of Oklahoma City University. Immediately upon his arrival in Oklahoma City, Thoburn and his wife Caroline became actively involved in the affairs of the Methodist-Episcopal Church. At that time there was some discussion of the establishment of a local educational institution under the auspices of the church. Nothing came of this movement, however, but the idea caught Thoburn's imagination. Thoburn's zealously religious father had in later life moved to Texas where he worshipped in the Methodist-Episcopal Church, South. The Methodist Church had been split into Northern and Southern branches, with each having its own administrative hierarchy. Yet, the two branches of the church were compatible theologically, and Thoburn's father had no difficulty in worshipping and being active in the Southern branch. Therefore, Thoburn was impressed with the practicality of unification of the two wings of the church, and he felt that organization of any educational institution could be a means of helping to bring about such a union.¹³

The idea of securing an institution of higher learning through joint cooperation of the two branches of the church continued to develop in Thoburn's mind until early in 1901. At that time, he approached Anton H. Classen, president of the Oklahoma City Commercial

Club, with his idea. Classen was intrigued with Thoburn's concept and his forceful presentation. He asked Thoburn to prepare a written proposal in detail to be presented at the state conferences of each branch of the church. Both were to meet in October of that year. Thoburn drafted his proposal and proceeded to present it personally to the Methodist-Episcopal Conference at Shawnee. C. B. Ames of Oklahoma City appeared before the conference of the southern branch at Chickasha. Delegates were appointed by the respective counterparts and a joint commission for the purpose of establishing a university was authorized, with Thoburn named secretary of it.¹⁴

In December of 1902, this joint commission was replaced by a board of trustees. Again Thoburn was named secretary, and in September of 1904 Epworth University began operation. Thoburn had even suggested the name of the institution, and he was filled with pride when classes began in the university's new \$40,000 building.¹⁵

Thoburn's role in the establishment of Epworth University had not ended with merely proposing the idea or seeing it begin operating. Indeed, he worked with Classen and others in the landscaping of the grounds and the actual construction of the university's building. Moreover, in September of 1904 he was actively engaged in developing a plan for raising an endowment fund for the university. Regarding Thoburn's role in the founding of the school, W. G. Fink commented that "if any special one is to be credited with the existence of Epworth it is my friend Thoburn." Moreover, Fink asserted that Thoburn could never appreciate his "worth to the world if you never do another Christian deed, for the influence of Epworth will go on

for years after you and I are gathered to our Father." Fink remembered how Thoburn had brought up the subject of the university when such an institution appeared "intangible and unpromising," but Thoburn's "ability, energies, and prayer brought it right out."¹⁶

A student at Epworth University from 1907 to 1909, Leslie A. McRill in later years remembered that Thoburn visited the campus often. In particular, he would attend the chapel exercises and bring an interesting historical artifact to show, for by 1907 he was doing research for his first history of Oklahoma. McRill remembered Thoburn as a very quiet, well-versed man who was "almost as meek as Moses" but who was an excellent speaker who held the rapt attention of his audience.¹⁷

Thoburn remained active in the affairs of Epworth University as Secretary of the Board of Trustees until the institution closed its doors in 1911. The supporters of the institution, including Thoburn, were deeply disappointed at this turn of events. The failure of the experiment was not due to lack of cooperation on the local level between the two wings of the church. Indeed, the Epworth Federated Church, of which Thoburn was a member, had been remarkably successful in uniting both branches of the church at the local level to support the university. Rather, unwarranted interference from outside sources--principally high level officials in each branch of the church--led to the institution's demise. Thoburn's labors in behalf of Epworth University as a vehicle for unification of the Methodists were not in vain, however, for the idea lived on and was embodied in Oklahoma City University.¹⁸

While Thoburn's support for his church and Epworth University never varied, his means of earning a living would have remarkable

variations in the ensuing years. By February of 1902, Thoburn had left the services of The Last Frontier and was editing the Farm Journal, a magazine published in Oklahoma City. However, his stay with this enterprise was cut short when he accepted a position in May of 1902 as Secretary of the Oklahoma City Commercial Club. In this position he again would make an enduring contribution.¹⁹

Thoburn became Secretary of the Commercial Club when Clifton George requested at the April 29, 1902, meeting of the Club's Directors that he be allowed to take a vacation to October 1 and that his position be filled by J. B. Thoburn during his absence. Thoburn already had accepted a position as Secretary of the Territorial Board of Agriculture, but it would be some months before that new entity would be organized. Thus he agreed, when contacted early in May, to serve the Commercial Club on a temporary basis.²⁰

Remarkably, Thoburn almost immediately suggested a reorganization of the Club! He noted that the real work of the Club, that of promoting the continued growth and expansion of business and economic opportunities in Oklahoma City, was being hampered by the fact that at least half of its activities were social in nature. In addition, he asserted that the organizational structure of the Club was weak. Thoburn previously had worked with several of the leading members of the Club in forming Epworth University and this experience had undoubtedly buoyed his confidence.²¹

Thoburn selected Seymour Heyman, a director who was dissatisfied with the status quo, to aid in carrying out his plan. Heyman was receptive to Thoburn's idea of developing a strong organization to meet the needs of the business community in a rapidly growing city.²²

On November 10, 1902, the Directors of the Commercial Club approved the calling of a meeting of the membership to "consider and discuss the advisability of re-organizing as a Chamber of Commerce."²³ The meeting took place on November 14, and Seymour Heyman briefly outlined the proposed plan of reorganization. The members were addressed by various individuals, including John W. Shartel, and then voted to establish a special committee to draft a definite plan of reorganization, submit bylaws and to report at a future meeting of the membership.²⁴

The special committee thus appointed included Anton H. Classen, Seymour Heyman, George E. Gardner, J. M. Owen, C. B. Ames, and J. W. Wykoff. Working with these gentlemen, Thoburn wrote the constitution of the new Chamber of Commerce. He studied the constitutions of chambers in cities such as Kansas City and St. Louis and combined the best features of their organizations with items unique to Oklahoma City. When presented to the membership, the new constitution was approved and has served with little change to the present. And the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce has become one of the most influential organizations of its kind in the United States.²⁵

Thoburn did not confine his energies to effecting the reorganization of the club, for he had other ideas he hoped to implement. He introduced the idea of a "write-up booklet or pamphlet" for Oklahoma City. This type of advertising was a new idea for the Commercial Club in 1902. He reported to the board that the booklet could be sold for 50¢ and that the sale of 4,000 copies would pay for an edition of 5,000, leaving 1,000 copies to sell and make a nice profit. The booklet was published in 1903 after Thoburn had left the organization.²⁶

Another idea Thoburn advocated during his service with the Commercial Club was the desirability of a railroad linking Oklahoma City with the northwestern part of the state. This would pull much of the agricultural produce of that area to the city for marketing. His first move was to prepare a detailed prospectus for a proposed line. Then he presented the document to a Mr. Finney, superintendent of construction for the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas line from Coffeyville, Kansas to Oklahoma City.²⁷

Thoburn's forceful presentation made a strong impression on Finney, who promised to recommend that a preliminary survey be made immediately. To Thoburn's disappointment, Finney eventually was overruled by those in higher authority in the M., K. & T. hierarchy. So eager were the farmers in southern Woodward County that they graded nearly twenty miles of right-of-way for this proposed railway as evidence of their interest and good faith. Although this railroad was never constructed, the idea of providing a means of marketing produce from northwestern Oklahoma through Oklahoma City remained in the public consciousness for many years and helped encourage the building of highways for motor vehicles in that direction in later years.²⁸

Thoburn left the service of the Oklahoma City Commercial Club to assume his duties as the first Secretary of the Territorial Board of Agriculture in February of 1903. With the tremendous impact he had made on the Commercial Club, it seems likely that he could have remained in that position indefinitely. But Thoburn's education and roots were in agriculture, and the secretaryship of the Territorial Board of Agriculture must have appeared to be an opportunity of a lifetime to him.²⁹

F. A. Waugh, an old friend from college days who had become a Professor of Horticulture and Landscape Gardening at Massachusetts Agricultural College, wrote to congratulate Thoburn on his appointment. "This ought to be a fine opening," Waugh stated, for "Everything is new and unformed so that you can cast the work of the department into any mould which best pleases you."³⁰ Thoburn found himself in another pioneering situation, and he determined to make the most of it.

The Territorial Board of Agriculture consisted of six individuals elected by delegates chosen by county institutes in each county. It was envisioned that each county institute would serve as the local vehicle for the dissemination of helpful information for agricultural communities in the state. Periodic meetings would be held to hear lectures on various agriculture topics. Each county institute would have an annual meeting to conduct local business and elect delegates to the statewide annual meeting.³¹

The board elected at the annual statewide meetings was charged with the duty of collecting and publishing articles containing helpful scientific information and statistics relating to agriculture, horticulture, animal husbandry, and related activities. In addition, it was to oversee the county institute system. As secretary, Thoburn's duties included working with the faculty of the Agricultural and Mechanical College and the staff of the Agricultural Experiment Station in the preparation of programs for institute meetings, and he was specifically charged with attending the annual meetings of each of the institutes. In addition, the secretary was to perform any other duties that the board might assign to him. The energetic, thirty-seven

year-old Thoburn, whose salary was fixed at \$1,000 per year, was destined to expand the activities of his office far beyond what was originally contemplated.³²

Thoburn discovered from the outset that his office would be used as a bureau of information. Thus he found the demands of correspondence piling up until at the beginning of his second year he had to hire stenographic help. In order to satisfy the growing demand for information, the secretary established a reference library in his office. By donation, exchange, and purchase, he created a library of more than five hundred volumes, plus hundreds of pamphlets.³³

Thoburn soon found that his previous experience as a newspaper writer would benefit him greatly in his new position. Through this medium he could disseminate information on agricultural subjects widely. He issued bulletins to the press periodically on a wide range of subjects. For example, in the Cherokee Messenger of May 5, 1905, there appeared a notice from Secretary Thoburn that an "oil company" from St. Louis had sent "a carload of castor beans to Oklahoma City and is trying to encourage planting." A minimum price of \$1.00 per bushel was being guaranteed for all the beans raised.³⁴

Thoburn also issued more weighty articles to the press on occasion. Indeed, he conducted his own experiments in horticulture and consulted experts such as his old friend F. A. Waugh. Articles, such as "The Development of the Fruit Growing Industry of Oklahoma," were sent to the press. In fact, Thoburn unofficially served as a press agent for Oklahoma agriculture. During the St. Louis World's Fair of 1904, Thoburn supplied the press with stories on Oklahoma's agricultural exhibits.

Primarily through his energetic efforts, the Oklahoma agricultural exhibit at the fair was constantly supplied with fresh Oklahoma produce during the growing season that year.³⁵

Thoburn also did valuable work in organizing the county institutes. In the July 5, 1904 meeting of the Board of Agriculture, he was instructed to set dates for county institutes, publicize the schedule and employ lecturers for the meetings. The secretary moved into this work with eagerness, for he believed that the institutes could be of great benefit in improving the quality of agrarian life. Not only should the institutes focus on applied agricultural technology, but also they should be conducted to enlist the interest of the entire farming family. Thoburn's concept of the broad functions of the county institutes can be considered an intellectual forerunner of the subsequent county extension system.³⁶

Thoburn was never completely satisfied with the number of institute meetings held under his auspices, but for a pioneering effort he made a credible showing. For example, a total of fifty-two institute meetings were held in the Territory during the year ending June 30, 1904. During his service with the Board of Agriculture, he endeavored to increase the number and quality of farmer's institutes.³⁷

As secretary of the Board of Agriculture, Thoburn also worked diligently to promote the use of irrigation in the Territory. Under the terms of the National Reclamation Act of 1902, surplus funds from the sale of public lands in the Territory were being placed in a reclamation fund. By July of 1903, Oklahoma had contributed more than \$1,000,000 to this fund. Yet Thoburn was astonished to see some

expressions in the press that Oklahoma should not avail itself of participation in the benefits of the law, for some people feared that talk of irrigation allegedly would damage the Territory's image among prospective investors in the East.³⁸

Thoburn argued that the distance from the eastern part of the Osage country to the western edge of Beaver County "is greater than the distance from Boston to Buffalo" and that the variation in the amount of rainfall is substantial. Thoburn thus felt it imperative that the Territory participate in the program, at least in the western sections. Because of the adverse comments in the press and the apparent apathy of the citizens of the Territory, however, he noted that Oklahoma's interests were receiving little attention in Washington.³⁹

Thoburn began actively to agitate the subject through the press and through personal contacts so that the Territory had more than forty delegates at the National Irrigation Congress held at El Paso, Texas in 1904. During this congress, Thoburn made a "short but forceful" speech on the benefits of irrigation, noting that nothing is more noble in present fields of activity than the attempt to reclaim the arid West. Thoburn also was able to organize several meetings in the western part of the Territory to discuss irrigation.⁴⁰

Thoburn's activities on behalf of irrigation began to bear fruit early in 1905. He noted that the people in western Oklahoma Territory understood the need for irrigation and that they had made their feelings known to reclamation officials. He spoke of his dream "irrigation development in western Oklahoma that will ultimately add thousands to the population and millions to the wealth of the Territory."⁴¹

Promotion of legislation beneficial to agriculture was another duty taken on by this energetic secretary. When the last territorial legislature convened in January of 1905, Thoburn presented twelve pieces of proposed legislation pertaining to various phases of agriculture. Among the bills written by Thoburn and passed into law were the boll weevil quarantine law, a trademark law, and a bill to encourage irrigation in the Territory.⁴²

Thoburn enjoyed his job as secretary because he believed in the family farm as a life style. A product of farm life himself, he strongly believed that education in the primary schools should be designed to promote pride and interest in agriculture. Textbooks in all subjects were designed to draw youngsters away from the farm, Thoburn felt, and thus were contributing to the dangerous exodus from rural to urban America that was underway at that time. He deeply believed that the agrarian way of life must be preserved in America. Consequently, he took pride in his position as secretary of the Territorial Board of Agriculture. Moreover, this was a position in which he could use his agricultural expertise to best advantage. But just as he was beginning to feel secure and content in his job, circumstances were taking shape that would force him out of office.⁴³

On July 5, 1904, Thoburn was unanimously re-elected secretary of the Board of Agriculture for the ensuing year. However, meeting in executive session the following day in the secretary's absence, the Board limited him to \$20 per month for the year to pay for a typewriter and stenographic help. This came at a time when the demands of his office were increasing daily.⁴⁴

The inadequate provision for office help made it difficult for Thoburn to keep up with the routine paperwork of his office, for thereafter he was forced to do most of his stenographic work. In September he was warned by a friend on the Board of Directors that he must keep all his routine office-work up-to-date, "for there are greedy mouths after your job if my foresight is right."⁴⁵

Early in 1905, the Guthrie Daily Leader reported that an effort to remove Thoburn through political chicanery was underway. A deal was alleged to exist between a certain State Senator and the faction on the Board led by Ewers White. Supposedly the Board would receive a larger appropriation if it would remove Thoburn. Thoburn's friend among the directors, R. Kleiner, would be salved by being elevated to the presidency of the Board. This allegation was hotly denied by several members of the board, but not by Kleiner.⁴⁶

Possibly the Continental Creamery Company, a powerful and growing trust seeking to monopolize the creamery business in the Territory, might have had a hand in Thoburn's difficulties. In May of 1905 Thoburn was congratulated by the chief of the Dairy Division of the U. S. Department of Agriculture for having "taken grounds to encourage the small creameries." Yet he also warned Thoburn in the same letter that the trust would "use its influence to make it warm for any one who would oppose them in any way."⁴⁷

On July 7, two days after Thoburn was dismissed from his office by the directors, the Guthrie Daily Leader reported that "it was learned today that the creamery trust has been against Thoburn in this fight, because he has been fighting the trust and coaching the farmers in plans to fight it also."⁴⁸

The secretary had used every legitimate means to combat the trust and to build up independent creameries. Of course, the trust "has fought back and much of the opposition against him, it is said was influenced by this trust."⁴⁹

Prior to the meeting on July 5, during which Thoburn was not re-elected as secretary, Ewers White, president of the Board of Agriculture, took to the press to explain in advance why Thoburn might be removed! He asserted that personal jealousy and political deals would not cost Thoburn his job; rather it would be his own incapability. Thoburn had failed to keep up with his office work, asserted White, both in the matter of correspondence and in the maintenance of official records. Moreover, the secretary's biennial report was four months' late, and he had done virtually nothing in the matter of legislation. Finally, White stated that he believed Thoburn to be honest but that he simply lacked ability.⁵⁰

At the Board meeting on July 5, 1905, C. A. McNabb and Thoburn were nominated for secretary. William H. Phelps had submitted an application and also was considered in the voting. The first ballot gave McNabb three votes and two votes each to Thoburn and Phelps. As none of the candidates had a majority, a second vote was taken with McNabb receiving four votes, Phelps two and Thoburn one. Thus at the age of thirty-nine, Thoburn again was cast adrift in his quest to find his calling.⁵¹

Thoburn's dismissal was greeted with an outburst of indignation in the press throughout the state. The Guthrie Daily Leader noted that the chief charge against Thoburn seemed to be that he was too

popular with the press; other charges against the Secretary were largely unfounded. Virtually every newspaper in the Territory expressed disgust with the Board's action in firing Thoburn and praised him for the work he had done. The Daily Oklahoman voiced the sentiments of many when it stated editorially that "Thoburn has made a splendid secretary for the agricultural interests of Oklahoma even if he has not for the board." He has been "active, resourceful, practical, and indefatigable."⁵²

Even Territorial Governor T. B. Ferguson spoke strongly in public against Thoburn's dismissal. He asserted that not more than one percent of the public supported the Board's action against Thoburn and that the Secretary had taken the office "when there was nothing and has builded it until it stands not second to any in the west."⁵³ Interestingly Thoburn was a staunch Republican at this time, and Governor Ferguson also represented the GOP. There is no direct evidence, however, that Thoburn's politics entered into his being booted from office.

F. C. Burtis, an agriculturalist at the Oklahoma Agricultural Experiment Station who was familiar with the situation in the farming community in Oklahoma and on the Board of Agriculture, asserted that Thoburn had been treated "unjustly" and that he had performed the duties of his office as competently as humanly possible. Thoburn "had the work of four men to do," yet was turned out for "trifling and seemingly unfounded charges." Burtis finally alluded to what he felt was the real cause of Thoburn's dismissal by stating that "few men have the back bone and honest purpose to strike out boldly as you have at all

frauds that are gotten up to fleece the farmers when you must have been aware that such actions would bring a fight upon you from powerful corrupt interests."⁵⁴

J. B. Thoburn had suffered the painful darts of political intrigue while serving the public on a pittance of \$1,000 per year. This would not be the last time he would experience this type of pain. Throughout his life, Thoburn steadfastly held to his convictions regardless of the subject of his beliefs or the nature of his opposition. And he would pay the price for his uncompromising adherence to whatever he deemed proper principles and policies.

Although Thoburn never held another significant position in agricultural affairs, he never lost interest in the subject. Indeed, one of his great crusades in later years would be the promotion of a Great Plains movement designed to prevent floods, promote irrigation, and even alter the climate.

A few days after his dismissal from the Board of Agriculture, Thoburn received a business proposition from an old acquaintance, John B. Dickenson, a lawyer from Davis, Indian Territory. Dickenson wanted to form a land company with himself and Thoburn as partners; thereby, he believed, the two could make "plenty of money." The plan involved selling stock in the company and using the funds to buy Indian lands at bargain prices throughout the Territory. Then they would sell the lands to white settlers at a nice profit. Dickenson would use his connections in Indian Territory and Thoburn would use his in Oklahoma Territory. "We could do a rushing business in farm lands very soon," Dickenson said, "for you would be the expert and I would be the man to secure lands for sale."⁵⁵

Dickenson's plan must have looked to Thoburn like a scheme to cheat the Indians and to "farm the farmers." He was not interested and soon found himself in the service of the Farmer's Magazine as managing editor. This was a good position in which Thoburn could use his expertise as an agriculturalist, as a printer, and as a writer. However, this work did not provide sufficient challenge to keep Thoburn satisfied, and he thus became caught up in the campaign to achieve single statehood for Oklahoma and Indian territories.⁵⁶

With the Enabling Act under consideration in Congress during the spring of 1906, Thoburn carried on a letter-writing campaign to promote its passage. For example, as "a republican and a former citizen of Kansas" he appealed to Representative W. A. Reeder of Kansas to "do all in your power to secure House concurrence in the Statehood Bill as amended in the Senate." He noted that if Republicans in the House of Representatives succeeded in defeating the passage of the enabling act, which would set statehood machinery in motion, "it could not fail to have an unfavorable effect upon the future organization and strength of the Republican party in Oklahoma."⁵⁷

By April 23, Thoburn had given up hope that the enabling act would be passed that session. The hopes of Oklahomans had been dashed, according to the agitated editor, "seemingly as the result of a whimsical stubbornness" on the part of Speaker Joseph G. Cannon and the weakness of others who were afraid to oppose Cannon's exercise of a power "so despotic that it could be wielded by none but the usurper in America."⁵⁸ It appeared to Thoburn that Oklahoman's prayers and petitions had been in vain, but as a recent victim of

political intrigue he was not surprised for "such efforts are always all but useless in a contest between right and might."⁵⁹

Thoburn thus determined that a new approach would be necessary to achieve statehood. He enunciated a plan of direct political action that illustrated his burgeoning talents as a political tactician. Writing to a member of the Democratic National Committee from Oklahoma City, Thoburn advocated a carefully calculated plan to defeat Speaker Cannon and Republican members of the House who had lined up in opposition against statehood in the next congressional election.⁶⁰

In preparing for the campaign, Thoburn stressed the importance of working quietly and avoiding undue or premature publicity. He hoped to "lull the opposition leaders into a sense of security and confidence." In addition, Thoburn urged the Democratic National Committee to pay close attention to the selection of candidates in the districts in question. "They should be good mixers and good talkers," he said, "with force of character to give weight to their words." They should run on platforms "distinguished for brevity and terseness, rather than partisan rancor," and the question of joint statehood for the Oklahoma and Indian Territories should be promptly featured.⁶¹

During the last ten days before the election, a number of qualified Oklahoma speakers would appear in each district, according to Thoburn's plan. If possible, a number of Republican speakers from the various localities would be enlisted in the effort. Finally, Thoburn advocated a letter-writing campaign by former residents of the contested districts who have moved to one of the territories. Concerted appeals to old friends would have a powerful effect, Thoburn

felt. Thoburn's exercise in political tactics apparently was never applied, however, for Congress passed the Enabling Act, much to Thoburn's surprise, and it was signed by President Theodore Roosevelt on June 16, 1906.⁶²

Thoburn's next adventure in attempting to perform valuable service while earning a living was destined to be ill-fated. In February of 1907, he was appointed by the Oklahoma Jamestown Exposition Company "to superintend a collection of exhibits, dispose of stock in the enterprise and have general charge of all the work incident to arranging for Oklahoma and Indian Territorys' exhibit" at a major fair or "exposition" to be held at Jamestown, Virginia. He also became a director in the company. The company directors cited Thoburn's work while secretary of the Territorial Board of Agriculture as having demonstrated his ability to promote the Jamestown enterprise, and his efforts in building and maintaining the Oklahoma exhibit during the St. Louis Exposition had been remarkably successful. Moreover, Thoburn enjoyed this kind of promotional work, and he eagerly began his quest to finance the program.⁶³

Thoburn believed the Jamestown Exhibit offered an excellent opportunity to advertise the resources of the two territories with the hope of encouraging increased settlement and investment from Eastern states. Thus he set about visiting each of the twenty-one towns represented on the company's board of directors to entice individuals to subscribe stock in the company. The money thus raised would apply toward the expenses of collecting the exhibit and constructing an Oklahoma Building at the exposition.⁶⁴

Thoburn found raising money for the Jamestown project a difficult task. An associate reported that he was having much difficulty in interesting the citizens of Muskogee in the Jamestown proposition. In fact, Burns Hegler found that "jarring them loose from their coin is like pulling teeth without cocaine."⁶⁵ On behalf of the company, Thoburn also wrote a small book entitled Oklahoma: Its Resources and Attractions and the Activities and Achievements of Its People. Published in 1907, this small book illustrated effectively the romantic and interesting history of Oklahoma as well as its many resources. The industrial and agricultural potential of the new state was extolled in grand fashion. But the chapter on the history of the state would have the most lasting impact, for this was the future historian's first attempt to research and write a survey of the state's past. He would return to that subject in the near future in a project that would change the course of his life.⁶⁶

Thoburn's involvement with the Jamestown Exposition Company also would plague him in the future. In 1918, when his finances were not at their best, Thoburn received a letter from Former Governor Lee Cruce who had served as one of the directors of the company; Cruce called Thoburn's attention to the fact that in placing the exhibit at Jamestown, certain indebtedness was incurred to one Mr. Eddy. This gentleman had obtained a court ruling that the company had not been incorporated properly, and that the directors could be held liable as individuals for the debt. One of the defendants, H. T. Douglas of Shawnee, had paid the entire liability on behalf of the defendants. Now Cruce asked if Thoburn would pay his share of the settlement, a total of \$200.⁶⁷

Whether or not Thoburn paid his share of the settlement is unknown. His lifelong reputation for honesty in his personal and public business would indicate that he likely paid the amount, painful as it must have been. The Jamestown Exposition venture was ignored by Thoburn in later years when recounting his activities at this time of his life. Given the difficulty he had in raising money for the project, it probably was one of his least successful ventures.

Thoburn's energies were not completely consumed with promoting the Jamestown Exposition Company. At this time he again demonstrated his ability to dream big dreams, for he became interested in the idea of a canal from Oklahoma City to Webbers Falls. This would give Oklahoma City an outlet to the Mississippi River and vastly aid in the development of the city. To effect his novel idea, Thoburn worked with D. P. Marum, an attorney from Woodward.⁶⁸

Thoburn's plan apparently contemplated the construction of a rail line from northwestern Oklahoma to Oklahoma City, thus combined with the canal giving an economical marketing outlet for the products from that part of the state. He had worked for such a railway while serving as secretary of the Commercial Club, and just prior to joining forces with Marum he approached Charles N. Haskell regarding the need for such a railway.⁶⁹

Haskell, who became the state's first governor, had been a successful railroad promoter in his native state of Ohio. Thoburn told Haskell that a railroad should extend from the northwest corner of Oklahoma in a southeasternly direction to Haskell's home city of Muskogee, located at the head of navigation of the Arkansas River.

Thus while Oklahoma City likely would become the capital city of the new state, Muskogee would be the "great market and distributing point for the products of the new state."⁷⁰

Within a month, however, Thoburn had devised a means to make Oklahoma City both the capital city and the marketing and distribution center of the state by means of the proposed canal. He and Marum planned to be among the original incorporators for the canal, but they recognized the need to interest other parties who had sufficient funds to invest for the preliminary survey and the actual incorporation of the canal company.⁷¹

Thoburn wrote the W. K. Pulmer Company of Kansas City inquiring about the costs of a complete survey and a full report covering the engineering and financial possibilities of the project. Soon word of the proposed project began to circulate. Corb Sarchet, a newspaper correspondent, wrote Thoburn wanting "dope on canal projects," as the St. Louis Post Dispatch was interested in the story.⁷²

Despite Thoburn's and Marum's best efforts, however, their plans met with failure. Their idea was too far ahead of its time. In December of 1907, Marum wrote Thoburn, referring to the "slurs and insults" heaped upon them six months previously when they had formally proposed their plan for a water way to Webbers Falls. Thoburn undoubtedly was disappointed in this development, but he did not brood long about it; soon we was pursuing another means of making a living.⁷³

During the last half of 1907, Thoburn served as an official lecturer for the immigration department of the Frisco railway company. He was responsible for covering all states east of the Mississippi

River. Attempting to encourage travel and removal of people by rail to the Southwest, Thoburn gave a series of lectures illustrated with the aid of a stereopticon and fifty pounds of glass slides.⁷⁴

This tour of the Eastern states afforded Thoburn "a splendid opportunity to compare the intelligence and enterprise of the people of Oklahoma with those of some of the older states. He found that Oklahomans compared favorably in every way with the inhabitants of the eastern states. Thoburn emphasized the pioneering, forward-looking spirit of Oklahoma, dubbing himself the ambassador from the "land of now" to the "way back states."⁷⁵ Thoburn's service with the Frisco Railroad was short-lived, however, for the Panic of 1907 forced a retrenchment which cost the lecturer his job. Yet this experience led him to continue development of his interest in Oklahoma history.⁷⁶

The year 1907 was a pivotal one in Thoburn's life. During that year he also published a book entitled Art Work of Oklahoma, The New State. This work primarily consisted of handsome photographs, and the limited-edition volume has become quite rare. This publication, in addition to his book on Oklahoma for the Jamestown Exposition Company and his lectures on the Southwest for the Frisco Railroad, helped instill in the budding historian the interest and the confidence to produce his first book-length history of Oklahoma in 1907.⁷⁷

Prior to touring the East for the Frisco Railroad, Thoburn had decided that a school history of Oklahoma would be a marketable item--one that would have virtually no competition for classroom adoption. He secured a co-author, the former Superintendent of the Oklahoma Public Schools, Issac M. Holcomb. However, Holcomb was extremely

busy with his career as cashier of the Oklahoma City National Bank and his activities in the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, and proved to be of little assistance.⁷⁸

Under the pressure of a deadline, Thoburn researched and wrote the little volume in haste. Moreover, he had to train himself to be a historian. Thus the volume had shortcomings which he readily admitted. Perhaps because of his admiration for the service of his father and his uncle during the Civil War, Thoburn over-emphasized the military characters and martial history of the Indian Territory. William H. "Alfalfa Bill" Murray in later years told Thoburn that he had "dwelt too much on wars and battles and not enough on the life of the people in your book."⁷⁹ Despite its flaws, Thoburn had succeeded in producing the first general survey of the state's history suitable for classroom use. As with any pioneering effort, there was criticism. Some teachers condemned what they referred to as "such a dry text."⁸⁰

Actually, the book was quite readable when compared to the vast majority of the history textbooks of that era. Some of the criticism was due essentially to the fact that the teachers were abysmally ignorant of the subject, Thoburn asserted in later years. Actually, on the whole the book proved quite popular with both teachers and students.⁸¹

Thoburn's major activity from 1908 until he joined the faculty at the University of Oklahoma in 1913 was as a writer for newspapers and magazines. He wrote extensively on historical topics, but covered a wide range of subjects in other fields. One of his favorite outlets was Sturm's Oklahoma Magazine. Between 1907 and 1910, he published

twelve articles in this magazine; most of them were products of considerable primary research. Moreover, they were written with a good measure of literary flair.⁸²

A good example of Thoburn's style during this period can be found in an article he published in Sturm's Oklahoma Magazine in 1908 entitled "Names of Oklahoma Streams." In telling the story of Sergeant Major Creek, he reviewed the saga of one Sergeant Major Kennedy of the Seventh Cavalry. Kennedy was the lone survivor of a battle with the Cheyenne. The warriors were closing in on him and he appeared meekly to acquiesce to capture and slow death by torture:

Just as his adversary was about to seize him, there was a lunging thrust which sent the trooper's flashing blade clear to the hilt through the warrior's heart. Wounded unto death, the stricken red man reeled backward just as the crash of the score of bullets loosed the martial spirit of the Sergeant Major and the blood of both crimsoned the snow at the end of one of the most thrilling tragedies ever enacted on the Great Plains. And so the name of Sergeant Major Creek has a significance which should not be forgotten, for it must ever remind us of death as brave men met it before peace came to the beautiful valleys of western Oklahoma.⁸³

In these early days of his career, Thoburn wrote history for the consumption of the general public. It had to be readable, for his livelihood depended on it.

In 1910, Thoburn apparently was considering going into the newspaper business. In August of that year, William Allan White, Thoburn's friend and a distinguished journalist from Kansas, wrote that he was interested in Thoburn's plan to establish a newspaper in Oklahoma City. Nothing came of these plans, however, and Thoburn continued to work as a free-lance writer.⁸⁴

During these years Thoburn turned down what appeared to be interesting offers--from a financial viewpoint--in the realm of agriculture. For example, his old acquaintance from Davis, John B. Dickenson, had moved up in the world and offered Thoburn a position with his new National Land and Sub-irrigation Company in 1908. In 1910 the Borden Condensed Milk Company approached Thoburn with a proposition which likely would have afforded considerable security. Yet Thoburn turned aside both of these offers. Late in 1910 he began securing historic photographs for illustrating a lecture on the history of the Great Plains. He now seemed to be committed to spending his life in some phase of historic work.⁸⁵

When the opportunity came for Thoburn to accept a position in the Department of History at the University of Oklahoma in 1913, he accepted immediately. Although his career at the University would not be of the duration that he probably expected when he moved to Norman in 1913, it did firmly establish him in the realm of history. No more would he wander from job to job. He now had found his calling in life.

Thoburn had spent twenty years following his graduation from college searching for his station in life. Yet one theme holds true for all these years. He was not satisfied unless he was pioneering in whatever he might be doing. He was a prime mover in the organization of Epworth University, forbearer of Oklahoma City University; he played a central role in the transformation of the Oklahoma City Commercial Club into a vigorous Chamber of Commerce; he performed a vital service in establishing the office of secretary of the Territorial Board of Agriculture; and he established himself as a trackmaker in the virgin field of Oklahoma history.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹Unpublished Biographical Sketch, Folder MA-2, No. 1, TP.
- ²Ibid.
- ³Thoburn to ?, n.d., Folder MA-2, No. 1, TP.
- ⁴Ibid.
- ⁵Ibid.; Wright, "Pioneer Historian," 399.
- ⁶Lingenfelter, "Thoburn," p. 7; Wright, "Pioneer Historian," 399.
- ⁷Ibid., 399-400; Lingenfelter, "Thoburn," p. 7; J. B. Thoburn, Secretary and Editor, The Last Frontier: A Journal Devoted to the Kiowa-Comanche Country (Oklahoma City: Frontier Times Publishing Company, 1901. Volume 1, Numbers 1-12 may be found in the Library of the Oklahoma Historical Society.
- ⁸J. B. Thoburn, "Confession and Petition" and "The Duty of the Hour," Clippings from the Oklahoma Saturday Post, dated September 1901, Folder TH-1, TP.
- ⁹Thoburn to Captain M. J. Hogarty, July 15, 1922, Folder KI-1, TP; Lingenfelter, "Thoburn," p. 7; Wright, "Pioneer Historian," 400.
- ¹⁰Ibid.
- ¹¹Ibid.
- ¹²Ibid.
- ¹³Lingenfelter, "Thoburn," p. 7; Wright, "Pioneer Historian," 398.
- ¹⁴Ibid.
- ¹⁵Ibid.
- ¹⁶W. G. Fink to Thoburn, September 26, 1904, Folder EP-1, TP; George E. Kessler to Anton H. Classen, September 5, 1903, Folder EP-1, TP.
- ¹⁷Interview with Leslie A. McRill by the author, July 2, 1975. Tape available at Shepherd Library, Oklahoma Heritage Center, Oklahoma City.

¹⁸Lingenfelter, "Thoburn," p. 7; Resolution by Members of Epworth Federated Methodist Church, Joseph B. Thoburn, et. al., n.d., Folder ME-4, TP.

¹⁹F. D. Colburn to Thoburn, February 26, 1902, Folder TH-1, No. 3, TP; Wright, "Pioneer Historian," 400.

²⁰Minutes of Board of Directors, Oklahoma City Commercial Club, April 29, 1902, Stanley C. Draper Library, Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce.

²¹Lingenfelter, "Thoburn," p. 7; Wright, "Pioneer Historian," 400.

²²Lingenfelter, "Thoburn," p. 7.

²³Minutes of the Board of Directors, Oklahoma City Commercial Club, November 10, 1902.

²⁴Minutes of General Membership Meeting, Oklahoma City Commercial Club, November 14, 1902; "Statehood Maneuvers Highlighted," Newspaper Clipping, Thoburn File, Hensley Collection, private collection owned by Joan Keyes, Oklahoma City.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Oklahoma City: The Industrial Prodigy of the Great Southwest, (Oklahoma City: Lindell and Nockels, 1903). Minutes of the Board of Directors, Oklahoma City Commercial Club, September 23, 1902. See also written report of Thoburn attached.

²⁷Lingenfelter, "Thoburn," p. 7; Wright, "Pioneer Historian," 401.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Minutes of the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, February 25, 1903. In 1901, Thoburn wrote an article for Sturm's Oklahoma Magazine entitled "Product of Pulling Together," in which he traced the history of the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce. Thoburn modestly minimized his role in the organization of the Chamber. He must have felt considerable pride, however, when he wrote that "there may be a few complacent and self-satisfied spirits in Oklahoma City who have never been affiliated with the commercial organization who yet fondly imagine that they have helped to build a city." These individuals "might be enlightened if they were to turn to the pages of nature and study the philosophy of parasitic life." For Thoburn, the Chamber of Commerce was the "nerve center of the community," leading, not merely in material advancement, but in civic, moral, philanthropic, and social lines as well." Joseph B. Thoburn, "Product of Pulling Together," Sturm's Oklahoma Magazine, IX (No. 6, 1910), 27-28.

- ³⁰F. A. Waugh to Thoburn, February 7, 1903, Folder TH-1.2, TP.
- ³¹J. B. Thoburn, Secretary, First Biennial Report of the Oklahoma Territorial Board of Agriculture. (Guthrie: The State Capital Co., 1905), pp. 6-7.
- ³²Ibid., p. 7; Minutes of Territorial Board of Agriculture, February 11, 1904, Volume I, State Archives; F. C. Burtis to Thoburn, July 8, 1905, TP.
- ³³Thoburn, First Biennial Report, p. 19.
- ³⁴Ibid.; Cherokee Messenger, May 5, 1905, p. 2.
- ³⁵F. A. Waugh to Thoburn, October 19, 1909, Folder TH-1.2, TP; "The Development of the Fruit Growing Industry of Oklahoma," Mss. in Folder TH-1.2, TP; N. H. Lingenfelter, "Thoburn's History of Oklahoma Still Most Authentic Guidebook," The Daily Oklahoman, Sunday, July 5, 1931, Section C, p. 6. Thoburn apparently took Corb Sarchet, City Editor of the Guthrie State Capital, at his word when the journalist told him that there were "four or five men in Guthrie who could make or break any man in the new position." These men were outside newspaper correspondents; hence Sarchet intimated that Thoburn should "be good and come through with a news story occasionally." Ibid.
- ³⁶Minutes of Territorial Board of Agriculture, July 5, 1904; Thoburn, First Biennial Report, p. 21.
- ³⁷Thoburn, First Biennial Report, pp. 21-23.
- ³⁸Ibid., pp. 28-29.
- ³⁹Ibid.; p. 29.
- ⁴⁰"For Irrigation," The Mangum Star, December 1, 1904, p. 1; Thoburn, First Biennial Report, p. 31.
- ⁴¹Ibid.
- ⁴²Don C. Smith to Thoburn, n.d., Folder IN-1, TP; John A. Eaton to Thoburn, March 22, 1905, Folder TH-1.2, TP; Cherokee Messenger, May 5, 1905, p. 2.
- ⁴³Thoburn, First Biennial Report, pp. 75-79.
- ⁴⁴Minutes of Board of Directors, Territorial Board of Agriculture, July 5, 1904, Volume I, State Archives; Minutes of Board of Agriculture, July 6, 1904, *ibid.*
- ⁴⁵R. Kleiner to Thoburn, September 22, 1904, Folder TH-1.2, TP.

- 46"Political Chicanery," Guthrie Daily Leader, July 7, 1905, p. 1.
- 47Edward H. Webster to Thoburn, May 22, 1905, Folder TH-1.2, TP.
- 48"Political Chicanery," Guthrie Daily Leader, July 7, 1905, p. 1.
- 49Ibid.
- 50"White Strikes Back," The Daily Oklahoman, n.d., Folder TH-1.2, TP.
- 51Minutes of Territorial Board of Agriculture, July 5, 1905.
- 52"Thoburn's Retirement," The Daily Oklahoman, April 21, 1905, Folder TH-1, No. 1.2a, TP; various newspaper clippings, *ibid.*;
"Political Chicanery," Guthrie Daily Leader, July 7, 1905, p. 1.
- 53"Political Chicanery," *ibid.*
- 54F. C. Burtis to Thoburn, July 8, 1905, Folder EI-1, TP.
- 55John B. Dickenson to Thoburn, July 6, 1905, Folder BI-1, No. 3, TP.
- 56Malcolm D. Owen to Thoburn, March 17, 1906, Folder TH-1.2, No. 2, TP; Wesley Merritt to Thoburn, March 17, 1904, *ibid.*; David B. Cooney to Thoburn, December 12, 1905, *ibid.*; F. C. Burtis to Thoburn, January 18, 1906, *ibid.*
- 57Thoburn to W. A. Reeder, March 13, 1906, Folder OK-11, TP.
- 58Thoburn to R. M. Stafford, April 23, 1906, *ibid.*
- 59Ibid.
- 60Ibid.
- 61Ibid.
- 62Ibid.; Edwin C. McReynolds, Oklahoma: A History of the Sooner State (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954), p. 314.
- 63"Thoburn Selected as the Promoter to Collect Exhibits for Jamestown Exposition," The Daily Oklahoman, February 2, 1907, p. 10.
- 64Ibid.; Burns Hegler to Thoburn, May 24, 1907, Folder JA-1, TP.
- 65Burns Hegler to Thoburn, *ibid.*
- 66J. B. Thoburn, compiler, Oklahoma: Its Resources and Attractions, and the Activities and Achievements of Its People (Oklahoma City: The Oklahoma-Jamestown Exposition Co., 1907).

⁶⁷Lee Cruce to Thoburn, September 25, 1918, Folder JA-1, TP; Lee Cruce to Thoburn, October 25, 1918, *ibid.*

⁶⁸D. P. Marum to Thoburn, April 1907, Folder CA-1, TP; D. P. Marum to Thoburn, n.d., *ibid.*

⁶⁹Thoburn to Charles N. Haskell, March 28, 1907, Folder RA-1, TP.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*

⁷¹D. P. Marum to Thoburn, April, 1907, Folder CA-1, TP.

⁷²A. M. Meyers to Thoburn, June 3, 1907, *ibid.*; Corb Sarchet to Thoburn, June 4, 1907, *ibid.*

⁷³D. P. Marum to Thoburn, December 4, 1907, *ibid.* In 1911, Thoburn would again voice his interest in navigation on the Arkansas River in preparing a historical sketch on "steam boating on the upper Arkansas River." Thoburn drew attention in the conclusion of his story to the "great benefits which would accrue to the community-at-large were the river to be opened." L. H. Rooney to Thoburn, September 6, 1911, Folder ST-4, TP. Also, L. H. Rooney to Thoburn, July 10, 1911 and July 14, 1911, *ibid.*

⁷⁴Lingenfelter, "Thoburn's History," p. 6.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*; J. B. Thoburn, "As Others See Us," Sturm's Oklahoma Magazine, VI (No. 2, 1910), 73.

⁷⁶S. A. Hughes to Thoburn, December 16, 1907, Folder BI-1, No. 3, TP.

⁷⁷J. B. Thoburn, Art Work of Oklahoma, The New State (Racine, Wis.: The Harvey Photogravure Co., 1907). This volume may be found in the library of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

⁷⁸J. B. Thoburn and Issac M. Holcomb, A History of Oklahoma (San Francisco: Doub & Co., 1908); Lingenfelter, "Thoburn's History," p. 6.

⁷⁹Wright, "Pioneer Historian," 402.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*

⁸¹Lingenfelter, "Thoburn's History," p. 6.

⁸²Thoburn's writings for Sturm's Oklahoma Magazine are listed in Wright, "Pioneer Historian," Addenda C, 412.

⁸³J. B. Thoburn, "Names of Oklahoma Streams," Sturm's Oklahoma Magazine, XI (No. 4, 1910), 59-60.

⁸⁴William Allan White to Thoburn, August 19, 1910, Folder TH-1, TP.

⁸⁵Thoburn to D. W. Young, December 22, 1910, Folder TH-1.1, TP.

CHAPTER IV

THE UNIVERSITY YEARS

Joseph B. Thoburn's career at the University of Oklahoma spanned only the years 1913 to 1917. During this period he again operated as a pioneer, especially in the fields of archaeology and ethnology. And, as in his earlier situations, he faced shortages of funds for the operation of his program and for his salary. In fact, much of the time he was on leave, for the University did not have sufficient funds to operate his department. He utilized these periods to research and write his first multi-volume history of Oklahoma. By the time Thoburn left the service of the University, he had solidly established himself as the state's pioneer archaeologist and historian.

Prior to accepting a position at the University of Oklahoma as the Instructor in charge of research and collection, Thoburn already had begun a revision of his textbook on Oklahoma history. He had done considerable research and had developed his skills as an historian to the point where he could not allow his original work to stand without reworking it. He corrected his earlier mistakes of fact, added some new material that he had discovered, and had S. M. Barrett of the University's School of Education provide a section on the "Government of Oklahoma."¹

Thoburn submitted the new book to the State Textboard Board, but, as he recalled some years later, political jockeying led to an inferior book being adopted. In fact, he asserted that the book accepted by the board was merely a rewrite of Thoburn's original work. And it contained all of Thoburn's original errors. Thoroughly disgusted, he never again submitted a book for textbook adoption.²

One of Thoburn's first activities as a member of the University's faculty was to promote the formation of history clubs in high schools throughout the state. In his letter to high school teachers, the professor suggested the mechanics of organizing such clubs. In addition, he urged as club activities the gathering of relevant historical information about each town and providing copies of this data to Thoburn for the research collections at the University. Moreover, he hoped that such programs would influence youngsters to become more interested in their history and heritage. Interestingly, Thoburn's concept of high school history clubs in recent years has been adopted by the education division of the Oklahoma Historical Society, and are known as "Heritage Clubs." These organizations have been formed in numerous schools throughout the state, and their numbers are expanding each year.³

Shortly after his arrival on the Norman campus, Thoburn visited eastern Oklahoma for several weeks while on an errand for the University. While there, he recalled his visit to Indian Territory some twenty-three years previously, and his youthful curiosity regarding the numerous small mounds in the area returned in full force. Since he had begun his research and writing of Oklahoma's history in 1908, he had learned about the "timber-framed, dome-shaped earth-covered

huts or lodges" of the Pawnee and Arikara-Caddoan Indian tribes. It seemed logical to Thoburn that these mounds could have originated in the fall and destruction of a similar type of habitation.⁴

During this brief trip, Thoburn visited nearly twenty counties. He used every spare moment for "tramps through cornfields and cotton patches" with the result that he returned to the University with a "hatful" of chipped chert and broken pottery. President Stratton D. Brooks saw Thoburn's findings and inquired into the Professor's interest in such artifacts and his previous experience in collecting them. When Thoburn had completed his story, President Brooks immediately assigned him to covering the field of American ethnology in addition to his normal duties.⁵

The prospect of doing field work in archaeology greatly excited Thoburn, and he was eager to get started. His primary goal at the outset was to investigate the mounds thoroughly and see if they were remains of ancient human dwellings. His first step, however, was a thorough perusal of the published literature on the mounds.⁶

Thoburn was intrigued to discover that the origin of these small mounds had been the subject of an extensive dispute between individuals in the disciplines of geology and archaeology for more than two generations. The geologists held that the "tumuli" were "natural mounds," and "suggested as possible cause for such formation erosion or the weathering decomposition of rock, glaciation or ice action, wave action, spring and gas vents, earthquake action, animal burrows, ant-hills plus numerous other speculations" even more fantastic than these.

Archaeologists had urged that the mounds must be the result of human endeavor but "cited no details."⁷

Thoburn thus decided that he would find proof to verify the archaeological view of a human origin of the mounds. Carefully dissecting several mounds, Thoburn found the "postholes in which supporting timbers had been placed and other conclusive evidence of the construction of earth-covered human habitations." The professor also found artifacts which further convinced him of the human origin of the mounds.⁸

Late in 1916, Thoburn made a trip to Delaware County where he found evidence of "another prehistoric race--cave dwellers this time." However, he was alarmed to find on the scene an "expedition which had been sent out by the University of Pennsylvania . . . digging a lot of stuff from the floors of the cave and overhanging ledges." Thoburn was most "anxious . . . to preserve the cream of that stuff for Oklahoma."⁹

His plans were soon sidetracked, however, by financial difficulties. In January of 1915, he reported to his friend, J. F. Weaver of Fort Smith, Arkansas, that the legislature would convene the following day and that he felt apprehensive concerning the appropriation the University would receive. So much did Thoburn and President Brooks fear legislative parsimony that they decided not to ask for a special appropriation to fund Thoburn's sub-department themselves; rather, they would have the appropriation requested "by the Indians" and the bill would be introduced by "an Indian member of the Legislature." Both Thoburn and Brooks believed that they would experience less

difficulty with this approach than if the appropriation had to "run the gauntlet with the regular appropriation."¹⁰

Unfortunately, this plan failed. In March, Thoburn wrote confidentially to Weaver that his plans for the future were in doubt. The legislature had "slashed appropriations to the point where there can be but little development during the next two years." Moreover, the disgusted professor reported that "My salary has not equalled my living expenses, even with the exercise of the strictest economy, so I cannot keep up the present gait indefinitely."¹¹

Worse than his inadequate salary, in Thoburn's view, was the prospect of needed work being left undone. He felt that if his work could not be pushed vigorously during the coming two years it "might as well be abandoned." Even if his salary were satisfactory, he maintained, "it would be of questionable wisdom to remain as a figurehead with no means to efficiency in the field that should, but cannot, be worked."¹² Thoburn believed that the cause of inadequate legislative support of his work was due to the fact that "Oklahoma . . . has nearly a score of state educational institutions." Those essential institutions, such as the University of Oklahoma, obviously were seriously hampered, Thoburn declared, "in order that the nonessential schools of lower grade (which have been established and maintained at the behest of pork-barrell politics) may be supported." For the dispirited Thoburn, the situation was "more than discouraging."¹³

However, he decided to stay on at the University and attempt to locate funds to carry on his work by whatever means he could devise. In June of 1915, the Extension Department of the University allotted

\$250 to Thoburn which the professor put to good use "with very fair success" in making a reconnaissance trip down the Red River valley and in doing some excavation. The enterprising archaeologist then was able to secure funds from another unexpected source when the "Geological Survey . . . opened up its heart and purse strings" to finance field work for him during the month of June 1916. Thoburn was delighted with this windfall. He decided to work in Delaware County in "the Cherokee Hills and 'camp with the cave dwellers' for several weeks."¹⁴

This was the area where Thoburn earlier had encountered the excavating party from the University of Pennsylvania. He was certain he would "turn up some interesting finds in that archaeological province."¹⁵ One of the students recruited by the professor to help him on this expedition to Delaware County was Elmer Fraker, who in later years became executive director of the Oklahoma Historical Society. Fraker was greatly impressed with Thoburn and his work. Many years later he vividly recalled what it was like to accompany Thoburn on a field trip.¹⁶

Thoburn became acquainted with Fraker because they attended the same Methodist Church in Norman. When "the Professor," as Fraker and other students referred to him asked the sophomore if he would like to accompany him and several other young men on an expedition to a place called Big Mouth Cavern on Honey Creek, the eager student "jumped at the chance." Another member of the party was John Joseph Matthews, a part-Osage who later distinguished himself as a fine writer and historian.¹⁷

As was his usual habit, Thoburn went ahead of the party three or four days to make advance preparations. When the students arrived at Grove, they found him walking with a pronounced limp. He had been using a team and buggy to survey the countryside and to locate the best camping site for the group; something apparently had scared the horses and they ran away with him. Finally, he had been dumped into the rocks and bushes when the buggy overturned.¹⁸

The trip from Grove to Big Mouth Cavern required traveling four miles over substantial eastern Oklahoma hills. A local citizen was procured to haul the men and their equipment to their work site with a team and wagon. The party struggled up and down what seemed to them to be more like mountains than hills. Although the sun had been shining brightly when they departed Grove, a sudden thunderstorm caught them far from their destination. To make matters worse, the lead mare "remembering that her beloved offspring had been left at home, became possessed with an overwhelming desire to be with her foal," and refused to proceed further. All manner of "entreaties and persuasion" failed to entice the stubborn animal to move. Finally, Thoburn and his students unhitched the team and fled to the shelter of a small cave which happened to be close by. No sooner had the drenched party entered the cave than Thoburn observed that they had come to excavate in caves and there was no need of wasting time. Soon the young men were digging for evidence of the cave's ancient inhabitants. Bits of pottery and some arrowheads were uncovered within a short time.¹⁹

When the storm abated, the adventurers hitched their team and hoped to be on their way. However, the obstinate "old nag" again refused to budge. A kindly citizen happened by with a span of mules, and he consented to pull the wagon to the crest of the hill. From there the trail was reasonably passable and the horses finally resumed the task of transporting the party to Big Mouth Cavern. They arrived at the campsite exhausted from helping pull the wagon through mud holes and drenched from the rain.²⁰

After the young crew was established at their campsite, Thoburn lectured them on how to identify objects of archaeological importance. He discussed the cave-dwellers who likely occupied the cavern several thousand years earlier. Finally, he noted that their first task would be to remove the tons of rock and soil that over the ages had buried the artifacts for which the group would search.²¹

Large sifters were set up so the dirt could be carefully strained to expose any item of significant size. This grueling job continued day after day. And they were successful. Thoburn recounted that "relics of a cave people" found in the cavern included "flint implements, bones and teeth of game animals, shells of bevalve mollusks" and some fascinating bone implements--"needles, awls, shuttles, etc." Also located were some tiny arrowheads, "scarcely larger than a bean," which Thoburn explained were used by poisoning the tips and propelling them through blow pipes.²²

Thoburn allowed the group to have some fun in order to break the tedium of hard labor. Indeed, the professor demonstrated his own sense of humor in two amusing incidents. One of the members of

the expedition, James Brill, represented one of the large metropolitan newspapers and daily wrote stories on the discoveries being made. He had a tendency to overstate the "luxuries" being enjoyed by the party. In one of his stories, he beautifully described the natural bounties of the area. To these accurate statements, he added the fictitious statement that they were enjoying cream from a goat rented from a nearby farmer. When Brill was away from camp, Thoburn packaged a can of condensed milk, and enclosed a brief note: "This is Jim's goat."²³ Thoburn also demonstrated his sense of humor by working in league with the young men in perpetuating the hoax of the "Hecome-hipcome" monster on the citizens of the area. The hilarious episode had its origins in the party's being mistaken for a group of gold diggers.

A legend of the area told of Spanish gold being buried somewhere in the vicinity of Big Mouth Cavern. Consequently, as word spread of the expedition's activities, increasing numbers of curious onlookers visited the camp. Thoburn even had to promise the rifle-brandishing farmer who held the lease for the property on which they were working that they would share half of any gold discovered. While this scene was taking place, the students were seized with "spasms of mirth" and retreated far into the reaches of the cavern to conceal their laughter from the serious native.²⁴

One Sunday morning, when all members of the expedition were attending church save one left on guard, the camp was visited by twenty-three citizens who demanded to see the gold-filled teeth they had heard about. Explanations regarding the true nature of

the party's work simply were not believed. Hence the students, with Thoburn's acquiescence, invented the awful Hecome-hicome which they maintained lurked deep within the Big Mouth Cavern. At every opportunity, the young men began telling local citizens of dreadful happenings at the camp: "Hair-raising, blood-curdling, ear-piercing screams and wails" were alleged to emanate from the cave at night, making it impossible for the party to sleep. Moreover, they asserted that this "man, ghost, beast, devil, or whatever it might be was growing more restless," for his screams were being heard issuing from far back in the cavern late in the afternoon. Soon the countryside miles around the camp site was abuzz with the stories of the monster.²⁵

The first Sunday afternoon after the Hecome-hicome rumors were implanted among the populace found a large group of citizens from both Grove and the surrounding countryside gathered at the campsite. Seated on boulders and on the ground, each had allowed his curiosity to overcome his fears and hoped to hear or even see the now famous creature.²⁶ As was characteristic of Thoburn, he was friendly with the crowd and proceeded to show and explain some of the artifacts that had been uncovered. His audience, however, simply was not interested in arrowheads and paid little attention to the professor. Thoburn thus smoothly switched his lecture to the subject of the unusual experiences the group had endured during the past few weeks. He even lowered his voice for dramatic effect and had his now attentive audience sitting on the edge of their boulders. Elmer Fraker describes the ensuing scene as follows:

Just as Thoburn reached the most terrifying part of his narrative, one of the young conspirators leaned forward, motioned to the Professor, and gave a hissing "Sh!" It may sound trite to say that a pin could have been heard to drop, but it was nevertheless true.

Then from far back in the cavern came a barely audible sound if sound it might be called. The far away sounds, groans, wails and cries of all the lost souls in Purgatory could never have made a more fear-inspiring discord. With a wild yell, all of us conspirators dashed out of the cavern mouth, screaming at the top of our lungs, "It's the Hecome-hicome! He's coming out!"

Some of us had long considered ourselves sprinters and long distance runners, but all such illusions were immediately removed, for as we dashed through the sapplings and around the boulders, we were passed by no less than twenty people. First came the young men, flitting by like flying Mercurys, followed in order by old men, girls, small children and lastly, the older women, who were somewhat handicapped by long skirts. The deed was done. The objective was reached. We sub-surface dwellers circled back to the cave and arrived in time to shake hands in congratulations to Joe as he came crawling out of the interior of the cave, covered with clay, but clasping his Osage flute--the great Hecome-hicome.²⁷

With the populace sufficiently terrorized, Thoburn and his colleagues were afforded several weeks of virtually uninterrupted work. Near the end of June, however, the expedition came to an abrupt end when dogs raided the food supply and almost completely devoured it. Unfortunately, the hungry canines had no fear of the Hecome-hicome. Thus the professor and his charges packed their gear and headed for home.²⁸

Recalling his impressions of Thoburn, Fraker remarked that he kept "all of us rambunctious young bucks" under control with the "force of his personality." Thoburn never spoke harshly to his charges, but they respected him and "didn't want to do anything to offend him." The young men also especially enjoyed the evenings

sitting around the campfire as Thoburn regaled them with interesting and often amusing stories of bygone days in northeastern Oklahoma.²⁹

Four years after this expedition ended, three of the students who had accompanied Thoburn to Honey Creek paid him a surprise visit at his new job with the Oklahoma Historical Society in Oklahoma City. Again, Fraker recalled that "Tears of joy filled his eyes when he beheld us." That evening after dinner Thoburn told "stories of early Oklahoma with the same gripping interest as in the days when we gathered around the campfire at Big Mouth Cavern."³⁰

Thoburn again was able to do some field work, this time in the "northern part of the state," during the summer of 1917. He financed this trip by finding "an oil man up there who has generously agreed to meet all expense incident to excavations made in that county." Of course, he was not, "shouting that from the rooftops."³¹

Thoburn informed his friend, J. F. Weaver, that he had been working with a Harvard man during the expeditions that summer. The fellow recently had returned to his home a few weeks and had reappeared with a new bride. Thoburn felt that it now would be best if they traveled in separate parties, "as I do not care to be mixed up with any honey-moon field trips." Thoburn also noted that the Harvard man feared that if they traveled separately, Thoburn would locate more archaeological sites than he would. "This I am apt to do," the professor asserted, "as I do most of my scouting on foot while he likes to do his in a Ford car on a good road at 15 or 20 miles an hour."³²

At the University, another of Thoburn's tasks was building the collection of the Museum. Again, funding was a serious problem. The

professor worked with President Brooks in an attempt to establish an endowment fund for a first-rate ethnological and archaeological museum on campus. One of Thoburn's tactics was to have a petition signed by each of the chiefs of the Five Civilized Tribes which was submitted to the Carnegie Corporation by United States Senator Robert L. Owen, a Choctaw Indian. Even this approach failed to achieve positive results, however, despite the dearth of funds, the University was able to maintain a small museum. Of course, most of the holdings consisted of items Thoburn had collected on his field trips. From time to time, he was required to keep "open house" in the museum, especially when large groups would visit the campus. When a large track meet took place at the University, Thoburn spent several days lecturing on the artifacts on display in the museum.³³

In May of 1917, Thoburn journeyed to the East for consultation with the curator of the museum in Andover, Massachusetts, and another archaeologist. This trip was enlightening and enjoyable for Thoburn, who visited eight of the nation's greatest museums during his two-week sojourn. He was assembling ideas for museum development that he eventually would put to use in Oklahoma. He was pleasantly surprised to discover that he had "been digging up some things that cannot be duplicated in several of the largest museums." While on this trip Thoburn had an extended conference with "a millionaire professor at Harvard, who greeted and treated me with the most charmingly cultured condesension."³⁴

Another of Thoburn's interests at the University during his tenure was the Indian students. In fact, he encouraged them to form

an Indian Club early in 1914. This group, probably at Thoburn's suggestion, secured a list of Indian graduates from the state's high schools and addressed a letter to each one. This resulted in the Indian enrollment at the University increasing by more than fifty percent. Thoburn also assisted in calling a conference for representatives of the various Indian tribes of Oklahoma. They met on the campus to discuss Indian affairs, and Thoburn hoped to get their backing in the quest for an adequate legislative appropriation and in securing an endowment fund for the museum. These efforts, however, had little positive results in the way of raising money, but they certainly did help the Indian students to maintain their cultural heritage and pride.³⁵

Thoburn also served as a partial publicity agent for the University and its Museum collection. He was in demand for speeches, such as the talk he made before the Oklahoma City Rotary Club in 1916. He gave an interesting presentation about his archaeological investigations, showing specimens and drawing sketches for the businessmen; he concluded his presentation with an appeal for the businessmen to give the University their "moral support" so that the important investigations it had been conducting could continue. Thoburn also promoted the University and its museum by preparing an exhibit for the state fair at Oklahoma City. Moreover, he had to stay with the exhibit throughout the fair. He found this to be hard work, for it kept him lecturing almost constantly. However, Thoburn did not object, for this proved to be "a good advertising stunt."³⁶

Thoburn always was active in promoting the University whenever he could. Moreover, he was jealous of the prerogatives of the institution in the realm of state and local history. Thus he was particularly "annoyed, and pestered even, by the grandstanding antics of one of our state normal schools which is trying to outdo the University in its apparent zeal for original work in local History."³⁷ This object of Thoburn's wrath was the "Central State Normal Historical Society." Perhaps what irritated Thoburn most about this "Edmond Normal bunch" was the fact that they read a story in the press about Thoburn's aiding the citizens of Salina to locate the site of the old Chouteau trading post and urging them to mark it with some sort of appropriate monument. The Central State organization promptly contacted the Salina authorities and offered to furnish them a marker. Thus the Central State Historical Society got its name on the marker merely by acting as a go-between without letting the people of Salina know that they could have acquired it directly.³⁸

Although he was "patient and long-suffering," Thoburn had "a limit, so there had to be something doing." Thus Thoburn worked out a scheme. First he asked the president of the Oklahoma Society of the Sons of the American Revolution (of which Thoburn was a member) to establish a state committee on historical landmarks. The first marker to be placed would be a monument honoring Milton W. Reynolds, Thoburn related. The irony of the situation was that Reynolds had been buried in an unmarked grave "for more than a quarter of a century right there at Edmond, where the original and only simon-pure 'monument builders' are holding forth."³⁹

Pleased with his plan, the professor felt "we will be able to put over something in which the aforesaid 'monument builders' can pose as innocent bystanders." They might be able to steal ideas from others, Thoburn asserted, but "when it comes to original work--well, they are simply not in the history class at all." Finally, Thoburn declared that if "all this does not hold them for awhile, there is something else in reserve that will make a snipe hunt or a badger fight seem insipid and uninteresting in comparison."⁴⁰ subsequently, he noted that he had written a story for the newspaper and "dated it right out of Edmond--we'll keep that bunch guessing."⁴¹

One of Thoburn's most important accomplishments during the years he was at Norman was the writing and publication of a multi-volume history of Oklahoma which firmly entrenched him as the leading historian of Oklahoma at that time. Ironically, this was done during a year's leave of absence from the University beginning with the fall of 1915. The leave was necessitated by the fact that the University did not receive sufficient funds to run his department.⁴²

Thoburn's effort, entitled A Standard History of Oklahoma, essentially was an expansion of his earlier school history, "with much additional illustrative material, largely used in the form of footnotes." In addition, it was "profusely illustrated with pictures with authentic sources."⁴³ This was a remarkably comprehensive study of Oklahoma's History in two volumes, with three volumes of biographical sketches added. He worked more than one and a half years writing this history. His trials and tribulations in the production of this

work were interesting. Those who have pounded keyboards even in much less monumental literary efforts can empathize with Thoburn in both his periods of exultation and weariness.

On March 4, 1915, Thoburn related to his old friend, J. F. Weaver, that he had started on the manuscript of his new history of Oklahoma. He was so interested and stimulated by the project that he had to force himself to stop to take care of his correspondence. Indeed, Thoburn, enthused, "I can scarcely let it alone."⁴⁵ Only one week later, however, he complained that "sometimes the material for a footnote is harder to find than that required for several pages of text." Thoburn was a strong advocate of "content footnotes," wherein he provided biographical material about an individual mentioned in the narrative or some other type of relevant information. Thus he was digging for biographical information of the "early American traders at the mouth of the Verdigris."⁴⁶

In January of 1916, Thoburn reported that he was "up to my neck" in trying to write a condensed story of the Civil War in the Indian Territory. He found that there was much conflict and so much that was indefinite and vague "that one has a hard time trying to piece it all out." He asserted the conflict was "a pitiful story at best," and that he was not "painting very many halos of glory into my picture of the state's history."⁴⁷

During the ensuing months, he found the constant effort taking a toll on him. In noting that he was grinding away on the 1840-1860 section of the book, he added that "it is getting to be a grind, too, believe me." However, in the same letter he reported that he finally

had located a photograph of a certain Methodist missionary. "Nothing is impossible with the historian," he exulted, "if he is only patient and persistent."⁴⁸

On March 4, 1916, Thoburn wrote that he was tired, "having already ground out about 2,000 words of Mss. today." He complained that if "one were to use all of the desirable material the work would be three times as large" as he was allowed. He finally decided to "quit and go out and work in the garden--get some needed exercise for my body and try to forget history and its writing for a little while."⁴⁹ By July 26, his outlook toward his project had brightened. He noted that in a few days he would be "on the homestretch." Although he said he would be glad when it was completed, he now was enjoying the work. The final effort to meet his publication deadline, however, pushed him "to the limit of my strength." He was greatly relieved when the work on "that history" finally ended in September.⁵⁰

Reflecting on this work in later years, Thoburn was not entirely happy with the finished product. He asserted that he had been allotted too little time to prepare a work of that magnitude and that it had been impossible to include much material he felt was pertinent. He also wanted to use 600 photographs and illustrations, but was limited to 100 by the publisher. Finally, he felt that the publishers did not give it "the circulation that it deserved."⁵¹

Thoburn's never ending struggle for funds to operate a meaningful program as a special investigator in archaeology and local history was a constant source of frustration for him during his tenure at the University of Oklahoma. Thus it was not a difficult decision for

Thoburn to accept a position as a research assistant at the Oklahoma Historical Society in 1917. Yet his accomplishments in Norman during these years were substantial despite the trying circumstances. He was the first to do systematic archaeological work in Oklahoma; this was made possible through his affiliation with the University. He would continue with his archaeological work periodically throughout his life. In addition, his multi-volume history of Oklahoma, published in 1916, was a major mile-stone in his development as a historian.

As during the earlier part of his life, he again had pioneered while at the University. And under trying circumstances, he did fine work for that institution. As he embarked on his new career with the Oklahoma Historical Society, for which he would be most widely remembered, he must have felt that the years of frustration were ending-- but for Joseph B. Thoburn they were only beginning.

FOOTNOTES

¹J. B. Thoburn and Issac M. Holcomb, A History of Oklahoma (Oklahoma City: Warden Company, 1914); Lingenfelter, "Thoburn's History," p. 6; Wright, "Pioneer Historian," 403.

²Lingenfelter, "Thoburn's History," p. 6. Thoburn to Joseph G. McCoy, April 28, 1914, Folder TH-1.1, TP.

³William M. LeMay to Thoburn, January 6, 1914, Folder IN-3, TP; J. M. Dyer to Thoburn, November 19, 1913, *ibid.*

⁴J. B. Thoburn, "Notes on Archaeology," 112.

⁵*Ibid.*, 112-113.

⁶George Bird Grinnell to Thoburn, December 29, 1913, Folder TH-1.1, TP; Thoburn, "Notes on Archaeology," 113.

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, January 4, 1915, Folder WE-2, No. 2, TP.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, March 6, 1915, *ibid.*

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, March 4, 1915, *ibid.*

¹⁴Thoburn to Omar P. Stephens, May 5, 1916, Folder MU-1, TP; Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, April 16, 1915, Folder WE-2, No. 2, TP; Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, May 2, 1916, Folder WE-2, TP.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶Elmer L. Fraker, "With Thoburn at Honey Creek," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, XXXIV (No. 1, 1956), 44-52; see also personal interview with Elmer Fraker by author, July 2, 1975. Tape available at Shepherd Library, Oklahoma Heritage Center.

44. ¹⁷ Interview with Fraker; Fraker, "With Thoburn at Honey Creek,"
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., 45.
- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ Ibid., 46.
- ²² Ibid.; Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, July 26, 1916, Folder WE-2, TP.
- ²³ Fraker, "With Thoburn at Honey Creek," 47.
- ²⁴ Ibid., 48; Thoburn had similar difficulties in his excavations in the mounds near Spiro, Oklahoma. The Treasurer of the Spiro State Bank, F. Q. Poynor, wrote Thoburn that "I still hear some say they did not think you were after pottery and arrowheads altogether. I think the coming spring will see quite a few yards filled in and the dirt will all come from Indian mounds." F. Q. Poynor To Thoburn, December 6, 1914, Folder UF, TP.
- ²⁵ Fraker, "With Thoburn at Honey Creek," 48-49.
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ Ibid., 50-51.
- ²⁸ Ibid., 51; Interview with Fraker.
- ²⁹ Interview with Fraker.
- ³⁰ Fraker, "With Thoburn at Honey Creek," 51-52.
- ³¹ Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, July 27, 1917, Folder WE-2, TP.
- ³² Ibid.
- ³³ Robert L. Owen to Thoburn, December 22, 1915, Folder MU-1, TP; Robert L. Owen to Thoburn, January 8, 1916, *ibid.*; Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, May 11, 1916, Folder WE-2, TP.
- ³⁴ Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, May 7, 1917, Folder WE-2, No. 2, TP.
- ³⁵ Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, October 12, 1914, *ibid.*; Kiowa Bill to James J. Hill, October 20, 1914, Folder KI-1, TP. Thoburn attempted to arrange for an expedition game of Indian ball at the University in 1916. However, the expenses attendant with carrying out the project apparently were too much to overcome. ? Wilson to Thoburn, September 12, 1916, Folder CH-1, TP; ? Wilson to Thoburn, September 14, 1916, *ibid.*

³⁶"Ancient Pottery Buried in State," Newspaper Clipping, TH-1.2, TP; Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, October 24, 1916, Folder WE-2, TP.

³⁷Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, April 1, 1916, *ibid.*

³⁸*Ibid.*

³⁹*Ibid.*

⁴⁰*Ibid.*

⁴¹*Ibid.*

⁴²Thoburn to Omar P. Stephens, May 5, 1916, Folder MU-1, TP.

⁴³Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, March 17, 1915, Folder WE-2, TP.

⁴⁴J. B. Thoburn, A Standard History of Oklahoma (Chicago and New York: The American Historical Society, 1916). A comprehensive evaluation of Thoburn as a historian will be made in a later chapter. It should be noted that the biographies in the last three volumes of the set were sketches of individuals who subscribed to the history in advance of its publication. Thoburn had no responsibility for the content of these sketches.

⁴⁵Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, March 4, 1915, Folder WE-2, No. 2, TP.

⁴⁶Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, March 11, 1915, *ibid.*

⁴⁷Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, January 20, 1916, Folder WE-2, TP.

⁴⁸Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, February 25, 1916, *ibid.*

⁴⁹Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, March 4, 1916, *ibid.*

⁵⁰Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, July 26, 1916, *ibid.*; Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, October 24, 1916, *ibid.*

⁵¹Thoburn to E. J. Gardner, June 25, 1919, Folder OK-8, TP; Thoburn to Mrs. Maude E. Long, January 18, 1926, *ibid.*

CHAPTER V

CONFUSION, CONFLICT, AND ACCOMPLISHMENT

Joseph B. Thoburn accepted a position on the staff of the Oklahoma Historical Society in 1917 because he believed the new job would offer a chance to make more efficient use of his talents and provide an opportunity to do pioneering work in developing the Society. Moreover, he hoped his personal financial situation would be improved in the years ahead. But, except for a brief period at the outset, he would endure frustration and conflicts until he was appointed Director of Research in 1926. Although these were years of turbulence, they were also years of accomplishment both for Thoburn and the Oklahoma Historical Society.

It is difficult for those familiar with the Oklahoma Historical Society in recent years to understand the nature of the organization that Thoburn joined in 1917. He had been a member of the Board of Directors since 1903 and knew the history of the Society well. The Oklahoma Historical Society had been founded as a department within the Oklahoma Territorial Press Association in 1893. W. P. Campbell served for one and a half years as custodian on a voluntary basis, as there was no legislative appropriation to support its existence activities. During this period, he published a little sheet called "Mistletoe Leaves" to build interest in the work of the Society.¹

Campbell and the Press Association found to their chagrin, however, that a second historical society had been formed at the University of Oklahoma and had organized to receive recognition and an appropriation from the next legislature. Accordingly, the Third Territorial legislature designated the organization at Norman as the Oklahoma Historical Society. Campbell's functions and collections were taken over by the University in 1895. Campbell was paid \$450 for his time and money spent in establishing the historical society collections. Among the collections were almost complete files of the territorial papers.²

Because of meager appropriations to support the society, little development took place. Then in 1901 the legislature recognized the need to relocate the society's collections in a fireproof building. The directors were authorized to effect such a move when they could do so without incurring any extra expense. This resulted in moving the society's collection to the fireproof rooms offered by the new Carnegie Library in Oklahoma City. Moreover, the legislature provided that the Society would again be moved to the new state capitol building whenever that happened to be completed.³

In 1904, W. P. Campbell returned to the society as custodian and remained in that position until his death in 1924. Until 1917, the staff of the society consisted of the custodian and one file clerk. Under the circumstances, Campbell did an outstanding job in building the society's collections. Yet when Thoburn joined the staff in 1917, there had been no effective cataloging or organizing of the archival holdings. Moreover, the president of the society, Jasper Sipes, also had been in his position since 1907. He would continue to serve in

that office from 1907 to 1926. Thus Thoburn had two "old-timers" with which to contend in attempting to change policies and improve the quantity and organization of collections.⁴

Thoburn faced his new situation at age fifty-one with eagerness and confidence. His title was "Research Assistant," and as such he was allowed to do some archaeological field work prior to the involvement of the United States in the First World War. He was greatly pleased that his work seemed destined to be much better supported than it had been at the University. Immediately he began the task of upgrading the filing system for the society, especially newspaper clippings of biographical material. With no formal training in archival work, he explored systems in use in more established historical societies in other states. He also inaugurated an effort to have the library holdings cataloged systematically. However, inertia and inadequate funding delayed the beginning of that essential task until 1921.⁵

When President Sipes journeyed to California in 1919, Thoburn asked him to pay particular attention to several matters pertaining to organization of archival and library materials. Sipes was instructed to discover how the California State Library stored "photographs, maps, charts, manuscripts and other documents which could not be bound and put on library shelves." He also wanted Sipes to observe whether press clippings were mounted in the library "in scrap-books or on sheets or large cards which can be arranged in filing cases." Thoburn believed that the California State Library "presumably . . . contains the latest and best methods," and he wanted to establish a

system for the Historical Society that would be the "best that is to be had and use it exclusively from the beginning."⁶

Thoburn also busied himself from the outset in acquiring additional manuscripts of historic importance and transcribing them with extensive annotations. Thus he achieved the two-fold purpose of increasing the holdings of the society and of making significant historical manuscripts more readily available to students of the past. One of his projects involved editing the letters of Casandra Sawyer Lockwood, a missionary at Dwight Mission, Indian Territory, in 1835. Through considerable effort, Thoburn eventually located a granddaughter of Mrs. Lockwood who was able to provide information on the missionary's life. Thoburn hoped that the Society would have the funds to publish a book containing the Lockwood letters and other manuscripts edited by him, but this was never done.⁷

Thoburn interrupted his work at the Historical Society in the summer of 1918 to move his family from Norman to Oklahoma City and to answer the call of duty to his country in the struggle against Germany. Always intensely patriotic, Thoburn perhaps was thinking of his family's military heritage when he declared in July of 1917 that he wished the war had been "pulled off a few years earlier or else . . . I had been ushered into being a few years later." Although he enjoyed the work he was doing, he "felt the call to service to my country rather than science and literature just now."⁸

Age precluded Thoburn's desire to enter the Army, so he decided to do the "next best thing." He took a vacation in July and recruited a new National Guard Company of which he was commissioned captain.

This was the same rank he had held when he left the Guard in 1903. He knew that he probably would not be allowed to serve if his company were activated because of his "rather advanced" age for his rank. He thus had to content himself with the knowledge that he had "raised and drilled a mighty fine company. . . ."9

Thoburn remained in the Guard until late in 1919. He acknowledged that "it takes a lot of time and worry--yes, and some money--that I cannot very well afford to spare." He was staying "on the job until we can vanquish that bunch at Washington which is bent on wiping the organized militia out of existence." He believed that there was something more sinister to the movement than "is apparent on the surface," so he deemed it his "patriotic duty to stick for the time being."10

Thoburn also attempted to serve his country during the war through his position with the Historical Society. The federal government was asking the American people to eat more corn and less wheat in support of the war effort. Thoburn observed that many people simply did not know how to prepare corn more than one or two ways. The Indians, however, had used corn as an important part of their diets for centuries. Thus he reasoned that their knowledge should be tapped for the good of the nation.11

To obtain information, Thoburn wrote a wide range of people to obtain as many as possible of the "various recipes, directions, and means used by the Indian people in cooking, grinding, roasting, baking or otherwise preparing corn for food." He also wanted to have the "tribal names" for each dish described as well as descriptions "of

hominy blocks, grinding stones," and any other implement used in preparing these delicacies. He planned to have the information compiled into a pamphlet for popular distribution. In so doing, he felt he simultaneously was aiding in the conservation of wheat and in preserving an aspect of Indian lore.¹²

Another pleasant task Thoburn performed during his first few years with the Historical Society was his service on the Confederate Memorial Commission. This body was composed of five individuals charged with the duties of locating Confederate cemeteries within the state, determining the cost of purchasing the land on which these cemeteries were located, fencing them, and appropriately marking those spots where only a few veterans might be buried. This, of course, was strictly a public service appointment with no remuneration provided for members of the commission.¹³

Thoburn had inaugurated the movement which led to creation of the Commission three years earlier in 1915. Upon visiting the site of the Battle of Honey Spring, Thoburn had been struck with the "desolate" condition of the Confederate cemetery there as compared with the Federal cemeteries at Ft. Gibson and at Ft. Smith. He thus felt impelled to call attention to the situation in a press interview.¹⁴

Soon thereafter he was approached by a chapter of the Daughters of the Confederacy for advice on how to remedy the situation. He recommended that the members ask the legislature for a bill establishing a commission to solve the problem. This was accomplished, and Thoburn was thrilled when he was named secretary of the commission. "Say, can you imagine how I, the son of a 'blue-bellied' Yank, appreciate the

appointment under these circumstances?" he asked his friend J. F. Weaver.¹⁵ Thoburn well understood the passions of the Civil War still burned in the hearts of many: "How some of my father's old G. A. R. comrades up in Kansas would gasp were such an announcement to reach them!"¹⁶ Thoburn and the commission chairman, Mrs. Jewel Hicks of Durant, carried the load of work for the commission and eventually compiled a list of forty-seven Confederate burial sites.¹⁷

Another interesting project relating to historical preservation which Thoburn helped initiate was the placement of a herd of Longhorn cattle on the Wichita Mountain Forest and Game Reserve in southwestern Oklahoma. Thoburn had a conversation with Frank Rush, Supervisor of the Reserve, in the course of which the successful increase of the buffalo herd at the facility was noted. After several days, Thoburn wrote to suggest that "there is another animal . . . which . . . had a large place in the early history of the Southern Plains region" which also "has been threatened with extermination." Thoburn was referring to the "slab-sided, spindle-shanked, wide-eyed, long-horned breed of cattle, commonly known as Texas cattle."¹⁸

Thoburn continued this letter with a two-paragraph essay on the role of the Longhorn in the history of the region, noting the tremendous impact of cattle drives and the role of Longhorn oxen in moving freight over Western trails prior to the building of the railroads. In addition, he noted that teams of these oxen "pulled the great breaking plows which turned the virgin sod when the taming of the wilderness began." Finally, Thoburn made a stirring appeal for the preservation of the historic beasts:

If the buffalo is to be preserved from extinction (as all who appreciate its part in the history and tradition of the past must admit that it should be), certainly, and for the same reasons, the breed of cattle which is a reminder of the ranches and ranges of yore--the breed, the hoofs of whose herds word deeply the parallel paths of the long trails to the northward--the breed which made patient, plodding progress before the freighter's wagons and the settler's breaking plow, in the slower days of old--certainly and surely, I say, this breed should not be suffered to become extinct.¹⁹

Thoburn concluded by wondering if a place might not be found for these cattle at the Reserve. He was certain that the active support of old-time cattlemen could be had in securing foundation stock for the herd.²⁰

To strengthen his appeal, Thoburn saw that a number of early day cowmen received copies of his letter. He also brought the matter before cattlemen's conventions in Oklahoma and Texas. His efforts in Texas were fruitful, for the Texas Cattlemen's Association passed a resolution endorsing his plan, urging the Texas congressional delegation to support the proposition, and pledging the members of the Association to aid in securing foundation stock for the herd. During the 1920's a Longhorn herd was established at the Wichita Reserve. While it seems probable that the idea also was voiced by others, perhaps even earlier than Thoburn, the historian's efforts in the movement doubtless played a significant role in the successful project.²¹

Thoburn's career took another turn when he was elected secretary at the Oklahoma Historical Society's Annual Meeting in January of 1919. This represented the establishment of a position of authority and responsibility above that of custodian. Creation of the position of

secretary also reflected the expansion of the scope of activities of the Society. Thoburn's reaction to the appointment was not one of exultation. He noted that the office "does not add anything to my prerogatives." However, having his name on the letterhead and his right to use an official signature did prove helpful, for "when it came to writing to people who did not know me, I needed the prestige." There was, he observed, "decided opposition to the proposition on the part of the custodian. . . ." Until Campbell's death in 1924, Thoburn would face opposition from him on numerous issues.²²

By July of 1920, Thoburn and Campbell were decidedly at odds with each other. Campbell was nearly eighty years old and had always been the chief figure of authority on the staff of the Historical Society. Now he was being eclipsed by Thoburn, who wanted to change operations to suit himself. Thus Thoburn reported to board member Robert L. Williams that a qualified individual had been found to catalogue the collections of the Society. Yet, Thoburn stated, "Mr. Campbell is still opposed to cataloging the collections though he has no objections to Miss Dell Pemberton Slaughter personally." Thoburn also confided that "Mr. Campbell may acquiesce in the plans that are to be made for the arrangements of the stack-room, etc. Though I understand he has told other employees 'Thoburn will find that he is not running things here'." The secretary observed that he did not necessarily want to run things, but the time had arrived when "someone must see to it that the work of classifying, arranging, cataloging and indexing the library and documentary material is begun."²³

Thoburn also clashed with Campbell regarding the purchase of several consignments of valuable old books. Campbell opposed purchase of the books, preferring to let part of the Society's appropriation return to the state treasury. Thoburn "took the matter to Judge Thomas H. Doyle" who was acting president in the absence of Jasper Sipes. Doyle visited with Campbell on the matter with the result that Thoburn purchased the books he desired. Shortly thereafter, Doyle notified Campbell that Thoburn had been named "acting librarian" by the board of directors and had authority in library matters subject to the board's supervision.²⁴

Campbell and Thoburn also clashed over the issue of publications of the Society. The secretary favored the issuance of a scholarly journal to be published each quarter. Of course, the Chronicles of Oklahoma, which was soon established, fitted Thoburn's ideal. Campbell, however, had been editing a small magazine entitled Historia for almost ten years and did not desire to see it superseded. Thoburn worked to have the board halt publication of Historia, for to him it was "so grotesque that it gives the Society a black eye every time it comes out."²⁵

Thoburn also was unhappy with the Society's president in 1920, Jasper Sipes. Thoburn complained to Dr. M. M. Quaife of the Wisconsin Historical Society that Sipes had been president "for fourteen or fifteen years," that he was a businessman "with a genius for making money," that he "appreciates fully the dignity and honor of his position, and that he was jealous of his prerogatives" though "actually lacking in capacity of an intelligent understanding of the purposes"

of the Historical Society. In addition, Thoburn declared that it was impossible to get Sipes to "adopt any progressive policy," and that he "is a great success in the art of postponing the consideration of suggestions." Finally, Thoburn asserted that the president recently had shown a "penchant for colonizing the staff . . . with personal friends and favorites without regard to aptitude or qualifications."²⁶

Thoburn also was having trouble with another individual on the Society's staff in 1920, one who would cause him trouble for several years. He noted in a letter to J. F. Weaver that a woman who had been on the staff for one year "has more zeal than knowledge and had a propensity for wanting to run the whole works."²⁷ He was referring to Czarina Conlan, who held the position of field director. In the near future, Thoburn in private would be calling her the "chief hell raiser."²⁸

One of the most acrimonious controversies involving Thoburn at this time was the establishment of the Chronicles of Oklahoma and who would control the content of the Journal. Judge Robert L. Williams, a former governor who was rapidly becoming a dominant force on the Board of Directors, worked in league with Thoburn in getting the concept of the Chronicles approved. Williams then was named chairman of a publications committee consisting of himself, J. S. Buchanan, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Oklahoma, and Arthur N. Leecraft, a close personal friend of Williams. The committee proceeded to name Buchanan as editor-in-chief and Professor E. E. Dale of the University of Oklahoma as associate editor. The committee contemplated that Thoburn and Campbell would "be contributors" to the Chronicles.²⁹

Thoburn obviously was unhappy with this situation. Indeed, as early as April of 1918 he had evidenced strong distrust of the History Department at the University, asserting that the institution was planning a "coup d'etat (or something else to that effect) which is nothing other than to attempt to take over and monopolize the preparation and issuance of historical publications for the state of Oklahoma," rather than permitting the Historical Society to do so. He considered this primarily an instance of the "personal jealousy (which hindered and hampered me while I was connected with the University) following me to my new position."³⁰ His fears about the University attempting to dominate publications on Oklahoma history seemed justified when Buchanan and Dale were awarded control of the Chronicles. Thoburn felt that at least the associate editor should be "representative of the Historical Society"--and of course the logical representative of the Society would have been Thoburn.³¹

Frustrated by his exclusion from control over the Chronicles, Thoburn allowed himself some candid, caustic comments in private about the editor-in-chief and his associate. He noted that Buchanan had arrived in Oklahoma "during the second Cleveland administration to teach history in a normal school." Eventually he was transferred to the University, "where the hard and fast rules of seniority have made him dean of the college of arts and sciences." Moreover, Thoburn asserted that Buchanan was "something of a feudist in that he never forgives or forgets." Thoburn felt he had won Buchanan's animosity "when I broke into the local history game at a time when he was supposed to have a monopoly in that field."³²

Thoburn also had some harsh words for E. E. Dale, the Associate Editor. Thoburn noted he is a much younger man and is a "product of the University which he is now a faculty member." Moreover, Thoburn asserted, "he had gone through the requirements for the master's and doctor's degrees without being able to cast off" the characteristics of "the understudy or the satellite." In fact, Thoburn declared, Dale "has been prospered and promoted because of his willingness to fawn and to follow rather than because of any pronounced personality or ability."³³

When the first issue of the Chronicles was in preparation, Buchanan sent Thoburn and Dr. Emmett Starr a manuscript consisting of letters by Cherokee leader Stand Watie as edited by Dale, Thoburn used the opportunity to rip Dale's scholarship, asserting that the letters were important historically but that the editorship was inadequate. First, Thoburn argued that much "pertinent, not to say essential, supplemental" information had not been used. Second, some of the footnotes "should be amended or modified in the interest of clearness." Finally, he asserted there were "several misstatements as to facts and some unwarranted inferences." Adding further insult to Dale, Thoburn told Buchanan that he had consulted with Colonel Leecraft, who agreed that "it would be a serious mistake to publish this manuscript in its present form." Leecraft suggested that Dale travel to Oklahoma City and "go over these matters in detail and permit us to help him make most of the opportunity which this occasion affords."³⁴

The first issue of the Chronicles must have been irritating to Thoburn. Indeed, the entire issue was dominated by the University,

for all contributors of articles had some connection with that institution. Moreover, the editors managed to print six and one-half pages of "Historical News Items" without once mentioning Thoburn's name. Not surprisingly, Thoburn was not pleased with the editorial work done in the first issue of the Chronicles, and he "frankly informed the editors of that fact--a bit of gratuity which was not received graciously by them." Nonetheless, the secretary "succeeded in getting them to modify and correct some of the worst breaks." He "might have made numerous other suggestions," but he "refrained lest I be regarded as being unduly officious."³⁵

The second issue of the Chronicles was delayed due to financial problems and did not appear until October of 1921. By that time, Thoburn had been appointed managing editor. J. S. Buchanan was still listed as editor and E. E. Dale as assistant editor. Thoburn's influence was evident in the editorial section at the front of the issue. One of the editorials stressed the need for a "proper and reasonable housing for the Oklahoma Historical Society and its collections," which, Thoburn asserted, "promises to be a live issue henceforth." Another of the editorials discussed the recent cut in legislative appropriations for the Historical Society, which amounted to forty percent of the total budget. Thoburn declared that the time had arrived when the Society "should insist upon fairer treatment and freedom from unjust discrimination in the matter of adequate provision for the proper prosecution of its work"36

By the time the third issue of the Chronicles appeared in June of 1923, there no longer was an editor and assistant editor or managing

editor listed. Rather the masthead showed a publication committee consisting of C. W. Turner, Joseph B. Thoburn, and Emma Estill. Of these three, Thoburn obviously was the dominating force. From this point on in the development of the Chronicles of Oklahoma, the journal was in the hands of individuals on the staff of the Oklahoma Historical Society. While Thoburn may have seemed unduly harsh in wresting control of the Chronicles away from the University of Oklahoma, the best interests of the Oklahoma Historical Society in the long view doubtless were served.³⁷

In later years, Thoburn's attitude toward Buchanan and Dale apparently mellowed. At Buchanan's death in 1930, Thoburn wrote Dale and stated that Buchanan had served well as a member of the board of directors for many years. Indeed, Thoburn asserted that he had "always felt a measure of personal satisfaction that it was upon my nomination that he was first elected." Furthermore, he declared that when Buchanan's spot on the board of directors was filled, he hoped the choice would fall on Dale, "for you can fill his place more nearly than anyone else."³⁸ Thoburn's attitude toward Buchanan had changed sufficiently by 1931 that Thoburn would rank him among Oklahoma's twenty-five most useful citizens of all time.³⁹

Although Thoburn's struggle for control of the Chronicles of Oklahoma was more spectacular, his work in obtaining valuable research materials for the Society's library and archives was also important. Thoburn wrote letter after letter seeking to obtain various materials. For example, he had Major E. Hue searching the Archives of the Bibliothéque Nationale in Paris for "diaries, journals, letters, reports or

other data bearing upon the exploration or trade exploitation" of the valleys of the Red or Arkansas Rivers and their tributaries.⁴⁰ Some of the other materials Thoburn sought for the Society included Indian legends, papers of prominent individuals, significant diaries and journals, and samples of the state's literature. By 1927 the acquisition and organization of library and archival collections had developed to the point where out-of-state visitors were impressed. A member of the executive committee of the Kentucky State Historical Society exclaimed: "I was tremendously impressed with the splendid work which your collections and library testified to."⁴¹

By the latter part of 1921, Thoburn was placed on half salary and many employees were laid off because of a severe reduction in the Historical Society appropriation. Thoburn was forced to try to keep up with his work without any stenographic assistance, and the process of cataloging the Society's collections had to be halted. Hard pressed financially, Thoburn seriously considered resigning, wondering "if I have to continue to work at a sacrifice, am I justified in doing so?" He did not want riches; rather "all I ask is a decent living and a chance to work Do you blame me if I am sometimes not only discouraged but also disgusted?"⁴² Although publishers told him he was a fool not to quit "and avail myself to literary opportunities . . . I am impelled to stay on the job solely by a sense of loyalty to it and to the state"⁴³

As when he was with the University of Oklahoma, Thoburn blamed the funding problems faced by the Historical Society in 1921 and 1922 on the "multiplicity of higher (?) educational institutions of this

state." He was so agitated that he planned to go before the next legislature and "talk more frankly than most supplicants for Legislative favors do." Thoburn planned to tell the legislators that they could have his job and that he would retire to his little forty-acre chicken ranch. There, "in addition to raising poultry," he would "expect to raise hell" by exposing the "viciously corrupt lobby representing a bunch of state schools which have no real reason for existence."⁴⁴

Thoburn's situation in 1922 was not better than it was at the end of the previous year. Still working on a half-time, half-pay basis, his time had been taken up largely by performing the work that could have been done much better by a stenographer. However, he told the board of directors that "it should not be inferred . . . that the secretary's whole time has been spent in pounding the keyboard of a typewriter." Indeed, he asserted that such activities frequently had been interrupted by the "ringing of the telephone, receiving visitors and numerous diversions, not to mention dusting the museum cases, sweeping the floor of the library and newspaper stackrooms" and other jobs that seemingly "would come within the scope of a janitor's duties." Yet he decided to stay with his job, recommend specific changes in policy, and go after more substantial support from the next legislature.⁴⁵

The principal and most urgent change of policy he suggested was the appointment of a committee on legislation. A committee previously had been appointed but had never met, and as a result, "the Society's Legislative interest practically went by default."⁴⁶ In a letter to

Governor J. B. A. Robertson in September of 1922, Thoburn discussed the needs of the Historical Society for the next two years beginning July 1, 1923. Thoburn declared that it was time for the Historical Society to be "as frankly outspoken" in regard to the matter of Legislative appropriations as the various other state institutions. He added that in assuming that attitude, the Society was warranted not only by the actual needs but also by what other progressive states were doing for their historical societies.⁴⁷

First, Thoburn asserted, the Historical Society must have more room immediately. While there was talk of a new building being constructed, Thoburn noted, the Society needed additional room immediately to take care of the growth and expansion of its collections. Moreover, he pointed out that the library and newspaper files already were crowded beyond what the State Fire Marshall had determined was safe. More museum cases also were needed, and Thoburn strongly urged the governor to consider making available more space in the state capitol for Historical Society use.⁴⁸

Thoburn also forcefully stated that the Society "needs an adequate staff of competent and specially qualified workers and these should be compensated as well, proportionately, as the people employed in the state's educational system." Thoburn listed twelve positions which would comprise what he would consider an adequate staff. This would necessitate a payroll of from \$17,000 to \$18,000 per year. This was a reasonable sum Thoburn argued, when compared with payrolls in other states. In addition to the payroll, Thoburn asserted that there should be a special appropriation for the cataloging of the Society's

library and documents collection. This appropriation should be adequate to employ "5 or 6 catalogers and copyist assistants for two years" so that the Society's collections could be made available for easy and quick reference.⁴⁹

Thoburn concluded by noting that the Historical Society should have from \$15,000 to \$18,000 per year to pay for operating expenses such as postage, telephone, telegraph, freight, express, drayage, stationery, travel, and other routine costs of operation. Again, he noted that these figures may seem to "border on the extravagant," but said it would be well to consider what other states were doing along those lines in support of their historical societies.⁵⁰

In 1923 he continued to wrestle with the problems of funding. He was especially concerned that a legislative committee be formed and activated to help ensure a substantial appropriation from the legislature, which would meet in July of that year. But Jasper Sipes, President of the Society, refused to form a legislative committee. Thoburn believed that Sipes and Czarina Conlan preferred to meet with the legislators and governor personally and thus between them control the Historical Society's budget.⁵¹

Disgusted with the situation, Thoburn decided to take matters into his own hands. When Sipes went to Chicago on a business trip, Thoburn arranged a meeting of the executive committee. A legislative committee was formed on a motion voted by the acting president, two vice-presidents, the secretary, and one other director. When Sipes returned, this committee had already met and had arranged a conference with Governor Walton. Thoburn noted that with the makeup of the

committee, "there is at least a fair chance that the President will have a chance to learn what it means to be a figure-head."⁵²

While struggling along in 1923 under adverse circumstances, the Historical Society hosted the sixteenth annual meeting of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association. This was an impressive convention with more than 500 in attendance. It lasted for three full days with the usual sessions wherein papers were read--and people were bored. The delegates were treated, however, to their choice of one or two tours to historical areas of the state. All sessions were held in the banquet hall of the Huckins Hotel and the convention was a marked success.⁵³

The Historical Society succeeded in obtaining a sufficient appropriation from the legislature in July of 1923 for Thoburn to be put back on full time. The Society received more money but it did not reach the sum Thoburn had requested. Moreover, the secretary's job was becoming more and more demanding. He simply had more to do than he could possibly handle. The old custodian, W. P. Campbell, passed from the scene in 1924. Although Thoburn had quarreled with him often, he helped write a fine essay honoring Campbell as a pioneer who created the Historical Society and kept it going through extremely difficult times. In a personal letter, not intended for publication, Thoburn also expressed his feelings for Campbell. Thoburn remarked that Campbell was a "very unique personality and he rendered valuable service to the people of Oklahoma during the years that he put his very life into the beginnings of the Historical Society."⁵⁴

Also in 1924, Thoburn played a major role in the redesigning of the state flag of Oklahoma, a fact in which he took great pride in later years. Thoburn was never satisfied with the flag adopted by the Third State Legislature in 1911. It consisted of a red field with a white star in the center. Superimposed on the white star were the blue figures, "46". Secretary Thoburn felt that the fact that Oklahoma had entered the Union as the 46th state was merely incidental, so to him the flag held little significance in a sentimental or patriotic way. Moreover, Thoburn felt that it had never had a popular appeal and thus was seldom displayed on public occasions. Finally, Thoburn approached Mrs. Andrew R. Hickman, a state regent of the Oklahoma Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution, in the later summer or early autumn of 1924. To her he forcefully stated that he felt Oklahoma should have a flag of such significance, "with sentimental associations and originality of design, as to quicken popular interest and appeal to the patriotic approval of the citizenship of the state." Impressed with Thoburn's logic, Mrs. Hickman organized a statewide contest for the submission of competitive designs.⁵⁵

Among the twelve designs submitted was one by Mrs. George Fluke, Jr., of Oklahoma City. Mrs. Fluke had visited the Oklahoma Historical Society and asked Thoburn for suggestions. In response, Thoburn pointed out a flag hanging on the wall and framed like a picture which had been used as the battle flag of a Choctaw battalion fighting on behalf of the Confederacy during the Civil War. This flag had a dark blue field, and Thoburn remarked that the new state flag might well

have a blue field. Thoburn then led Mrs. Fluke to a spot where there was also hanging on the wall a "heavy buffalo rawhide shield . . . with a fringe of pendant eagle feathers." Finally, Thoburn led the way to a museum case in which were displayed several peace pipes and suggested that one of these and an olive branch be crossed and superimposed on the face of the field. Thoburn explained that the deep blue stood for loyalty and devotion, that the Indian shield would be appropriate as the "Red Man's State" and the shield could symbolize "justifiable, defensive warfare," and that the peace pipe and the olive branch were the symbols of peace of the red and white races. Mrs. Fluke faithfully reproduced Thoburn's suggestions, and her design won the unanimous approval of the selection committee. In turn, Thoburn wrote the concurrent resolution passed by the legislature in adopting the new flag. He was proud of the reception this flag received during the ensuing years.⁵⁶

The museum items of which Thoburn was so proud constituted part of a major problem for the Historical Society in 1924. They simply had used all their space in housing library and archival materials and the museum artifacts which had multiplied at a tremendous rate largely through Thoburn's efforts. The problem was extremely acute between 1924 to 1926 when adequate additional space was acquired in the capitol building. Of course, a better solution was the construction of the new Historical Society Building in 1929.⁵⁷

Thoburn was a zealous collector of museum artifacts, and, despite the ever increasing congestion, he continued to acquire more interesting items. Indeed, he admitted in 1926 that with all available storage and

exhibition space filled, "it seems good policy to keep on piling museum material in the hope that the next legislature may see fit to make provisions for the occupancy of floor space in the Capitol that is not otherwise utilized." His theory of aggravating the problem in order to achieve a solution was an interesting technique, and it apparently worked.⁵⁸

Thoburn began early in his career at the Historical Society to build a museum collection. By 1919, he was talking about the Society's "junk shop," noting that the museum collections were "accumulating so rapidly that it will be but a few years until the Society crowds itself out of its quarters and has to have a building of its own."⁵⁹ But despite this rapid growth, Thoburn was not satisfied. Thus he launched an effort to "secure the removal of the museum material" which he had obtained or had deposited in the museum at the University of Oklahoma to the museum of the Historical Society. While he felt that the artifacts were safe at the University, he believed that "since there has been no one there who knows anything about American Archaeology since I left . . . I do not think they are making very much use of the museum in a practical way." With the Society having fifty visitors for each one at the University, as Thoburn estimated, the educational value of the collections would be much greater at the Historical Society. His approach was to ask individuals whom he had convinced to place artifacts on loan at the University to transfer them to the Historical Society.⁶⁰

Thoburn's efforts to obtain the material at the University of Oklahoma museum apparently were successful. He noted in November of

1919 that "most of the people who deposited museum material with the University through my instrumentality, while I was connected with that institution, seemed glad to have it transferred to the custody of the Historical Society."⁶¹

Moreover, Thoburn was energetic in soliciting donations to the Society's museum. For example, in December of 1919, he wrote L. G. Herron of Idabel, Oklahoma to ask him to be on the outlook for certain items for the Historical Society. The secretary was especially interested in typical specimens of implements and utensils used during the pioneering period, such as ox-yokes, log-chains, sod-plows, spinning-wheels, hand-looms, and hominy-blocks." Thoburn also was especially interested in acquiring artifacts of the prehistoric people of that area of the state, such as "arrow points, spear heads, scrappers, knife blades or other objects of flint, stone axes, hatchets, tomahawks, hoes" and numerous related items. He hoped that owners of such objects could be induced to place the items on loan with the Historical Society or donate them outright. In return, the Society would pay the shipping charges and see that the donor or owner was given proper recognition.⁶²

Thoburn also was active in bringing in museum items himself. For example, he spent several weeks in the Muskogee area in 1920, and while there visited the site of Mackey's Salt Works in northwestern Sequoyah County on the Illinois River. From there he brought in "an ancient iron salt kettle, which weighs one thousand, sixty-five pounds." Thoburn also visited the Lewis Ross Salt Plant at Salina and secured for the museum a "couple of sections of the log pipe which carried the salt water from the spring to the boiling house." These items taken

together, would "serve to illustrate very forcibly the tales of the long vanished industry."⁶³

On another excursion, Thoburn ventured out and brought in a "sabre, a belt pistol, a brace of horse pistols, a musket, a bayonette and cartridge box, all of Revolutionary origin." The side arms, Thoburn noted, belonged to a captain of the Connecticut line, while the other artifacts had been captured from the British.⁶⁴

In 1922, Thoburn acquired one of the Historical Society's most interesting exhibit items, an old Concord stagecoach from the 101 Ranch near Ponca City. Thoburn informed the donor, Colonel J. C. Miller, that the coach would have to remain outside one of the museum doors in the corridor, because it was too big to go through any of the doors into the main exhibit area. This was not a major problem, however, for he observed that "most visitors are quite keen to go out there to inspect it." Moreover, he noted that "in itself, it is quite a large argument in favor of a building for the proper housing of the Society and its collections--which must come in time, anyway."⁶⁵

Thoburn's propensity for accepting virtually all items offered to the museum did cause him consternation on at least one occasion. In later years he recalled that three or four years after the end of the First World War he read an article in the newspaper one morning that eight children in Watertown, New York had been killed as the result of a "dud" French artillery shell that had been brought home as a souvenir by a returning Doughboy. Apparently one of the children had given the point of the shell a sharp rap with a croquet mallet and the charge of "TNT" exploded. An hour later, Thoburn received a call in his office whereupon the following conversation took place:

"Is this the Historical Society?"

"Yes, Ma'm."

"Do you have any war relics in your museum?"

"Yes, Ma'm, a few."

"Well, I have a shell that I will donate as a specimen."

Thoburn inwardly commented to himself that he was less than enthusiastic about the acquisition. However, the matter was soon forgotten, but within less than two hours the specimen was delivered to the museum.⁶⁶ The shell, which was found to be a duplicate, was placed side by side with another shell. Several days later, Thoburn asked some artillery officers from Ft. Sill, who happened to be visiting the museum, whether the two shells held explosive charges. In response, one of the officers jolted the secretary by observing that "there is enough 'TNT' in either of those shells, if exploded, to kill every living being between this floor and the next one above just by the concussion, if none were struck by flying fragments." Thoburn thus decided that he had to rid himself of the menacing shells immediately.⁶⁷

First, Thoburn attempted to persuade friends who were traveling to Newcastle to see a big flood on the Canadian River to take the shells along and deposit them in the river. Understandably they declined. Finally, Thoburn determined to have the shells buried in a dump just southwest of the capitol. There was much grading going on at the capitol grounds at this time, and soon the shells were covered by six to eight feet of dirt and clay.⁶⁸

Fifteen years later the shells came back to haunt Thoburn when it was announced that an oil well would be drilled at the dump where

the awesome shells were buried. Thoburn remembered that the shells were located there and intended to notify the oil men, but the matter slipped from his mind for two or three days. When he thought of it again, he found a new oil rig with its "cellar" only a few feet from the spot where the shells had been buried. Fortunately, a working man's pick had not struck the point of either of the shells, or a real tragedy might have taken place.⁶⁹

Thoburn added prehistoric artifacts to the museum in 1925 and 1926 when he was able to undertake some extensive field work for the first time in several years. In May of 1925, he returned to the site in Delaware County at Big Mouth Cavern for further excavation. In addition, a second site approximately eight miles distant, also was investigated. This was at a mound near the mouth of Elk River (north of Grove, Oklahoma). Thoburn relied heavily on volunteer workers in this project and followed the policy of having them change sites periodically so that all volunteer workers had the opportunity to examine two distinct prehistoric cultures.⁷⁰

Thoburn and his crew faced considerable discomfort for the weather was "uniformly hot and sultry." Worse than the weather, however, the expedition frequently was disturbed at both sites by "night prowlers and thieves, and more or less continuous and persistent activities which are believed to have been systematically inspired by a commercial collector" who resided just across the line in a bordering state. That individual, Thoburn noted, was a dealer in prehistoric relics whose ethical standards would not stand close investigation; thus he had personal reasons for attempting to discourage the operations of the Historical Society.⁷¹

Interesting artifacts were recovered both from the mound and from the cave. Thoburn especially appreciated the "rare and beautifully wrought specimens of ancient arts and crafts" from the caverns. However, his expedition opened up more work than it could finish with the funds allotted by the Historical Society. He attempted to secure additional funds, pending a campaign to raise money by private subscriptions, but was unsuccessful. After several weeks, he was able to raise limited funds by private subscription, and the work was resumed, but the scene of operations was shifted to Boone County, Arkansas, where two caves were excavated thoroughly. Thoburn reported that the cultural artifacts in these caves were distinctly different from those in the Big Mouth Cavern. He noted that a concerted effort on the part of several competent investigators should be made to bring about an understanding of these prehistoric cave cultures.⁷²

Finally, late in 1926 Thoburn began work in Kay County on the Arkansas River near the Kansas Border. This work was financed by E. W. Marland, a Ponca City oil man who became governor of Oklahoma in 1934. Thoburn's activities in that area would lead to his discovery of the site of Ferdinandina, an early French trading post on the Arkansas River.⁷³

Because of Thoburn's many duties, the Historical Society's Board of Directors, on February 1, 1926, split his job into two positions. Thoburn became Director of Research, and J. Y. Bryce was elected secretary. Thoburn rejoiced in this development, for his work had piled up "until it became a nightmare, almost." He felt that he now had a "real chance to do the work for which there has been but little

time or opportunity." At the age of sixty, he seemingly had achieved a position where he could earn a livable wage and where he would not be frustrated constantly in his work.⁷⁴

His service from 1917 to 1926 had been marked by financial hardship, conflict, and turmoil. Yet these also were years of remarkable growth in the development of the Oklahoma Historical Society. Progress had been made in all phases of the Society's operations. With his appointment as director of research, he likely believed that his years of service with the Oklahoma Historical Society were just beginning. But as he had so frequently in the past, Joseph B. Thoburn would become involved in a controversy that again would subject him to the pain of political intrigue.

FOOTNOTES

¹Eva Riggins Johnson, "The Oklahoma Historical Society and Its Works, (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1926). pp. 1-4; Thoburn to Governor J.B.A. Robertson, September 27, 1922, Folder OK-1, TP.

²Johnson, "The Oklahoma Historical Society," p. 2; Thoburn to Governor Robertson, September 27, 1922, Folder OK-1, TP.

³Johnson, "The Oklahoma Historical Society," pp. 2-3; Thoburn to Governor Robertson, September 27, 1922, Folder OK-1, TP.

⁴Johnson, "The Oklahoma Historical Society," p. 4; Thoburn to Governor Robertson, September 27, 1922, Folder OK-1, TP.

⁵Thoburn to R. N. Leerskov, April 14, 1918, Folder OK-2, No. 4, TP; William E. Connelley to Thoburn, January 23, 1928, Folder BI-1, TP; Thoburn to Jerome C. Smiley, October 13, 1919, Folder TH-1, No. 3, TP; Thoburn to Miss Stella Drum, March 5, 1921, Folder MI-6, TP.

⁶Thoburn to Jasper Sipes, October 14, 1919, Folder TH-1.1, No. 1, TP. Thoburn also had heard that the California State Library used some sort of photographic system in reproducing documents. He wanted Sipes to learn all about it. While this device might not be important at the present, Thoburn remarked, "it might become so later on and I hope you will find opportunities to investigate the matter." Ibid.

⁷Thoburn to Miss Sarah Torrey, June 4, 1918, Folder L0-1, TP; Thoburn to David Redfield, June 7, 1918, Folder RE-1, TP; Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, September 4, 1918, Folder WE-4, TP; Thoburn to Miss Sarah Torrey, October 7, 1919, Folder L0-1, TP.

The Lockwood letters were finally published in 1955. See J. B. Thoburn, editor, "Letters of Casandra Sawyer Lockwood: Dwight Mission 1835," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, XXXIII (No. 2, 1955), 202-237. Another of Thoburn's projects was editing the reminiscences of Josia Butler, a Quaker and Iowan who served as the first teacher for the Comanche and Kiowa school at Ft. Sill in 1870. See Thoburn to Jesse Sturm, January 20, 1919, Folder BU-1, TP.

⁸Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, July 27, 1917, Folder WE-2, TP; Thoburn to Miss Sarah Torrey, August 24, 1918, Folder L0-1, TP.

⁹Thoburn to George Bird Grinnell, June 28, 1919, Folder SP-1, TP;
Thoburn to William E. Connelley, September 4, 1918, Folder CO-4, TP;
Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, September 4, 1918, Folder WE-4, TP.

¹⁰Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, February 1, 1919, Folder WE-2, No. 2,
TP.

¹¹Thoburn to Mr. T. W. Alford, April 2, 1918, Folder IN-6, TP;
Thoburn to C. Ross Hume, April 25, 1918, *ibid.* By April 26, Thoburn
had managed to collect 25 or 30 recipes. It is not known whether the
pamphlet was ever published. No record of it was found.

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³House Bill #476, "Creating A Confederate Memorial Commission,"
Folder CO-2, TP.

¹⁴Thoburn to W. K. Makemson, August 22, 1918, *ibid.*

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, July 27, 1917, Folder WE-2, TP.

¹⁷"List of burial ground wherein remains of Confederate Soldiers,
who were killed in battle or who died of wounds or disease during the
years 1861 to 1865, inclusive, were interred," Folder CO-2, TP.

¹⁸Thoburn to Frank Rush, February 5, 1919, Folder LO-3, TP.

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹Thoburn to Bob Boone, February 13, 1919, *ibid.*; "Resolution
of Texas Cattlemen's Association Pertaining to Longhorn Cattle,"
Copy, *ibid.* A thriving herd of longhorns may yet be seen at the
Wichita Game Reserve.

²²Thoburn to James Mooney, February 20, 1919, Folder MO-1, TP;
Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, February 1, 1919, Folder WE-2, No. 2, TP.

²³Thoburn to Robert L. Williams, August 12, 1920, Folder OK-2,
TP.

²⁴*Ibid.*; Thomas H. Doyle to Keystone Bindery, August 14, 1920,
Folder OK-2, TP.

²⁵Thoburn to Robert L. Williams, August 12, 1920, Folder OK-2,
TP. Commenting on his relationship with Campbell, Thoburn told J. F.
Weaver that "old Mr. Campbell is still on the job, a little more
childish and a little more jealous of his prerogatives each year than
he was the year before." Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, August 5, 1920,
Folder WE-2, No. 2, TP.

- ²⁶Dr. M. M. Quaife to Thoburn, July 18, 1920, Folder OK-2, TP.
- ²⁷Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, August 5, 1920, Folder WE-2, No. 2, TP.
- ²⁸Thoburn never mentioned the "chief hell raiser" by name, but deduction leads to Czarina Conlan. In 1923, there were only four people on the Historical Society staff. These included Thoburn, Campbell, Miss Elizabeth Kneen (of whom Thoburn approved), and Conlan. See Minutes of Annual Meeting of Oklahoma Historical Society, May 28, 1923, The Chronicles of Oklahoma, I (No. 3, 1923), 279-280.
- ²⁹R. L. Williams to Jasper Sipes, "Report of Publications Committee," January 10, 1921, Folder OK-3, TP; Thoburn to Dr. M. M. Quaife, July 18, 1920, Folder OK-2, TP.
- ³⁰Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, April 15, 1918, Folder WE-2, No. 2, TP.
- ³¹Thoburn to M. M. Quaife, July 18, 1920, Folder OK-2, TP.
- ³²Ibid.
- ³³Ibid.
- ³⁴Thoburn to Dr. J. S. Buchanan, December 15, 1920, Folder WA-4, TP.
- ³⁵"Historical News Items," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, I (No. 1, 1921), 104-110; Thoburn to Dr. Solan J. Buck, May 2, 1921, Folder OK-3, TP.
- ³⁶"Editorials," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, I (No. 2, 1921), 114-115.
- ³⁷The Chronicles of Oklahoma, I (No. 3, 1923).
- ³⁸Thoburn to E. E. Dale, March 26, 1930, Folder DA-2, TP.
- ³⁹R. G. Miller to Thoburn, January 26, 1931, Folder OR-8, TP, list attached. For an interesting account of the controversy over the editorship of The Chronicles of Oklahoma, see E. E. Dale and James D. Morrison, Pioneer Judge: The Life of Robert Lee Williams (Cedar Rapids, Iowa: The Torch Press, 1958), pp. 367-369. The bitterness which Dale must have felt against Thoburn in the early 20's to some degree remained with him apparently throughout his life. For example, in Dale's 1956 version, he asserted that Thoburn thought of himself as better qualified to edit the Chronicles because of his newspaper background. He also noted that Thoburn was tactless in his editorial suggestions.
- ⁴⁰Thoburn to Major E. Hue, February 17, 1918, Folder TH-1, No. 1, TP.

- ⁴¹Thoburn to W. H. Cleveland, June 25, 1919, Folder CO-6, TP; Anton H. Classen to Thoburn, March 6, 1919, Folder OK-9, TP; Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, n.d., Folder WE-2, No. 2, TP; Thoburn to F. E. Gillette, November 1, 1919, Folder OK-9, TP; Thoburn to F. C. LaSalle, June 19, 1920, Folder UM-1; Thoburn to Mr. J. B. Dickenson, August 16, 1923, Folder TH-1.1, TP; Thoburn to Miss Annie Garner Thornton, n.d., Folder, LI-1, TP; Thoburn to Lieut. Col. C. A. Back, October 11, 1926, Folder IN-1, TP; Lucien Beckner to Thoburn, January 16, 1927, Folder SH-1, TP.
- ⁴²Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, September 17, 1921, Folder WE-2, No. 2, TP.
- ⁴³Thoburn to M. F. Ingraham, September 14, 1921, Folder OK-2, TP.
- ⁴⁴Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, September 17, 1921, Folder WE-2, No. 2, TP.
- ⁴⁵Thoburn to Board of Directors, n.d., Folder OK-8, TP.
- ⁴⁶Ibid.
- ⁴⁷Thoburn to Governor J.B.A. Robertson, September 27, 1922, Folder OK-1, TP.
- ⁴⁸Ibid.
- ⁴⁹Ibid.
- ⁵⁰Ibid.
- ⁵¹Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, January 31, 1923, Folder WE-2, No. 2, TP.
- ⁵²Ibid.
- ⁵³"Experts Come to State for History Study," The Daily Oklahoman, Sunday, March 25, 1925, p. 8; Roy Shambaugh to Thoburn, April 4, 1923, Folder IN-1, TP.
- ⁵⁴Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, December 5, 1924, Folder WE-2, No. 3, TP; Thomas H. Doyle, Jesse R. Moore, and J. B. Thoburn, "William Parker Campbell," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, II (No. 2, 1924), 93-97; Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, May 9, 1924, Folder WE-2, No. 3, TP.
- ⁵⁵"The State Flag of Oklahoma," undated mss., Folder OK-8, TP.
- ⁵⁶Ibid.; Thoburn to Metropolitan School Supply Company, Inc., June 28, 1929, Folder OK-8, TP.
- ⁵⁷Thoburn to Robert L. Williams, December 2, 1924, Folder OK-2, TP.

58^{Thoburn to Mr. E. C. Searcy, September 7, 1926, Folder MU-1, TP.}

59^{Thoburn to Elmo Flynt, November 6, 1919, Folder MU-1, No. 4, TP.}

60^{Thoburn to Ed Byington, November 6, 1919, Folder MU-1, TP.}
It seems likely that in addition to the reasons stated above, Thoburn also used this tactic to strike at his adversaries at the University, especially James S. Buchanan.

61^{Thoburn to Ed Byington, November 12, 1919, Folder MU-1, No. 4, TP.}

62^{Thoburn to L. G. Herron, December 23, 1919, Folder OK-2, TP.}

63^{Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, October 8, 1920, Folder WE-2, No. 2, TP.}

64^{Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, November 3, 1922, *ibid.*}

65^{Thoburn to Col. J. C. Miller, April 12, 1922, Folder MU-2, TP.}

66^{Undated and untitled manuscript, Folder MU-1, TP. This manuscript was typed on Thoburn's typewriter and although it was written in the form of a news story, Thoburn probably wrote it.}

67^{*Ibid.*}

68^{*Ibid.*}

69^{*Ibid.*}

70^{"Report of Secretary of the Oklahoma Historical Society," April 4, 1925, Folder OK-4, TP; J. B. Thoburn, "Oklahoma Archaeological Explorations in 1925-26," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, IV (No. 2, 1926), 143-148.}

71^{"Report of Secretary," August 4, 1925.}

72^{*Ibid.*; Thoburn, "Oklahoma Archaeological Explorations," 148.}

73^{*Ibid.*; Leslie A. McRill, "Ferdinandina: First White Settlement in Oklahoma," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, XLI (No. 2, 1963), 122-159. Thoburn's archaeological theories and work are evaluated more thoroughly in a later chapter.}

74^{Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, February 10, 1926, Folder WE-2, No. 2, TP; "Minutes of the Board of Directors of the Oklahoma Historical Society, February 2, 1926," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, IV (No. 1, 1926), 78.}

CHAPTER VI

THE ETERNAL WRANGLE

With his election as director of research and an increased state appropriation for the Historical Society, Thoburn's outlook for the coming years seemed bright in 1926. But by 1931 he would be removed from the Society through the political intrigue of Robert L. Williams, a former governor of Oklahoma and a director on the board of the Historical Society. Ironically, Thoburn's four most enjoyable years at the Historical Society preceded two years of acrimonious wrangling.

Thoburn's election as director of research was considered by his friends on the board of directors to be a recognition of his "excellent work" in historical research in Oklahoma. Charles F. Barrett acknowledged Thoburn's research and publications in Oklahoma history when he asserted that "a creditable share of the excellent work" that had led to the growth and expansion of the Oklahoma Historical Society had been "contributed by the zeal and effort of Mr. Thoburn as its Secretary." Moreover, Barrett noted that it was "a satisfaction" to friends of the Society to know that Thoburn's abilities and special training for research would not be hampered in the future by "office details, but can be exercised in a larger and more fruitful field."¹

In less than a year, Thoburn received another promotion. Elevated to the position of curator, he was designated "The Head of the Oklahoma

Historical Society." Specifically he was able to have "general superintending control of the working forces in the Society." The curator acknowledged that this promotion "was a rather rude shock in some quarters as well as a surprise to me." He also noted that most of the employees had accepted the change with "apparent willingness of resignation." He did observe, however, that the one exception appeared to be the "chief hell raiser" as he was wont to label Czarina Conlan.²

Thoburn's new situation enabled him to enter into a contract in 1926 to write another two-volume history of Oklahoma. He had been wanting to rewrite his history of Oklahoma, published originally in 1916, for several years. He hoped to make it more comprehensive and accurate in the light of new materials available, and he also hoped "to make some money out of the enterprise this time."³

Despite his new circumstance, Thoburn realized that he would not be able to do the history by himself, given the "other responsibility and work" which he had on hand. Consequently he asked Miss Muriel H. Wright to be his co-author because she had "done much research and writing under my tutelage and with my editorial assistance during the past six years; she understands my viewpoint and is familiar with my methods." He also noted that Miss Wright was a "Choctaw Indian-- a grand-daughter of Governor Allen Wright and a daughter of Dr. E. N. Wright." Moreover, he noted that like himself, "she is inspired with a purpose to make this a really monumental piece of work."⁴

In 1929, Thoburn and Wright completed Oklahoma: A History of the State and Its People. This was his greatest historical work and remains a valuable survey of Oklahoma history. Two volumes containing

biographies of subscribers also were published with the set, but the authors were not responsible for their content. These biographical sketches have since proven to be of significant value to historical researchers, but the authors cannot be held accountable for their accuracy.

In 1927, the Historical Society received an appropriation "for the purchase of modern equipment, for the library, museum, and newspaper stack-room," totaling \$35,000 over two years. In addition to securing the new equipment, the Society was allotted additional floor space on the second and fourth floors of the capitol, almost doubling its existing floor space. Thoburn believed that, even with the new space, within two or three years the enlarged facilities would be overcrowded; therefore he strongly recommended that "the agitation for a new building should be vigorously renewed."⁶

In February of 1929, the state legislature finally appropriated \$500,000 for the construction of a building for the Oklahoma Historical Society on the grounds at the state capitol. For the enthusiastic Thoburn, the passage of that bill by an almost unanimous vote in both the house and senate, was "a fair indication of what the people of the state at large think of the Historical Society and the work it has been trying to do."⁷

In addition to working on his multi-volume history, Thoburn published seven major articles in The Chronicles of Oklahoma between 1926 and 1931. The scope of these articles ranges from archaeological topics to "The Peace Council Celebration at Medicine Lodge" to "The Naming of the Canadian River." He also was able to carry on several

archaeological expeditions during this period, adding significantly to the museum's collections of prehistoric artifacts.⁸ However, Thoburn's duties at the Historical Society during this period involved more than doing historical research and writing. Indeed he personally answered most of the inquiries that were made to the Society--many of them addressed specifically to him. He was patient and painstaking in answering inquiries from individuals on a myriad of subjects over the years. Often he would respond with a lengthy dissertation on the subject in question. It was not unusual for him to write two- or three-page letters typed single spaced and with only the smallest of margins. Often this was done because there simply was no readily available published account on the subject of the inquiry.⁹

In addition, Thoburn was in great demand to give speeches to many organizations because of his reputation as the preeminent historian of Oklahoma. He always tried to accept speaking engagements if at all possible. Usually he received only his costs for travel--and sometimes not even that. Yet, he rarely allowed the lack of provision for payment of expenses to prevent him from giving the talk.¹⁰

Another significant aspect of Thoburn's work was the help he gave others with their historical research. He wrote numerous letters over the years, spending considerable time in finding materials and directing people to sources to aid their studies. He would do whatever possible to be of assistance. For example, in one instance he offered to send a lady in Ponca City his personal copy of a particular book to aid her in preparation of a paper for the Daughters of the American Revolution on the role of the Indians in the Civil War.¹¹

Thoburn was a staunch believer in encouraging programs such as centennial celebrations, pageants, and reunions to promote an awareness and appreciation of history and heritage in the public mind. One such event was the reunion of the surviving "Boomers" of David L. Payne's Oklahoma colony held at the state fair of Oklahoma on September 28, 1926. Thoburn represented the Historical Society in sponsoring the event, along with the Oklahoma State Fair Association and the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce. Thoburn apparently handled the task of locating as many of the Boomers as possible and writing to invite them to attend, and then writing a second time to remind them of the event.¹²

It was raining when the day of the reunion arrived, resulting in a "pitifully small" attendance. However, Thoburn observed that otherwise the event was a success. Despite the small attendance, he asserted that the meeting "kicked up a lot of interest" and he had picked up the names of many Boomers. Subsequently he approached them about writing their reminiscences of their experience with Payne. "The story of Payne and his 'colony'," Thoburn believed, "had been in danger of being lost and getting into the same vein of traditions which includes "Robin Hood and Captain Kidd." Because of the reunion, Thoburn felt that "we can now rescue it for preservation and real history."¹³

Another interesting enterprise in which Thoburn participated was the pageant for the Indian peace treaty celebration and homecoming at Medicine Lodge, Kansas in 1927. The event commemorated the Medicine Lodge Council of 1867 at which peace had been made with the tribes of the Southern Plains. Thoburn traveled twice to Medicine Lodge to help in making plans and then made a third trip with a group of Indians sent

to look over the grounds. He had 225 members of the Comanche, Kiowa, Prairie Apache, Cheyenne, and Arapho tribes at the celebration. He noted that the experience had made a strong impression on the Indians involved, and that "the result will be manifest in the material that may more readily be secured from them for the archives of the Society."¹⁴

Unfortunately for Thoburn, the pleasant situation he enjoyed as curator in 1926 and early 1927 came to an early end, for he became involved in a bitter personal struggle with Robert L. Williams. In February of 1927 he reported that "the hell-raising has been resumed in more aggravated form, largely because of the captiousness of 'Bob' Williams." At the same time, he was approached as to whether or not he would be interested in heading the Department of American Anthropology to be established at the University of Oklahoma. This did not "sound so badly" to him, for he wrote that he had "neither taste nor time for continuous contempt, bickering and intrigue I am weary of the everlasting and eternal wrangle here." However, he never received a firm offer of this position.¹⁵

Thoburn had first crossed words with Williams in 1921 over the editorship of The Chronicles of Oklahoma. The former governor had engineered placing the Chronicles in the hands of J. S. Buchanan and E. E. Dale of the University of Oklahoma; Thoburn had opposed this and eventually gained control of editorship of the Chronicles himself. At the annual meeting of the Historical Society on February 5, 1924, R. L. Williams was re-elected to the board, and Grant Foreman was elected as a new director for a five-year term. Like Thoburn, Foreman already was emerging as an outstanding historian, focusing largely on

the history of the Five Civilized Tribes. Soon, a rivalry developed between Foreman and Thoburn.¹⁶

Thoburn had long considered himself the pioneer historian of Oklahoma, and he understandably developed a pride in his reputation as such. In 1922, for example, he asserted that "I have written more Oklahoma history than any of several other people put together." By 1930 the rivalry between the two men had become intense. Responding to one of Thoburn's letters, his friend J. F. Weaver wrote in May of 1930 that "I can see that my suspicions were justified. Some gall has Foreman to lay claim to being the historian of Oklahoma when you had established a reputation in that field before he thought of entering it."¹⁷

In October of 1931 Thoburn first heard talk that Grant Foreman could become the next president of the Historical Society. Immediately he wrote John B. Meserve of Tulsa to mention that fact and to suggest W. A. Ledbetter of Oklahoma City as an alternative. Meserve responded, however, that if Foreman wanted to be the next president of the Society he would be for him "tooth and nail." Meserve thought Ledbetter was a capable individual, but wondered "why should Tulsa and the East side be excluded for the benefit of an Oklahoma City man."¹⁸

Apparently referring to Grant Foreman, Thoburn observed in July of 1931 that "while I was the first to enter and to occupy the field of research and writing in the history of Oklahoma," there has been considerable effort to "belittle my work . . . and to eliminate me from that field." Indeed, Thoburn noted that if there were not other evidence of his success it would be proven by the fact that he had become the object of "noticable jealousy of more recent aspirants in that

field." As R. L. Williams was a strong ally of Grant Foreman, Thoburn would have to contend with the anonymity of a powerful politician.¹⁹

The friction between Thoburn and Williams and Foreman surfaced in a variety of ways. One of these was the quality of work and status within the Historical Society of Muriel H. Wright. Thoburn, of course, was a good friend and strong supporter of Wright. As early as 1921, Thoburn said she was "a lady of education and refinement" who "is wonderfully thorough in her work." So much confidence had Thoburn in Wright's work that he asked her to co-author his multi-volume history of Oklahoma in 1929. Thus, any attack on Miss Wright was considered an attack on Thoburn and sorely resented by him. In August of 1929, Williams made it very clear that he considered Miss Wright to be employed by the Historical Society on a temporary basis: "It is not contemplated that she is to be permanently on the payroll." Moreover, Williams began to watch closely for evidence that Miss Wright was not doing her work properly.²⁰

In September of 1930, Williams wrote Dan Peery, secretary of the Historical Society, to complain about the work of Miss Wright. Grant Foreman had brought him a letter that she had sent to Foreman. In the letter she noted that in the next issue of the Chronicles she would have an article on the organization of counties in the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations. Williams asserted that the organization of counties in each of the Five Civilized Tribes should have been covered in the article. Also, Williams contended that Wright had "misconstrued the purpose for which she was employed," for she had stated that the article and maps accompanying it represented her own research rather than a

use of the data compiled by Peter Hudson. She had been hired to prepare material previously assembled by Hudson for publication in the Chronicles, not to do her own research.²¹

Even worse in Williams' estimation, Wright also had stated in her letter to Foreman that she was preparing a monograph for the Society dealing with American negotiations with the Chickasaws from 1826 to 1837. Again, Williams argued, she was not employed to do such work. Moreover, "Mr. Grant Foreman is writing a book that covers these items . . . and we haven't the money to duplicate this matter."²²

Thoburn undoubtedly was made aware of this complaint against Wright as Williams specified in the letter that he wanted it to be shown to her. In turn, she must have informed her mentor of its contents. That Thoburn's wrath could be raised in reaction to criticism against Wright is evidenced by his response to a critical remark which he undoubtedly took as having originated with Grant Foreman. A correspondent noted in a letter to Thoburn that sometime during 1929 a "learned man" had written to him, saying that some people who are writing books about "Indians" don't know the history of their own tribe." Just previous to this comment, the author had been talking about Grant Foreman's works and whether or not Thoburn felt he would be able to produce a better history of the Five Civilized Tribes than Thoburn and Wright had produced. The obvious inference to be drawn was that Foreman had made these remarks about Wright. Thoburn's response was predictable. Referring to the "learned man" who had made such a "venomous insinuation" with its "manifestly unjust implication," he asserted that if his knowledge

does not exceed his spirit of fairness, his opinion in such a matter is not worthy of any consideration whatsoever."²³

A curious incident in 1929 also helped heighten tension and bitterness between Thoburn and Williams. A strongbox was placed in the cornerstone which was to be laid in the construction of the new Historical Society building on November 16, 1929. A special copy of the final edition of the Tulsa World for that date along with other newspapers was to be placed in the strongbox. Accordingly, the circulation manager of the World arranged for the Stephenson News Agency in Oklahoma City to deliver a copy of the paper to Thoburn at the Capitol Building so that it could be placed in the cornerstone.²⁴

Several days later, the circulation manager of the World again wrote the Stephenson News Stand to inform them that they had received a letter from Judge R. L. Williams who stated that the paper had not been delivered and that Williams himself furnished the paper which was placed in the cornerstone. The letter continued, "We are very much put out as this is not the first time that you and your organization have failed us in matters of this kind."²⁵

The owner of the newsstand telephoned Thoburn, who in turn wrote the Tulsa World to explain that the paper had been delivered by the Stephenson News Stand as directed and that he "personally placed" the World, along with other newspapers, in the copper box. "I do not believe anyone else placed any other newspapers in the receptacle after I had placed the copies of the Tulsa World and other papers therein," Thoburn declared, "for the reason that there was no room left to hold another paper." It was beyond Thoburn's understanding "just how the

distinguished jurist of the Eastern Oklahoma Federal Court felt called upon to file such a complaint." He also noted that Mr. Bryce, secretary for the Society, was absent from the office for the day; "otherwise, I am sure he would sign a written statement to the effect that I placed all the newspaper copies in the copper box."²⁶

Williams and Thoburn also clashed over the issue of Thoburn's being invited to give fifteen-minute presentations over WKY Radio three days each week for an indefinite period. This was a voluntary offer on the part of the management of WKY, and Thoburn would receive no pay. This was an opportunity for him to give interesting historical presentations that would have a beneficial effect for the Oklahoma Historical Society. Thoburn's presentations were to be a part of the station's entertainment program, and he planned to "gauge his contributions accordingly and, at the same time . . . advertise the society and its work in a modest, unobtrusive way."²⁷

Thoburn sent letters to various directors, seeking their approval for acceptance of the offer. R. L. Williams responded that he viewed the matter favorably so long as it cost the Historical Society nothing. However, he felt that the officers of the Society in addition to Thoburn, should "go on the air at least one time." Williams then listed what he would suggest as a possible schedule saying that Thoburn could talk the first time, then Colonel Colcord, the president, and others. Among those listed were "Mr. Grant Foreman, whose recent books have made him an international figure in history." Williams went on to state that by dividing the presentations in that manner "each field

of the Oklahoma Historical Society would be brought clearly before the public." That would help bring in more members to the Society.²⁸

Williams also argued that to undertake the radio project would require continuous preparation, whereas the primary purpose of the Historical Society "is to gather research data and to make it of record . . . to be available for those seeking after it." Moreover, Williams argued that by dividing the programs, the burden of preparation would be not great on anyone. Such an arrangement would be much more effective, Williams noted, coming from "so many agencies" because it would reach in a personal way many more people "and so many more professions and vocations."²⁹

After sleeping on the matter overnight, Williams added a postscript to his letter stating that it was his "best judgment that nothing be done in accepting this proposition until we have a regular meeting of the board of directors in April." This was a new departure, Williams declared and should be considered at a regular meeting of the board. Williams sent copies of his three-page letter to Thoburn to the fifteen other directors, apparently attempting to rally their support for his view. In writing Judge Baxter Taylor, Williams argued that unless the program was done the way Williams suggested "it will be just like a lecture by Thoburn, who holds a position with the Historical Society, a matter of entertainment." However, Williams said, "if we can get a message from each one he can fix his message in such a way to show the people it is not only educational and cultural but it is essential for them to join in and support it." Williams urged Taylor to "show this letter to Governor Murray and

let him see what is being done. The State don't want to pay anybody a salary for such purpose as this."³⁰

One of the responses Williams received to his letter and copy of his letter to Thoburn was from Mrs. Frank Korn of El Reno. She wrote Williams to say that she felt Thoburn "equal to the occasion of presenting the facts as his service antedates all of us." Moreover, she asserted the invitation was extended to Thoburn and not to the rest of the directors. Speaking to Williams' assertion and about Grant Foreman being internationally famous as a historian, Mrs. Korn noted that she had read in the Oklahoman (which controlled WKY) that "J. B. Thoburn and Dr. E. E. Dale were leading historians of the state." Mrs. Korn certainly would not "oppose the editors in their choice to forward this message." Mrs. Korn took the position that "this is no affair of the Board of Directors and I am hands off the proposition."³¹

Thoburn responded to Williams' letter that he was perfectly willing on his part to wait until the next meeting of the board of directors but that he would have to notify the station management. He noted that the radio executives were eager to start the series as early as possible, and that the final decision on the changes Williams had suggested would have to rest with the station management.³²

Ten days later, William Gillespie of the WKY Radiophone Company wrote Charles Colcord, president of the Oklahoma Historical Society, to express the station's point of view. Gillespie stated that Thoburn had been invited to give programs to be "based on the history of the development of Oklahoma." The management, Gillespie noted, felt that Thoburn "knew a great deal about the history of this state, as we

have heard him speak on the subject a number of times." The management understood that the officers and directors to whose attention the matter had been called were virtually unanimous in expressing their appreciation to WKY and in urging Thoburn to accept the invitation. Yet, they had learned from one "source" that acceptance would be held in abeyance until the next meeting of the Society's board of directors. Moreover, Gillespie noted that they had heard "from this same source," that Thoburn would be expected to present only one or two talks and the rest would be by other individuals connected with the Society.³³

Gillespie asserted that the invitation had been extended to Thoburn because of his connection with the Historical Society and "because of his recognized ability and enthusiastic zeal in the collection and preservation of historic data." Moreover, it would be unacceptable for twenty people to participate in a program as there would be inevitable confusion regarding "the type of program we want and the time it goes on." If handled by Thoburn alone, Gillespie believed the Historical Society would receive a great deal of favorable publicity and at the same time provide a public service. Thus Gillespie concluded "unless the original agreement with Mr. Thoburn is carried out, we have no other recourse than to withdraw the invitation."³⁴

Colcord responded by thanking the station for its invitation and declaring that "as far as letting fifteen or twenty members of the Society talk instead of Mr. Thoburn, we would not desire that this be done." The talks could start, as far as Colcord was concerned, as soon as WKY could get Thoburn to agree to begin. Soon Thoburn

was "on the air" on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, from one to five p.m. This victory by Thoburn over Williams undoubtedly aggravated the former governor's rancor against the historian.³⁵

The rivalry between Thoburn and Williams became so intense that Thoburn attempted early in 1931 to stack the annual meeting of the Oklahoma Historical Society in order to effect a revision of its constitution. He outlined his plan in a letter to N. S. Nichols, president of the Oklahoma Press Association. Thoburn told Nichols that relief from existing conditions could come only by "amending the constitution as to eliminate what is, in effect, a virtual dictatorship and to prevent a repetitiveness of such a contingency in the future." Thoburn urged Nichols to have "a goodly number of newspapermen at the Society's annual meeting on January 29." He recalled the role of the Press Association in the founding of the Historical Society and seeing it through its early years. Thus he asserted the Press Association had "ample reason to reassert its interest in and influence in behalf of the Oklahoma Historical Society."³⁶

Thoburn's plan was to effect a change in the constitution whereby Robert L. Williams' power would be greatly reduced. In a draft of his letter addressed to the members of the Oklahoma Historical Society, he pointed out that since the Historical Society had moved into the new capitol building in 1917, its board of directors had been taken over by state and federal public officials and practicing attorneys. Indeed, Thoburn asserted that these groups held seventeen of the twenty-five memberships on the board of directors. Because of this circumstance, Thoburn declared that a "virtual dictatorship in the

affairs of the Oklahoma Historical Society" had developed during recent years. "Few public officials and employees have the courage to act independently" when such actions mean opposing "the wish of dominantly willful political influence." Likewise, he observed that most attorneys will not attempt to oppose the "will and wish of certain determined influences."³⁷

Thoburn described the "dictatorship" that he had referred to by observing that one member of the board attempts "to dominate not only the meetings of the board but the annual meetings of the Society also." Moreover, he declared, "he is intolerant of all opposition, . . . makes practically all of the motions and wants to dictate all appointments." Indeed, Thoburn declared Williams appeared to assume that he was the only person possessed of the requisite knowledge and wisdom to assume direction of the Society's operations in their most intricate detail. The intolerable situation on the board which allowed this dictatorship to go unchecked must be changed, Thoburn declared.³⁸

As of January 19, Williams, chairman of a special committee on revision of the Society's constitution and bylaws, had not called a meeting of his committee. The date of the meeting was set for January 29. Thoburn did not think Williams planned to call a meeting. Accordingly, he recommended to Nichols that he have twenty to twenty-five newspapermen at the annual meeting. Through "carefully made plans and harmonious team-work," Thoburn planned to bring about a reformation of the Society's constitution by having the newspapermen take over the meeting.³⁹

When Williams was called to give his report on behalf of the constitution and bylaws committee, he would have little to say because he had never convened his committee, Thoburn predicted. This would occasion some "pertinent questions" as Williams attempted to explain "his course in regard to the matter." Thoburn then outlined a series of motions to be made and approved in rapid succession which would have the effect of discharging Williams' committee, appointing a new committee, having it meet within ten days, and having a report at a reconvened meeting of the membership on May 20. All pending amendments would be transferred to the new committee for review and action. Thoburn cautioned that these various motions should be made by at least three or four different members and each one must be coached carefully to be able to speak to the motion if necessary.⁴⁰

Apparently, Thoburn felt that with the new committee he would be able to make headway with his ideas for modifying the membership of the Board of directors, thereby clipping the power of R. L. Williams. His plans, however, were destined to fail. Williams apparently called his committee together prior to the annual meeting, for at the meeting Williams presented numerous amendments to the constitution. Of course, none of them had any effect on the composition of the board of directors.⁴¹

Apparently the actual process of removing Thoburn from his position in the Historical Society began at the meeting of the Society's board of directors January 23, 1930. With Thoburn absent, Williams moved that the curator be elected director of research in ethnology and archaeology at his current salary. The motion carried.

Later in the meeting, Williams moved that Grant Foreman be elected director of historical research. Williams had now put Thoburn in a position which the politician could later argue was not essential.⁴²

Williams revealed his view of the position of director of research in ethnology and archaeology and his dislike for Thoburn in a letter to Dan W. Peery, secretary of the Society, in discussing the budget for the coming year. Williams stated "I would be willing to fix the compensation of the Secretary at \$2,400 per year and that of the Director in Ethnology and Archaeology at \$2,000 per year." Williams reasoned that the "responsibility of the Secretary is greater than than of the Director of Ethnology and Archaeology." Moreover, "I do not believe we can get \$2,000 per year in services in favor of the Historical Society from the Director of Ethnology and Archaeology."⁴³

The final blow came on April 23, 1931, when Governor William H. Murray line-item vetoed the appropriation for Thoburn's position. Asked if the job he had vetoed was Thoburn's, Murray was quoted as saying "I don't know who it is. I don't care about the person, I want to save the unnecessary jobs." Historical Society directors were reported as saying that the probable cause of the veto was the "animosity between Thoburn and Judge R. L. Williams, former governor, and Murray friend." Earlier in the session, a senate committee had sliced Thoburn's salary from the appropriation but numerous protests resulted in its being placed back in the bill. Thus when it appeared Thoburn had won the struggle to keep his job, Murray struck with his veto.⁴⁴ There can be little doubt that Williams influenced Murray in this matter. On April 13, 1931, Williams wrote Murray regarding the

general appropriation bill for the Historical Society; after discussing various items in the bill, he asserted:

If any item is to be eliminated from this bill we could dispense with the item "Research Director in Ethnology and Archaeology" better than anything else, and we have no appropriation to aid in research in ethnology and archaeology this year, but I think the legislature did right during these hard times in not appropriating money for such purpose. It would have taken at least \$1,000 to be matched with a like amount from the Smithsonian Institute to have done anything in ethnology and archaeology.

It is my understanding that you have fifteen days in which to approve the appropriation bill or disapprove it and I will be in Oklahoma City on the 20th and will have an opportunity then to go over this matter in detail with you.

That Williams was a confidant and staunch political ally of Governor Murray is evident in the large volume of correspondence that passed between the two.⁴⁵

Personal tragedy accompanied the professional insult suffered by Thoburn. Several months later, Thoburn recounted that "when my wife read a rather sensational account of my enforced retirement in a newspaper, the results and shock caused an acute heart attack and she passed from the mortal life in less than four hours later." Thus almost overnight Thoburn was dealt a severe blow both in his personal life and in his professional career.⁴⁶

In the months and years following Murray's veto, Thoburn apparently understood Williams role in the affair. In July 1931, he could state that Murray did not know "he was hitting me as he was imposed upon and influenced by a small but powerful coterie of directors which could not bring about my undoing within the precincts of this Historical Society. . . ."47

As in 1905 when Thoburn was removed by political intrigue as secretary of the Territorial Board of Agriculture, there were widespread expressions of disgust and condemnation of Murray's action in the press. In an editorial entitled, "Proverbial Ingratitude," the Daily Oklahoman noted that Thoburn had made the collection of the State's historical data the "ruling passion of his life and as the directing genius of the State Historical Society he rendered a service whose beneficial effects will be felt for many years." The editorial further stated that for the sake of saving "the modest salary which an opulent state had been paying a valued servant" Thoburn's office has been abolished by executive veto. Finally, the Oklahoman observed that "many a youth who covets a career of state service has cause to stop and consider when he reads this distressing chapter from Thoburn's life." The El Reno American also stated that while the Historical Society is not a political order, "there are those of its Directors who would make it not only a political society, but also an organization with which political debts can be paid."⁴⁸

Ironically, Thoburn had been approached in September of 1930 regarding the job of secretary of the Kansas State Historical Society. With his consent he could have been nominated for election to that position at a salary of \$3,000. While Thoburn was deeply appreciative, he declined, saying:

I have lived in Oklahoma for more than thirty years and, figuratively speaking my roots are grown deeply into her soil; I have had a somewhat constructive, though unobtrusive, part in her affairs and, possibly, even at my age, may have a larger and more important part therein, during the years of the immediate future.⁴⁹

J. B. Thoburn had rendered almost twenty years of service to the Oklahoma Historical Society, beginning when he was elected to the board of directors in 1903. He gave staunch service during times of financial hardship and personal conflict. Far more than any one individual, he was responsible for the Society's growth and development between 1917 and 1931. Yet, at age sixty-five he was cast aside through political chicanery, changing the course of his professional and private life.

FOOTNOTES

¹Charles F. Barrett, "J. B. Thoburn to be Director of Research Work," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, IV (No. 1, 1926), 1.

²"Minutes of the Board of Directors, Oklahoma Historical Society, November 9, 1926," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, IV (No. 4, 1926), 372; Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, December 24, 1926, Folder WE-2, No. 2, TP.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵J. B. Thoburn and Muriel H. Wright, Oklahoma: A History of the State and Its People (4 vols., New York: Lewis Publishing Company, Inc., 1929). LeRoy H. Fischer, "Muriel H. Wright, Historian of Oklahoma," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, LII (Spring, 1974), 13.

⁶"Undated report to the members of the Board of Directors," Folder OK-2, TP.

⁷Thoburn to George Bird Grinnell, February 18, 1929, Folder OK-2, TP.

⁸Wright, "Pioneer Historian," 405; a listing of each of Thoburn's articles in The Chronicles of Oklahoma may be found in the bibliography of this work.

⁹Miscellaneous letters of inquiry with Thoburn's answers attached are found throughout the Thoburn Papers. A series of folders are required in the collection merely to handle letters of inquiry. For example, see Mrs. L. V. Hannon to Thoburn, n.d., Folder OK-2, TP; Thoburn to Mrs. L. V. Hannon, April 20, 1926, *ibid.*

¹⁰Interview with H. Merle Woods, July 1, 1975, tape available at Shepherd Library, Oklahoma Heritage Center. M. L. Wardell to Thoburn, January 13, 1927, Folder TH-1, 1b, TP.

¹¹Thoburn to Mrs. George H. Brett, November 16, 1926, Folder CI-1, TP. The Thoburn Papers contained numerous communications to and from Thoburn regarding historical research and writing. See also, Johnson, "The Oklahoma Historical Society and Its Work," p. 9.

¹²Thoburn to Mr. C. W. Blanche, September 8, 1926, Folder OK-2, TP. See also, a form letter dated September 16, 1926 intended to remind previously contacted boomers of the event.

¹³Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, October 3, 1926, Folder WE-2, TP.

¹⁴Undated report to Board of Directors, Folder ME-1, TP.

¹⁵Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, February 17, 1927, Folder WE-2, No. 3, TP. Thoburn was not offered the position at O. U.

¹⁶"Minutes of Annual Meeting of the Oklahoma Historical Society, February 5, 1924," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, II (No. 1, 1924), 83.

¹⁷Thoburn to Captain M. J. Hagerty, July 15, 1922, Folder KI-1, TP; J. F. Weaver to Thoburn, May 16, 1930, Folder WE-2, No. 3, TP.

¹⁸John B. Meserve to Thoburn, October 15, 1931, Folder OK-2, TP.

¹⁹Thoburn to Gifford Pinchot, July 4, 1931, Folder BI-1, TP. Thoburn was sensitive to any hints or suggestions that Foreman might be surpassing him in the quality of work on Oklahoma History. In 1930 he was asked if he felt that Foreman's "abilities and facilities" would place him in a position to prepare a better history of the five civilized tribes than Thoburn and Wright had produced in 1929. Thoburn responded that considering the connection of both he and Mr. Foreman with the Oklahoma Historical Society "and the personal relations existing between us, I am not in a position to express an opinion as to his ability in such a line." Thoburn to W. M. Dunn, April 18, 1930, Folder OK-2, TP.

²⁰Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, September 17, 1921, Folder WE-2, No. 2, TP; R. L. Williams to J. Y. Bryce, August 6, 1929, Oklahoma Historical Society Correspondence, R. L. Williams Papers, Oklahoma Historical Society.

²¹R. L. Williams to Dan W. Peery, September 10, 1930, *ibid.*

²²*Ibid.*

²³William M. Dunn to Thoburn, April 15, 1930, TP; Thoburn to William M. Dunn, April 18, 1930, Folder OK-2, TP.

²⁴L. W. McFetridge to Stephenson News Agency, November 15, 1929, Folder OK-2, No. 1, TP.

²⁵L. W. McFetridge to Stephenson News Agency, November 23, 1929, *ibid.*

²⁶Thoburn to L. W. McFetridge, November 23, 1929, Folder K-2, No. 1, TP.

- ²⁷Thoburn to Harry Campbell, March 10, 1931, Folder OK-2, TP.
- ²⁸Robert L. Williams to Thoburn, March 9, 1931, *ibid.*
- ²⁹*Ibid.*
- ³⁰*Ibid.* R. L. Williams to Judge Baxter Taylor, March 9, 1931, Folder T-31, Williams Papers, Oklahoma Historical Society.
- ³¹Mrs. Frank Korn to R. L. Williams, March 13, 1931, Folder OK-2, TP.
- ³²Thoburn to Robert L. Williams, March 14, 1931, *ibid.*
- ³³William Gillespie to Charles Colcord, March 24, 1931, *ibid.*
- ³⁴*Ibid.*
- ³⁵Kirke Mechem to Thoburn, April 7, 1931, Folder KA-1, TP; Thoburn to Dr. Forrest Clements, April 15, 1931, Folder NI, TP.
- ³⁶Thoburn to N. A. Nichols, January 19, 1931, Folder OK-2, TP.
- ³⁷Draft of letter to the members of the Oklahoma Historical Society, n.d., Folder OK-2, TP.
- ³⁸*Ibid.* There is no evidence that this letter was ever submitted to the membership.
- ³⁹Thoburn to N. A. Nichols, January 19, 1931, *ibid.*
- ⁴⁰*Ibid.*
- ⁴¹Minutes, Oklahoma Historical Society, Annual Meeting, January 21, 1931, The Chronicles of Oklahoma, IX (No. 1, 1931), 106-109.
- ⁴²"Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors," Oklahoma Historical Society, January 23, 1930, The Chronicles of Oklahoma, VIII (No. 1, 1930), 143-144.
- ⁴³R. L. Williams to Dan W. Perry, November 5, 1930, Oklahoma Historical Society Correspondence, R. L. Williams Papers.
- ⁴⁴"J. B. Thoburn Ousted When Murray Vetoes Salary Item," Oklahoma City Times, Thursday, April 23, 1931, p. 22.
- ⁴⁵R. L. Williams to William H. Murray, April 13, 1931, Folder M-31, R. L. Williams Papers; see also R. L. Williams to William H. Murray, March 10, 1931, *ibid.*; January 8, 1931, *ibid.*; February 27, 1931, *ibid.* Williams advised Murray on numerous questions, and even suggested amendments to certain bills. His advice always seems to have been cheerfully accepted and even sought by Murray.

⁴⁶Thoburn to "Friend William", July 7, 1931, Folder BI-1, No. 3, TP.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸"Proverbial Ingratitude," The Daily Oklahoman, April 25, 1931, p. 8; El Reno American, April 30, 1931, n.p. Numerous other press clippings from various papers may be found in the Folder BI-1, TP.

⁴⁹Homer Eiler to Thoburn, n.d., Folder BI-1, TP; Thoburn to Homer Eiler, September 29, 1930, *ibid.*

CHAPTER VII

FAMILY LIFE

With the death of Rachel Caroline Thoburn in 1931, Thoburn's family life as such came to an end. In his private life, he had found his share of pathos and difficulties just as he did in his public career. Unfortunately, he apparently was not able to go home at the end of a trying day and have happy experiences with his family. His purely personal pursuits were very limited, while his public service endeavors were myriad. Indeed his one "hobby" which gave him considerable enjoyment was horticulture.

Thoburn had met Rachel Caroline Conwell while he was a student at Kansas Agricultural College at Manhattan. Miss Conwell had served as a teacher in Indian Territory for a time in a Choctaw Academy. She was attractive and intelligent and like Thoburn was a devout Methodist. They were married on June 6, 1894. He was twenty-eight years old, Caroline five years younger.¹

Over the years, Mrs. Thoburn led a busy life as an active participant in church and club work in Oklahoma City in addition to rearing two daughters. She served twenty-five years as State Conference Secretary of the Women's Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Church. In addition, she was an active member of the Sorosis Club in

Oklahoma City. In 1923, she was elected a lay delegate to the General Conference of the Methodist Church which met at Springfield, Massachusetts.²

The Thoburn's had two daughters, Mary Eleanor and Jeanne. One of the real tragedies in Thoburn's personal life involved his daughter Mary. Thoburn was playing with his little girl, as fathers often do, by tossing her in the air and catching her. Her childish giggles became shrieks of anguish when her father somehow failed to catch her. Little Mary suffered a severe injury which rendered her crippled for the rest of her life. In later years she was able to walk with an elevated shoe and, part of the time, with one crutch. She was in a wheel chair for a number of years, but by the time she had become a young adult she could walk with crutches. Thoburn must have grieved every time he saw her hobbling along. To make matters worse, Mary had difficulty accepting what had happened to her and was bitter toward her father. Only in his later years was Mary able to overcome to a large degree her feelings of bitterness toward her father.³

In addition to the distressing situation with his daughter, he grew so far away from Mrs. Thoburn that by the early 1920's he and his wife would not sit down to dinner together unless they had company. Mrs. Thoburn apparently found it difficult to forgive her husband for crippling Mary, although she recognized it was an accident. Mary's resentment may well have been shared by her mother.⁴

Another primary cause of the difficulties between Thoburn and his wife was the matter of finances. Throughout his career, Thoburn worked for pathetic wages. He obviously had the talent to make more

money, but he preferred to devote his time to public service. It was difficult for Mrs. Thoburn to understand why her husband would stay with the Historical Society in the early 1920's, receiving only half of what had been a meager salary and yet putting in full-time work. Compounding the problem of Thoburn's making little money was his generosity. In later years, H. Merle Woods recalled that Thoburn was never able to accumulate anything "because he was too generous with his time and talents." Moreover, he often would spend his own money on some historical artifact that he feared otherwise might be lost to the state; while he saved many such items, he also "came near to breaking himself financially."⁵

In addition, Thoburn constantly was making speeches and never refused an invitation unless he had an unresolvable conflict. And, he "never had his hand out to get fees." He apparently seldom received compensation for his expenses in making trips to give speeches and helping boost local museums, pageants, and commemorative celebrations. This level of devotion to a cause in the face of financial sacrifice often was difficult for others to understand, especially for those who shared his hardships.⁶

Apparently, the Thoburn family had to rely on Mrs. Thoburn's personal wealth to a considerable extent. Although not wealthy people, her family in Kansas had some property, and she had accumulated a small nest egg by the time she married. In an age when men were always expected to be the "bread winners", Thoburn constantly was reminded of his wife's financial contribution by the fact that all their property until her death was held in her name.

For example, in 1903 Caroline Thoburn purchased six lots from the University Development Company on Northwest 21st Street in Oklahoma City. The Thoburn's built their home on lots 11 and 12 (present day 910 Northwest 21st). The other lots, constituting present day 906 and 912 Northwest 21st Street, were held for investment and sold in later years at a nice profit. The Thoburns apparently kept their home in Oklahoma City during the years he served on the faculty at Norman and in 1918 sold their property for \$4,500. Several months later, Mrs. Thoburn purchased a forty-acre farm from the same individual who purchased their house. This acreage was located approximately seven miles west of the Oklahoma City business district on Northwest 10th Street. Again, the land was in Mrs. Thoburn's name and remained so until her estate was probated in 1935. At that time, the forty acres was divided with each daughter receiving fifteen acres and Thoburn receiving ten acres. In addition, Thoburn received from the two daughters property at 2408 North McKinley. This residence apparently had been placed in the daughters' names by Mrs. Thoburn.⁸

Another factor which may have caused difficulties in Thoburn's relationship with his wife was his heavy involvement with his career after normal business hours. He apparently spent his time in the evenings with his research, writing, and correspondence. For example, Thoburn informed his good friend, J. F. Weaver, that because of the press for time "this evening, as most other evenings, I have come back to the office"9

Indeed, one of the most interesting and conspicuous aspects of Thoburn's personality was his determination to make the most efficient

use of his time. On at least two occasions he wrote the Oklahoma Railway Company to complain that he had been delayed fifteen minutes in getting to the capitol because operators of trolley cars did not stop and pick him up when he had to transfer. He wrote to complain about the situation, stressing that "it is highly important that I get to the capitol at the earliest possible moment." In addition he observed that "I did not lose my patience or vent my feelings in any expletives but nonetheless I was not in a very pleasant humor."¹⁰

Outside of his work and his crusade in politics and conservation, Thoburn allowed himself very few diversions. He did enjoy over the years remaining in touch with old friends and events in his hometown of Peabody, Kansas. In 1912 he published an article in the Peabody Gazette dealing with oldtimers of the community. Over the years he made several trips back to Peabody for various occasions. In 1921 he encouraged the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the formation of the Methodist Church in Peabody, and he returned to his home county in 1923 to "help his old school district celebrate its fiftieth anniversary." Again the celebration was originally Thoburn's idea; he had written to the county superintendent and the teacher in charge of the district. The idea caught on and a celebration was held.¹¹

Thoburn decided to make a "two-day vacation to attend." He was the only original pupil in attendance and thus the celebration centered to a large degree around him. Some 350 people were present as well as a band from Peabody and "an orchestra" from the county seat. The congressman from the district made a spirited address in dedicating

a new flagstaff, and then lunch was served on a table as long as the school house. Thoburn observed that it was "spread with more good things to eat than I ever saw on one table before." He was forced to discipline himself to eat sparingly, however, because he was to give the principal address immediately after lunch, and he preferred "an active brain to an overloaded stomach." He enjoyed the inspiring occasion, noting that he had never spoken to a more interested or attentive audience. "I would not have missed it for one year out of my life."¹²

Another activity which Thoburn enjoyed was his involvement with the Oklahoma Society of the Sons of the American Revolution. He was a charter member of this organization and remained active throughout his life. He was intensely patriotic, and in the SAR he was able to associate with others with the same level of patriotic intensity.¹³

The only significant "hobby" Thoburn allowed himself to pursue was in the realm of horticulture. Of course, his interest in this field stemmed from his youth on the farm in Kansas as well as his educational training. He always enjoyed working in a garden or orchard. Living in a bustling city, Thoburn's horticultural pursuit was his tie to his rural agrarian heritage.

As early as 1908 he was serving as secretary of the State Horticulture Society. He again served as Secretary in 1911 and remained interested and active in the society at least through 1918 when his duties with the Historical Society became so time-consuming. That year he began making monthly payments on a set of Bailey's Cyclopedia of Horticulture. In 1909, he was so interested in horticulture that

he was conducting "experiments in plant breeding" and he was encouraged by an official in the Department of Agriculture to continue his experiments. Among these was his effort to find the best way of grafting currants.¹⁴

Thoburn used his knowledge of currants to advantage in 1912 when he signed a contract with the firm of Garee & Garee, nurseymen of Noble, Oklahoma. The firm agreed to receive from Thoburn "all cuttings, scions, rooted slips and plants of four certain varieties of wild currants, so called, now grown by Thoburn." The nurseymen would then cultivate these items and eventually sell them with the profits to be split between Thoburn and the firm.¹⁵

Thoburn also had an interesting association with the Arnold Arboretum at Harvard University. He provided various plant species from Oklahoma for the Arboretum from September 1912 through December 1914. During this period he sent a wide variety of seeds, leaves, and descriptions of Oklahoma flora to the Arboretum. Among the items sent were fruit and foliage from his own tree plum, a species from extreme Western Oklahoma of cercocarpus, "prunish plants," fruit from the diospyros virginiana, and other interesting items. Apparently he received only his expenses as remuneration for this enterprise.¹⁶

By 1919 Thoburn had become particularly interested in growing pecan trees and was intrigued by a report of trees in a certain area which produced nuts of above average size and quality. He was especially interested in the possibility of grafting various types of pecan trees to produce a better product. He planned to "bombard a number of my friends in different parts of the state to help me

out in the matter of preserving, inquiring and reporting locations of trees bearing unusually good quality of pecans." Indeed he believed that "pecans should be developed into a revenue producer in Oklahoma and it can be done if some system is shown in the way of selection and development." He noted that since no government agency was interested in the matter he would personally do what he could to bring this about. Although he apparently was unable to pursue the matter as intended, it is interesting to note that today Oklahoma is one of the leading pecan producing states in the nation.¹⁷

Thoburn remained interested in horticulture throughout his life, with his focus expanding and changing to different plants and varieties from time to time. On one occasion his interest in horticulture was combined with his interest in history; he wanted to landscape an area of the State Capitol grounds with cuttings and offshoots from historic trees throughout the United States. He made great plans for this by writing extensively and actually obtaining and nurturing some cuttings of historic trees. However, the project was derailed by an uncooperative official in charge of the grounds and was never carried out.¹⁸

Thoburn's family life, at least by the time he was employed at the Oklahoma Historical Society in 1917 was not pleasant. He spent many nights away from home in his work, and apparently there was a certain amount of friction when he was at home. His principal diversion from the labors of his career came in practicing horticulture. But he did not allow himself much time for purely personal recreation. He was too busy with his professional career and with the crusades undertaken in what he conceived to be the public interest.

FOOTNOTES

¹Wright, "Pioneer Historian," 399; "Wife of Curator Dead," Unidentified Press Clipping, Folder OK-2, TP.

²"Wife of State Curator Dead," *ibid.*; Thoburn to F. A. Waugh, December 4, 1923, Folder TH-1.1, TP.

³Interview with Anna Maude Smith, by the author, July 7, 1975. Tape available in Shepherd Library, Oklahoma Heritage Center.

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵*Ibid.* Interview with H. Merle Woods, July 1, 1975.

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷Deed Record Book No. 36, p. 45, Office of the County Clerk, Oklahoma County Courthouse, Oklahoma City.

⁸Deed Record Book No. 475, pp. 577-579, *ibid.*

⁹Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, January 31, 1923, Folder WE-2, No. 2, TP.

¹⁰Thoburn to Oklahoma Railway Company, October 9, 1924, and June 13, 1924, Folder OR-1, TP.

¹¹W. P. Hickock to Thoburn, April 4, 1912, Folder TH-1, TP; ? to Thoburn, March 16, 1921, Folder TH-1, No. 3, TP; Thoburn to Captain William F. Hoch, February 23, 1926, Folder MI-8, TP; Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, June 9, 1923, Folder WE-2, No. 2, TP.

¹²Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, June 9, 1923, Folder WE-2, No. 2, TP.

¹³Wright, "Pioneer Historian," 399; W. W. Robertson to Thoburn, April 7, 1930, Folder NI, TP; Mrs. Henry D. Rinsland to William J. Crowe, November 28, 1938, *ibid.*; Interview with H. Merle Woods, July 1, 1975.

¹⁴? Paschall to Thoburn, August 17, 1908, Folder NI, TP; O. M. Morris to Thoburn, March 28, 1909, Folder UF, TP; J. G. Harrison and Sons to Thoburn, November 21, 1911, Folder TH-1.2, No. 4, TP; B. E. Sanford to Thoburn, June 21, 1918, Folder NI, TP; Walt ? to Thoburn, September 22, 1909, Folder TH-1.2, No. 4, TP; F. A. Waugh to Thoburn, October 19, 1909, Folder BI-1, TP.

¹⁵Contract, March 14, 1912, Folder TH-1.2, TP.

¹⁶L. S. Sargent to Thoburn, September 18, 1912, Folder TH-1.2, TP; L. S. Sargent to Thoburn, November 25, 1914, *ibid.*; L. S. Sargent to Thoburn, December 14, 1914, *ibid.*

¹⁷Thoburn to C. M. Lawrence, December 4, 1919, Folder TH-1.2, TP; Thoburn to Will B. Munson, November 11, 1919, *ibid.*

¹⁸Numerous letters in Folder TR-1, TP.

CHAPTER VIII

CRUSADING IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

A man of broad and varied interests, Joseph B. Thoburn could not confine his activities merely to those endeavors for which he drew a salary. He had strong convictions on a number of issues, and he felt that it was his duty to use his talents in what he conceived to be the public interest. In addition to his dedication to preserving the past, he was vitally concerned with problems of the present and future. In particular, he crusaded to promote his belief in resolving problems of race, of politics and of conservation and reclamation of the Great Plains. His beliefs and activities in these three areas were especially interesting because they revealed much about his character and because they influenced his viewpoint as a historian.

In response to a letter from Cornelius Vanderbilt in 1921, Thoburn explained that in addition to research and writing in local history, he also had invaded the fields of ethnology and archaeology. This had led him to become "something of an anthropologist" and to develop a strong interest in "all that pertains to questions of race and race relationship." In addition, he had been "privileged to view the great Negro problem from both northern and southern angles," and he had studied it "free alike from the bias of sentimentalism as well as from that of prejudice." In his view, Thoburn informed Vanderbilt,

the problem of race relationship in the United States had several facets. These included the "undue influx of undesirable and unassimiliable stocks from Central and Eastern Europe and Western Asia; the threatened "Mongolian Intrusion, from Eastern Asia; the "Negro problem"; and the "question of immigration from Mexico." The Mexican problem, Thoburn believed, would never develop "such sinister significance as either of the three above mentioned."¹

Thoburn explained why he feared the impact of each of the four groups he had outlined by setting forth two "axiomatic principles." First, he argued that a democracy "must be based upon and supported by a homogeneous citizenship" if it is to be successful and achieve permanency. The citizenship of the nation must be "possessed with a kinship of common ideals and aspirations and, if not an actual identity of race and language, at least no insuperable bar to the ultimate amalgamation and coalescence of the several component elements." Second, he declared that "the merging of radically dissimilar stocks is fraught with danger," especially if one of these "is markedly lacking in the matter of moral ideas and standards."²

Thoburn was particularly concerned with what historians have referred to as the "new migration" which began in the years immediately following the end of the American Civil War and continued until immigration quotas were established in the 1920's. This so-called new immigration differed from the "old immigration" in that these people came primarily from Southern and Eastern Europe. He viewed them as "less desirable and unassimilatable social stocks." The old immigration

had consisted primarily of individuals from the British Isles and from Northwestern Europe. They were, as he phrased it, "of racial strains that could be and were readily assimilated." Moreover, they were all "voluntary immigrants, largely animated by an ambition to improve their condition in life socially and politically as well as materially." The new immigrants, on the other hand, were prompted to migrate "chiefly if not entirely by motives of material interest." Moreover, Thoburn asserted that they came without knowledge or appreciation of American institutions and "the spirit which founded and developed the same."³

Thoburn argued that because of the excessive migration of unskilled workers, the labor market had been overcrowded. According to him, their willingness to work for low wages lowered the standard of living for unskilled American laborers. This caused many Americans to obtain additional skills and crowd into the ranks of skilled labor which led to the formation of unions. Feeling the effects of overcrowding, many skilled laborers sought to better themselves by qualifying for one of the professions, thus overcrowding them in turn. Consequently, this influx of foreign migration had tended to overcrowd all aspects of the labor market, thus keeping wages below what they should be so all could enjoy an American standard of living. The result of this, Thoburn argued, "has been to lower the marriage rate and the birth rate of the native American population."⁴

He believed that three principal groups were responsible for encouraging the importation of cheap labor into the nation: (1) "the manufacturing, milling and mining interests"; (2) "the rich who want

personal service" of a character not easily secured among "people of the native American stock"; and (3) "the Trans-Atlantic steamship companies who make a profit by landing such immigrants in quantities on our shores." These groups, he declared, were animated entirely by self-interest; together they traditionally had "selected the man who is nominated by the President and confirmed by the Senate to serve as Commissioner of Immigration."⁵

Thoburn declared that "we have heard a lot of twaddle" concerning the so called "melting pot," which was supposed to be "fusing these diverse elements into a composite and desirable unity." But, he observed, a visit to the great cities of the nation readily demonstrated the fallacy of that belief. "After having carefully noted the real facts in the case, ask yourself if the 'melting pot' is even simmering!" he declared. Moreover, he asserted that in recent years, "we have had much nauseating gush concerning 'Americanization,' so called." He believed the "sentimental drivel about the 'melting pot' and 'Americanization'" was merely a smoke screen to prevent the American people from seeing the real dangers involved in a virtually unrestricted immigration from "questionable sources." He thought it imperative that unrestricted immigration from the Old World be halted to "provide employment for all of our people at decent wages and thus encourage the preservation of the American" He was convinced that a "heterogeneous, mongrel citizenship" would result in the destruction of the American republic "just as surely as it caused the decline and fall of ancient Rome." Of course, his views toward limiting immigration from Japan and Mexico were equally as pronounced.⁶

Concerning the "vexatious Negro problem," he noted that the abolition of slavery began the complication of the problem of the presence of an "unassimilable" race in the United States, for only a few years later Congress "saw fit to try a dangerous experiment by thrusting the ballot into the hands of the men of a race which had just emerged from a state of servitude." An "orgy of extravagance" and a "riot of corruption" followed. Thoburn believed that attempts to solve the "Negro Problem" were always "clouded and hindered by unreasoning prejudice, on the one hand, and an equally unreasoning sentimentalism on the other." The rational approach, he declared, required freeing the mind from both of these approaches. In his view, the essential question was not one involving "the color or odor of the Negro's skin," but one that considered "his temperament and his mental and moral attitude toward life as he finds it." Unfortunately, Thoburn asserted, "anyone who is really acquainted with the Negro in the mass must admit that as a race" they "are quite generally lacking not only in the element of character themselves but also in the matter of ability to recognize and appreciate character in other people." Indeed, he declared, "character must be the foundation of the citizenship of any democracy which is to endure."⁷

To Thoburn, the Negro people still remained "what the environment of the ages made them--an exotic race from the tropics." Most of them are "but imitative and without either the character or the initiative to make possible an independent progressive development." The real crux of the problem for Thoburn was the danger "that threatens the integrity of the white race." There seemed to be little danger of

legalized miscegenation, he declared, but "illicit miscegenation is a fact, an ugly, monstrous fact." Sadly, Thoburn stated, in most instances, the "racial traits of the least desirable ancestral stock are dominant in the personality of the hybrid individual." These traits included "instability, inconstancy, insincerity, superficiality, treachery and dishonesty and in nearly every instance a hollow conceit and an over weaning ambition"8

For Thoburn, the race problem was a "festering sore which needs attention" and which should not be put off to the next generation. It was necessary, he declared, to make "our sentiments known and felt rather than merely revising our opinions periodically to conform to the platitudinous declarations of this, that or the other political platform." Finally, he observed that "the people of Oklahoma have a peculiar opportunity to lead out in a constructive way" that "perhaps is unique among the states in the Union." Just how this would be done, however, he did not explain.⁹

He continued in his later years to ponder the racial problem, and eventually attempted to devise a scheme as part of a third-party movement which would develop answers beneficial to both races. Moreover, his views at that time would not have been considered reactionary or harsh. The majority of white people undoubtedly would have agreed with him, strange as that may seem in later years.

Thoburn's view toward the Indians of the United States was quite unlike his attitude toward blacks. Again, as was typical of his day, Thoburn viewed Indians in terms of how well they had adopted the culture of the whiteman. Thus he noted that the Indians of Oklahoma

were of diverse tribes and ethnic stocks and that they ranged from all "different types and grades, from the well educated, enlightened and cultured type which meets the caucasian on an equal basis, to that which clings to primitive beliefs, customs and manners" He pointed out that while the highest proportion of cultured and enlightened Indians were among the Five Civilized Tribes, "people of equal culture, refinement and worth are to be found among other tribes in various parts of the state."¹⁰

Thoburn seemed to develop a special empathy for the Plains Tribes after he had been with the Historical Society for several years. In 1922 he asserted that he had good friends among the Cheyenne, Comanche, and Kiowa Tribes, and "truer friends and men of finer spirit I do not know anywhere." He went on to declare that the "whole history" of Federal governmental policy regarding the management of Indian affairs is "a series of woeful blunders." Indeed, he asserted that "most if not all of our Indian wars were unnecessary--men of our race (horse thieves, whiskey peddlers, unfaithful government agents) were at the bottom of most of the trouble."¹¹

Thoburn apparently believed that Indians had demonstrated as a race that they could be assimilated into the white population, and that those who maintained their racial purity had the ability to function in a democracy. He was quick to point out that many of Oklahoma's leading citizens were of Indian descent. His viewpoint on race certainly influenced him in the research and writing of his Oklahoma history, and it was a factor in his growing interest and support of a third-party movement in politics.¹²

A few days after he left the employ of the Oklahoma Historical Society in 1931, he told a newspaper reporter that he had been unable to speak out on political matters because of being in the public service. To illustrate his attitude in that relation, he told a story about an unsophisticated Irishman who purchased an owl after being told it was a parrot. Several days later, the practical jokers who had sold him the owl returned and asked him if the bird had done any talking. The Irishman answered: "Niver a bit, but sure an' he's been doing a divil of a thinkin'." ¹³

Thoburn indeed had been doing "divil of a thinkin'" on political matters, and he had also done some talking in confidence. Moreover, on leaving the Historical Society he began developing his theories for a third-party movement and helped in the initial plans of organization. His views on national and state political affairs over the years were interesting and enlightening as to the character and philosophy of the man.

Thoburn was a staunch Republican when he first came to Oklahoma from Kansas via Washington, D. C. By 1910 he considered himself a "Progressive Republican," and he helped to organize a meeting of the Progressive Republican forces in Oklahoma. Yet as the years went by he became less a Republican and more an independent. Commenting on the presidential election of 1916, he observed that there was "no issue of consequence" between the two parties. It was merely a matter of the "outs" versus "ins." He did note that both Woodrow Wilson and Charles Evans Hughes were committed to programs of ultra preparedness for war and commented that this "craze" had been "artfully worked up by the

manufacturers of munitions and armaments." He hoped that Wilson would win the election, for he believed that would result in the dissolution of the Republican organization, clearing the way for a really constructive national party."¹⁴

Observing the turmoil in Russia during the First World War, Thoburn felt something should be done to support the "idealist government" of Aleksandr Kerenski. Thus he addressed a letter to General Hugh L. Scott urging that Theodore Roosevelt be commissioned a major general and be sent to Russia, "either with or without a command." He also suggested to the Daily Oklahoman that it publish an editorial on the proposition of sending "Teddy over there to help Ambassador Francis and Karensky in the effort to hold down the lid." Thoburn noted that the situation in Russia was "no ordinary crisis and I am sure that the Colonel is the man for the job." He believed this idea had been presented to President Wilson by General Scott, but that it had been turned down either for partisan reasons or because of the narrow vision of the president's advisors. Thoburn believed that Teddy's vigorous way of thinking and acting would put real "back-bone into the Karensk regime and what it would have saved Russia and saved the rest of the world too God only knows."¹⁵

Thoburn also was concerned during World War I about excessive profits by industrialists taking advantage of the situation. Referring to the "heartlessness of certain industrial leaders and their selfish course since the outbreak of the war," he observed that "there seems to be no limit to their rapacity." He believed that the government would have to begin "grappling with the problem of price fixing and wage regulation."¹⁶

Commenting on the national election of 1920, Thoburn acknowledged that the Republicans would probably win and doubted that there would be any improvements in the matter of "expenditures or the speculative craze and the high cost of living." "Two years hence," he observed, "the present party positions will again be reversed, the Republicans again 'pointing with pride' while the Democrats will be performing the 'viewing with alarm act'." Thus, "the old game of 'hornswoggling' the people will go on until something happens to put one or the other of the parties permanently out of business."¹⁷

In 1922 Thoburn secretly took part in a political affair which gave him considerable satisfaction. He reported to his friend J. F. Weaver that in Oklahoma City there "is a bunch of silk-stocking citizens . . . (300 of them to be exact--they belong to the Lakeside Country Club)" who would attest to Thoburn's ability in a political way if they only knew whom to blame for the failure of some nicely laid plans they had. They had made strenuous efforts to manipulate the location of a hard-surfaced highway financed with federal funds, which they sought "to take from the line that has the heaviest agricultural tonnage" coming into Oklahoma City in order "to add to the comfort and complacency of a bunch of pleasure seeking golf players." As it was, he noted, the golf players were at a loss to understand "how a pack of rustic clodhoppers, without any skill, influence or experience in politics can so successfully block their little game."¹⁸ Thoburn asserted that he had organized the farmers and counseled and encouraged them for nearly two years. He admitted that he was interested because of his forty-acre farm, but more important than

that he would always be "opposed to the means and methods resorted to in order to beat a farming community out of a better road just to please the folks who drive out to the golf links in limosines." He noted that if he were situated so that he could participate openly in politics, "I would surely enjoy the game on its own account, even if I played it only as a private citizen without any ambition for public preferment."¹⁹

By 1924 Thoburn was talking seriously about a national third-party movement. He believed that a progressive third-party movement could start in Oklahoma and would "sweep southward over Texas and northward across Kansas and Nebraska," as conditions were right for that sort of movement into those states. Moreover, Thoburn wanted to see the "real progressives of the south and west get lined up together." He noted that the fatal flaw of third-party movements since the Civil War had been their inability to unite South and West. Moreover, they each had fallen heir to leadership from the old parties. He hoped that the new party would be led by young men. Moreover, he believed that the new party must deal with the racial problem or else the South would have to remain solidly in the Democratic camp.²⁰

In 1926 and again in 1928, Thoburn raised the possibility of a third-party along the lines he had mentioned earlier; however, a new issue began to dominate his thinking: the desirability of maintaining the "noble experiment" or prohibition. By 1932 he believed that both parties had raised the "hue and cry for the end of prohibition" merely as a "smokescreen for their inability to devise constructive policies to deal with the depression." Thoburn decided that he would not vote

either for Hoover or Roosevelt since both showed weakness on the prohibition issue. Moreover, he believed that neither of the major parties was capable of dealing with the depression. He felt it was inevitable that a third party would rise and supplant one of the major parties "less than a year after the end of the current campaign." The new party, he believed, would save the nation from a possible communist revolution and lead it out of the depression.²¹

Soon after his removal from the staff of the Historical Society in 1931, Thoburn was taking an active part in attempting to organize a third-party. He began preparing questionnaires to be sent to leading citizens throughout the state in an attempt to recruit them to the new party. Among those with whom he corresponded regarding production of the questionnaires and political organization were H. Merle Woods of El Reno and H. M. Renner of Woodward. Thoburn apparently had been doing some recruiting, for Woods remarked in a letter to Thoburn that he was "glad to hear of the men you have lined up." Woods intended "to draw out a few of the fellows around here who are of the type we need."²²

In promoting a third party in 1931, Thoburn again focused on the need for a solution to the racial problem of the United States. He pointed out that there had never been an extensive, systematic collection of facts and data relevant to the problems on a national level. He urged, therefore, the creation of a commission to "direct and supervise the collection and compilation of the necessary data and information" which would be essential for a "systematic, scientific,

nation-wide study of the race problem as it involves the status and ultimate destiny of the people of African descent in this country."²³

He soon would discontinue his agitation for a third political party when he went to work for the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, supervising archaeological field work in northwestern Oklahoma. He was acutely aware that political activities along that line could result in his losing the job, an occurrence that he could ill afford in the midst of the Great Depression. The repeal of prohibition and the failure of the third-party movement must have been bitter disappointments to Thoburn, but he had better success and more long range impact with another of his crusades in the public interest-- the reclamation of the Great Plains.

Thoburn first became interested in the idea of storing surplus storm waters on the Great Plains the summer before his senior year at Kansas Agricultural College. Moreover, he had worked to promote irrigation while he was secretary of the Territorial Board of Agriculture. During the ensuing years he also spoke on the issue whenever he could; however, not until 1918 did he begin his crusade to reclaim the arid plains. Thoburn outlined his master plan for the Great Plains in a newspaper article published in 1922. His plan was aimed at banishing drought, preventing floods, and making the plains the breadbasket of the nation."²⁴

His basic plan involved storing most of the surplus storm waters which were allowed to run into rivers and down to the ocean before it reached the streams. This would be accomplished by erecting reservoirs on each farm. Such reservoirs then would be used for irrigation and

other economical uses. For example, Thoburn argued that the reservoirs would make the production of food fish possible in "thousands of places where such things now are unknown," and would also make possible water sports such as bathing, boating, camping, fishing, hunting, picnicing and skating in regions where now only barren prairie exist."²⁵

Another major benefit of the plan, according to Thoburn, would be an increase in the moisture content of the atmosphere. This would result in a lessening of the evaporative effect of the sun and wind on cultivated soil and growing vegetation. He also pointed out that in addition to using the water for irrigation, some would escape by seepage and springs. Thus the subsurface soil would be moistened, and dry draws and ravines would become running streams during most, if not all, of the year. In turn, this would make water power available where none had existed before. This system also would aid in preventing serious floods in the lower river valleys, as it would store most of the water before it entered the stream. There also would be an increase in wild water fowl and certain species of fur-bearing animals, and the water supply for domestic stock purposes would be increased. Moreover, soil erosion and damage to bridges, roads, and fences would be minimized.²⁶

Thoburn was emphatic in his insistence that the system should be comprised of thousands of small reservoirs built and owned by individuals. These reservoirs would be located to catch the runoff at its source rather than letting it get into rivers and thus requiring the construction of huge dams. "Water could be stored much more easily before it reaches the river than afterward," he observed.

Thoburn believed that the Great Plains thereby would become the bread-basket of the nation. Indeed, it would be if it had the moisture. Cooperation had to take place across the Great Plains to make his plan completely effective, he declared, and therefore it was necessary to develop a consciousness on the part of the citizens of the Great Plains as a unit. He sincerely believed that "within ten years, there will be no arid plains if the plains people themselves back the movement."²⁷

As early as 1914, Thoburn was writing numerous citizens in western Oklahoma to obtain information on flood damage. He felt he needed some hard statistics to make his point in arguing for flood prevention and irrigation. For example, he wrote William P. Hickock of Taloga asking for an estimate of "loss to crop and property in the valley of the two Canadian Rivers in Dewey County, using a separate blank for each river." He believed that if the people of western Oklahoma could be shown statistics regarding flood loss, they would "conclude the time had arrived for concerted action in the matter of water storage on a large scale and flood control" ²⁸

In 1918 he became more active in promoting his plan. Again he busied himself gathering statistics. First, he called on the Bureau of Crop Estimates to obtain statistics relating to the losses in crop and livestock production through drought on the Great Plains during 1917 and 1918. He was informed that the Bureau had never been called on to make such a computation, but Thoburn informed them that it was just as important to know the total amount and value of such losses as it was to know the size and value of a bumper crop. Finally, one official of the Bureau wrote to inform Thoburn how to make such

computations for himself. Thoburn proceeded to make an exhaustive and supposedly accurate series of computations concerning drought losses sustained by citizens of Oklahoma and several other states of the Great Plains in the decade 1909 to 1918. His results were staggering; he estimated that for the entire area during the period such losses ran into the several billions.²⁹

By 1918 Thoburn believed that "the time has come for action." He seriously was considering taking a "brief leave of absence" from the Historical Society to spread the message needed "to arouse the people of the Plains and the eastern borders thereof to the importance of an organized effort to put an end to the perennial menace of the drought" and to diminish "the blasting effects of the sirocco or the hot wind." He observed that he had put in more time studying the matter than "anyone else now living." He felt that he could convince people that his plans were practical from a business standpoint and that he could "appeal sufficiently to the sentimental side of the proposition" to arouse the needed enthusiasm. "May be I am only a wild-eyed dreamer," he postulated, "but someone must dream these things before they can be brought to pass."³⁰

In November of 1918 he reported that a movement was underway to hold a preliminary conference of representatives from the states of Nebraska, Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. This would be a small preliminary conference for the purpose of developing an organization for a systematic effort "in the way of dissipating the prevalent provincialism of the people of the Great Plains" and fostering a "spirit of fellowship and community of interest" that would make the execution

of his master plan possible. The conference, however, was not held; Thoburn would have to wait until 1923 when he made a more concerted effort to spur the movement.³¹

Thoburn again considered taking a leave of absence from his work at the Historical Society in 1923 to "throw myself into the new movement in order to make it go." Early that year he addressed letters to the commercial organizations of four of the principal towns in western Oklahoma asking them to "arrange dates for public meetings which I could attend and speak on the theme of 'Drought Cost and Water Conservation'." One town declined, but Thoburn found another to take its place on his proposed itinerary. His schedule included Altus, Clinton, Woodward, and Guymon. In April he set forth on his one-man campaign "with some degree of anxiety," for although he had "often discussed this matter with personal friends and had them convinced," it remained to be seen whether he could "convince the people collectively." Thoburn found tremendous interest in western Oklahoma for his ideas; as he spoke, he received invitations to visit other communities. Consequently, he addressed meetings in eleven towns; had he accepted all the invitations to give the same speech in other communities, he would have "been out there for a month." As a result of his efforts, delegations from the various communities were to meet in Oklahoma City on June 18 to confer with the boards of directors for the city and state chambers of commerce to "induce those bodies to join in calling a Plains-wide conference on the subject to be held in Oklahoma City in the next fall."³²

The meeting took place as planned on July 18 and established a preliminary organization "for the purpose of issuing a call for a Plains-wide conference to be held in Oklahoma City." This conference would "inaugurate a movement on the part of the people of all the Plains states for the general storage of the surplus storm waters of the entire Plains region." An executive committee was appointed at the meeting on July 18 and scheduled a conference at the Huckins Hotel for July 24.³³

In August of 1923, Thoburn reported an incident which strengthened his resolve in the movement. As he was sitting down to breakfast one morning, two tenant farmers "came to the door asking for work wanting to mow the lawn or anything else to enable them to earn a dollar." The hot winds had wiped out all of their labor for a season. Neither of them had eaten anything since noon the previous day and, Thoburn reported, "each has a dependent family. It wrings one's heart to know that such conditions can happen on some of the best agricultural land in the state of Oklahoma."³⁴

Thoburn's movement seemed destined for a successful beginning, as the executive committee called for a Plains-wide conference to take place November 7 and 8, 1923, in which delegations were to arrive from across the Great Plains. By October 17, however, the conference had been postponed indefinitely because of the exigencies of local flooding in Oklahoma City, which was occupying local leaders in the Chamber of Commerce. This, of course, was the worst flooding in Oklahoma City's history, one ironically causing the cancellation of Thoburn's conference; it was a manifestation of the problem he was seeking to control.

However, he optimistically observed that though the meeting had been postponed, it had not been cancelled permanently.³⁵

With the cancellation of his long-dreamed-of Great Plains conference, Thoburn continued gathering statistics to help promote the cause in the future. In November of 1923 he wrote Stanley Draper of the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce to suggest the gathering of statistics on the damages caused by the recent flooding of the North Canadian River; he said this would be helpful in passing needed legislation. He wanted to know if the Chamber would be willing to collect such data from the "cities and towns along the line of the valley and from the public utility corporations." He suggested that the following information be obtained: total damage to residences and household furniture; total damage to business, houses and stock of merchandise; total damage to real estate used for business or residential buildings; and total damage to streets, roads, bridges, sewers and other public property within municipal limits.³⁶

Despite his dreams, Thoburn was never again able to come as close as he had in 1923 to organizing a Plains-wide movement for reclamation of the arid area, yet he would remain interested in the subject throughout his life. Events in the conservation movement by September of 1925 had him disillusioned with the movement in Oklahoma: "I have no faith in its success, either now or later," he asserted. "The plan I have in mind can await the disillusionment of the interested public," he declared, "though it is to be regretted there should be any delay on such an account."³⁷

The thrust of the movement for flood control in 1925 was governmental spending for the construction of large reservoirs. This, of course, was contrary to Thoburn's views, for he favored holding the surplus storm waters more nearly at their source before they reached the rivers. This would be more effective, he believed, and would spread the benefits throughout the Plains rather than having them accrue to a few cities near the lakes. Yet he did not want his views to be made public on this in 1925, as he did not care to be considered a "knocker" in matters such as "drainage, irrigation, conservation and flood control, which are of such vital interest to the people of this and neighboring states."³⁸

By April of 1927 Thoburn's passion for his plan for the Great Plains again was inflamed. He exclaimed to J. F. Weaver that "I am going to organize that Plains conservation movement before long and it will take me out of my present position--it is infinitely larger and of more immediate importance than my present work" at the Oklahoma Historical Society. "Some younger man can take up the latter, get better paid for it and be accorded better support than I ever would." He believed that he could "do this new stunt in a year and a half or two years and then give my whole time to literary work."³⁹ Again, however, Thoburn was unable to follow through with his plan. In 1931 he revealed that his zeal for the conservation movement at least rivaled his enthusiasm for history. He informed an old friend that "this historical work is fascinating, but the dream of having the surplus storm waters of the Great Plains country restored, for use as well as a measure of flood prevention, is still the passion of my

life." Moreover, he hoped that he would be able to give "the proposition the assistance of a beneficial push before the end of my active career."⁴⁰

Thoburn's attempt to give the movement a push would be confined to writing articles and letters rather than organizing a movement as he had in the early twenties. In 1931 he prepared a news release couched in terms of an interview with Joseph B. Thoburn, but apparently written by him; this dealt with the causes of the drought then gripping the country, sending huge dust clouds across the land. He again used the opportunity to advocate his ideas for the storage of waters on the Great Plains, which would have the long-range effect of altering the climate.⁴¹

In 1933 he addressed a series of letters to Henry A. Wallace, Secretary of Agriculture, in which he expounded his ideas on conservation and reclamation. In these he forcefully argued that the various bureaucratic agencies involved in conservation work on the Federal level should be combined into one reclamation and conservation bureau "which would be supreme in all matters of water conservation, flood control, river drainage, navigation, etc." He also spoke strongly against the use of the Army Corps of Engineers in conservation and reclamation projects. He preferred using civilian engineers. Thoburn argued that military engineers tended to be concerned less with the economic aspects of engineering than did civilian engineers because their salaries and allowances would go on regardless of any "wasteful extravagance, just so he does not exceed the limits allowed by a generous appropriation."

Thus it would be a matter of sound policy to confine "military engineers to military engineering."⁴²

Thoburn also argued forcefully in his letters to Wallace against the use of large reservoirs for so-called flood prevention. He felt that it was "an economic crime" to flood thousands of acres of the most valuable agricultural land. He favored numerous smaller reservoirs in the "broken and rolling uplands." There they would actually keep the rivers running and would help "prevent floods, minimize erosion and otherwise benefit a whole valley instead of chiefly a single community." He also argued forcefully that all reservoirs built by damming rivers which have their source in the Rocky Mountains are destined to be filled with "sand and other silt" and over the years the storage capacity of even huge reservoirs would be greatly reduced."⁴³

As with his political activities, Thoburn's service with the Federal Emergency Relief Administration and the Works Progress Administration led him to curtail his activities on behalf of promoting his views on conservation. In writing to a candidate for the U. S. Senate in the middle thirties, he did venture an essay on his conservation beliefs and the folly of the construction of large reservoirs. He urged the candidate to advocate a program of real conservation such as Thoburn had expounded over the years. Referring to his work for the WPA Historical Records Survey, he observed that "you may readily surmise how long my employment on such work would last if I were known to be writing thus to you."⁴⁴

Thoburn's crusades on the subjects of race, politics, and conservation had played a major role in his life. His views on race relations and politics would especially influence his concept of history, and his enthusiasm for the conservation movement, which rivaled his passion for history, was an outgrowth of his early experiences on the Great Plains and his lifelong reverence for the agrarian way of life. Although in his later years Thoburn would be unable to zealously pursue his crusades on these three subjects, he could still lead a useful and productive life until his death in 1941.

FOOTNOTES

¹Thoburn to Cornelius Vanderbilt, March 31, 1921, Folder TH-1.1, TP. See also, Cornelius Vanderbilt to Thoburn, March 22, 1921, *ibid.*

²*Ibid.*; Undated mss. of speech given before the Sons of the American Revolution, Folder MA-1, TP. It seems likely from the content of the speech that it was given in the late nineteen-teens or early twenties.

³*Ibid.*

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶*Ibid.*; Thoburn to Cornelius Vanderbilt, March 31, 1921, Folder TH-1.1, TP.

⁷Undated mss. of Speech, Folder MA-1, TP.

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰Thoburn to Dr. Paul Dowd, July 28, 1920, Folder SC-1, TP.

¹¹Thoburn to Thomas Baird, May 16, 1922, Folder CH-3, TP.

¹²Thoburn to Dr. Paul Dowd, July 28, 1920, Folder SC-1, TP.

¹³Lingenfelter, "Thoburn's History," p. 6.

¹⁴Senator ? Cummings to Thoburn, January 29, 1910, Folder OK-8, TP; Howard L. Stephens to Thoburn, Folder TH-1, No. 1, TP; J. B. Dickenson to Thoburn, August 1, 1920, *ibid.*; Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, July 26, 1916, Folder WE-2, TP.

¹⁵Thoburn to W. G. Link, December 24, 1919, Folder ME-4, TP; Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, July 27, 1916, Folder WE-2, TP.

¹⁶Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, April 20, 1918, *ibid.*

¹⁷Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, August 5, 1920, *ibid.*

- ¹⁸Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, May 31, 1922, Folder WE-2, No. 2, TP.
- ¹⁹Ibid.
- ²⁰Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, December 5, 1924, Folder WE-2, No. 3, TP.
- ²¹Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, October 3, 1926, *ibid.*
- ²²H. Merle Woods to Thoburn, August 17, 1931, Folder NI, TP; H. M. Renner to Thoburn, August 19, 1931; *ibid.*; H. M. Renner to Thoburn, September 30, 1931, *ibid.* Also, there are three separate questionnaires found in the Thoburn files and each is in a different folder. See Folders TH-1.3, OK-8, and NI.
- ²³Untitled Manuscript, n.d., Folder NI, TP. See also, Thoburn to Eugene Arnett, November 23, 1931, Folder RA-2, TP.
- ²⁴"Billions Can Be Saved to Farmers of Oklahoma by Private Water Storage Plan, Expert Declares," The Daily Oklahoman, Sunday, September 24, 1922.
- ²⁵Ibid.
- ²⁶Ibid.
- ²⁷Ibid.
- ²⁸Thoburn to Honorable William P. Hickock, June 17, 1914, Folder IN-1, No. 2, TP. See also, various letters in Folder IN-1.
- ²⁹Untitled Manuscript, n.d., Folder BI-1, TP.
- ³⁰Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, September 4, 1918, Folder WE-2, TP.
- ³¹Thoburn to C. M. Curston, November 14, 1918, Folder BI-1, TP. See also, Joseph B. Thoburn, "New Reservoir Forerunner of Vast Storage System Destined to Save Destructive Floods of Plains to Ammelioriate Hindrances of Climatic Conditions," The Daily Oklahoman, Sunday, April 12, 1918, Section F, p. 4.
- ³²Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, June 9, 1923, Folder WE-2, No. 2, TP.
- ³³Thoburn to Eugene P. Gum, July 23, 1923, Folder CO-1, TP; Thoburn to Colonel J. F. Rooney, June 29, 1923, *ibid.*
- ³⁴Thoburn to Victor H. Cochrane, August 11, 1923, Folder NI, TP.
- ³⁵Thoburn to J. F. Easely, October 17, 1923, Folder CO-1, TP; Thoburn to Clark E. Jacoby, August 2, 1923, *ibid.*; Thoburn to Elmer E. Fraker, September 14, 1923, Folder UF, TP.

³⁶Thoburn to Stanley Draper, November 2, 1923, Folder CO-1, No. 2, TP.

³⁷Thoburn to James Ryan, September 28, 1925, *ibid.*

³⁸*Ibid.*

³⁹Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, April 23, 1927, Folder WE-2, No. 3, TP.

⁴⁰Thoburn to Jack Potter, January 3, 1931, Folder TR-4, TP.

⁴¹Untitled Manuscript, August 20, ?, Folder TH-1.3, TP.

⁴²Thoburn to Henry A. Wallace, May 23, 1933, Folder CO-1, TP.

⁴³Two undated letters from Thoburn to Henry A. Wallace, *ibid.*

⁴⁴Thoburn to ?, September 20, 1934, Folder MA-2, No. 1, TP.

CHAPTER IX

IMPACT AS HISTORIAN AND ARCHAEOLOGIST

Joseph B. Thoburn was a pioneer both in the history and archaeology of Oklahoma. Indeed, he was the first to do significant work in either of these disciplines as they related to the state. For Thoburn, history was his first love, and it took precedence in his view over archaeology. In his historical writings, he endeavored to chronicle the past as accurately as possible and in such a way as to promote pride and patriotism. He was not prone to deep interpretive analysis; rather as a pioneer in his field, he primarily was concerned with uncovering and presenting the basic story. However, he did find archaeology fascinating and devoted considerable time and energy to it. With advances in the technology of archaeological investigation, his theories in that discipline have been questioned; nevertheless, his work was of tremendous value because he preserved many artifacts and, more important, he stimulated others to enter the field.

Although Thoburn pioneered both in the history of Oklahoma and in the state's archaeology, his primary interest over the years clearly was the field of history. In 1921 he reported that he had just returned from the "roughest trip" he had ever experienced. He had spent three weeks in northeastern New Mexico and "found many ancient village sites, pictographs, etc.," all of which was very interesting to him. Yet, he

reflected, "archaeology is only a side line with me, hence it was the incidental part of the trip."¹⁷ The things that meant the most to him were the "places I visited, the people whom I met, the information I gleaned, and the inspiration that I gathered in a historical way."¹

Thoburn's most important historical writings were his three surveys of Oklahoma history, the first of which appeared in 1908. This initial effort was written as a school text. Modifications of this provided the basic outline for his major surveys of Oklahoma history in the future. Thoburn admitted making some mistakes in his first effort as it was hastily done. However, he revised the book in 1914 utilizing new materials and correcting mistakes.²

In 1916, he produced his multi-volume survey of Oklahoma history. The first two volumes of the five-volume set consisted of his survey, while the final three volumes were biographies of subscribers. This survey of Oklahoma history was remarkable considering that he had little secondary material to use. He had to do extensive research and rely almost exclusively on primary research materials.³

In 1929 he teamed with Muriel Wright to produce an exhaustive survey of Oklahoma history to that time. This again was an expanded version of his survey of 1916, but contained much more in the way of content footnotes. This survey in many ways is still the best work on pre-statehood Oklahoma. It provides a massive amount of information in a relatively readable style. Again, the final two volumes of the four volume set were devoted to biographies of individuals subscribing to the publication. In addition to his books, Thoburn published numerous articles on Oklahoma history during his career between 1907

and 1940. Principal outlets for his articles were Sturm's Oklahoma Magazine and The Chronicles of Oklahoma. Most of his articles were either biographical in nature or else dealt with Indian or military themes.⁴

Thoburn also published widely in newspapers in Oklahoma and in other states such as Kansas. He believed that history should be presented in popular form, accurately yet readable. His journalistic background undoubtedly influenced him in this regard. With only a bachelor's degree in agriculture, he had never attended a graduate college to study history; therefore the philosophy of writing history primarily for historians had not been impressed on him.⁵

Thoburn believed that one of the essential functions of history was to promote pride and patriotism among the citizenry in general and among youth in particular. He was convinced of the value of a knowledge of local history by the people of any given community or commonwealth in the promotion of patriotism. As examples, he cited the "patriotism of the Swiss mountaineers or of the Scottish Highlanders."⁶

History had a special role to play in Oklahoma, Thoburn believed, because of its complexity. The state had been peopled, he noted, "by pioneers who were diverse as to origin and descent and who differed radically in sentiment, tradition and ambition." Therefore, "there is a lack of that unity of spirit which distinguished the people of neighboring states." As a result he asserted that "the true spirit of Oklahoma patriotism is still in the process of germination." Fortunately, the history of Oklahoma was so interesting, he believed, that it should not be difficult to interest young people in its study.⁷

He illustrated his belief in the value of history and the importance in promoting patriotism in the "prefatory" of his school textbook in 1908:

The history of Oklahoma is a record that should bring a feeling of pride to the bosom of every citizen. It is a story we should know. We love best when we know what we love and why. It is our hope that when the story of Oklahoma is told to her citizens, the blood may mount to the cheek, the heart throb more quickly, the eye flash with patriotic fire and love. There is no surer way to bring this about than to teach the youth the magnificent history of our new state.⁸

He personally was intensely patriotic throughout his life, and the importance of history and fostering patriotism always was a factor in motivating his writing.⁹

In order to make history interesting to the average reader, he believed that the romantic aspects of the past should be highlighted. In July of 1923, he observed that there was a new cult of American historians who "can see no way to achieve distinction except by 'exploding myths,' throwing heroes off their pedestals and otherwise giving vent to expressions of a spitefully destructive spirit." He also noted that "nothing in American history is safe or sacred from the impious assaults of this bunch of seekers after cheap notoriety and publicity." Conversely he declared that "I am just old-fashioned enough to want to see some of the romance of American history untouched."¹⁰

Thoburn also attempted in his historical writing to foster the basic values of individual initiative and work. Answering an inquiry from a young man interested in historical society work, Thoburn informed him of the training that would be necessary to take up that

line of activity in the future, noting that graduate training in the field of history would be a necessity. "It may call for years of struggle, but struggle means the development of strength," he exclaimed. Yet, "life is not to be measured in terms of years or of material wealth accumulated, but rather in terms of helpful service to one's fellowmen, to society and to his native land." Thus it was worthwhile to prepare for success, he stated, and that achieving it depended on whether an individual was "willing to pay the price in the elements of determination, devotion, and application--if he is willing to deny himself some of the pleasures and some of the ease that tends to allure and to work, work WORK!"¹¹

Thoburn always preferred to emphasize individuals who set positive examples. He was particularly interested in heroic military figures, unselfish Christian missionaries to the Indians, outstanding Indian leaders, bold pioneer settlers, and others who were inspirational through example. Conversely, where he was required to allude to "the presence and activities of the outlaw element," he "avoided details and personal mention since I do not feel that that sort of material or, rather, that sort of people have any rightful place in history."¹²

Generally speaking, Thoburn was not prone to interpretive historical writing. However, at times he would formulate interesting and incisive conclusions regarding certain events. For example, in his edition of 1910, while discussing warfare between whites and redmen on the Great Plains, he noted that there were "some of its phases which, in this later and more peaceful period, are well nigh incomprehensible." But, he noted, "the interest of the two races were so antagonistic, and

so irreconcilable under the conditions then existing, rendered the warfare thus engendered cruel . . . and vengeful to the extreme." Moreover, he declared, "It would not be . . . fair for us . . . to sit in judgment on the deeds of those who resorted to what they regarded as practical means for solving the problem that did not seem to them to be capable of a specific solution."

Thoburn also strongly emphasized the impact of frontier conditions on Oklahoma in the twentieth century. In 1929 he asserted that Oklahoma's "social conditions, institutions, ideas, traditions and precedences have not yet entirely emerged from the formative period." This was to be expected, he noted, for the same had taken place in older states over a longer period of time than had elapsed since the settlement of Oklahoma. Consequently, he believed that "there will be opposition to every measure and movement that has for its purpose the betterment of the commonweal, but the leaven of progress and civic righteousness is here and, in due time, it will make manifest its influence and power."¹⁴

One of Thoburn's most outstanding characteristics as a historian was his emphasis on the accuracy of detail in his own work and in that of others. In August of 1925 he chastised Major E. E. Hadley, director of publicity at Oklahoma A & M, for inaccuracies in an article published in the press. Thoburn stated that he was surprised to see in Hadley's story on the origin of county names "that you paid no attention to my request for correction of some of the statements contained therein." Thoburn observed that every reporter in citing historical facts had two obligations in addition to that of trying to make an interesting story, "namely, one to the authority quoted and one to the reading

public and each of these have a right to expect fair treatment and good faith at his hands."¹⁵

In June of 1930, Thoburn learned that Professor J. Frank Dobie of the University of Texas planned to have the various cattle trails that led from Texas to Kansas "officially marked as 'Chisholm' trails!" Thoburn remarked that Jesse Chisholm had been involved in developing only one cattle trail. Thoburn rued the fact that Professor Dobie had proceeded to develop a program without consulting officials in Oklahoma, noting that "it may well be doubted whether, if someone in Oklahoma were to propose to arbitrarily name any old trail across the state of Texas, such a course would be tamely accepted by Texas people."¹⁶

Thoburn found it difficult to stand idly by without taking action. For example, he informed J. F. Weaver in January of 1915 that there was a "hot air artist" from Ada named McMillan who wrote about Indian matters. The Daily Oklahoman, Thoburn noted, used much of McMillan's material. What irritated Thoburn was the fact that McMillan "never hesitates because of the lack of data or facts--he just draws upon the resources of a very versatile imagination and goes right on." Thoburn noted that McMillan recently had "dished up" a story on the Cherokee General Stand Watie which was "full of misstatements." Thoburn planned to write a story "dated out of Webbers Falls for the purpose of setting matters right." Indeed Thoburn noted that he repeatedly had protested the paper's publishing this "brand of 'dope'."¹⁷

Several weeks later, Thoburn reported that he had sent a story on Stand Watie to the Oklahoma City Times and that a marked copy would be sent to the man at Ada later. He felt that the article would "jolt

him a little," for after pointing out and correcting all of the errors and misstatements, Thoburn's article concluded "as follows: 'with the correction of the foregoing, the story as sent up from Ada is substantially correct.' The joke of it is that 'the foregoing' takes in about all there was to the story." He later reported that there had not been a single story from Ada since the Webbers Fall story appeared. In April that year Thoburn noted that "Ada correspondent is still resting from his labors." In the meantime, Thoburn had felt required to "kill off another fake correspondent" He noted that this man's stories were all dated out of Blackwell, and he "found in The Daily Oklahoman an easy mark until I saw fit to aim a 42 cm howitzer from a little town out in the western part of the state, and now he has dropped out of the game, too."¹⁸

One of the most impressive aspects of Thoburn's work was his intensive use of primary source materials in his comprehensive surveys of Oklahoma history. Much of the basic structure of Oklahoma history that students now take for granted was pieced together by him. Where possible he would obtain material directly from individuals involved in the events about which he happened to be writing. Often he would locate a son or daughter who could provide material. For example, in 1908 he corresponded with General George B. Cosby, who participated in campaigns against the Indians on the Plains in the late 1850's.¹⁹

Thoburn also went to great lengths to locate photographs of important individuals mentioned in his books. For example, he searched for several years to obtain a photograph of the Cheyenne Chief Black Kettle, who was slain at the Battle of the Washita. He pursued this

effort through numerous channels, all of which ended in failure. However, "one day in 1910, there drifted into Oklahoma City a derelict of the old plains." This fellow had had a long and colorful career, serving among other things as cowboy, buffalo hunter, mule skinner and camp cook. Thoburn reported the old fellow had experienced "a losing fight with John Barleycorn and . . . was shy of the sight of one eye as a result of lax social relations--you know the type." Thoburn spoke on occasion with this character, once asking him if he had ever seen a photograph of Black Kettle. The drifter replied that he had not, but "knew someone who either would have one or would know who had."²⁰

Thoburn assumed the "old chap" merely wanted to borrow a half dollar as usual. However, Thoburn gave him the money and expected no results from his comments about the Black Kettle photograph. Several days later, the old drifter asked Thoburn if he had heard from the gentleman he had contacted about the Black Kettle portrait. Thoburn had not written yet, whereupon the old timer volunteered to write himself. Thoburn "said good-bye" to another half dollar and supposed that was the end of the episode. "Within a week, however, he came to me bringing a small card photo, just the size of the engraving in my book." Thoburn was elated, commenting that he did not know of "anything in the course of all my work in this line of research and investigation that has given me more personal satisfaction in my success in this quest for a portrait of Black Kettle."²¹

Joseph B. Thoburn was widely regarded as Oklahoma's outstanding historian at the time of his death in 1941. As a pioneer in the field

of Oklahoma history, he greatly contributed to the preservation of the state's past by gathering huge amounts of primary source material and putting together the first comprehensive survey about the state. His pioneering work undoubtedly influenced the entrance into the field of talented individuals such as Grant Foreman, E. E. Dale, and others. Because of his reliance on primary source materials, much of Thoburn's work is still of considerable value to students of history.

Thoburn also did significant pioneering work in the field of archaeology in Oklahoma. As with history, he was self-taught. His archaeological theories have not withstood the test of time as well as his Oklahoma history surveys. This is largely due to the advancements made in archaeological technology and techniques.²²

Perhaps the most important and interesting theory developed by Thoburn as a result of his field work was his notion that the Indian population in the United States was not of Asian origin and had not come to the North American continent by way of the Bering Strait as was, and still is, the conventional wisdom. Rather he believed that the Indians of the North American continent originated in what he called the "racial swarming ground" in southern Mexico and Central America. There all of the requirements necessary for a dense population of high cultural advancement were at hand. He theorized that such dense populations, if not reduced by disease or war, sooner or later sought relief in migrations.²³

He believed that at least five and perhaps seven great migrations had taken place at intervals averaging approximately a century each. Five of these, he theorized, were the parent stocks of the groups

known in modern times as the Algonquin, Iroquian, Siouan, Muskogean, and Caddoan. Moreover, he believed that the Athabascan tribes (including the Apache and the Navajo) were descendants of another big migration from the south as were possibly the Shoshone tribes (Ute, Snake, Comanche).²⁴

He based these theories on his findings when excavating mounds in eastern Oklahoma. He was convinced that all the mounds in the area were the result of human origin. Apparently, more recent techniques have shown that the vast majority of the mounds in the area are of natural origin. Many of the items found in the mounds were put there as the result of burials in more recent periods than Thoburn had realized. Thus, grave doubts have been cast on his theory of the racial origins of the American Indian.²⁵

In northwestern Oklahoma, Thoburn discovered what he considered to be evidence of Pueblo Indian cultural influence in the area. For example, he found irrigation canals and believed that in these mounds he had uncovered what had been imitation pueblos. His findings in the western part of the state also led him to solidify his theory on the origins of the American Indian and the racial swarming area in southern Mexico and Central America. Again, more recent investigations have cast doubt on his findings in this area. Again, for example, it appears that the mounds in this area for the most part are of natural origin.²⁶

Thoburn's archaeological work cannot be taken lightly, however. Indeed, further investigation may uncover evidence that would tend to support his theories, but, whether or not that happens, he made his

mark in Oklahoma archaeology as a pioneer. He was the first to do any systematic study, and his work stimulated others to follow. One recent observer in the archaeological discipline noted that Thoburn did an excellent job given the lack of technological advancements of his day and the limited resources with which he was allowed to work.²⁷

Joseph B. Thoburn's impact as Oklahoma's pioneer historian and pioneer archaeologist has been profound. He began working in Oklahoma history in a period when very few people appreciated the effort. He perhaps did more to popularize Oklahoma history than any subsequent historian to date. Moreover, his early activity stimulated others to work in the field of Oklahoma history. His multi-volume history of Oklahoma, published with Muriel Wright in 1929, still serves as a valuable survey, especially on Oklahoma history prior to 1900. As a pioneer in archaeology in Oklahoma, Thoburn again opened the field and generated interest on the part of trained professionals during the ensuing years. Although his archaeological theories are now questioned, his role as the first investigator in the field cannot be depreciated.

By the time he was removed from the Oklahoma Historical Society in 1931, Thoburn therefore had established himself as Oklahoma's track-maker in history and archaeology. And during his last years, he remained productive.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, May 24, 1921, Folder WE-2, No. 2, TP.
- ²See Joseph B. Thoburn and Issac M. Holcomb, A History of Oklahoma (San Francisco: Doub & Company, 1908), and J. B. Thoburn and Issac M. Holcomb, A History of Oklahoma (Oklahoma City: Warden Company, 1914).
- ³J. B. Thoburn, A Standard History of Oklahoma (5 vols.; Chicago and New York: The American Historical Society, 1916).
- ⁴J. B. Thoburn and Muriel Wright, Oklahoma: A History of the State and Its People (4 vols.; New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, Inc., 1929). An extensive listing of Thoburn's publications may be found in the bibliography of this work.
- ⁵H. M. Woods to Thoburn, March 29, 1928, Folder BI-1, No. 3, TP. A few examples of Thoburn's historical writings for newspapers are: "Fort Gibson, A Place of Much Importance in Early Days of Southwest," Muskogee Daily Phoenix, April 12, 1931, Sec. B, p. 3; "Satanta's Last Boost," The Wichita Eagle, June 25, 1922, n. p.
- ⁶"Untitled Mss.", n. d., Folder OK-4, TP.
- ⁷Ibid.
- ⁸Thoburn and Holcomb, A History of Oklahoma, p. v.
- ⁹"Untitled Mss.," n. d., Folder OK-4, TP.
- ¹⁰Thoburn to Mrs. Emma B. Alrich, July 11, 1923, Folder TH-1.1, No. 3, TP; Thoburn gave a talk on "the romance of Oklahoma history" as the principal speaker on the program for the Oklahoma Day Celebration in El Reno on November 16, 1922. See "El Reno Celebration Honors 'Oklahoma Day'," The Daily Oklahoman, November 17, 1922, p. 9.
- ¹¹Thoburn to John D. Swihart, March 20, 1928, Folder IN-1, TP.
- ¹²Thoburn to E. L. January 15, 1929, Folder BI-1, No. 3, TP.
- ¹³J. B. Thoburn, "A Campaign of the Texas Rangers Against the Comanches," Sturm's Oklahoma Magazine, X (No. 5, 1910), 38.

- ¹⁴Thoburn and Wright, Oklahoma: A History, Vol. 2, p. 779. See also, Lingenfelter, "Thoburn's History," p. 6.
- ¹⁵Thoburn to Major E. E. Hadley, August 6, 1925, Folder OK-7, TP.
- ¹⁶Thoburn to Professor T. U. Taylor, June 28, 1930, Folder CH-6, TP.
- ¹⁷Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, January 23, 1915, Folder WE-2, No. 2, TP; Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, February 1, 1915, *ibid.*
- ¹⁸Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, March 17, 1915, Folder WE-2, TP; Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, April 26, 1915, *ibid.* Thoburn also attached such literary notables as Zane Grey and Edna Ferber for their haphazard regret for accuracy of historical detail. See Thoburn to A. M. Runyon, January 27, 1930, Folder FE-3, TP.
- ¹⁹Thoburn to General George B. Cosby, July 28, 1908, Folder RA-3, TP. See also Thoburn to Director, Department of Public Archives, Ottawa, Canada, June 15, 1934, Folder TR-3, TP.
- ²⁰Thoburn to W. M. Camp, October 19, 1919, Folder WA-2, TP.
- ²¹*Ibid.* The folder TH-1 in the Thoburn Papers contains numerous letters of Thoburn's inquiring about photographs and historical documents. Another example of Thoburn's diligence was his successful search over an eight-year period to find a photograph of General Matthew Arbuckle. See Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, October 11, 1915, Folder WE-2, No. 2, TP.
- ²²Larry Banks, unpublished preface for "The Northern Caddoan Peoples of Prehistoric Times and the Human Origin of the Natural Mounds, So-called, of Oklahoma and Neighboring States," by Joseph B. Thoburn, unpublished manuscript, Oklahoma Historical Society.
- ²³"Memorandum," Folder TH-1, p. 1, TP; J. B. Thoburn, "The Tropical and Sub-Tropical Origin of Mound Builder Cultures," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, XVI (No. 1, 1938), 101-117.
- ²⁴"Memorandum," Folder TH-1, pp. 2-3.
- ²⁵J. B. Thoburn, "Notes on Archaeology," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, VII (No. 3, 1929), 112-114; Larry Banks, unpublished preface to "Natural Origins."
- ²⁶Thoburn and Wright, Oklahoma: A History, Vol. I, p. 16; J. B. Thoburn, "Ancient Irrigation Ditches on the Plains," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, IX (No. 1, 1931), 56-62; Sherman P. Lawton, "Pueblo Influence in Oklahoma," Bulletin of the Oklahoma Anthropological Society, XIV (March 19, 1966), 100.
- ²⁷Banks, unpublished preface to "Natural Origins."

CHAPTER X

THE FINAL DECADE

The two-fold impact of being removed by executive veto from his job at the Historical Society and of suffering the unexpected death of his wife only a few hours later did not end Thoburn's work. In the years immediately following his removal, he was accorded several honors and was elected to the Board of Directors of the Historical Society. Moreover, his employment with the Federal Emergency Relief Administration and with the Works Progress Administration allowed him to continue working in the fields of history and archaeology. And, in 1938 he returned to the Historical Society as Custodian of the Union Army Room. He would face hard times in the last decade of his life, both physically and financially; yet at the end of his life, he was proud of what he had accomplished and had attempted to achieve.

Unfortunately, one of Thoburn's most interesting projects in the 1930's ended in complete failure. He wanted to "introduce the Plains people to each other, through the medium of the metrical expressions of their poets, bards, minstrels, baladists, and rhymesters," thereby contributing toward the creation of a "regional consciousness that is all but lacking, especially in the meridian directions." He hoped to accomplish this by publishing an anthology of Great Plains verse.¹

He had started the compilation of various pieces of verse prior to 1920, but his project was so ambitious that he never could consider it completed. In 1922 he noted that he had "sufficient material for a book" but that he wanted to make it "the book." Thus he had not felt like "slighting it or unduly hastening its completion." He was determined that, when he finished with his anthology, there would be "no occasion for anyone else to glean that field again in the near future." He also planned to include some "prose addenda, with explanatory notes in brief 'who's who' sketches of many of the writers." Moreover, he felt that "if it gets into the right hands, it should make its compiler some money."²

By 1932 the work still was unpublished, but Thoburn asserted that "this seemingly tedious task has also been very much in the nature of a labor of love." He explained that he had reviewed "something between 7,500 and 8,000 items of metrical literature . . . from which less than 500 selections had been made." For some reason this anthology, which undoubtedly would have been an interesting and valuable work, never was published. The strange thing is that he had definite plans to publish the book in 1934, and a newspaper article, on the occasion of his death, stated that he had published an anthology of Great Plains verse in 1934. However, he apparently had difficulties locating a publisher for his work. A letter from a W. E. Bard of Dallas appears in Thoburn's letter file dated June 15, 1935, in which Bard noted Thoburn's difficulties and suggested he try several publishers in Texas. Muriel Wright reported that "the completed manuscript of this anthology with an introduction by William Allan White, of Kansas, was

lost prior to Dr. Thoburn's death." This must have been a great blow to Thoburn to lose such a manuscript.³

During the year immediately following Thoburn's removal by executive veto from the Historical Society, several honors were accorded him to demonstrate the support and respect that many felt toward him. First, he received an honorary Doctor of Letters degree from Oklahoma City University. This undoubtedly was an honor he greatly appreciated, for he held only a bachelor's degree in agriculture and sometimes felt that professional disciplines of history and archaeology looked down on him because of his lack of formal training.⁴ On "Oklahoma Day," November 16, 1931, Thoburn was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame, administered by the Oklahoma Memorial Association. He was modest in telling others about this selection. Thus a correspondent from Arkansas wrote that it is "quite an honor to be in Oklahoma's Hall of Fame and I'm sure your girls appreciate it even if you don't care much about it."⁵ Thoburn had been one of the original thirty directors elected when the Memorial Association was created in 1927. The Memorial Association in later years became the Oklahoma Heritage Association. Thoburn apparently was active in the work of this Association.⁶

On January 28, 1932, Thoburn was elected to the Board of Directors of the Oklahoma Historical Society. He was present and after his election was asked to participate in the deliberations of the board. From that point until his death, he was active in Historical Society affairs. In fact, he was not absent from a single meeting of the Board of Directors until July 26, 1934.⁷

Thoburn was especially interested as a member of the Board of Directors of the Historical Society during the 1930's in the marking of significant historic sites in the state. He discussed the way this type of project had been carried out by other institutions and suggested some of the more important locations to consider for marking. He maintained his interest in historical markers during the rest of his life. For example, in 1936, he was especially interested in marking the grave of Jesse Chisholm. He also was interested in the idea of placing a marker in the northwest corner of the state where New Mexico, Texas and Oklahoma joined as well as at the point where Oklahoma, Kansas, and Colorado meet.⁸

For some reason, Thoburn had little luck in getting Jesse Chisholm's grave marked. The people of Enid had planned to locate Chisholm's grave, exhume the body, and remove his bones to Enid. Thoburn managed to persuade them to leave Chisholm's remains interred where they had been for so many years. He remarked that he had tried to get the management of the Boy Scouts organization to have a marker erected, but they never seemed to have any money. "Some of these days," he asserted, "I may have a 'ship come in' in which event I will have it marked myself."⁹

In 1938 he supervised preparing the text for ten historic markers to be erected at Fort Gibson. This work apparently was done shortly after he rejoined the staff at the Historical Society.¹⁰

Interestingly, Thoburn was able to make peace with Robert L. Williams and even come to admire him by 1939. After developing an eloquent essay on the role of William P. Campbell in the Society's

development, Thoburn then discussed Williams, noting that he "did not become interested in the Historical Society till near the end of his term as the state's chief executive." He was chosen a director of the Society because this was a custom commonly afforded former governors. However, Williams took the compliment seriously and had given the Society the "benefit of his best thoughts and his ablest efforts by day and has literally dreamed of the possibilities and needs of such an institution by night." Thus Williams was helping spur "the rapidly increasing influence and inspiration" of the Historical Society in the "minds and hearts of Oklahoma people." Finally, Thoburn declared that Campbell had "dreamed a worthy dream and that Williams had 'the worth and the will' to build that dream into a splendid achievement." This indeed was a remarkable statement for Thoburn to make, given the rancor existing between him and Williams only eight years previously.¹¹

During the 1930's, Thoburn continued to believe in the beneficial value of centennial celebrations and pageants. He viewed such events as a means of inspiring public interest in history. He was especially interested, for example, in the centennial celebration of Washington Irving's tour on the prairies, and was a leader in the movement to see that each community along Irving's route undertook to stage a local celebration. He even published an article in The Chronicles of Oklahoma to promote the effort.¹²

Thoburn also attempted to inspire others to make centennial observances of special historical events. For example, he wrote the commander at Fort Sill in 1934, informing him of the approaching 100th

anniversary of the Leavenworth-Dodge Military Expedition of 1834. Thoburn noted that a great peace council had been held with the Comanche, Kiowa, and Wichita tribes, and that this was the "first time that the Indians of these tribes had ever been brought into official relations with the Government of the United States." Thus, Thoburn observed, "a commemorative centennial celebration of some sort might be well worthwhile." He further suggested that it would be appropriate to be staged under the auspices of the three tribes involved. He offered to render personal assistance in the planning of such a celebration.¹³

Apparently Thoburn's position as custodian of the Union Army Room in the Historical Society, which he held from July of 1938 until his death, was nominal. In fact, he served more as a research consultant for the Society staff and for individuals doing research in Oklahoma history."¹⁴

In 1940 he apparently tried his hand at writing historical fiction. His manuscript, "For the Land of His Fathers," was rejected by the Thomas L. Crowell Company as containing interesting information but, as a story, "lacking in some element that would be essential to its success."¹⁵

Thoburn also had the opportunity to do some significant work in local history outside his connection with the Historical Society. In 1936 he became an editorial consultant for the Works Progress Administration. His job was to research and write a history for each county in Oklahoma. In doing this he wrote to various individuals in the state to enlist their aid and secure materials for the various

county histories. During his tenure with the WPA, he was able to research and write most of the county histories and collected much significant material on local history.¹⁶

Thoburn also was able to do significant work in archaeology during the 1930's. In 1932, for example, he was sent by the Historical Society to examine a burial mound near Gore, Oklahoma. There he hoped to find evidence to strengthen the theory he had developed over the years that the original inhabitants of the area had come in waves of successive migration from Central America rather than from Asia by way of the Bering Strait.¹⁷

In 1934 he was hired by the Federal Emergency Relief Administration for "non-relief employment" as Thoburn put it, "delving into the traces of prehistoric human life in the Oklahoma Panhandle." He worked for the FERA until 1938. In northwestern Oklahoma he found what he considered to be evidence of the influence of Pueblo culture, such as ancient irrigation ditches and the remains of structures that had been built in imitation of the pueblos of the Southwest. He previously had explored the irrigation ditches in the area and thus was interested in returning for a closer look.¹⁸

During the last years of his life, Thoburn had to face increasingly difficult circumstances. Prior to his enforced retirement from the Historical Society, he had never been able to accumulate any savings. Circumstances forced him to move in 1940 to 830 Northeast 21st, and again in 1941 to 137 Northeast 14th. Mrs. Claude Hensley, whose husband was an intimate friend of the historian, would decry Thoburn's pathetic quarters with its one-burner stove during these later years.¹⁹

In this period Thoburn almost daily would walk to the Hensley residence at 1303 North Broadway, arriving at approximately 3:00 p.m. Invariably he still would be there at dinner time, whereupon Mr. and Mrs. Hensley would invite him to dine and he would accept. Mrs. Hensley's daughter recalls that Thoburn always ate heartily and with a little prompting would accept the last ear of corn or what other items might remain at the end of the meal. In her view, Thoburn was both lonely and hungry.²⁰

By 1939 the infirmities of old age were creeping up on Thoburn. Joan Keyes recalls watching Thoburn at dinner and wondering if he would be able to get the soup from the bowl to his mouth without spilling it as he shook so much. Compounding Thoburn's physical problem was the fact that he was hit by an automobile on January 13, 1939. Later he reported that the car had been driven by "a careless and irresponsible youth" with the result that he had to endure much involuntary idleness during many months of the recovery period. During that time he suffered because his "senses of eyesight, feeling and hearing each was more or less impaired." During this period of recovery he also observed that his memory was not clear, but that he seemed to be regaining in September "some of the temporarily impaired faculties and, moreover, the element of caution in attempting to traverse a thoroughfare overcrowded with traffic."²¹

Given Thoburn's penchant for being involved in traffic accidents, not to mention his episode with the vault in the Colcord Building, it seems almost miraculous that he lived to a relatively old age. In 1924, he had been involved in an automobile accident when he received

a "bad welt" on the side of his head and a "crushing blow" on his chest, causing two broken ribs on the right side and one on the left side and some "badly sprained cartilages."²² Thoburn apparently believed that his surviving the accident in 1924 was a result of divine intervention. Thus, a correspondent replied to one of Thoburn's letters by congratulating him on his "providential escape from death when he swooped so close. And what I agree with is that the Father has some great work for you to do."²³

In 1925, Thoburn came within inches of being run down by a reckless and perhaps drunken driver who failed to stop. He managed to avoid future automotive mishaps until 1932. Early in November of that year, he was riding with a friend who was "trying to keep a dry-weather schedule when he struck a stretch of oiled highway upon which a light rain had just fallen." The driver lost control and "skidded into the ditch at a speed of about 50 miles per hour." Thoburn suffered bruises, abrasions, and cuts, but these were "nothing in comparison with the shock."²⁴ Again, in 1934, Thoburn was injured in an automobile accident while visting relatives in the East.²⁵

Thoburn's traffic accident in 1939, therefore, was simply "more of the same" for the unfortunate historian. This time, however, he would never completely recover physically. In September of 1940 he observed that, while he had always been interested in anthropology, "the time of my participation in such quests will doubtless soon be terminated by the flight of years which is unmistakably making its mark on my physical frame." Reflecting his deep religious faith, he continued that when it came time for him to "wing my way to that

spiritual ground from which no traveler ere returneth, it will be to renew the acquaintances and friendships of earlier existence on earth."²⁶ On Friday morning, February 22, 1941, Thoburn suffered a "paralytic stroke in his home and was taken to University Hospital. There when visited by his friend, Claude Hensley, he could only squeeze Hensley's hand in response to Hensley's conversation. His final battle was lost a week after entering the hospital."²⁷

At the time of his death, Thoburn had \$45.18 in the bank. In addition, he had "approximately 150 unbound sets of his Oklahoma: A History of the State and Its People," and he owed the Western Bindery of Oklahoma for labor and materials a claim of \$195. He still owned the ten acres remaining to him from his original forty-acre farm; in 1935 he had given each of the daughters fifteen acres. No matter how difficult times became, Thoburn apparently had been determined to hold on to his little patch of land."²⁸

Joseph B. Thoburn was buried in an out-of-the-way spot in Rose Hill Cemetery in Oklahoma City. His daughters apparently could not afford to spend much money, so he did not receive a headstone. Thus, Oklahoma's pioneer historian and archaeologist was laid to rest in a pauper's grave.

Despite Thoburn's sad situation during the last two years of his life, however, he never complained about his financial status. He had the satisfaction of knowing that he had dedicated his life to public service and that he had made his mark in Oklahoma history.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹Thoburn to Irving Weinstock, November 25, 1932, Folder UF, TP.
- ²Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, November 3, 1922, Folder WE-2, No. 2, TP; Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, June 9, 1923, *ibid.*
- ³"Thoburn Called One Who Made, Wrote History," The Daily Oklahoman, March 3, 1941, p. 16; W. E. Bard to Thoburn, June 15, 1935, Folder BI-1, TP; Thoburn to Irving Weinstock, November 25, 1932, Folder UP, TP. In the Thoburn Papers, Folder TH-1C, there appears a partial table of contents for the anthology. It appears to list only about a third of the items that would have been in the original manuscript.
- ⁴"Thoburn Called One Who Made, Wrote History," The Daily Oklahoman, March 3, 1941, p. 16.
- ⁵Linnie Glover to Thoburn, n. d., Folder TH-1, No. 1, TP.
- ⁶Blanche Lukas to Thoburn, September 28, 1927, Folder ME-2, TP; O.H.P. Brewer to Thoburn, n. d., *ibid.*
- ⁷"Minutes, Quarterly Meeting of Board of Directors, Oklahoma Historical Society, January 28, 1932," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, X (No. 1, 1932), 140-141; "Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors, Oklahoma Historical Society, July 26, 1934," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, XII (No. 3, 1934), 369.
- ⁸"Quarterly Meeting of the Board of Directors, Oklahoma Historical Society, October 27, 1932," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, X (No. 4, 1932), 598; "Minutes of the Quarterly Meeting of the Board of Directors, Oklahoma Historical Society, October 29, 1936," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, XIV (No. 1, 1936), 123.
- ⁹Thoburn to Dean Taylor, August 30, 1939, Folder CH-6, TP.
- ¹⁰Documents containing texts of historic markers, Folder OK-6, TP.
- ¹¹Thoburn to "Miss Breckenridge," September 14, 1939, Folder OK-2, TP. See also, R. L. Williams to Thoburn, April 4, 1938, *ibid.*
- ¹²Joseph B. Thoburn, "Centennial of the Tour of the Prairies, by Washington Irving (1832-1932)," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, X (No. 3, 1932), 426-433; "Minutes of Quarterly Meeting of the Board of Directors

of Oklahoma Historical Society, April 28, 1932," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, X (No. 2, 1932), 198; Dan W. Peery to Thoburn, April 6, 1932, Folder IR-1, TP.

¹³Thoburn to General William M. Cruikshank, n. d., Folder LE-1, TP. Thoburn also attempted to inspire an observance of the Centennial of the Chickasha Migration to Indian Territory. See Joseph B. Thoburn, "Centennial of the Chickasha Migration," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, XV (No. 4, 1937), 387-391.

¹⁴Wright, "Pioneer Historian," 406.

¹⁵Robert L. Crowell to Thoburn, April 5, 1940, Folder TH-3.3, TP.

¹⁶Thoburn to Esther J. Sheets, June 18, 1936, Folder OK-7, TP; A. L. Crable to Hon. Ron Stephens, June 24, 1938, *ibid.*

¹⁷"Discovery of Crumbling Bones of Vanished Race Under Mound Near Gore Attracts Scientists," The Muskogee Daily Phoenix, May 22, 1932, p. 1; "State Archaeologist Hopes to Find 'Lost Race' in Relics and Bones From Gore Burial Mound," The Muskogee Daily Phoenix, May 30, 1932, p. 1.

¹⁸Thoburn to Dr. Warren K. Moorehead, June 6, 1936, Folder OK-8, TP.

¹⁹Oklahoma City Directory (Kansas City, Mo.: R. L. Polk Company, 1940); Oklahoma City Directory (Kansas City, Mo.: R. L. Polk Company, 1941), p. 785; Personal interview by the author with Joan Keyes and Mrs. Mott Keyes, July 5, 1975.

²⁰Interview with Joan Keyes and Mrs. Mott Keyes.

²¹Thoburn to Dr. Arthur C. Parker, September 4, 1940; Folder TH-1, No. 3, TP; see also, Thoburn to Mrs. Cora Case Porter, August 30, 1939, Folder FO-2, TP; J. R. Keaton to Thoburn, April 12, 1939, Folder CH-2, TP.

²²Thoburn to J. F. Weaver, September 26, 1924, Folder WE-2, No. 3, TP.

²³E. D. Smith to Thoburn, September 21, 1924, Folder NI, TP.

²⁴Thoburn to Irving Weinstock, November 25, 1932, Folder UF, TP.

²⁵Isabel Thoburn Currie to Editor, El Reno American, June 12, 1956, Thoburn File, Claude Hensley Collection, in possession of Joan Keyes, Oklahoma City.

²⁶Thoburn to Dr. Arthur C. Parker, September 6, 1940, Folder BI-1, No. 3, TP.

²⁷Interview with Joan Keyes and Mrs. Mott Keyes; "J. B. Thoburn, State Historian, Is Dead," The Daily Oklahoman, March 3, 1941, p. 1.

²⁸"General Inventory and Appraisement," Thoburn Estate, Probate File 17318, Oklahoma County Courthouse.

CHAPTER XI

EPILOGUE

In 1954, Claude Hensley suggested to H. Merle Woods that something be done about Joseph B. Thoburn's unmarked grave. Hensley had been Thoburn's close friend in later years and was the last person he recognized before he died. Woods published an editorial in his El Reno American entitled "The State's Neglected Duty." Soon the Board of Directors of the Oklahoma Historical Society launched a special effort to raise funds to establish a suitable monument to Thoburn. The leader of the fund-raising effort was Judge Edgar S. Vaught. Officials of Rose Hill Cemetery offered to provide an appropriate site for Thoburn's grave and monument without charge. Sufficient funds were raised so that an impressive and beautiful Oklahoma granite marker, costing almost \$2,500 was erected. More than 100 people contributed to the fund.¹

The monument was unveiled on Thursday, July 27, 1956. On the monument was an outline of the state, the state seal, and a brief biographical tribute to Thoburn. This was an impressive occasion. Several months later, one of the young directors of the Historical Society called attention to the fact that \$47.50 still remained in the Thoburn Memorial Fund. He moved that this balance be used for purchasing flowers for Thoburn's grave each Memorial Day. His

motion was approved and the plan was carried out. To this day, although the fund long since has been exhausted, a staff member of the Oklahoma Historical Society each Memorial Day places flowers on Thoburn's grave. This is appropriate, for Joseph B. Thoburn contributed more than he received to the Society--as well as to his adopted state of Oklahoma.²

FOOTNOTES

¹ Claude Hensley to Mrs. Isabel Thoburn Currie, n. d., Thoburn Clippings, Hensley Collection, in possession of Joan Keyes; Interview with Joan Keyes and Mrs. Mott Keyes; "The State's Neglected Duty," The El Reno American, February 11, 1954, p. 5A; "Official Minutes of Quarterly Meeting, Board of Directors, Oklahoma Historical Society, October 27, 1955," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, XXXIII (No. 4, 1955), 560; "Minutes of the Fourth Quarterly and Annual Meeting of the Board of Directors of the Oklahoma Historical Society, January 26, 1956," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, XXXIV (No. 1, 1956), 123; "Official Minutes of Quarterly Meeting, Board of Directors, the Oklahoma Historical Society, April 26, 1956," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, XXXIV (No. 2, 1956), 253.

² "Monument to Noted State Historian Unveiled," The Daily Oklahoman, July 27, 1956, p. 9; "Official Minutes of the Quarterly Meeting, Board of Directors, Oklahoma Historical Society, July 25, 1957," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, XXXV (No. 3, 1957), 374.

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