

VIRGIL BROWNE: BIOGRAPHY
OF AN OKLAHOMA CITY
COMMUNITY LEADER

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CHAPTER I

EARLY LIFE

"Oklahoma City [was] a man-made town"¹ commented Virgil Browne while president of the city's Chamber of Commerce. The city in its early years had no natural advantages of waterways, nor was it located on one of the heavily traveled traditional east-west roads. And the advantage of being located near the center of the state was shared with Guthrie, El Reno, and Shawnee. Through the foresight, energy, and desire of its leaders, Oklahoma City became an outstanding community. It continued to prosper because the city builders remained vigilant and took advantage of every opportunity to make their town an even better place to live. Without the constant effort by these leaders to foster growth and opportunity, Oklahoma City would have lost its position of supremacy to Tulsa, Wichita, Dallas, or Fort Worth. These communities, along with many others, were competing for the same markets and resources.

Browne, who arrived in Oklahoma City in 1922, was not one of the original pioneers, but he gave freely of his many talents to better his adopted city. He established himself as a community leader in the 1920's, and during the difficult days of the Great Depression, he was one of the outstanding community builders. While the nation fought the Second World War, he labored to assure that the home front carried its share of the battle. At the same time he laid the foundation for re-

forms and improvements in the state's institutions. After the war he continued working to make Oklahoma City and the state of Oklahoma a better place to live. By the time Browne moved to Oklahoma, he already had been tested several times. His climb to success in business had been difficult, but in the tradition of Horatio Alger he had not become discouraged or given up. Through hard work and quick thinking, along with some luck, he became successful.

Browne's claim to fortune in business and as a community builder began during the traumatic days when the scars of the Civil War were beginning to heal. At the end of the war a long and hard depression settled on East Texas. Most of the people there had invested their money in worthless Confederate bonds. The slaves then were freed without compensation to owners, and cotton prices were low. During the period of Reconstruction the depression remained. Rutherford B. Hays was elected President by Congress in 1877 and Reconstruction came to an end, but the hard economic conditions remained.²

At Mount Pleasant, Texas, on November 21, 1877, Browne was born to Spillman and Josephine Jackson Browne. The farm where he was born was owned by his grandfather, Theophilis Andrew Jackson, and his grand uncle, James Jackson. The Jacksons were well established and highly respected in the community. Before the Civil War they had been wealthy, and under the conditions of Reconstruction they were considered well-to-do. The boy's father, Spill, moved to Texas from Alabama to manage several tracts of land Virgil's grandfather, John Tanner Browne, had purchased. Thus the baby had the advantages of being a member of one of the leading families.³

The farm offered many advantages to the boy. He could fish either

in the Sulphur River or in White Oak Creek which ran near the property. There were two fish ponds which his grandfather had built on the plantation; one pond was stocked with perch and bass, the other with carp. The carp, which were considered an exotic fish, had been imported from Europe. Although they proved to be inferior to eat, many guests were delighted to watch the fish rise to the top looking for food when Jackson would strike his cane on a fence post. The perch and bass were an economical dish to serve the many house guests.⁴

The plantation had a large orchard which supplied the family with fresh fruit from May until late autumn. Before Virgil's birth the fruit had been distilled into brandies and vinegar, but while he was a boy the still seldom was used. The fruit was eaten by the family or given away. Cotton was the main crop. The farm also had its own cotton gin which was used by several local farmers. All the manual labor was done by ex-slaves. In these pleasant conditions Browne began learning the proper role of a Southern gentleman from a leading family.⁵

He accepted the proud, self-confident characteristics of a person who was born to lead. He learned that he should be his own employer and that certain types of labor were beneath his social station. As the first son of a planter, he was expected to accept all the responsibilities of the exalted position, and he was to reject all things which were beneath his class. During these formative years the boy began to dream of becoming a doctor like his uncle, James Jackson, who had graduated from Tulane Medical School. After graduation "Uncle Doc," as he was known, moved with his brother to Mount Pleasant where he established a successful medical practice and became a land speculator.⁶

In 1890, Uncle Doc died suddenly without leaving a will. Most of

the family assumed that Josephine Jackson Browne and her sister Alma Jackson Camak would receive most of their uncle's property. But James Jackson's two half brothers and four half sisters demanded their share of the estate. To satisfy each claimant the land was sold at auction at very low prices. The Browne family had not fully recovered from the traumatic experience of Uncle Doc's death when on August 5, 1890, Virgil Browne's mother passed away. At the time of her death, Mrs. Browne was thirty-four years old and the mother of three children: Virgil, age twelve, Alma, age nine, and William, age seven. Her death marked the beginning of a new and different life for young Virgil Browne.⁷

Shortly after the funeral, Aunt Alma and her husband, J. M. Camak, and their children moved into the big house with the Browne family and Grandfather Jackson. Soon Mrs. Camak had taken full control of the house and the children, but she was partial to her own children. At least Virgil believed she was unfair, and one day he "lit into her and said she came into our house and took over, and she treated her children better than us, that her husband was unable to provide the living for them and if it wasn't for my father and grandfather furnishing the living for her family that they would be in the poor house."⁸ Jackson overheard the boy's angry statements and decided to improve things. After the fall school term, Virgil was sent to live with his Aunt Denie Long in Tyler, Texas.⁹

Virgil's education had followed several different courses up to that time. The first school he attended was Jones Chapel, a church and school combined. The teacher, Mark Spivey, stayed at the Browne home and walked with the Browne and Camak children to school. Later the Browne children were sent to Mount Pleasant where they boarded with the

Williams family. When Virgil became large enough to be trusted with a horse, he rode to school with a Black man as escort. Later the boy began walking the two miles from the family home to the Mount Pleasant School. All the schools the Browne children attended were one-room affairs in which all the grades sat together.¹⁰

While attending the Mount Pleasant School, young Virgil experienced an embarrassment which shook his self-confidence. The teacher assigned each of the children a verse to memorize and recite at a general meeting of parents and students. Browne learned his lines, but when he looked out at the crowd his mind went blank, and he finally was led from the laughing group. In later years Browne commented "that I . . . never forgot the experience and all through my life this thing has haunted me to such an extent that to this day I dread to get on my feet and say things that I would like to say."¹¹ However, he was not shy or timid when talking in a group or face to face. Inasmuch as he was the youngest student in the school, he took liberties which were denied other children; the older children were required to talk in a whisper, but Virgil spoke right up, much to the dismay of the older children. He soon learned that while in a group he had more freedom than he had in front of an audience.¹²

The ego of the proud boy received another blow while attending school. The children played a game by joining hands in a circle and revolving, singing "King William was King George's Son." At a certain point in the song each boy was to kneel in front of the girl he most admired and rise and kiss her. While playing the game, Virgil knelt in front of the girl he admired and rose to kiss her, but she refused him. The public rejection hurt Virgil's pride to the quick. The two inci-

dents resulted in the boy having a deep desire to be liked by others. He also developed a desire to be better than others. After leaving the Mount Pleasant School during the winter term of 1891 and moving to live with his Aunt Long, he continued to be driven by a desire to be accepted by his peers; yet at the same time he wanted to outshine them.¹³

The two terms of school he spent in Tyler were pleasant, but in the spring of 1892, Spill Browne decided to quit managing the plantation and begin some other line of work. After looking around, he decided to sell washing machines. To help him in his new venture he brought his two sons, Virgil and Will, to live with him in Mount Pleasant. For several weeks the two boys and their father washed clothing all over two Texas counties but did not sell a single washing machine. The people who were interested in buying did not have the money to make a cash payment, and credit was not available. The people with money had others do their washing, so they likewise were not interested in washing machines. When Spill's money began running low, he sold his buggy and had the two boys ride the team of fine black horses to one of their aunt's farms some twenty miles from Tyler. After delivering the horses, the two boys caught a train to join their father.¹⁴

In Lufkin, Texas, a half brother of the boy's grandfather worked as a millwright, and Spill hoped he might find some work with him. More important, the trip was a face saving one for Spill, who did not want to return to the plantation and admit that his business venture had failed. Things were slow in Lufkin and the family did not stay long, but while they were rooming at the Principal Hotel young Virgil heard a story which he enjoyed repeating. The manager of the hotel received for safe-keeping the billfold of one of the house guests. The manager was busy

and in a hurry so he did not notice the physical characteristics of the patron. The next morning someone asked the manager for his billfold and he produced it. A few minutes later the hotel manager found the guest still in bed asleep and realized that the wrong man had the billfold. The manager woke the guest saying, "Get up you sleepy head! Another man has gone off with your billfold and you are laying here asleep!"¹⁵

After leaving Lufkin the Brownes moved to Beaumont, Texas, where Spill was employed at a sawmill and Virgil started working at a fruit stand. The boy enjoyed his work, and he was assured of something to eat although the wages were low. The father was not accustomed to manual labor and thought it was a humiliation to his social position. He worked only a few days, then quit and took his family to Lake Charles, Louisiana, where his brother, Robert L. Browne, ran a casino and entertained the customers as a humorist.¹⁶

At Lake Charles the boys lost part of their naiveté about life. Uncle Bob and a woman the boys thought was their uncle's wife welcomed them into their home. The couple had been married earlier, but the woman did not approve of running a gambling place and divorced her spouse. Under the strain of the depression, however, she had returned to her ex-husband and attempted to remarry. Uncle Bob refused to marry the same woman twice, and his ex-wife finally returned to her family in Mississippi. When she moved out, Spill, Virgil, and Will were required to find new quarters. Uncle Bob did not want to run a home for unproductive people.¹⁷

Besides running the casino, Uncle Bob was an enthusiastic hunter and fisherman as well as an interesting teller of stories. Because he knew where hunting and fishing were good and could entertain people,

Charles and William Mayo employed him to take care of their yacht, the North Star, which was anchored near Lake Charles. When a party was going out on the yacht, he would make all the arrangements for supplies and equipment. He also would accompany the parties. After each trip he would return with stories to tell his cronies. The stories and the thought of owning a yacht fired the imagination of Virgil. He developed a desire to own his own yacht, and later, after becoming a success in business, he owned several fine craft.¹⁸

Soon after arriving at Lake Charles, Virgil, who even as a boy was quite resourceful, began earning his living by trolling the Calcasieu River for bass. He then divided his catch into two-pound bundles and sold these in the community. While the boy was supporting himself, his father spent most of his time in and around the games of chance, but after a string of bad luck at the tables, Spill began looking for work. The first employment he found was in a sugar refinery. Virgil also went to work at the refinery taking trash off the conveyor belt that ran from the yard to the mill. Between selling fish and working at the sugar mill, Virgil believed that he was doing all right, but his father had difficulty with the manager and quit. He also required that his son leave the job, and thus the family again was without means.¹⁹

Within a few days Spill began firing a brick kiln, and Will and Virgil moved into an empty kiln. At night the boys slept on a cart used to deliver bricks, and during the day they cooked their meals on a dutch oven they built from broken bricks. Despite these humble living conditions the family's income was getting low, but Virgil had been able to save a little money for clothing. One night in mid-winter, while Spill was firing the kiln and the boys were sleeping on a cart, a tramp from

the nearby railroad came to sleep with the boys near the fire. The next morning Virgil discovered the bum had stolen all his money, forcing him to remain clad in tattered clothing.²⁰

When the family funds were almost gone, Spill quit the job at the kiln and took a contract to cut wood about fifteen miles from Lake Charles. The father planned that the small boys would help him in the woods, so the family rode a logging train to the camp where they moved into a dugout. This proved a difficult situation in which to live, especially for people accustomed to a large house with many servants. After making themselves as comfortable as possible the Brownes started to work. The boys proved too small for the task, for they could not handle their end of the crosscut saw or cant hook. To get help Spill returned to Lake Charles where he hired a "bar fly" named Mike. When Mike arrived in the logging camp, he looked around and did not find a saloon so he returned to Lake Charles. At this point Spill was forced to give up the wood contract. After returning to Lake Charles, Spill told Virgil that any further schooling was impossible, and he could not do any more for his son. Virgil would have to make it alone. The news came as a shock to the boy, but he resolved to make the best of a bad situation. He asked his father to buy him some new clothing and a ticket to Houston, Texas. The saddened older man complied, and the boy caught the train to what would become his rendezvous with destiny.²¹

Houston was an exciting place in 1893 when Browne first arrived, but the boy from Mount Pleasant was low on pocket money and could not pause to appreciate the richness of the community's life. He was able to rent an attic room which could be reached only by a ladder. Since he did not know how long he would be without work, he lived on bread and

butter. He had worked a little around a grocery store in his hometown; therefore, he began looking for employment in one of the stores. But he was too young and too small to work in the stores, and since he did not know the city he could not work as a delivery boy.²²

After several discouraging days fruitlessly searching for work, Browne became desperate and was ready to go to work on a farm as stoop labor. One Saturday, therefore, he went down to the French Market and began looking for a kind-faced farmer who might hire him, but the pride and arrogance of his training kept him from approaching any potential employers. After spending several hours wandering about the stands and listening to the bargaining, Browne returned to his room broke and hungry. He did not know where to go or what to do.²³

The next day, a Sunday, he was standing on the corner of Main and Preston worrying about his future when someone yelled, "Hey, kid, you want a job?"²⁴ Browne was afraid that the speaker was talking to someone else. He turned around and saw a man looking directly at him. Hal Nolan, the head clerk for a drugstore, wanted someone to help at the soda fountain. The job paid three dollars and fifty cents per week. Browne was able to find a place nearby where he and another boy shared a bed and received two meals a day for ten dollars per month. The remainder of his salary he used for laundry, clothing, spending money, and savings. Despite the small margin between necessary expenses and total income, the boy managed to save part of his wages. This could provide a cushion for the future.²⁵ When he went to work in the drugstore, neither he nor his employer realized that Dame Fortune was beginning to smile on the red-headed boy. Within a few short years Browne was combining the information he gained at the soda fountain

with the knowledge he picked up in the pharmaceutical business to make concentrated syrups for the soda pop business. His climb to business success began with this job, but it was a long road to the top. This same road was open to everyone, but he was willing to do the hard work necessary to travel this route.

A combination of forces caused the boy to become engrossed in his new employment and to want to learn as much as he possibly could about the entire drugstore and soda fountain business. He naturally was curious, and the drug business offered a suitable substitute for his dream of a medical profession. The room in which he lived was small, dark, and smelly, and was far from conducive for lounging during idle hours; therefore he stayed at the store and worked--and learned. He knew that promotion was possible only if he knew how to handle the position above the one he held. As a result he spent long hours at the store making himself useful.

By taking an interest in the store, Browne gained the respect of his employers. Soon Nolan and his prescription clerk, Mr. Bennett, were allowing him to fill bottles of quinine, castor oil, turpentine, and paragoric. By accomplishing these simple tasks, he was encouraged to begin working at more complex and interesting projects. In a short time he knew the names of most of the drugs and chemicals so that he could wait on the customers. One day he overheard Nolan telling Bennett, "That red-headed kid can be a registered druggist in a year if he keeps doing like he is."²⁶ Bennett disagreed, however. The boy decided to prove Bennett wrong and set himself the goal of becoming a registered druggist.²⁷

A few weeks after the conversation, Nolan bought his own drugstore

and Browne went to work for him. The new store did not have a soda fountain so "the kid" spent most of his time keeping the shelves stocked and working as a general handy man. When someone came in to have a prescription filled, the prescription clerk, Mr. Peek, watched over the youth's shoulder while he made up the order. During this time he became efficient at filling ordinary prescriptions. He also mastered the art of rolling pills and making all types of powders and tinctures.²⁸

The prospects for the boy were improving, but his character would not allow him to work long for another man. In a short time he "got too smart alecky and Peek fired him."²⁹ He soon found employment at the Lewin and Anderson Drugstore on Main Street. There he worked as a soda jerk and began learning the mysteries of mixing soft drinks. But his sharp tongued comments to the other soda jerk and a dispute over broken glasses resulted in an unhappy situation. One day he saw an advertisement in the newspaper for a soda jerk at the store; knowing this referred to his position, he quit before he was fired. Before finding another job, Browne took stock of what had occurred and decided that if he hoped to succeed he would have to curb his tongue and learn the art of being a salesman. In a few days he had a fourth job.³⁰

About the same time he received a letter from his father who had returned to the plantation at Mount Pleasant. Spill wanted his son to return home and finish school. After nearly a year in Houston, during which time the boy had learned more than any school could offer, he returned to the family circle to renew his education. This attempt at further education was short-lived, however, because he was older than the other students. He had developed other interests and had been involved with events in the real world which made the books seem timid.

He wanted something more exciting than a one-room school could offer.³¹

For the first twelve years of his life Browne had lived in comfort and ease although life did not offer splendor. Then fate dealt a severe blow which tested his mettle for the next four years. His dreams were shattered and were replaced with poverty, hunger, and despair. But through hard work he had overcome his difficulties and gained a wealth of knowledge which would be useful many times in later life. The school of hard knocks had been constructive.

FOOTNOTES

¹Virgil Browne, Speech to Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, Jan. 1938, Browne Collection.

²Virgil Browne, personal interview with the author, Apr. 7, 1973.

³Gaston L. Litton, ed., History of Oklahoma at the Golden Anniversary of Statehood (New York, 1957) IV, 707; Virgil Browne, Unpublished Manuscript Autobiography, I, p. 1 (In his later life Virgil Browne made at least three attempts to write his autobiography. All three works follow the same general outline before 1922; however, each work varies on the amount of detail. One work does not attempt to go beyond 1922 and the other two works are fragmented. For convenience of footnoting I have arbitrarily numbered these unpublished, typescript works which are hereinafter cited as Autobiography I, II, III.); Autobiography II, p. 1; Autobiography III, p. 1.

⁴Autobiography I, p. 3.

⁵Autobiography II, p. 3; Autobiography III, p. 4.

⁶Virgil Browne, personal interview with the author, Apr. 7, 1973; Autobiography III, p. 3.

⁷Autobiography I, p. 6; Autobiography II, p. 8; Autobiography III, p. 7.

⁸Ibid., p. 10.

⁹Autobiography II, p. 8; Autobiography III, p. 10.

¹⁰Autobiography I, pp. 7-8; Autobiography III, p. 10.

¹¹Ibid., p. 91.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Autobiography I, p. 7; Autobiography II, p. 9; Autobiography III, p. 11.

¹⁵Autobiography I, p. 7; Autobiography II, p. 9; Autobiography III, pp. 11-12.

- ¹⁶Ibid., p. 13.
- ¹⁷Ibid.
- ¹⁸Ibid.
- ¹⁹Autobiography I, p. 8; Autobiography II, p. 10; Autobiography III, p. 14.
- ²⁰Autobiography I, p. 9; Autobiography III, p. 16.
- ²¹Ibid.
- ²²Autobiography I, p. 9; Autobiography II, p. 11; Autobiography III, p. 16.
- ²³Virgil Browne, personal interview with the author, Apr. 7, 1973.
- ²⁴Autobiography III, p. 17.
- ²⁵Autobiography I, p. 10; Autobiography II, p. 12; Autobiography III, p. 18; Virgil Browne, personal interview with the author, Apr. 7, 1973.
- ²⁶Autobiography III, p. 18; Virgil Browne, personal interview with the author, Apr. 7, 1973.
- ²⁷Autobiography III, p. 18.
- ²⁸Ibid., pp. 17-18.
- ²⁹Ibid., p. 18.
- ³⁰Virgil Browne, personal interview with the author, Apr. 7, 1973.
- ³¹Ibid.

CHAPTER II

LEARNING THE DRUGSTORE BUSINESS

Opportunity cast its shadow across the path of Virgil Browne while he was uneasy about going to a school where all the other students were younger and less experienced than he. Opportunity came in the form of one of Mount Pleasant's high-rolling sports, Charles S. Stephens, who owned half interest in a local drugstore. Stephens liked to play cards, to bet on the horses, and to live a fast life. Inasmuch as he was a bachelor, his domestic responsibilities were small, but the drugstore required a great deal of attention. His partner, one Dr. Mathews, could not and would not run the store. Thus, in 1894, Stephens was looking for someone to handle the business while he enjoyed his pleasures.¹

Stephens heard the stories of Browne's experience in Houston drugstores and decided to investigate. Browne readily admitted that he was not a registered pharmacist but that he could fill simple prescriptions and handle most of the general work needed in a successful drugstore. He promised to take a correspondence course and pass the state examination for a pharmacist's license. Satisfied with this explanation, Stephens offered the boy employment. Browne quit school and began working for fifteen dollars a month and board and room. He lived with his employer at his mother's home.²

Stephens did not want to spend much time with the store, and Browne was young and ambitious; therefore he soon took control of many of the

managerial functions of the business. The boy knew, or at least knew about, everyone in the county. With this information he began the vital task of approving all the credit. The backbone of the business was farmers who paid their bills only once a year. A keen sense of who was a good risk could make the difference between success or failure for the firm.³

After proving his ability in the credit department, Browne became involved in ordering merchandise. His first effort in buying came by accident. Stephens was at Hot Springs, Arkansas, during the racing season when a salesman representing a firm in St. Louis that dealt in sundries made his yearly stop in Mount Pleasant. The drugstore usually placed a large order with the firm, so the salesman talked Browne into placing a conditional order subject to Stephens's approval when he returned. The youth was excited and ordered the usual items plus some expensive soaps, hair brushes, monogrammed stationery, and other items which local customers usually had to go to Dallas to purchase. The total order was quite sizable, but Stephens, who had been lucky at Hot Springs, gave his approval. Because the cotton crop that year was better than average and the price was good, the farmers soon bought out the supply of expensive items. With this successful start Browne soon was tending more of the business of the store while his employers were spending less time there.⁴

The next three years were happy ones for the young druggist who had secured his license without any difficulty after hard work. However, he learned that Stephens was not always honest. On one occasion he caught his employer and a man called Red marking a deck of playing cards. This put Browne on his guard when one day Stephens came into

the store and suggested that Browne help him sell his interest to Dr. Mathews. Browne agreed to help with the sale by staying on and running the store. With this assurance, Mathews bought the store with its entire invoice. A few weeks later Stephens returned to the store and wanted Browne to help him buy the store back, but this time Stephens wanted to invoice out all the dead stock. Browne refused to go along with the deal and without his help it fell through. Stephens then opened another store. He attempted to assure success by hiring Browne. The young man placed honesty above profit and refused to take part in breaking the doctor. The new competition did not disturb the youth who wrote his sweetheart, "I am now second to none."⁵

During the first week of May 1900, Browne wrote Maimie Lee Robinson "My dear papa wants me to go to Galveston and take a course in chemistry this fall or winter. [He also] wants me to go into business for myself after I get back from Galveston."⁶ A week later he told the girl how he was ready for bigger and better things. In the same letter he wrote, "I don't think I will work on a salary after this year--not unless I get a nice salary. And this town can't afford it with three drug-stores."⁷ The young man, not yet twenty-three and very much in love, was ready to leave his hometown and look for richer rewards. However, fate had other things in store for Browne.

Virgil wrote Maimie Lee, on May 10, 1900, that "Dr. Mathews is not well. [He] has been in bed since Sunday."⁸ A few days later the doctor died, leaving his half brother, Allen E. Mathews, as his heir. After the death a Mount Pleasant banker, Eugene Lilinstern, came to the drug-store and talked to Browne about the future of the store. Both men agreed that the heir, who was a farmer, had no experience in running a

store and could not handle the business. Lilinstern offered to loan Browne the money to buy the store if his grandfather would countersign the note. After taking inventory, Browne learned that the stock and accounts of the business were worth about \$6,000. This was an interesting opportunity, but if he bought the store he would not be able to get the diamond ring he was thinking about, nor could he leave Mount Pleasant as he planned. At this time he wrote a letter to his sweetheart in which he stated the philosophy which lay behind all of his business affairs, saying, "If I do get it [the store], I am going to have one of the best drugstores in this part of the state. I am going to work it for all there is in it and will leave nothing undone that lay in the way of our success."⁹ In all of his business deals he wanted the best and would leave nothing undone to assure success.¹⁰

The young man decided to buy the business, but the heir did not want to sell the store. Moreover, Browne's grandfather, who was eighty-two years old, hesitated at signing so large a note. To sidestep both problems Browne decided to form a partnership. The principal of the Mount Pleasant School, W. H. Seay, had told Browne that he would like to go into the drugstore business. The principal was talked into investing, and Mathews was convinced he should sell two thirds of the stock in the store. Each person had two thousand dollars worth of stock. To pay his share Browne invested his savings and borrowed some money. During the three years that Browne had been at the store he had saved about \$500, and thus he had to borrow only \$1,500. His grandfather was willing to sign a note for this reduced amount. By July 1, 1900, Browne Seay and Company was in business--but just barely.¹¹

After making all the arrangements to borrow the money to purchase

his share in the business, and after setting up the partnership, Browne and his associates learned that they had no home for their business. The people who owned the building in which Dr. Mathew's drugstore was located either did not know of the plans for reopening the business, or else they did not believe that all the arrangements could be made. As a result the building was rented to someone else and Browne, Seay and Company was forced to find a new building. Mount Pleasant was built on a square with no business on the west or south side. Businessmen there assumed that a successful business had to be located in the business district on the east or north side. The partners were lucky and found a building which they rented on the east side and near the post office.

After Dr. Mathews's death the store was closed a few days for inventory, and then it was necessary to remain closed a few more days while moving to a new location. During this period many of the old customers began trading at the other drugstores. Any further delay in opening would be disastrous to the company. So with considerable effort the new store was pushed into operation. Browne, Seay and Co. had been open only a few days when Grandpa Jackson became ill. The family did not expect him to live long. To see the old man while he was still alive, Browne, who greatly admired the old man, hurried to his bedside to begin the vigil. While at the Jackson home some two miles from town, Browne noticed a large fire in Mount Pleasant one evening. The fire, which was in the building next to the new store, threatened to consume everything. Excitedly Seay opened the door to the store to get the books, and a wild group of men rushed in and began packing and carrying everything out into the street. In the rush one showcase and one large mirror were broken. The building was left in a shamble by the

people and the fire. The next morning Browne returned to town and found all the store's invoice sitting in the street.¹³

Browne looked up Seay and admonished him. The young businessman "would rather have them [the goods] burned than to had them taken out and damaged as they [were]. If [he] had been [there he] would never have agreed to have them all moved out."¹⁴ The smoke damage was extensive, but the insurance company settled without any problems. In fact it took only fifteen minutes to settle the whole affair. With the money from its insurance, the company was able to find a new location and begin operations. However, they were forced to move to the west side where few people normally passed. But the building was new and did attract two more businesses--a hardware store and a women's clothing store.¹⁵

Simply having a cluster of stores to draw buyers was not enough to assure the store's success. Something new or different to draw people's attention was necessary to get sales started and to bring accounts from the established businesses. Browne, Seay and Co. created interest by installing a new and modern soda fountain--the only one in town. The fountain service emphasized quality drinks which drew regular customers. Browne added color to the business by going out on the street each market day, Saturday, and flattering the farmers by telling them how important they were to the new business and the community. The direct approach resulted in getting many prospective buyers inside the store. Through his contact with the farmers Browne learned that crops and farm prices would be good in the fall. This would create a demand for luxury items. To take advantage of the market, Browne began selling a line of costume jewelry and watches. A watch repairman was hired to handle the

business in time pieces. Cut glass and chinaware later were added to the store's merchandise. The young businessman was able to become the prescription druggist for the two doctors in town. By establishing their business along new and old lines, by innovations, and by looking ahead, the partners were able to establish their store on a sound base.¹⁶

The key to the business's success that first year was based upon principles which Browne adopted early in his business career. He always sold quality merchandise which satisfied his customers. To avoid the reputation which results from profiteering, he sold at reasonable prices, but he allowed margins for capital reserves and profits. To expand the business, he treated the customer like a king. The store's fixtures, soda fountain, and jewelry added to the atmosphere of dignity. The public responded favorably.

The success of the store was due primarily to Browne's effort, but his success and attitudes caused difficulties among the partners. Seay remained resentful towards the younger man who had faulted him rather than applauded him after the older man had saved the goods from the fire. The school principal believed that congratulations for valiant effort should have been extended rather than the sharp tongue lashing given by the young "whipper snapper." The third partner, Mathews, likewise began to resent Browne. In the new store there was an old display case which contained hot water bottles, syringes, trusses, and other unattractive items. Mathews believed that the case should be located where people could easily look at the merchandise so he put the case in front of the prescription counter. Browne had the case moved to an out-of-the-way place. Mathews retaliated by moving the case back to the

spot he wanted it--and Browne moved it again. The changing of location for the case went on for several days, but neither party talked to the other about the problem. One morning in a loud voice so everyone could hear, Browne threatened to take an ax to the case if it was moved out front again. The case was not moved again, but the working relationship between the partners deteriorated. Although each man had an equal share in the stocks, Browne believed he should run the store and the other men should do his bidding. The other partners did not see things in the same light.¹⁷

Browne's relationship with the customers caused problems for the partnership. The street contact with the people soon developed an association with the customers where they would allow only the young redhead to serve them. Often he was busy, but the customers would wait rather than let one of the partners take care of them. This hurt the pride of the older men while inflating the ego of the younger man. Seay and Mathews admitted that they could do little of the business. And Browne reminded his partners who was doing the work and running the business when they seemed to forget. He always thought of the business as his personal property. It was never "our [partners'] business."¹⁸

The difficulties between the partners came to a head when Browne hired a prescription clerk to help him. The older men believed that the clerk was not necessary inasmuch as they were not being kept busy. The wages for this clerk would reduce the profits among the partners, but Seay and Mathews agreed to hiring someone to learn the prescription business. After the new employee established himself as a reliable man, Seay told Browne that he did not "feel right about him doing all the work." He suggested that "we buy Mathews out and that will give you

more of a share in the business."¹⁹ Browne agreed, but Mathews refused to sell. A few days later Seay again approached Browne with a proposal. After stating his feelings about the young man being unfairly treated, Seay offered to sell his shares. Mathews again rejected the plan. He liked "things the way they were."²⁰

After establishing the image of honest men attempting to solve a problem, the older men sprang their trap on the younger man. They offered to purchase Browne's interest in the store. He realized that if he refused to sell he would be forced to give up managing the store. He controlled only one third the stock. Although he did not want to leave the business, the young man sold his share and began looking for new opportunities.²¹

In the meantime, some of the difficulties the young man was having in business were due to his courtship and marriage, making him edgy and disagreeable. On a pleasant Sunday in June of 1899, Edward D. Clanden, who had a date with another girl, brought Browne to Pittsburg, Texas, to meet Maimie Lee Robinson. The Robinsons were a leading family in East Texas, and Miss Robinson's uncle, Oscar Branch Colquit, later became governor of Texas. This was a blind date, but soon Browne was making regular trips to Pittsburg, and in the evenings he would go to the telephone office where his friend Morris Greenspun let him call Miss Robinson without charge. A lively correspondence between the two quickly developed.²²

Miss Robinson was a very active, fun-loving girl who enjoyed dancing and "larking" at the world. On one occasion she was "sky larking" in a wagon while riding to an all night party when she hit a tree branch and cut her eye badly. Undisturbed by the injury or the blood on her

dress she continued on to the party and danced all night. She arrived home as the sun was rising, but both of her eyes were so black and swollen by that time that she could hardly see. The girl also was quite talented. In school she was the class poet, and throughout her life she was interested and active in poetry. Browne was more reserved, but he did make an effort to become out-going. He took dancing lessons, attended local theater productions, enjoyed traveling shows, and read extensively. He began to recommend books to Miss Robinson. And he was developing a cosmopolitan attitude as a result of his trips to Dallas and Fort Worth to purchase items for the drugstore.²³

The warm courtship of 1899 became deep love by 1900, but jealousy, pride, dominance, and ambition were also expressed during those months. In the spring a lover's quarrel developed, one soon blown out of proportion. Miss Robinson then took a trip to Louisiana without informing her lover of her plans. During the quarrel which lasted most of the spring and summer, Browne wrote at least thirty-five letters to his sweetheart. These letters revealed his old fear of having the girl refuse him as had happened in the game, King William was King George's Son. Although he was very much in love, he kept reminding his sweetheart of other girls he dated. This may have protected his ego, but it did not help the romance. He also instructed his sweetheart on how she was to act and whom she was to see. The young lady replied with the same type of letters--if she replied. Theirs was a turbulent courtship. But when the Dogwoods were in bloom in 1901 the couple married. The Reverend J. M. Nelson performed the ceremony while Miss Blanche Atkinson sang "O Promise Me," and the attendants looked on. The couple was married in the home of John E. Robinson, the bride's father.

After the wedding and reception, the newlyweds traveled to Mount Pleasant, and Browne left his wife to go to work.²⁴

The married life of the Brownes was not the story book version of living happily ever after. It was a union filled with the stress and strain of distinct personalities. They were like two rails of a railroad: both traveled parallel routes, they were joined by the ties, both were necessary, both had the same objective, but they were separate and unique. Two years after they were married Mrs. Browne wrote:

PAST AND PRESENT

The only difference, Virgil,
In tonight and two years ago
Is tonight I don't think you love me,
Then you did, don't you know?

About eleven when you were leaving
To take your long country ride,
The moon in her golden splendor
Found two lovers, side by side.

The same sweet strain repeating
Of faithful devotion and love,
In the shadows you kissed me,
And the moon smiled from above.

With my soul overflowing
With love I had pledged to you,
I returned to the spot when you were gone
Praying God you'd always be true.

I'm sitting alone in my room, love,
With a heart just aching in pain,
For you have so soon forgotten your plight
And are neglecting your "Sweetheart Mame."²⁵

Some time later she wrote another poem entitled "Without You."

WITHOUT YOU

It's lonesome here without you,
The rose clouds seem dark blue.
My sweetest songs sound flimsy,
And my heart sighs just for you.

It's lonely here my dear heart,
 The rose clouds seem dark blue.
 They tip the oaks in golden hues
 So beautiful, but dear I want you.

The evening clouds gather slowly,
 The sun is now hidden from view.
 I'll forget it until morning,
 But I'll dream tonight dear, of you.²⁶

Despite the difficulties and sadness of those early years, she would write on their sixty-third wedding anniversary:

TOGETHER

We have sailed through skies,
 We have cruised the sea,
 So long as we're together
 It matters not where we be.

Granite crags in the mountains,
 Or the Maimie Lee on the sea,
 We're still holding hands together
 Through wedded years . . . sixty-three.²⁷

After the Brownes moved to Oklahoma in 1922 and Virgil became well established, he took more time and interest in his family. But that was over twenty years after their marriage began and when the children were becoming young adults.

After the wedding on April 3, 1901, the couple moved to Mount Pleasant where Browne soon sold his interest in the drugstore. It took most of his money to pay off the note which he had signed with the bank to buy the store. When the owners of the two competing drugstores learned that Browne had sold his interest, they wanted to hire him. He refused the offers and decided to take his bride on a honeymoon to Louisiana to visit one of her aunts and to look for a good investment. At Shreveport the Brownes stopped to look at some businesses. But everything he was interested in was too expensive. Still looking for the right opening, the Brownes returned to Mount Pleasant where Mathews and

Seay attempted to sell the store to Browne.²⁸

After the young man had left the firm, a high-pressure salesman talked the two men into buying a large amount of merchandise by offering them discounts on quantities. As a result the men tied up all their capital and were unable to meet payments which were due. Browne refused to buy and eventually the men were forced out of business. To some extent he had been vindicated, but this did not help his financial situation. One day a Mr. Bastland, a traveling salesman with whom Browne was acquainted, suggested that Browne go to work for Herring Drug Company in Waxahatchee, Texas. On the recommendation and arrangements made by Bastland, Browne began work. His stay with the Herring Drug Company proved short, but it did bring him into contact with Coca-Cola.²⁹

Shortly after arriving at his new job, Browne heard of an opportunity to invest in a drugstore in Dallas. J. R. Madison and Pat Gorman operated two stores, and they were in need of capital. J. R. Madison was a well-known pharmacist and highly recommended by the city's physicians. This assured a good prescription trade. Browne looked the store operation over and decided to buy a third interest. His decision was made despite the recommendations of J. W. Crowdess who owned and operated a wholesale drug business in Dallas. Crowdess told Browne that the drugstore had a very poor credit rating and that all goods to it were sold only on a C.O.D. basis. The brash young man replied that he would furnish the necessary credit and that when he took over the business it soon would be among the best drugstores in Texas. Browne attempted to keep his promise. He invested all his personal capital and borrowed \$1,800 more. After joining the company, Browne and Madison agreed to take the downtown store and let Gorman have the suburban store for his

interest. Thus Browne and Madison became equal partners in the one store.³⁰

Browne and Madison moved the store to a new location and put in a soda fountain and equipped the store with modern fixtures. The new location was a two-story building with the second floor used for offices. Madison and Browne talked the leading surgeon in Dallas, the city health officer, and the county health officer into moving into the offices above their store. With the modern store and the offices to attract customers, the business began to grow and the future looked promising. However, Browne learned that much of the invoice he had purchased was inflated and many of the boxes were empty. He had been taken.³¹

The store had just reached a paying basis when a man called on Browne and presented him with a bill for \$600 plus three years' interest. Browne asked Madison about the note. Madison claimed the note was a personal note taken by Gorman when the store was originally organized. Browne was told not to worry about the note, but when the bill was not paid Browne and Madison were sued. Browne, realizing that Madison knew the city better than he, allowed his partner to contact a lawyer to defend them. Madison employed a county judge who was running for re-election. The case appeared in court twice, and both times the judge was out of town campaigning. Finally the case went by default. When the court officers collected from the store it took all their ready cash. This set off a panic among the other creditors who rushed to collect. Browne, after consulting a local banker, decided to leave the whole mess. The treasurer of the Texas Drug Company was made assignee. It was understood that the treasurer would operate the busi-

ness under receivership and employ Madison to run the store. Once all the debts were satisfied the store would be returned to the owners. The store owed, not including its debt to Browne, a little less than \$2,000. The actual invoice was worth a little more than \$5,000 and the business was good. The store should have been able to survive, but the receiver and his company's president decided to make a large profit. The treasurer sold the company to his president for a very low price and broke Browne and Madison.³²

The association with Madison opened a new door for the young businessman. Madison was a manufacturing chemist as well as a druggist. He produced many of the drugs which were sold at the store. While at the store Browne learned some of the mysteries of chemistry from Madison, and he began to develop his talent as an inventor. He and his father, Spill Browne, organized the Browne Manufacturing Company. The new company manufactured and sold "Browne's Scalp Tonic and Dandruff Cure." But after he went broke at the drugstore, inventions had to wait while the necessities of life were met.³³

Browne, who had become the proud father of a little girl, Margaret Elizabeth, on February 9, 1902, was forced to take his wife and child to the depot and put them on a train for her parent's home while he looked for work. At the time Browne had only twenty-five dollars in his pocket which he divided with his wife. He also had an \$1,800 debt to two banks. With the help of his father he was able to pay off the debt in a reasonable time. He began looking for work at drugstores. At his first stop he found temporary employment while a man took a vacation, but he needed something permanent. His next employment was selling for Henry K. Wampole and Company, which dealt in pharmaceutical specialties

and needed a representative for Texas. Browne started working on November 1, 1902, but did not receive any pay until after the job had been abolished in January 1903. The company allowed him an expense account and then deducted part of the expense from his salary of sixty dollars per month. He worked two full months and was paid \$112.30 after he had paid the expense of shipping his sample case to Philadelphia.³⁴

Browne's next job was as a prescription clerk in the Texas Pacific Coal Company town of Thurber, Texas. He roomed above the company store and took his meals in the company dining hall with the rest of the men. For the aspiring young businessman, who less than a year earlier had been quite brash with Crowdess, his new circumstances were "quite a comedown."³⁵

There never was a bird which flew so high that he did not have to come down to water. After returning to Mount Pleasant to enter school, Browne had risen from a clerk to a part owner in a drugstore, but because of his arrogance he had been forced to sell his interest. While flying high, he had learned much about the business world. He also had married an excellent woman. After being forced down by his partners, he did not give up but began looking for bigger and better ways to do business. He found the business, but again his arrogance prevented him from listening to sound advice. Thus his efforts came to naught, but he had learned more about chemistry. After the failure of the Dallas drugstore, the young man moved about looking for the right opportunity. His moving brought him to another low point--a prescription clerk in a company town. The low point was far better than the low point he had endured while in Houston. Each time Browne was forced to return for

water, he was able to find a refreshing pool at a higher level. He was a young man on the rise.

FOOTNOTES

¹Autobiography III, p. 20; Virgil Browne, personal interview with the author, Apr. 14, 1973.

²Autobiography III, p. 20.

³Autobiography I, p. 11.

⁴Autobiography II, p. 13; Autobiography III, p. 20; Virgil Browne, personal interview with the author, Apr. 14, 1973.

⁵Autobiography II, p. 14; Autobiography III, p. 21; Virgil Browne to Maimie Lee Robinson, Dec. 12, 1899, Mrs. Browne's Collection.

⁶Virgil Browne to Maimie Lee Robinson, May 6, 1900, Mrs. Browne's Collection.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Virgil Browne to Maimie Lee Robinson, May 10, 1900, Mrs. Browne's Collection.

⁹Virgil Browne to Maimie Lee Robinson, May 31, 1900, Mrs. Browne's Collection.

¹⁰Autobiography I, p. 13; Autobiography II, p. 15; Autobiography III, p. 22.

¹¹Autobiography I, pp. 13-14; Autobiography II, pp. 15-16; Autobiography III, pp. 22-23.

¹²Autobiography III, p. 23.

¹³Virgil Browne to Maimie Lee Robinson, July 1, 1900, Mrs. Browne's Collection; Autobiography I, p. 14.

¹⁴Virgil Browne to Maimie Lee Robinson, July 10, 1900, Mrs. Browne's Collection.

¹⁵Autobiography II, p. 17; Autobiography III, p. 23.

¹⁶Autobiography I, p. 15; Autobiography III, pp. 23-24.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 24.

- ¹⁸Autobiography II, p. 17.
- ¹⁹Autobiography III, pp. 24-25.
- ²⁰Ibid., p. 25.
- ²¹Virgil Browne, personal interview with the author, Apr. 14, 1973.
- ²²Autobiography III, pp. 92-93; Edward D. Clanden to Virgil Browne, June 1899, Mrs. Browne's Collection.
- ²³Maimie Lee Robinson to Virgil Browne, Mar. 12, 1900, Mrs. Browne's Collection; School Award, Mrs. Browne's Collection; Virgil Browne to Maimie Lee Robinson, Apr. 15, 1900, Mrs. Browne's Collection; Virgil Browne to Maimie Lee Robinson, Apr. 31, 1900, Mrs. Browne's Collection; Autobiography III, pp. 92-93.
- ²⁴Virgil Browne's letters in Mrs. Browne's Collection; Virgil Browne to Maimie Lee Robinson, June 24, 1900, Mrs. Browne's Collection; Virgil Browne to Maimie Lee Robinson, July 23, 1900, Mrs. Browne's Collection; Autobiography III, pp. 92-93; Virgil Browne, personal interview with the author, Nov. 3, 1973; The Pittsburg Gazette, Apr. 5, 1901, Mrs. Browne's Collection.
- ²⁵Maimie Lee Robinson Browne, So Much I Wished to Say: A Selection of Poems (Franklin, La., 1967), p. 13.
- ²⁶Ibid., p. 9.
- ²⁷Ibid., p. 10.
- ²⁸Autobiography I, p. 16; Autobiography II, p. 18; Autobiography III, p. 25.
- ²⁹Autobiography I, p. 17; Autobiography II, p. 19; Autobiography III, pp. 25-26; Compliments of the Coca-Cola Co. (Notebook), Browne Collection.
- ³⁰Autobiography I, p. 17; Autobiography II, p. 19; Autobiography III, p. 26.
- ³¹Autobiography I, p. 18; Autobiography II, p. 19; Autobiography III, p. 27.
- ³²Autobiography I, pp. 18-19; Autobiography II, pp. 19-20; Autobiography III, pp. 27-28.
- ³³F. Hutchings to Virgil Browne, Manager of the Browne Manufacturing Co., Dec. 23, 1902, Browne Collection; S. D. Murphey to Virgil Browne, Apr. 4, 1903, Browne Collection.
- ³⁴Autobiography III, pp. 28-29; Ailsen Ellin to Virgil Browne, Jan. 12, 1903, Browne Collection.
- ³⁵Autobiography III, p. 29.

CHAPTER III

BIG PLANS AND ACTION

"Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men's blood, and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans . . .,"¹ wrote Virgil Browne in January 1938 to the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce membership. Years earlier, Browne had begun making and pursuing extremely big plans.

He considered the job he had taken in Thurber, Texas, a temporary necessity. When he learned of an opening at the Parker Drugstore in Fort Worth, Texas, he applied for the position. After receiving a favorable response to his inquiry, he moved to that city, there to be joined by his wife Maimee Lee and his daughter Margaret Elizabeth. This employment was an improvement of his prospects, and uniting the family was joyful; but the young pharmacist was still looking for an opportunity to get into business for himself.²

A few days after he began working at the Parker Drugstore, a high pressure salesman stopped in the store. Charles H. White sold an inferior line of perfumes and toilet articles, but he was a first-rate salesman. He radiated an air of dignity and prominence which made the buyer feel that White was doing him a favor by selling his cheap line of products. Browne and the salesman had a long talk, and a few days later White returned and asked Browne if his knowledge of chemistry was sufficient to duplicate the perfumes and toilet articles he sold. Browne was

certain that he could and instructed the salesman to bring him his sample case. Although Browne lacked extensive training in chemistry, he had a solid understanding of the elementary techniques, and he had a keen sense of smell and taste. By using a blotter, evaporation, taste, and smell he was able to identify all the ingredients. With this knowledge the two men began manufacturing a line of perfumes which was of average quality and which could be sold at a reasonable price.³

After developing their product the two men confronted the problems of organizing a company and manufacturing the perfume. Since neither man had any capital to invest, they approached John M. Parker, the owner of the drugstore. Parker agreed to invest \$1,000 if Browne would manufacture the goods and White would sell the items. All parties agreed to the terms, and Parker-Browne Company was organized. Since Browne had very little money and the company was not established, he was forced to retain his employment at the drugstore and manufacture perfume after work. Thus he was working fifteen to eighteen hours per day. He only saw his family for brief moments, and he was so tired at those times he was not the best company. The young businessman had his own business, but for it to succeed would require personal sacrifice from him and his family.⁴

The new firm soon faced several problems which taxed the business skills of its founders. The salesman could not get repeat orders because the product was made in Fort Worth, a city best known for its stock yards, packing plants, and cotton warehouses. French perfumes, which were known for their exotic and excellent aromas, were entering the Texas market. Eastern perfumes, with their reputation among citizens who used them, also were competing for consumers favor. To

achieve a more favorable image, Parker-Browne Company arranged with White's brother, who lived in New York, to use his address for the firm. The New York address became the company address, while the Fort Worth address became a branch office. This change in address helped sales, but the blunt truth was that the perfumes and toilet articles which the company sold were of inferior quality and could not create a permanent demand.⁵

The partners therefore began looking for a new line which would have a demand and bring repeat sales when a man representing a California firm came into the drugstore and demonstrated two concentrated flavors for use in fountain drinks. At that time the popular drinks at the soda fountain were Coca-Cola, Dr. Pepper, limeade, and orangeade. At the Parker Drugstore, which had a very modern soda fountain, the chief drink was an orangeade. The drink was made by grating orange peel to get the basic flavor and then adding orange juice, carbonated water, and sugar. The drink was good and had excellent sales, but it took a great deal of time to make, and it was necessary to make a fresh batch each day. All the orangeade which remained when the store closed was discarded as waste. The concentrated flavors which the salesman from California demonstrated were found to be of high quality and time saving, and they also reduced the amount of waste. Although a pint bottle sold for six dollars, it was cheaper than the method being used at the drugstore. Browne and Parker agreed to purchase two bottles. Shortly after the salesman stopped in Fort Worth, the concentrate company went out of business.⁶

The trade name of the concentrate was Oleo-Resin Lemon and Orange. "Oleo-Resin [was] a common term used in pharmacy, meaning oil and

resin."⁷ With this information and the need for more Oleo-Resin, Browne began work on developing a high-quality concentrated flavor which could be marketed at a reasonable price. He developed two flavors, Lemon and Orange, which were marketed under the name Res-01a. He soon added lime and mint flavors. With the new product White was able to secure a large order from the major drugstore, Fortune and Ward Drug Company, of Memphis, Tennessee. Smaller stores also began buying Res-01a. At the same time Parker-Browne started to receive repeat sales. During 1904, Parker-Browne Company had a gross sales of \$2,340. Although it was not a major firm, it had developed a line of concentrates which could compete on the open market. With the shift in emphasis of their product, it became necessary to reorganize Parker-Browne Company.⁸

At the time when Res-01a entered the market, the carbonated beverage business was entering a new phase in its history. Soft drinks have been known by many names. Soda water was one of the first drinks, a name that left a lasting mark on the business. The term "soda" is still used when speaking of carbonated beverages which do not contain soda itself, as are "soda" pop and "soda" fountain. A Yale professor, Benjamin Silliman, was the first American to bottle soda water for commercial use. He opened his shop in 1806, and his major customers were people who wanted a cure for their hang-overs. At that time, and for years afterwards, bottled sodas were hawked by peddlers early in the morning. Silliman's operation was small and limited in impact because of his problem of making the soda water and finding suitable bottles. About the same time Silliman was beginning his bottling business, Colonel John Trumbull of New York developed a soda fountain. During most of the nineteenth century soda water, mineral water, tonics, and carbonated

water became associated with medicine. People believed that each had certain powers to cure diseases. As a result many apothecary shops opened, and the soft drink business became connected with drugstores. The term "pop" became associated with carbonated beverages during the late nineteenth century because of "the popping noise made when the gaseous pressure within the bottle was released, by removing the cork or other closure."⁹ Several individuals contributed to the development of a systematic method of providing carbonated beverages for the public at the fountain or in a bottle.¹⁰

The bottling business was immature until the 1890's and early 1900's. Then in 1893 the Crown Cork and Seal Company developed a bottle cap which was suitable for the soft drink industry. The Painter's foot-operated machine allowed syringing, filling, and crowning to be accomplished at one time. The new crowns and the foot-operated machine laid the foundation for revolutionizing the industry because "it allowed for filling and crowning carbonated beverages while under pressure, without the loss of gas, including an automatic syrup gauge."¹¹ In 1894 the Liquid Carbonic Acid Manufacturing Company began production of liquid carbonic acid for the soft drink business. This process assured a supply of high quality, low cost gas. The problems associated with making a satisfactory bottle were resolved when the Owens Machine began production of dependable bottles designed for the carbonated beverage industry.¹²

Many of the basic problems of bottling carbonated beverages therefore had been overcome by 1904, but the industry was not stable and several complex problems remained unresolved. The bottlers faced strong competition from the soda fountains, and until refrigeration made cool-

ing of bottles at home practical, fountains were the main sellers of carbonated drinks. Although the industry had made many advances from the time when Silliman began his efforts, it still had the image of a medicine which should be consumed only on occasion. Perhaps the most difficult problem for the bottlers was the type of men who were involved in the business. As a group they were not considered respectable businessmen, and banks were not willing to loan the bottlers large sums of capital to develop the industry. The result was that most bottling was done by very small firms.¹³

When Res-Ola first appeared on the market, several fountains were still using the unsanitary "lemonade bucket"--a large punch bowl from which the customers would dip out a cup full of the beverage. The cups were washed in cold water at irregular times. Often the beverage served had begun to spoil or ferment or had become filled with flies. In many cases when the drink became filled with flies the soda jerk or store manager would simply strain the flies off and sell the liquid. Since there were no pure food laws, the general condition of the fountain business was very poor as compared to later years. The improvement of technology such as refrigeration, closed containers, and inexpensive hot water greatly improved conditions at soda fountains.¹⁴

Conditions were bad in the fountain business, but in the bottling business they were even worse. "No one who could get into any other business went into bottling when I started," commented Browne.¹⁵ Most bottlers were looked down on by other businessmen--and with good reason. Often the bottler was selling his drink as a patent medicine or as a sideline to bottling beer. Sanitary conditions were poor. Bottles were hard to wash inasmuch as this was done by hand. Many of the drinks were

not standardized; thus a bottler might make a few bottles of good drink and a few bottles of poor drink. Bottlers often mixed and bottled their beverage on one evening then hawked their wares the next morning much in the manner of a fish salesman or street peddler. Because of the nature of the bottling business, many men were fly-by-night operators. These organizations made it almost impossible for honest bottlers to get the necessary credit to install modern equipment or to improve the standards of the industry.¹⁶

Although the business was looked down on by many citizens, Browne believed that the industry had a bright future, but for the next twenty years he often suffered difficulties and discomfort at the hands of other people. He remained with Parker-Browne Company for well over a decade, during which period the company never had enough credit with the banks in Fort Worth. At the same time the company was forced to give customers long term credit--a year or more. Because of its credit position, the company nearly went bankrupt during the panic of 1907. At that time a local banker told Browne to get out of the carbonated beverage business because he was too smart to waste his life and talent with an industry which had no future and which was composed of unsavory characters. However, Browne remained in the soft drink business. Several years later, in 1922, after he had become moderately wealthy and conducted himself with high ethics and morals, he still felt the stigma of being in a poor line of business. At a meeting of the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, a hotel owner, Mark Huckins, asked Browne "what type of business he was in." Browne replied that he was a Coca-Cola bottler. Huckins answered that "that was not much of a business."¹⁷ Directly behind the Huckins Hotel was a fly-by-night bottler and boot-

legger. The Coca-Cola bottler was stereotyped with the less respectable bottler.¹⁸

A few days after Browne had been in Oklahoma City he walked over to Main Street to watch a parade. One of the children's groups in the parade carried a banner which read, "We Don't Drink Coffee and We Don't Drink Coke."¹⁹ Two years later Browne was forced to threaten court action against J. F. Pottoriff, the principal of Emerson School in Oklahoma City, in order to remove the rules which forbade school children from drinking or talking about carbonated beverages--primarily Coca-Cola.²⁰

Browne early tried to improve the image of the carbonated beverage and ice cream industries. When Parker-Browne Company began production of concentrated flavor, Browne in 1907 began instructing bottlers and ice cream manufacturers on the use of artificial flavors. He stressed the use of compounds which were not dangerous to the health of the consumer. Many of the concentrates which were entering the market at that time were not safe to drink. He recommended the limited use of artificial flavors in order that the natural flavor of the ice cream or the drink could be tasted. Over flavoring created a poor product which was rejected by the consumer. The right amount of flavoring mixed with the right amount of carbonated water, water, sugar, and other ingredients resulted in the best possible drink for the market. Once the manufacturer had determined the best recipe, he should make certain that the recipe was followed closely to create a standardized drink for which the public could anticipate the taste. Only by standardization of flavor, argued Browne, could the ice cream and bottling business create a dependable demand.²¹

During these periods of instruction he also emphasized sanitation. Only when bottles or containers were free of foreign bodies could the producer be assured of a quality product. If the bottles, which had to be washed by hand, were dirty, the drink would soon spoil, and the product would not have a dependable taste. The struggle for high quality products which were dependable and safe to drink established Browne as a national leader in the soft drink business. His long fight for a safe, dependable, quality drink was one of his outstanding contributions to the soft drink business.²²

When Parker-Browne Company was reorganized in 1907, it retained the name of Parker-Browne and was capitalized at \$25,000. White, who was flighty by nature, sold his interest in the partnership to J. B. Huff. A close personal friend and family doctor, Dr. J. H. McLean, bought a few shares of stock. E. P. Renfro and Charles H. Hightower likewise purchased shares; Hightower was a partner with Parker in the drugstore. Moreover, Shaw Brothers Ice Cream Company and a few other firms associated with the flavoring business invested in the new company. This gave the company some working capital, but yet more capital was necessary. Parker, Huff, and Browne placed some of their stock back in the treasury and sold \$10,000 worth for \$5,000.²³

During this period of reorganization and incorporation, Browne wanted his father, Spill Browne, to buy a large block of stock in the company, but he had other plans. A few miles from Mount Pleasant, Texas, a whiskey-colored spring, thought to have valuable medical properties, was being developed by two men from Wolfe City, Texas. Browne's father believed that investment in the development project with a hotel, amusement park, bathing facilities, and a swimming pool was certain to

make high profits. The elder Browne first invested only a small amount, but soon he had invested heavily in the project. He built a street car line from Mount Pleasant to the mineral spring and endorsed the mortgages of the promoters. A fine hotel was built and a grand opening held, but soon business fell and the creditors were demanding their money. Finally Spill Browne lost his home and all his other property. Although the Brownes could be brought down, they were hard to keep down. In a few years Browne's father was financially secure as a real estate salesman and speculator in oil leases and drilling stock. The elder Browne was assisted back to economic health by his eldest son, for the ties between the two were quite strong and their characters were quite similar--both were traders.²⁴

In the Tarrant County Court House, Fort Worth, Texas, on July 21, 1907, the new company officially went into operation. However, more than two-thirds of the stock was sold on credit to be paid from the earnings of the company. As a result, the Parker-Browne Company was still under-financed. This poor financial condition nearly destroyed the firm. At this time bottlers customarily made their orders in the fall or winter for spring and summer shipments. Because of the seasonal nature of the bottling trade, most of Parker-Browne's customers could not pay until late summer; and if business was bad during the season, many bottlers were unable to pay until the following year. Two of Browne's principal competitors, W. H. Hutchinson Company of Chicago and Blumenthal Brothers of Philadelphia, were well-established firms. As such they were able to dominate the market for flavorings, and most of the dependable accounts were controlled by these firms. Browne sold fill-in orders and supplied the less attractive accounts. As a result

none of his customers had a good credit rating, and Parker-Browne itself was able to secure only limited credit.²⁵

In 1907, financial conditions in the nation began to tighten. The privately owned Hunter-Pheeling Bank of Fort Worth, operated by one Mr. Smallwood, sold to Tom Wagner. At the time of the sale Smallwood recommended to Browne that he go into a respectable business. Soon Browne began to think that he should have taken the banker's advice. Parker-Browne Company was not able to pay the money it owed Browne for his salary, nor was it able to pay the \$3,000 it owed the bank. In the fall Browne went into the bank to renew the note only to learn that the new owners had instructed their manager, Tom Yarborough, to liquidate the bank's debts. No more loans were being made, and bank withdrawals were limited to about twenty-five dollars. Learning the bank's position, Browne returned to his office where he was able to scrape up \$1,000. He took the money back to Yarborough and attempted to talk him into renewing the loan, but to no avail.²⁶

Browne talked to Parker about their dilemma, and the elder businessman recommended that W. E. Connell of the First National Bank be contacted. When the bank opened for business the next morning, Browne met with the bank executive, only to learn that financial conditions were very serious. But he was able to get Connell to loan him \$1,000. Connell told Browne to take the money to Yarborough and ask for a sixty-day extension on the remainder. Yarborough refused to consider an extension and demanded his money in full. It appeared that Parker-Browne had reached the end of the line. But when Browne returned to the First National and explained what had happened, Connell agreed to allow Browne to borrow another \$1,000.²⁷

While Browne was attempting to get enough money to operate another year, White, who was employed as a salesman for the company, received his expense money in the form of a cashier's check, the usual way to send money. White took the money to a bank in Beaumont, Texas, where the teller refused to cash the check. The salesman tore the check to pieces and threw it in the teller's face. Next he wired for a Money Order which would be honored. The money was sent with instructions calling the salesman off the road. Huff, who also was selling, was called in. Although the future looked grim, Browne decided to go all out rather than economize. His idea was to hire an established salesman. He met Mossop Thompson who was the top salesman for Blumenthal Company. Browne offered Thompson a very high salary and commissions if he would go to work for the firm. Although the new salesman cost the company more than all other wages combined, he soon proved his worth.²⁸

The record of sales for the company was:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Total Sales</u> ²⁹
1904	\$ 2,340
1905	\$ 3,234.70
1906	\$ 6,874.25
1907	\$17,522.76

The profits for 1907 alone were \$2,016.10, or nearly equal to the total sales of 1902.³⁰

Although the company turned a year marked by tight financial conditions into a boom season, Browne's personal finances were in a strained condition. Since arriving in Fort Worth, two boys, Virgil Spillman and Henry William Jackson Browne, had been added to the family. A fourth child was expected early in 1908. The family had just completed its third move since arriving in town. Their first home was located on the

corner of Taylor and Throckmorton Streets. The second home was at 1000 Hemphill Street. The new home was located at 908 Cherry Street. The demands of the growing family and the costs of moving were placing a severe strain on Browne's income; but during the financial crisis he was forced to mortgage everything he had to finance the company. He contracted loans totaling \$1,700. Some were short-term notes of thirty days, while others were longer, but none were for more than a year. To help through the difficult time Maimie Lee Browne took in boarders-- primarily Browne's father or brother.³¹

The crisis of 1907 was short lived, and so far as Parker-Browne Company was concerned, the panic was more beneficial than costly. The company had been forced to the wall and required to take a desperate step which resulted in sizable profits to the company, and it became established on a permanent basis.

Virgil Browne often told his friends "not to let anyone get into your sample bag."³² This was not an idle statement, for he and a friend had gotten into a sample bag and as a result had begun Parker-Browne Company. A salesman sold him two bottles of concentrated flavoring, and soon he was manufacturing the flavors. Yet the business did not prosper because of his duplication of other products; only through hard work, long hours, quick thinking, and personal sacrifice was Browne able to establish the firm. He was willing to pay the high price because he had made no little plans. His plans had a magic which stirred his blood. He instructed bottlers and ice cream men on the best methods to do business because he knew that his plans could be realized only by improving both the image and the product of the industry.

FOOTNOTES

¹Oklahoma (Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce), XXII, No. 1 (Jan. 13, 1938), p. 5.

²Litton, p. 708; Record of Browne Children, Mrs. Browne's Collection; Autobiography III, p. 30.

³Autobiography I, p. 20; Autobiography II, p. 22; Autobiography III, p. 30.

⁴Autobiography III, p. 30.

⁵Articles of Partnership between Charles H. White and John M. Parker, of the County of Tarrant, State of Texas, June 9, 1904, Browne Collection.

⁶Ibid.; Autobiography III, p. 30.

⁷Virgil Browne, Speech before Ice Cream Manufacturers and Bottlers, 1907, Browne Collection.

⁸Ibid.; Autobiography I, p. 21; Autobiography III, pp. 31-32; Parker-Browne Company Statement of Sales, 1904-1914, Browne Collection; Parker-Browne Reorganization Agreement, July 21, 1907, Browne Collection.

⁹John J. Riley, A History of the American Soft Drink Industry: Bottled Carbonated Beverages, 1807-1957 (Washington, 1958), p. 12.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 48-54.

¹¹Ibid., p. 87.

¹²Ibid., p. 93.

¹³Virgil Browne, personal interview with the author, Dec. 5, 1973.

¹⁴Virgil Browne, "How to Build a Greater Beverage Industry," Pacific Bottler, VI, No. 7 (July, 1925), p. 13; Virgil Browne, personal interview with the author, Dec. 5, 1973.

¹⁵Autobiography II, p. 26.

¹⁶Browne, "How to Build a Greater Beverage Industry," p. 13; Virgil Browne to Joseph R. Flynn, "Is it to be a Big Bottle, or a

Little Bottle?" undated, Browne Collection; Virgil Browne. Speech to the Bottlers of Missouri and Oklahoma, undated, Browne Collection.

¹⁷Virgil Browne, personal interview with the author, Dec. 5, 1973.

¹⁸Autobiography II, p. 46; Autobiography III, pp. 34-36.

¹⁹Virgil Browne, personal interview with the author, Apr. 7, 1973.

²⁰Oklahoma Coca-Cola Bottling Company v. J. F. Pottoriff, District Court, Oklahoma County, State of Oklahoma, Feb. 1924 (not fully dated or signed), Browne Collection.

²¹Browne, Speech before Ice Cream Manufacturers and Bottlers.

²²Ibid.

²³Autobiography II, p. 25.

²⁴Ibid., pp. 22-23.

²⁵Parker-Browne Reorganization Agreement; Autobiography I, pp. 23-24; Autobiography III, pp. 33-34.

²⁶Autobiography I, pp. 23-24; Autobiography II, pp. 26-28; Autobiography III, pp. 33-34.

²⁷Autobiography I, pp. 23-24; Autobiography II, pp. 26-28; Autobiography III, pp. 33-34.

²⁸Litton, p. 708; Autobiography I, p. 25; Autobiography II, p. 28; Autobiography III, p. 36.

²⁹Parker-Browne Company Statement of Sales.

³⁰Autobiography III, p. 36; Parker-Browne Company Statement of Sales.

³¹Record of Browne Children; Virgil Browne to Spill Browne, July 10, 1907, Browne Collection.

³²Stanley C. Draper, personal interview with the author, Oct. 15, 1973.

CHAPTER IV

THE BIG TIME AND ONLY THE STRONG SHALL SURVIVE

Three years after the panic of 1907, the management of Parker-Browne Company was aspiring to a position of great strength in the carbonated beverage field. To that time the company had prospered but was small. These were not average men who were satisfied with small gains, however. The largest profit the company had shown was \$2,595.14, which had been divided among the several stockholders with no one receiving any substantial sum of money. The company's great days were in the future and could only be achieved if its leaders were bold, resourceful, strong, and intelligent.¹

The bottling business was growing and the CO₂ business promised high profits. The bottled CO₂, which was necessary for the business in the booming Southwest, was controlled by a single company, the Liquid Carbonic Company, a monopoly that caused many uneasy moments. The bottlers began to encourage Parker-Browne Company to start bottling carbon dioxide for use in the soft drink business. But the method of manufacturing the gas was a closely guarded secret, and the cost of building a plant was high. As a result, Virgil Browne, the manager and leader of the small firm, did not feel that Parker-Browne could afford the risk until it had become firmly established in the concentrated flavor business. However, in 1910, the Parker-Browne men believed that the time had come to expand their business. They felt powerful enough to chal-

lence Liquid Carbonic Company in the open market.²

At the urging of the stockholders Browne began to obtain estimates of the cost of constructing and operating a carbonated gas bottling plant. After obtaining the limited information, he told the stockholders that the new plant would cost \$100,000. To raise the necessary capital, they decided to increase the capital stock to \$50,000, but only about one-half that sum or \$25,000 in actual cash was added because each stock sold at a fifty per cent discount. Of course, the reduced price of the stock was not commonly known. The company hoped to borrow \$25,000 from a local bank. The remaining amount was to be carried by the engineering firm which installed the plant.³

Parker-Browne Company did not have a strong credit rating and was only a small firm, therefore the Fort Worth banks would loan \$25,000 only if someone with money and standing was willing to countersign the note with his resources as security for the loan. To achieve his goal Browne had to find the right man and interest him in the project. If the plan for expansion was to succeed, a large building along railroad tracks would have to be acquired. The building would have to be suitable for installing the plant and storing large quantities of raw material and gas bottles. Much of the raw material would be bought in carload lots, thus the trackage was necessary. At this time a man who was wealthy enough to sign the note and who also owned a suitable building was available.⁴

A grocery wholeseller from Beaumont, Texas, one Mr. Howard, had sold his business and moved to Fort Worth to enter the brokerage business. The brokerage business had not been profitable, and he wanted to get into another line. While in the wholesale business he had acquired

a building which suited the requirements of the proposed gas business. The first major hurdle in expanding the business was reaching a suitable agreement with Howard.⁵

An agreement was reached and the stock issue was prepared. Howard received \$5,000 worth of stock as down payment for his building, and he was allowed to buy another \$20,000 worth of stock. His son-in-law, Albert Shaw, was authorized to purchase \$5,000 worth of stock. Besides selling his building, Howard was to give his personal bond to back the loan of \$25,000 with the bank. Browne received several shares because of his formulas for concentrated beverages and because he was the only one who knew anything about constructing and operating a gas plant. The company further agreed that Browne could increase his stocks by \$8,000 which would allow him to take advantage of the stock increase. And in a private agreement Howard promised to lend Browne the money to purchase his share of the stock.⁶

After the preliminary arrangements for providing the necessary capital were made, Browne took his children to their grandparents home in Pittsburg, Texas. He and his wife Maimie Lee then went east on one of the most pleasant and enjoyable business trips of their lives. The couple's first stop was in New Orleans where they contacted the district representative of United States Steel. This was the first time either of the Brownes had been in the city, and the steel representative, whose company would benefit handsomely from the sale of gas cylinders, entertained his clients in royal style. The Brownes and their only acquaintances in New Orleans, Mr. and Mrs. A. B. Freeman, were taken to dinner at Antoine's Restaurant where they were served a seven-course dinner with all the trimmings. After this brief but delightful stop in New

Orleans, the couple then boarded a ship of the Mallory Line for New York. Aboard the ship several people thought the Brownes were on their honeymoon, and in some respects the trip was like a honeymoon. Since leaving the drugstore in Mount Pleasant in 1901, Browne had spent very little time with his wife and growing family. He had worked a minimum of twelve hours a day at the company, and when he came home in the evening, he was still thinking about the business. The larger the business became the more it required of his time. He was general manager, credit manager, shipping manager, and often salesman. The trip to New York, after the wonderful days in New Orleans, was the first time in many years that Browne and his wife had time to get to know each other again.⁷

When they landed in New York, they were met by one Mr. Torrence who represented the Carbondale Company which would construct the bottling plant. Torrence took the Brownes to the Imperial Hotel. After the visitors were settled in the hotel, Torrence entertained them at the new Astor House for dinner and then asked "where they would like to go next and what they would like to see."⁸ Mrs. Browne, who loved music, was not bashful and asked to go to the Metropolitan Opera. Her husband, who did not share his wife's enthusiasm for highbrow music, had other plans and told her so. However, when Mrs. Browne learned that Enrico Caruso and Dame Nellie Melba (Mrs. Helen Mitchell Armstrong) were the leading players at the Metropolitan Opera, she would not be denied. She also realized that her husband was afraid of embarrassing himself in front of Torrence. To bypass this obstacle she informed her spouse to simply follow their host's leader. During the performance, Browne became interested in the action on the stage and Torrence went to sleep.⁹

After the trip to the opera the two men got down to business. Inasmuch as Browne had not been in a carbonation plant, Torrence arranged for him to visit one in Pennsylvania. While in Pennsylvania, Browne also visited the steel mill at Harrisburg which made the material for the Fort Worth operation. To the young business executive "the high spot of our trip was . . . when I went through a steel mill . . . which was processing huge blocks of steel."¹⁰

The night at the opera and the trip to the steel mill exemplify the difference between Mr. and Mrs. Browne's interests. One enjoyed the fine arts; the other more practical arts. Both were highly individualistic and made their wishes known, yet both were understanding and willing to compromise their differences. Theirs was not a fairy tale story of lovers with nothing but common interest and goals working as a team, but rather a very human act in a very real world.

After closing the deal for constructing the plant and furnishing the necessary gas bottles, the Brownes returned to Fort Worth. Arriving home, they soon learned that the pleasant part of the expansion plans were over and a stormy time had arrived. The Liquid Carbonic Company had learned of Parker-Browne's intentions of becoming competitors. To cripple the new competitor before it started, the older and established firm reduced the price of gas. The leaders of Liquid Carbonic Company hoped that Parker-Browne would enter a price war which would destroy the aspiring company. Browne did not take the bait. Yet the biggest threat to the success of the project came from within the firm. The reduction in the retail price of bottled gas caused Howard, who had a large cash investment involved and was expected to countersign a large note, to become worried. His anxiety was heightened when construction was de-

layed because of shipping problems. While laboring under the strain, Howard told the banker that Browne had not provided for sufficient capital to run the bottling plant. The banker decided to protect himself and loan only \$15,000 instead of \$25,000.¹¹

Howard soon realized that the Liquid Carbonic Company was not going to destroy Parker-Browne Company, however, and at this point he decided to take over the company and make a very large profit for himself. To accomplish this he put off loaning Browne the \$8,000 to purchase shares. After clipping Browne's voting power in the company, Howard began working on the other stockholders to have himself elected president of the company. At first he claimed he did not want any salary and that he would not interfere with the operations of the plant. All he wanted was to learn the business. To humor him the stockholders decided to make him president without real authority. Browne would operate the company. Next Howard asked for a small salary to cover expenses. Again the stockholders were agreeable. After establishing himself as president with a small income, Howard stopped putting Browne off and refused to loan him the \$8,000. Howard also refused to loan Shaw \$5,000. This left the company short by a total of \$23,000. Howard assumed the company would be forced to sell Browne's and Shaw's stock to him; thus he would become the controlling stockholder.¹²

To undermine the stockholders' confidence in Browne and to gain the support of the employees, Howard and his son-in-law began stirring up trouble. Browne would give the employees instructions and Howard would follow along and change the instructions. He also spent a great deal of time with the engineers learning the operation of the equipment. It became obvious that Howard planned to wreck the business and scare the

stockholders into selling. He then would pick up the pieces and with his personal resources rebuild a profitable business.¹³

To meet the challenge, Browne turned to his old friend and telephone operator from Mount Pleasant, Morris Greenspun, who was known in Mount Pleasant as "Dutch" and in Pittsburg as "Jerusalem." He had begun his business career in East Texas as a peddler of laces and cotton goods. With his pack full of goods, the Jewish peddler had walked from door to door and town to town. After a few years as a peddler, Greenspun opened a telephone office in Mount Pleasant. The first line ran from the Doctors' offices to the drugstores. Soon he established an exchange and living quarters in the attic of the First National Bank. As telephones became more popular in Mount Pleasant, Greenspun began installing more lines. Most of this new construction was done in a slipshod fashion, which resulted in the lines becoming wrapped every time the wind blew. To keep the wires straight Greenspun would take a fishing pole and walk the line. After a time he extended his phone business to Pittsburg. When Southwestern Bell Telephone Company moved to West Texas where he acquired an ice agency and a beer and pop bottling business.¹⁴

While in West Texas, he came into contact with the products of Parker-Browne and decided that the company had a future. On one of his trips from West Texas to Mount Pleasant, where he still had some business interests, he stopped in at Parker-Browne and inquired of his old friend if any of the company's stocks were for sale. This was in 1908 when business was good and none of the stockholders were willing to sell. But Browne assured him that if any stocks did become available he would let him know. On a later trip to Fort Worth, Greenspun was in-

formed that Browne planned to fire one of the bookkeepers. After being fired, the bookkeeper would probably want to sell his \$2,700 worth of stock, which he had purchased at fifty cents on the dollar. Greenspun was able to acquire the stock. Thus he became interested in Parker-Browne Company.¹⁵

During the time that the gas plant was being installed, Browne did not feel he could afford a showdown with Howard, but when the plant was completed and on the first day it began producing more gas than its rating and the gas was of very high quality, Browne decided it was time for a showdown. The day after the plant went into operation the stockholders met to elect a president. Unaware of what lay in store for him, Howard arrived expecting to be re-elected president. But Browne had lined up the votes against him. He had arranged to have Greenspun, who was worth \$50,000, take Howard's place on the bank note. Browne had also threatened to leave the business and take his formulas and contacts with him if the other stockholders did not remove Howard. Faced with the lesser of two evils, the stockholders met Browne's demands. Howard was removed, but Browne's victory was only a Pyrrhic one. To get his name on the note Greenspun had demanded a price. Although he promised not to interfere with Browne's operating the company, he wanted to learn the business. For several months the two men worked hand in glove.¹⁶

The day following the stockholders' meeting, Browne faced another crisis. When the company had begun construction of the gas plant, it was unable to find a trained man to operate the equipment after the construction had been completed. As a result a man had to be trained. One Mr. Frazier, who had a great deal of experience with ice cream equipment, was hired and put to work when construction started. He was in-

structed to learn all he could from the engineers and men installing the plant. Frazier had followed his instructions and had learned the operation of the equipment. Since he was the only man at Parker-Browne Company who could operate the equipment and the company was under financial strain, he decided to take advantage of the situation to improve his wages and working conditions. His demands were so high that Browne was forced to refuse them. Frazier thereupon quit work, which left the company in a bad situation. But Frazier did not have another job or any prospects for employment, so a compromise between employee and employer was reached and he returned to work. In two days two crises had been met and overcome successfully.¹⁷

A third crisis soon developed. Because the bank had refused to loan the company the full \$25,000 and the actual stock sales had fallen short of the planned amount, the company did not have enough money to purchase all the gas bottles which were necessary for supplying the soft drink bottlers. Without these steel bottles the business would soon fail. To meet this crisis Greenspun and one Mr. Levy of the Western National Bank agreed to purchase the gas bottles and lease them to the company. The lease price was quite high and took most of the profits to cover the fee, but Browne had no choice but to agree with the deal. The profits in 1911, the first full year of the gas bottling business were \$7,186.79. To increase the profits, Greenspun suggested to Browne that the stock be increased from \$50,000 to \$75,000 and the increase be used to purchase gas bottles and buy Levy's interest. Browne was reluctant because he did not have the money to purchase his share of the stock, and an increase in Greenspun's share of stock would give him control of the company. Greenspun quieted Browne's fears by promising that at a

later date he would allow the shares to be increased by another \$25,000 and Browne could purchase a large quantity. Browne agreed and the bottles were purchased. In 1912, the company profits were \$21,003.86.¹⁸

With the company profits high and Browne's personal finances in better shape, he asked Greenspun to increase the stock another \$25,000 in order that he could purchase his share. Greenspun refused. Browne had brought his old friend from Mount Pleasant into the business to keep Howard from winning control of the company, but in the process he had lost control of it to his former ally.¹⁹

When Greenspun refused to honor his promise, Browne lost his temper and shouted, "You are just a double-crossing little SOB, and I am through with you. You have control of this business and I am leaving you and would like to sell you my stock for less than what it is worth, or I'll sell it to anyone who would be interested in buying."²⁰

Greenspun allowed the younger man to rage because he knew he held the trump cards. Browne owed the company \$1,500 and he had other debts. Greenspun could use the debt to the company to prevent Browne from selling part of his stock. Since Browne was the only one who knew how to mix the concentrated flavors, his departure would seriously injure Parker-Browne Company, and any prospective buyer of the stock would be hesitant to purchase once he learned the importance of the seller. Browne, who had spent so many years building the company, would not destroy his creation and himself in a moment of anger. Greenspun simply asked Browne, "Why can't you just stay on and be the manager of the company as you have been and as far as anyone knows you still have control?"²¹ Browne was not agreeable because the arrangement would result in Greenspun making most of the profit and Browne doing most of the

work.

After the young man let off steam, the two men reached a short-term working agreement. Browne was to get out of the office for a while. This would give the stockholders a chance to become accustomed to Greenspun running the business. Browne was to teach someone else to mix the concentrated flavors before he quit the firm. If a chance for a big and profitable business expansion occurred the two men would work together in the expansion, and at that time Browne could buy a large block of stock. But both men understood that within a relatively short time Browne would be moving on. The two men agreed that Browne should make a trip into the Rocky Mountain states to open up trade. This would give one a chance to get away and look for something else while the other consolidated his control. On the sales trip, which included a visit to Yellowstone Park, Browne conceived the idea of building a liquid gas plant in Tennessee or Georgia. The Southeastern states were the largest market for Coca-Cola and other sodas, but carbon dioxide gas for the business had to be shipped into the region. In the late fall of 1912, Browne received the approval of the other stock members to attempt to establish a plant in Memphis or Atlanta.²²

Browne was to promote the stock sale. Parker-Browne Company would take fifty per cent of the stock, or \$50,000 worth, and Coca-Cola dealers in the Southeast were expected to purchase the remaining fifty per cent. Most of the bottlers were strongly in favor of the gas plant, but they did not have the money to invest. Stock promotion in 1913 was especially difficult because of a recession which was pressing down on the nation. The effect of the recession can be illustrated by its effect on Parker-Browne. The company's net profits for 1912 were

\$21,003.86. The next year the company lost \$521.39. In a letter dated September 18, 1913, Greenspun wrote Browne, who was in Memphis attempting to sell stock, that the bank had just cut off credit, and no other bank would let them in. Five days later he wrote, "We are overdrawn about \$2,000.00 with every check out. Colgate has threatened to sue, and Pfizer has sent his man here for no other purpose but to collect from us. National Anniline, Mallincrodt, Dodge & Olcott and several others are raising hell, and it just simply is tearing me up."²³ During the early spring of 1915 the Western National Bank turned a \$15,000 note over to a collection agency. Times were indeed tough for expansion--it was hard to survive. But the soda pop business was a boom and bust business. In the spring of 1914 the bank was about to foreclose on the company, but by late fall the company showed a net profit of \$15,556.97. The company would survive, but the recession prevented it from expanding in 1913. In 1914, the Liquid Carbonic Company, which had learned of Browne's activities, moved to take control of the area by building a plant in Memphis.²⁴

Browne started preparing his way for leaving Parker-Browne in 1914 by investing in Coca-Cola plants in Texarkana, Texas, and Ardmore, Oklahoma. In 1915, the company he had worked so hard to build since 1904 was beginning to show high profits and substantial amounts of money. Total sales the first year the business opened was \$2,340; the last full year Browne was with the company its net profits were \$15,556.97. This marked a substantial growth, but the founder and most consistent moving force in the company was on his way out. Others would reap the bountiful harvest.²⁵

In April 1915, Browne began sending letters of query to several

firms which handled drugs and items associated with the soft drink business. He contacted the Dr. Pepper Company in an effort to find suitable employment. The W. J. Bush Company, which manufactured essential oils and chemicals that were used in industry, offered him a position as a traveling salesman and Browne accepted. He also was able to sell part of his stock to Greenspun, and the cash he used to pay off most of his debts. Browne still had stock in Parker-Browne, but none of the stockholders would buy them. After Browne left Fort Worth, Greenspun told the other stockholders that he was sick and was going to Europe for his health. He planned to leave his inept brother in charge of the plant. The stockholders panicked and sold their interest in the company to Greenspun for about one-tenth its value.²⁶

The strong survive and the weak die. An opportunity to expand Parker-Browne Company in the carbonated gas business appeared in 1910. One of the men, Howard, who took part in the expansion became frightened and greedy and attempted to take over the company. To block his move, the company founder and the stockholders allowed Greenspun a great deal of power, and by the summer of 1915, Browne was on the road selling and the other stockholders were out of the business. Greenspun maintained control of the company until he retired in the mid-1940's.²⁷

The events at Parker-Browne had hurt Browne, but he was not defeated. He would survive. While on a sales trip to New Orleans in 1915, he met Ira B. Harkey. Harkey was in the business of manufacturing vinegar and cider and had used some of Parker-Browne Company's preservatives. Soon the two men became well acquainted and began to plan a new business venture. In the early autumn of 1916 the two men signed an agreement in which both would be equal partners. Harkey would put up \$5,000 as need-

ed and Browne would furnish his notebook full of recipes for soft drinks and preservatives. The business opened in 1917 and proved to be profitable for both men. Greenspun attempted to block the progress of the National Fruit Flavor Company, but when he gained control of Parker-Browne Company, he failed to get control of the creative brains of the company. Within a short time the National Fruit Flavor Company had taken over the Parker-Browne accounts for preservatives and flavors.²⁸

Browne wrote his wife, after closing the deal with Harkey, "We are in business again. . . . I am going to do things differently and live a better way than we lived in Fort Worth."²⁹ He kept his promise.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹Parker-Browne Company Statement of Sales.
- ²Autobiography III, p. 36.
- ³Autobiography I, p. 27; Autobiography II, pp. 30-31.
- ⁴Ibid.
- ⁵Ibid.
- ⁶Ibid., p. 31.
- ⁷Autobiography III, p. 39; Maimie Lee Browne to John E. Robinson, [1910], Mrs. Browne's Collection.
- ⁸Autobiography III, p. 39.
- ⁹Maimie Lee Browne to John E. Robinson, [1910], Mrs. Browne's Collection.
- ¹⁰Autobiography III, p. 40.
- ¹¹Autobiography II, p. 32; Autobiography III, p. 41.
- ¹²Autobiography II, pp. 32-33; Autobiography III, pp. 41-43; Spill Browne to Virgil Browne, June 4, 1911, Browne Collection.
- ¹³Autobiography I, pp. 29-30.
- ¹⁴Ibid., p. 26; Autobiography II, p. 29.
- ¹⁵Autobiography I, pp. 26-27.
- ¹⁶Autobiography III, pp. 43-44.
- ¹⁷Autobiography I, p. 30; Autobiography II, p. 34.
- ¹⁸Autobiography I, p. 31; Autobiography II, pp. 34-35; Autobiography III, p. 44; Parker-Browne Company Statement of Sales.
- ¹⁹Autobiography III, pp. 44-45.
- ²⁰Ibid., p. 45.

²¹Ibid.; Agreement between M. Greenspun and Virgil Browne, State of Texas, County of Tarrant, May 1915, Browne Collection.

²²Autobiography I, p. 32; Autobiography II, p. 36; Subscription Agreement, Browne Collection.

²³Morris Greenspun to Virgil Browne, Sept. 24, 1913, Browne Collection.

²⁴Parker-Browne Company Statement of Sales; Subscription Agreement; Morris Greenspun to Virgil Browne, Sept. 18, 1913, Browne Collection; Ibid., Sept. 23, 1913; Ibid., Sept. 24, 1913; Ibid., Sept. 28, 1913; J. C. Pidgeon to Virgil Browne, Oct. 10, 1913, Browne Collection; Glover C. Johnson to Morris Greenspun and J. W. Covey, Mar. 5, 1914, Browne Collection; Morris Greenspun to George H. Miller, Mar. 7, 1914, Browne Collection.

²⁵Virgil Browne v. T. O. Smith, Coca-Cola Bottling Company, M. Greenspun, T. J. Coffey, and W. O. Spratt, Miller Chancery Court, Sept. 25, 1914, Browne Collection; T. J. Coffey to Virgil Browne and Morris Greenspun, July 11, 1914, Browne Collection; Parker-Browne Company Statement of Sales.

²⁶Virgil Browne to D. H. Davis, Apr. 5, 1915, Browne Collection; Virgil Browne to Arthur Bell, Dodge and Alcott Co., Apr. 5, 1915, Browne Collection; F. J. Gould to Virgil Browne, May 8, 1915, Browne Collection; R. S. Lazesby, President of Dr. Pepper Co., to Virgil Browne, Dec. 27, 1915, Browne Collection; Virgil Browne to W. J. Bush and Co., Apr. 5, 1915, Browne Collection; W. J. Bush and Co. to Virgil Browne, Oct. 6, 1916, Browne Collection; Ibid., Dec. 20, 1916; Autobiography III, p. 50.

²⁷Virgil Browne, personal interview with the author, Dec. 5, 1973.

²⁸Partnership Agreement between Ira B. Harkey and Virgil Browne, New Orleans, La., Sept. 23, 1916, Browne Collection.

²⁹Virgil Browne to Maimee Lee Browne, Sept. 2, 1916, Mrs. Browne's Collection.

CHAPTER V

GETTING INTO THE COCA-COLA BUSINESS

At the turn of the century, business was without many restrictions or restraint. The slogan which governed many transactions was the same as in Roman times: let the buyer beware. During the exciting days of 1903, the Coca-Cola Company had established a regional headquarters in Dallas, Texas. The next year Virgil Browne and his associates began their company which sold flavors to bottlers--often Coca-Cola bottlers. The business connections between the two companies had been strengthened and expanded after 1910 when Parker-Browne Company had begun bottling CO₂ for the soft drink business. The gas plant Browne and Morris Greenspun had planned to build in Tennessee primarily was to serve Coca-Cola Bottlers, and the men Browne attempted to sell stock to were Coca-Cola Bottlers. Through this extensive association Browne had developed confidence in the product and the future of this company. It was natural for him to associate himself with Coca-Cola when he left his own company, Parker-Browne.¹

The Coca-Cola Company offered two methods for businessmen to associate themselves with the parent company. An individual could enter the fountain business, which was strictly controlled by the Coca-Cola Company, or a person could get a franchise to bottle Coca-Cola. Since the bottling business was a small percentage of the total sales and the parent organization was attempting to expand the trade, bottlers were

allowed a great deal of autonomy. Thus the bottling of the drink consisted of several small businesses within a much larger company. Because of the independence offered and the promise of phenomenal growth, Browne was interested in bottling plants and not the fountain business.²

While on a trip to Tennessee in February 1914, promoting the expansion of Parker-Browne Company, Browne stopped by the Coca-Cola bottling plant in Texarkana, Texas. The building which housed the plant was old and small, just a notch above the alley bottlers which typified the soda business. Inside the plant two elderly men were sitting around a coal stove and complaining about the business and its future. Browne asked H. R. Limbarger and J. K. Limbarger why they did not sell out if they were so discouraged. The Limbargers replied by asking, "Why don't you buy it?"³ In reply to the question of what they wanted for the business, the bottlers said, "We'll take \$16,000 and you can pay one-fourth down and one-fourth each year after that until it is paid for."⁴ Browne did not have the money to buy the business, but he thought he could get the money. He wrote the terms of the agreement down on an old envelope which was laying on a desk and paid the men one dollar for a thirty-day option. The Limbargers signed the agreement, and Browne began looking for financial backing and a manager.⁵

Browne contacted T. O. Smith, a Pittsburg, Texas, bottler and talked him into buying part interest and running the business. When he heard of a chance to buy the Texarkana plant, Smith became quite excited, but he did not have any money until he sold his bottling plant in Pittsburg, which was worth about \$7,000. Browne agreed to make the first payment, but to get the money he had to go through Greenspun who controlled his stock in Parker-Browne. Greenspun became interested and

offered to make the first payment for one-third interest. This was agreeable, and the three men went to Texarkana to close the deal. But the Limbargers had received a better offer and refused to go through with the deal until their lawyer was confronted with the agreement Browne had written out on the envelope. After making the down payment and completing the transaction, Browne and Greenspun left Texarkana. Smith agreed to incorporate the company in Texas as soon as possible. The partners did not put their agreement in writing. Smith believed that he saw an opportunity to make an extremely good deal.⁶

After receiving several evasive answers concerning incorporation, Greenspun made a trip to Texarkana where he learned that Smith had begun incorporation in his own name in Arkansas, and that he had sold \$2,000 worth of stock to two of the men he had brought with him from Pittsburg. It looked like Greenspun would lose his \$4,000, while Browne stood to lose his one-third interest. To block Smith, Greenspun hired a lawyer and Browne hurried to Texarkana where he employed James P. Head to look out for their interests. To prevent Smith from selling any more stock, the lawyer got the local court clerk out of bed and had a restraining order signed.⁷

Meanwhile, Browne talked to Smith's bookkeeper, T. J. Coffey, who had bought part of the stock from his employer. Coffey bought the stock believing that Smith owned the business and that there was nothing unethical about the deal. On learning the truth, he agreed to testify in court on behalf of Greenspun and Browne. Smith's salesman, W. O. Spratt, who also had purchased stock refused to cooperate with Browne. When the case came before Judge James D. Shaver to determine if the bottling plant should be placed in receivership until the proper owners

could be determined, Smith testified that Browne and Greenspun had come from Fort Worth to Texarkana just to loan him \$4,000 without note or security except a promise to repay at an unspecified date and to trade with Parker-Browne Company. The judge did not believe Smith and put the property in receivership. Coffey and Spratt were named receivers.⁸

Browne's problems became more complex because the State National Bank had a note against the property, which had been acquired while the Limbargers were owners. The note was due July 15, 1914. By borrowing money from his father, Spill Browne, and his brother, William Browne and through other sources Browne was able to make a payment of \$1,500 and extend the due date on the remaining \$1,000 until September. By fall the business at Texarkana and at Fort Worth had been sufficiently good to allow the debt to be retired.⁹

Smith did not appear when the case came before the court for final judgment, and Greenspun and Browne won by default. The court ruled that Coffey and Spratt should be refunded the money each had paid Smith. Thus the purchasing price was \$16,000 plus \$1,000 each for Coffey and Spratt, plus \$2,500 for the bank totaling \$20,500. The whole deal was complex, trying, and expensive. At this point Greenspun decided he had enough of the Texarkana bottling plant and wanted to sell his interest. As a result, Browne began looking for another partner who could run the business. This time he turned to his friend Ollie L. Biedenharn, who had a one-half interest with his brother, L. C. Biedenharn, in the Shreveport, Louisiana, Coca-Cola bottling plant. Ollie agreed to purchase one-half interest in the Texarkana plant for \$5,000 if Browne would loan the company the money for new equipment. The money was to be paid as needed and not in a lump sum; thus Biedenharn could pay his

share when it was to his best advantage. By November the final details had been agreed upon, and Browne bought Greenspun's interest for \$5,000 and paid the claims of Coffey and Spratt. This made him full owner, so in a separate deal he sold one-half interest to Biedenbarn and loaned the Texarkana plant the money. Biedenbarn followed suit by hiring a resident manager and dividing his personal time between the Shreveport and Texarkana plants.¹⁰

Browne and Biedenbarn had purchased the Texarkana plant, but they still faced two very sticky problems before their purchase would be secure. While Smith was running the business, he had the Texarkana Coca-Cola franchise placed in his own name, and the franchise was only on a year-to-year basis. The new partners wanted a first-line franchise which contained a long-term contract. Smith's franchise expired in 1915, and the new owners of the plant were able to obtain a new first-line franchise. One problem was overcome, but the second problem could not be solved by time. A Texarkana fountain operator named Gallagher began bottling fountain Coca-Cola. The bottlers could do nothing about the new competitor until they received their franchise. Then, after receiving their franchise, they could do very little without the assistance of the parent company. But Biedenbarn was an old warrior who knew many angles and had several connections. He began working with his close personal friend, Charles V. Rainwater, Secretary-Treasurer of the Coca-Cola Company, to prevent unfair competition. Gallagher was taken to court and required to stop his illegal bottling.¹¹

The business at Texarkana prospered, but the partnership encountered turbulent times. After purchasing one-half interest in the bottling plant, Biedenbarn sold half of his interest to L. L. Dobson. This left

Browne with one-half interest and his partners each with a quarter ownership. At Biedenharn's request, Browne by 1916 had sold his partners more stock so that their share would allow large enough returns for the time and money they invested in running the company. Thus each person was an equal partner. When the National Fruit Flavor Company needed more money in 1919 to expand, Browne made a trip to Texarkana to collect part of the \$5,000 he had loaned the business in 1914--the money Biedenharn paid for his share of the plant. Biedenharn pointed out that he had also loaned the company large amounts of money since 1914, and he refused to pay Browne. Words were exchanged and Biedenharn tried to buy Browne's one-third interest for \$12,500. Browne refused and went on to Fort Worth where he received a telegram in which Biedenharn offered to sell his share to Browne for \$12,500. He assumed Browne needed the money, therefore he could not buy the stock. But Browne contacted his friend and business associate at the Ardmore, Oklahoma, Coca-Cola plant, Samuel McDaniel, and the two men offered to buy out Biedenharn and Dobson. They did not receive a reply to their offer, but Browne soon learned that Dobson had been bought out and Biedenharn owned two-thirds of the stock. Later Browne sold his share of the Texarkana plant at a more reasonable figure than had been originally offered.¹²

In 1914, Browne had begun what appeared to be the simple process of purchasing a business from two men who wanted to sell. But during his association with the firm he had to force the sellers to honor their agreement; one of his partners had attempted to take control of the business through highly unethical methods; and his last partner had tried to force him to sell his stock at a reduced rate. It was a tough business, and the buyer had to beware.

In contrast to Browne's first purchase of a Coca-Cola bottling plant, his second venture with this company was very smooth. The Oklahoma and Kansas representative for the Parker-Browne Company, William Browne, learned that the Ardmore, Oklahoma, Coca-Cola bottling business was for sale. He informed his brother, Virgil, who went to Ardmore and arranged to buy the plant for \$5,000 provided the parent company would grant a first-line franchise. That proved difficult. Several Coca-Cola plants had changed hands during World War I. Many of the plants were purchased by speculators who planned to get a first-line franchise and resell the business for a quick profit. The speculators were not concerned with the quality of product they sold nor with the service they gave their customers. As a result, they were hurting the Coca-Cola business. Partially to prevent such speculation, the parent company began checking into the motives of anyone who wanted to get a yearly contract transferred to a first-line contract, and connection with a creditable bottler was valuable to assure the change. After checking Browne's record and because one of his partners in buying the Ardmore plant owned and operated the plant at Sherman, Texas, the first-line franchise was issued.¹³

While negotiations for a first-line contract were underway, Browne had begun looking for someone with cash to purchase one-third interest in the company and another man to run the plant who could purchase a one-third interest. Thus there would be three people involved. Browne contacted Thomas J. Brown, Sr., who operated the Sherman Coca-Cola bottling plant. He agreed to put up one-third of the money. Virgil Browne was in the office of Thomas J. Brown, Jr., looking for someone to run the Ardmore business when McDaniel walked into the office. Brown told

Browne that there was the man to operate his plant.¹⁴

McDaniel, who was working as a mechanic, did not have any money, but he was the man for the job. He had a warm, friendly personality which attracted people and established long friendships; he was honest and hard working; and he was imaginative and could see what had to be done and had the ability to get the job done. McDaniel also was a great optimist. During the first years that he was at Ardmore the weather was cold and wet, which kept sales down, and operating capital was extremely tight; moreover, creditors were demanding payment. But he always had a sense of confidence which assured all that any moment they would find a pot of gold at the rainbow's end and all would be well. To get enough money to pay his share in the business, McDaniel sold a sixth interest to Fred Conner, his employer at the machine shop, and borrowed the remaining money from his brothers.¹⁵

Browne did not have any cash, so he put up some of his stock in Parker-Browne as security for his share of the business. He also agreed to purchase the needed new equipment through Parker-Browne Company and to turn his personal commissions from the transactions over to the Ardmore plant in the form of discounts to the company. Thus Brown, Browne, McDaniel, and Conner pooled their resources to purchase the Ardmore Coca-Cola plant.¹⁶

The profits from the Ardmore business were split very thin because too many people were involved, and it proved necessary to reorganize the company. In 1916, Browne and McDaniel bought Brown's interest by paying twice what the stock had sold for a year earlier, but the price of the stock was paid from company profits over a period of time. Thus the deal was fair. Conner's interest in the Ardmore plant was purchased by

buying the Clinton, Oklahoma, plant and turning it over to him. After Brown and Conner had been bought out, Browne had seven-twelfths interest in the Ardmore plant and McDaniel had the rest. Browne thereupon sold McDaniel enough stock to establish a fifty-fifty partnership. This partnership was based on mutual respect and honest dealing, and it lasted several years.¹⁷

While working for W. J. Bush Company, Browne also learned that a soda bottler at Temple, Texas, who had a year-to-year contract with the Coca-Cola Company, wanted to sell his business. His bottling equipment was old and badly worn, and his real estate was of little value. Browne contacted McDaniel, and the two men agreed to purchase the operation for \$7,000. When T. C. Lupton, who operated the Dallas Coca-Cola bottling plant, learned of the proposed sale, he decided to get full control of the Temple Coca-Cola business by applying for a first-line contract with the parent corporation in which J. T. Lupton was president. T. C. Lupton received the first-line contract and took over at Temple without paying the soda water dealer for his business. Browne and McDaniel offered to pay \$7,000 for a business which was of little value without the Coca-Cola franchise. Lupton simply took what he wanted. These were rough and tumble times, and the aggressive ones who realized that the Coca-Cola bottling business was becoming a bonanza fought for large stakes through methods which were well known and understood by men who staked their claim in an industry which was considered less than respectable.¹⁸

An indication of the growth which was occurring in the Coca-Cola bottling business was illustrated by court actions in 1920 when the parent company tried to expand its influence in the bottling business.

A decade earlier bottlers required approximately twenty per cent of the syrup manufactured. In 1920 the bottling business required forty per cent of the syrup. At the end of World War I the controlling interest of the parent company changed hands. The new owners attempted to "take over the bottling industry and control it absolutely as they [did] the syrup . . . sold to the soda fountains."¹⁹ To prevent this disaster the bottlers started court action. The court supported the bottlers, and the bottling business remained a fertile area for the right person to invest his time and money.²⁰

Not everyone was able to manage the business profitably although the bottling business generally was booming. R. S. Gitterman and Paul T. White, who owned the Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, bottling plant, were two men who lacked the necessary skills to run a successful business. At that time consumers in Oklahoma City were not enthusiastic about Coca-Cola, but when the two men bought the business it appeared they had the financial backing and experience to make it profitable. Gitterman was an experienced New York bottle crown salesman, and White's mother owned a chain of banks. In 1920 the pair purchased the Oklahoma City firm for \$130,000. They paid \$50,000 down and promised to pay the remaining \$80,000 on installments. Their first year in business was quite successful, so the two men took an expensive vacation to New York and spent their reserves. When the recession of 1921 drastically reduced their profits, White and Gitterman were forced to sell.²¹

While visiting the Ardmore plant in the fall of 1921, Browne learned of the possible sale of the Oklahoma City business. He contacted Gitterman and White and worked out an arrangement to purchase the property for \$150,000. White and Gitterman stood to make \$20,000 from this

sale. After taking an option on the plant, Browne returned to New Orleans, Louisiana, where he talked his partner in the National Fruit Flavor Company, Ira B. Harkey, into purchasing a share of the business. McDaniel also agreed to invest in the operation. Before Browne and his associates could take possession, they had to begin court proceedings against the sellers--who had found a better deal.²²

The Oklahoma City franchise originally had included Guthrie and Ponca City and extended north to the Kansas line. However, over the years the territory had been reduced as sections were sold. At the time Browne purchased the plant White and Gitterman were attempting to sell the Cushing territory in a separate deal from that in Oklahoma City. This attempt brought on the court action. By 1922 the deal was completed and Browne, Harkey, and McDaniel had purchased a large territory with great promise. But the bottling equipment was old and of little value. The carbonator could not mix the drink as required by the parent company. All the equipment was housed on the ground floor of the Havelin Hotel at 27 Third Street, but the real estate was only leased on a short-term basis. As a result all the men bought was an opportunity to make the business profitable.²³

When Browne and his associates purchased the Oklahoma City business, they had several advantages over earlier transactions. The National Fruit Flavor Company was quite profitable, and Browne was able to obtain the money necessary to put the new plant into first-class condition. After the business was purchased, the prosperity of the twenties remained. Yet with advantages of adequate credit and good times, the success of the business was due primarily to Browne's ability, for he personally managed the firm. He had to construct a new building,

drill a water well 800 feet deep to get soft water, and create a demand for his product. Despite these expenses, the business by 1927 was strong and profitable. During the depression of the 1930's, when other bottlers in Oklahoma City went broke or sustained heavy losses, Browne's Coca-Cola business made good profits. A further indication of his ability to run a successful bottling business was his connection with the Wichita, Kansas, Coca-Cola plant. In the early 1930's conditions at this plant were chaotic. Browne purchased a controlling interest in the plant in 1931 and put his oldest son, Virgil Browne, Jr., in charge of the operation. In just one year during the depth of the depression, the plant was running on a profitable basis.²⁴

Prior to and during World War I, with the exception of the short period when sugar was rationed in 1918, the Coca-Cola business was profitable for those who had the vision and daring to take advantage of the opportunity. During those same years the bottling business was becoming respectable. As a result many Coca-Cola plants were changing hands, and year-to-year franchises were being converted to first-line franchises. All types of individuals played a role in those fast moving times. The Limbarger types sold out because they did not see what the future offered. They only saw their immediate problems. Men of the Smith and Lupton stripe were after all they could get regardless of the means necessary to achieve their goal. McDaniel was able to combine luck with optimism and achieve success. Gitterman and White had the courage and saw the opportunity, but they allowed their optimism to crowd good business practices aside. Men of Browne's characteristics, who combined courage, foresight, optimism, and realism with a large share of good fortune, were able to gain success with dignity.

FOOTNOTES

¹Compliments of the Coca-Cola Co. (Notebook), Browne Collection; Subscription Agreement; Autobiography III, p. 60.

²Virgil Browne, personal interview with the author, Nov. 3, 1973.

³Autobiography III, p. 49.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Autobiography I, p. 33; Autobiography II, p. 37.

⁶Virgil Browne v. T. O. Smith, Coca-Cola Bottling Co., M. Greenspun, T. J. Coffey, and W. O. Spratt; Autobiography III, p. 49.

⁷Virgil Browne v. T. O. Smith, Coca-Cola Bottling Co., M. Greenspun, T. J. Coffey, and W. O. Spratt; Autobiography I, p. 34; Autobiography II, p. 38; Autobiography III, p. 50; Morris Greenspun to Virgil Browne, June 2, 1914, Browne Collection; Ibid., June 8, 1914.

⁸Autobiography III, pp. 50-51; Virgil Browne v. T. O. Smith, Coca-Cola Bottling Co., M. Greenspun, T. J. Coffey, and W. O. Spratt.

⁹T. J. Coffey to Virgil Browne and Morris Greenspun, July 11, 1914, Browne Collection; Lee & Lee, General Agents, The Union Central Life Insurance Company of Cincinnati, Ohio, to Virgil Browne, Sept. 11, 1914, Browne Collection; Manhattan Life Insurance Company Policy No. 132359, Mar. 26, 1908, Browne Collection; Virgil Browne, personal interview with the author, Nov. 3, 1973.

¹⁰Virgil Browne v. T. O. Smith, Coca-Cola Bottling Co., M. Greenspun, T. J. Coffey, and W. O. Spratt; Autobiography III, p. 51; Contract between Virgil Browne and Morris Greenspun, Nov. 16, 1914, Browne Collection; Contract between Virgil Browne and O. L. Biedenharn, Nov. 16, 1914, Browne Collection; O. L. Biedenharn to Virgil Browne, Nov. 26, 1914, Browne Collection; Ibid., Dec. 3, 1914.

¹¹O. L. Biedenharn to Virgil Browne, Mar. 19, 1915, Browne Collection; Ibid., Apr. 2, 1915; O. L. Biedenharn to Morris Greenspun, Sept. 9, 1915, Browne Collection; O. L. Biedenharn to Virgil Browne, Apr. 3, 1916, Browne Collection.

¹²Autobiography II, pp. 43-44.

¹³Autobiography I, p. 36; Autobiography III, pp. 45-48; Virgil Browne, personal interview with the author, Nov. 3, 1973; Charles V. Rainwater to Virgil Browne, Mar. 24, 1915, Browne Collection.

¹⁴Autobiography III, p. 46.

¹⁵Sam McDaniel to Virgil Browne, Mar. 12, 1915, Browne Collection; Autobiography III, p. 46; Sam McDaniel to Virgil Browne, June 27, 1915, Browne Collection; Ibid., Feb. 24, 1916; Ibid., Mar. 2, 1916; Ibid., Aug. 16, 1916; Ibid., Aug. 23, 1916.

¹⁶Autobiography III, p. 45; Virgil Browne to 20th Century Machine Co., Mar. 13, 1915, Browne Collection.

¹⁷Autobiography III, pp. 45-47.

¹⁸Virgil Browne, personal interview with the author, May 5, 1973; Charles V. Rainwater to Virgil Browne, Sept. 11, 1916, Browne Collection; Autobiography III, pp. 86-87.

¹⁹"Their Future is at Stake," (Unknown newspaper), Apr. 22, 1920, Browne Collection.

²⁰Coca-Cola Bottling Company, Atlanta v. The Coca-Cola Company of Delaware, et. al., Fulton Superior Court, May 3, 1920, Browne Collection; Coca-Cola Bottling Company, Chattanooga v. The Coca-Cola Company of Delaware, et. al., Fulton Superior Court, May 3, 1920, Browne Collection.

²¹Autobiography III, p. 62; Virgil Browne, personal interview with the author, May 5, 1973.

²²Autobiography II, pp. 44-45; Autobiography III, p. 62; Virgil Browne, personal interview with the author, Apr. 7, 1973; Ibid., May 5, 1973.

²³Description of the Oklahoma Coca-Cola Bottling Co., Browne Collection; Autobiography III, p. 63.

²⁴Description of the Oklahoma Coca-Cola Bottling Co.; Autobiography III, pp. 63-66; Virgil Browne, Jr. to Virgil Browne, Dec. 9, 1930, Browne Collection; Ibid., Jan. 13, 1931; Ibid., Jan. 29, 1931; J. W. Jeffords to Virgil Browne, Jan. 30, 1931, Browne Collection; Virgil Browne, Jr. to Virgil Browne, Feb. 10, 1931, Browne Collection; Ibid., June 2, 1931.

CHAPTER VI

INNOVATION--THE NATIONAL FRUIT FLAVOR COMPANY

AND THE OKLAHOMA CITY COCA-COLA

BOTTLING COMPANY

The climb to success in business for Virgil Browne began when he developed a line of concentrated flavors and organized the Parker-Browne Company. To succeed he had to be creative in both the chemical and managerial aspects of the business. After several years of trial and tribulation, the company proved successful, but Browne's innovative character did not become mature until after he and Ira B. Harkey had organized the National Fruit Flavor Company.

The National Fruit Flavor Company had several advantages over the older business. It was located in New Orleans where transportation and communication facilities were superior to those of Fort Worth, Texas. The bankers in New Orleans were more in tune with the thinking and nature of wholesaling and manufacturing firms. Thus their credit policies were more favorable to a company which produced fruit flavors than were the bankers in the inland city. With adequate credit the new company was able to expand and invest in new methods and products.¹

Ira B. Harkey was an established vinegar, preservative, and non-carbonated beverage businessman in New Orleans. His record in business proved an asset to the new firm, and he also was an excellent administrator who was able to take over many of the tasks Browne had been

required to do while with Parker-Browne.²

The original agreement between Harkey and Browne had called for Harkey to put \$5,000 into the business in addition to the use of his building and other facilities. Browne was required to place at the disposal of the new firm his formulas for fruit flavors which could be used in the bottling business, the ice cream business, and the candy business. After signing the agreement, Browne told his wife, Maimee Lee, that he was going to do things differently this time.³

After laying the foundation for the business, he had to solve minor family problems before he could turn his full attention to developing fruit flavors, preservatives, and soft drinks. The family, which had grown to six children, was hesitant to leave Fort Worth and its friends and familiar surroundings, but their entry into New Orleans soon put them at ease. For the children, who had never seen the Mississippi River or ridden a ferry boat, their arrival at their new home became an adventure. The Mardi Gras was in full swing, adding more spice to the lives of the young ones who were moving. With the family settled and the new company producing profits, Browne was able to begin developing a new line of fruit flavors which were marketed under the label of Squeeze. The most successful was Orange Squeeze, but the company also made Grape Squeeze, Lime Squeeze, Lemon Squeeze, Strawberry Squeeze, Mint Squeeze, Chocolate Squeeze, and many other drinks.⁴

One of the early problems which Browne faced--which, in fact, he had begun working before forming a partnership with Harkey--was preservatives for the soft drink business. During World War I many of the ingredients used in preservatives were taken from the market. This was especially true of the raw material produced in Germany. To meet the

demand for a new preservative, Browne developed "Benkalso" which sold well during the war, but with the return to peace and the opening of foreign trade the new line was replaced by the standard materials in which the bottlers had more faith and which provided the traditional tastes for bottled beverages. But during a difficult period, Browne had been able to develop a preservative which allowed many bottlers to continue in business. If this stop-gap measure had not been available, the shortage of preservatives would have had a disastrous effect on the bottling business; closing many bottling plants at that time would have slowed the growth of the bottling business.⁵

Although the National Fruit Flavor Company soon had a good line of products to sell and the threat of a shortage of preservatives had been bypassed, the success of the company was not yet assured. The products had to be sold. Browne was aware of the fact that Parker-Browne Company had its first real success because the right salesman had been employed; thus when he started with the new firm he began contacting good salesmen. Browne was well acquainted in the bottling business, and he was a shrewd judge of character; therefore, he was able to employ excellent salesmen. These men soon were able to get most of the accounts which had been with Parker-Browne. The company was also highly successful in selling to bottlers in the New England states, as well as in New York and Pennsylvania. Soon Coca-Cola bottlers who wanted to expand their line of products were doing business with National Fruit Flavor. One of the most important accounts was with a Coca-Cola bottler who was in Tampico, Mexico.⁶

The National Fruit Flavor Company became a success, but the First World War came very close to snuffing out its life. The Federal Food

Administration began imposing strict limitations on the sugar available to bottlers and candy makers. In some cases the limitation was as high as eighty per cent, but a fifty per cent limitation was the most common. And in the fall of 1918 the federal government threatened to declare the soft drink business a non-essential industry and close it. At that time the soda pop business did not have a trade organization to represent it in Washington, and the threat of closing the industry resulted in the organization of the American Bottlers of Carbonated Beverages. This trade association soon became important in protecting the bottlers' interests and in improving the industry, but the end of the war in November 1918 was the major factor in saving the industry from being closed.⁷

During the sugar crisis the National Fruit Flavor Company received a car load of sugar one Saturday. The sugar was unloaded and stored in the company warehouse. The next morning Browne went to the plant to check the mail and discovered that during the night someone had stolen every sack of sugar. He called the authorities and his insurance agent who investigated. Since the theft apparently had been an inside job, the insurance agent claimed that the company did not owe any damages. Thus there was a double threat of lack of sugar and loss of capital for the company. After talking to the insurance company's general manager and threatening to sue, National Fruit Flavor Company did finally receive its money. Through luck in the timing of the shipment of their products, coupled with the purchase of other sugar, the company was able to continue developing. Theirs was a close call, but innovation, management, and luck saved the business.⁸

Browne at last could look ahead of the immediate difficulties.

Although there were many distractions, he began developing other new drinks. He invented a lemon and lime drink of high quality, one similar to "7 Up," which appeared on the market several years later. Browne was afraid that other producers of soft drinks would simply imitate the drink. To prevent this he added other ingredients which disguised the lemon and lime base. The new ingredients, primarily ginger, made the product unstable. Finally after several years of working on the drink, National Fruit Flavor Company introduced "Mit-Che" to the public. The product met with great success early in 1928, but by the end of the season it was necessary to take it off the market. Mit-Che was an excellent drink if consumed immediately, but if it remained in the bottle over an extended period of time it began to deteriorate. This failure cost the parent company a large sum of money.⁹

During the years at New Orleans, Browne also began developing two ginger ale drinks. Both these drinks were placed on the market in the late 1920's under the labels of "Virgil's Pale Dry Ginger Ale" and "National Ginger Ale." The pale dry ginger ale was difficult to make marketable because "in the syrup . . . the separation [was] very bad, and look[ed] as though all the flavor and color [had] come to the top of the bottle."¹⁰ Browne finally was able to get the mixture to remain stable, but the processing was plagued with problems of sediment and filtering. National Ginger Ale met with more success.¹¹

National Fruit Flavor Company expanded and became highly successful during the First World War and the prosperity of the 1920's, but after the late 1920's the company began to lose ground. By the Second World War, Browne's son, John Robinson Browne, was writing about the need to get things going with the company. In 1961, Browne and Harkey sold

their interest in the business. The failure of Mit-Che and the limited success of the ginger ales were partly to blame for the later problems of the company. The growth of other drinks, such as Coca-Cola, and the decline of fruit flavored drinks also added to the company's problems. But probably the major factor in the loss of the National Fruit Flavor Company was Browne's moving to Oklahoma City. When he moved to Oklahoma City, he was not able to spend the time nor did he have the equipment necessary to develop new soft drinks or to perfect older soft drinks. His removal from the home office marked a major decline in the innovativeness of the company. The drinks which were sold in the late 1920's were primarily the result of experiments done before 1922. The last stages of development were sandwiched in with other critical work which distracted from the final product.¹²

When Browne, Harkey, and Sam McDaniel bought the Oklahoma City Coca-Cola bottling plant, Browne moved to the city with full intentions of remaining only a year. During that time he expected to get the new business reorganized and find a competent manager to take over the operation. If he had known that he would have to remain in the city, he probably would not have encouraged purchasing the company. But once the transaction was completed, Browne used his talents to establish a sound operation.¹³

Oklahoma City in 1923 had only one paved street, 23rd Street, which ran to a few miles from Choctaw. As a result most of the out-of-town bottling business was shipped by rail. Truck delivery service was maintained with Edmond, Yukon, Moore, and Norman, but if the roads were muddy the drivers could not make deliveries, or if it rained when they were on the road they could not get back to Oklahoma City. Solving the

problems of good roads was not within Browne's ability, but other problems in the bottling plant he could solve.¹⁴

The bottling business was restricted to summer trade when Browne arrived in Oklahoma. After the first cool weather in September or early October, merchants stopped stocking soda waters. Inasmuch as most of the drinks were cooled by ice, the retailer could not afford to purchase the ice and the drink for the limited trade of the off season. To establish a year round trade it was necessary to find ways of encouraging people to take the warm bottles home and cool them in their ice boxes. Browne was the first to experiment with a "six box" (six pack), which provided limited number of bottles for the customer who wanted to take some Coke home. The carton provided a convenient container in which to store the unused and used bottles. By developing a method which made home consumption of soft drinks convenient and appealing, Browne partially removed one of the big bottlenecks which restricted the trade. His was a simple but effective method.¹⁵

At the time Browne arrived in Oklahoma City, nearly all the bottling plants used a coal shovel to scoop crowns into the loading machine. When Browne built his new plant in 1923, he built a crown storage bin above the bottling machine. A long tube and a chain were attached to the bottling machine. When a crown was needed the chain was pulled. The process cut labor time and reduced the cost of production. Browne patented the process, but when other bottlers learned how simple the process was, they built their own. Browne thereby had developed a small but important change in the bottling business, one soon used by nearly all the bottlers.¹⁶

He also had problems with the water used to make his product. If

the water used in bottling carbonated beverage was too hard, it amplified the acid; if the water used was too soft, the acid in the drink was neutralized and the drink became flat. To standardize the water, he installed a treatment plant in the Oklahoma City bottling plant. This treatment made the water uniform and eliminated many of the pollutants which had endangered the sanitation of the drink. Browne's water treatment plant was the first installed in a Coca-Cola plant, but within a few years all the bottlers were putting in treatment plants. Browne recognized the importance of water to his operation and took steps to assure the best water to get the best product. His action left another permanent mark on the trade.¹⁷

To get the right water before treatment and to assure pure water, Browne drilled the first well in Oklahoma City to the soft water sand which lay about 800 feet down. When he began drilling, he was not certain what the results would be, but the effort was so successful that other businesses which wanted pure water began drilling deep wells. The new State Ice Company was the first company to follow Browne's example. The First National Bank, the City National Bank, the Huckins Hotel, and the Skirvin Hotel soon followed in digging wells. When the city water supply was threatened during the 1930's, many people seriously considered getting the city water supply from wells. The project was rejected because of costs and limited amounts of water, but Browne's discovery did provide him with excellent water and encourage others to follow.¹⁸

The premix bottling system was the result of Browne's efforts to improve the technique of bottling. When he first opened his plant, he thought it necessary to have two machines for bottling and one machine to provide the right amount of syrup. After seeing that beer bottlers

carbonized their drink with one machine, he began developing the idea for a new machine which would do the work of three. The new machine would control the amount of syrup, add the carbonated water, and shake the mix in one process. Although Browne developed the idea, he spent a number of years convincing the producers of bottling equipment to build the machine. When the machine was introduced, it quickly became common equipment in bottling plants.¹⁹

A Chicago inventor developed the automatic electric vending machine, and Browne was the first man to recognize its importance to the Coca-Cola business. He organized a subsidiary company of the Oklahoma City Coca-Cola Company to install vending machines. The new company bought about \$30,000 worth of venders and began installing them. The vending machine proved a boom to the bottling business; however, the company Browne organized proved to be unprofitable, and the parent Coca-Cola Company eventually took over the subsidiary company.²⁰

To advertise his product, Browne also developed new and novel methods. He was the first man in the soft drink business to begin advertising in the comic strip section of newspapers. He realized that almost anyone who read the paper would look at the comic section and that an interesting advertisement on that page would attract customers. He also was one of the first to advertise Coca-Cola by bringing radio listeners a play-by-play description of baseball games. During the 1924 season, he contracted with WKY radio to cover the games in the city. At first the team owners were willing to allow the games to be broadcast, but later, due to a drop in game attendance, they refused to allow the station to broadcast the games. The radio station completed their contract by giving the scores as they were posted on the bulletin board at

the Oklahoma Publishing Company. At that time the publishing company did not own the radio station. After one season the broadcast came to an end.²¹

New soft drinks, new equipment, new forms of advertising were not the only improvements Browne brought to the carbonated beverage business. He made a conscious effort to place the business on the highest level of ethical conduct. When he began management of the Oklahoma City plant the carbonization machine could not put enough carbonization in the bottle of Coke to meet the standards required by the company. The machine would only put two parts of carbonization in the drink, which was nearly the same level as that being used at the fountains. The correct amount for a bottle of Coke was three and one-half parts. Because of the lower carbonization and the nature of the consumer demand, the bottler was infringing on the rights of the fountain services. Browne recalled his earlier experience at Texarkana and installed a machine which allowed him to mix the drink correctly, although it cost him a large percentage of his trade. He did not believe that a person should take unfair advantage of him, and he would not take unfair advantage of others.²²

Yet he was a man willing to overlook the mistakes of others. For example, the system for checking out used by salesmen and delivery men at the Coke plant in 1922 encouraged theft from the company. The system was soon corrected, but in the process, Browne discovered that one of his salesmen had taken nearly \$2,000 from the company. Further investigation revealed that the salesman's wife was a dope addict and the money taken from the company had been necessary to support her habit. Browne removed the salesman from any position which would encourage further

theft of company funds, but he did not turn the man over to the law. Instead Browne took the loss of \$2,000.²³

In this instance he had been willing to accept the loss, but at the same time he became a very hard man to deal with when he thought profiteering was occurring. During World War I the increased cost in sugar had made it necessary to raise the price of soft drinks, but by 1922 the cost of bottling had been reduced to the pre-war level. After taking over the Oklahoma City firm, he lowered the price on a case of soft drink to a level which allowed the retailer to sell a bottle for five cents. Most of the retailers readily complied, but one woman at the stockyards refused to lower the price of a bottle of Coke or flavored drink. Browne countered by refusing to supply her. She met Browne's challenge by going to the State Corporate Commissioner, Campbell Russell, and demanding service. Browne made two appearances before the commissioner before he convinced him that he was lowering the price to the consumer and that the woman at the stockyard was the one who demanded to keep the price at an inflated level which would allow for excess profits. At the time Browne lowered the price of his product, Coca-Cola was the most expensive drink to bottle, and the reduced price actually cut deepest into the profits of the Coca-Cola bottler.²⁴

Browne's fight for high standards in the bottling business was national in scope. During the mid-1920's, Browne became very influential in the American Bottlers of Carbonated Beverages because of his stand on the "Big Bottle or Little Bottle" (Quality v. Quantity). The question was being seriously considered by many bottlers. The advocates of the big bottle were those who wanted to sell a ten ounce bottle of soft drink for the same price a six-and-one-half-to seven-ounce bottle

was being sold. When the cost of bottles, breakage, storage, and equipment was considered, the big bottle advocates were promoting a plan which would result in lowering the margin received by the bottlers by fifty per cent. The small bottle advocates wanted to remain with the six-and-one-half-ounce to seven-ounce bottle because they feared that the larger bottle would result in competition which would set the business back twenty years. The national advertising campaign of the American Bottlers of Carbonated Beverages and individual bottlers was reaching its goal of convincing consumers that the industry was a manufacturer "of a good, clean, pure, wholesome beverage in a uniform standard-size bottle for a reasonable price."²⁵ If the size of the bottle was increased but the retail price remained the same, many of the smaller bottlers who were working on close margins would have to cut corners to remain in business. The bottler who cut corners would begin making a product which was not clean, pure, and wholesome. This would result in the public beginning to look on the bottlers with disfavor. The market for all bottlers could be expanded only by increasing the per capita consumption of carbonated beverages. The best way to accomplish the expansion was to make sure the drink was clean and of high quality, service was good, and the customers were treated with respect.²⁶

Through various trade magazines and in speaking engagements before bottlers, Browne became one of the strong advocates of the smaller bottle. He had been a part of the days when competition between bottlers was unrestrained. In fact, he owed much of his success to those hectic days, but he also was very much aware of the blight which had plagued the bottlers during the days of boom and bust bottling. He had been a victim of those difficult times. A good, clean product sold by a re-

spectable person promised much more for the bottler and the customer than did a price was disguised by quantity.

The years of prosperity of the 1920's turned into a deep depression in the fall of 1929. By 1931, the bottling industry had suffered a loss of eighty per cent of its demand from the peak year. At the same time states which were attempting to find new sources of revenue were considering singling the soft drink business out for a special tax ranging from one cent per bottle to three cents per bottle. During those trying years the members of the American Bottlers of Carbonated Beverages elected Browne their president. His stand on fair business practices during the controversy over the size of the bottle and his well-known reputation among bottlers were major factors in his election.²⁷

During his terms in office Browne continued his efforts against price wars. The quarrel over the big bottle still remained, but a new threat was developing. Many bottlers were attempting to increase their volume by lowering the price of a bottle of carbonated beverage to the retailer, but the nationally accepted price for a bottle of soft drink was a nickle. Retailers were not lowering the price, but were simply making more profit. As a result volume was not increasing. Because of lower production costs which resulted from the depression, many bottlers were able to survive the situation as it existed in 1931 and 1932, but when prosperity began to return with its higher production costs these bottlers were not able to increase their prices to the retailer. Several bottlers did not heed the warning, and when production costs began to mount they were caught in a price squeeze and forced out of business.²⁸

Browne's second year in office as president of the American Bottlers

of Carbonated Beverages was filled with difficult times concerning membership, taxes, and competition from outside the bottling business. As the depression continued, the membership in the American Bottlers of Carbonated Beverages declined. In 1932, he mounted a vigorous campaign to get the membership back. During the year, he did stem the tide of decline and begin increasing membership. His most effective method of drawing members was by pointing out the advantages of the organization. Of vital concern to bottlers was the proposed federal excise tax on soft drinks coupled with an increase in the tariff on sugar. During the year Browne and the other officers in the American Bottlers of Carbonated Beverages spent much time in Washington working against the tax and the tariff. They were able to prevent the excise tax, but the tariff on sugar was increased. During the depth of the depression, consumers became reluctant to part with their nickles if they had any to part with. At the same time, ice cream and chewing gum began to make a strong bid for the consumer's nickle. This competition the American Bottlers of Carbonated Beverages was unable to do much about. In 1933, Browne turned the gavel over to a new leader.²⁹

Few men have been able to leave a lasting mark on their profession, and even fewer men have been able to leave their mark on their profession in as many ways as did Browne. He was a chemist who understood the requirement for a new drink. He used this knowledge to develop several drinks. He recognized the need for new methods of marketing and became a leader in promoting the now common six pack and the vending machine. He dreamed of better methods of production and promoted a new method of crowning bottles and of mixing drinks. He broke new ground in advertisement with the comic strip and the radio. He wanted a qual-

ity product and began using water purification and deep wells. He was a businessman who wanted a reasonable profit, but he was willing to forego some profit to aid an employee who needed a break. At the same time, he worked hard to prevent profiteering or competition which would hurt everyone in the business. He led his professional organization during one of its most trying times.

Perhaps the finest tribute that could be paid to Browne's honesty and integrity was given by Doug Kimble. At an American Bottlers of Carbonated Beverages executive meeting early in 1933, some of the men present were discussing the effect repeal of prohibition might have on the soft drink business. In a light manner Browne stated that he was going to join the wets by opening an old brewery in Oklahoma City. A couple of days later Browne was in New York when Kimble came to his room and asked if he was serious about opening a brewery. Browne and some other men were toying with the idea but everything was very indefinite. Despite the questionable nature of the enterprise, Kimble gave a \$50,000 cashier's check to Browne without a receipt or definite agreement; he wanted to invest in any enterprise in which the Oklahoma Citian was involved. Browne later determined that opening the brewery would not be profitable and returned the check. For several months Browne had held \$50,000 of another man's money without any questions being asked by the owner of the check.³⁰ That is truly being trusted.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹Autobiography III, pp. 59-60.
- ²Virgil Browne, personal interview with the author, Dec. 3, 1973.
- ³Partnership Agreement between Ira B. Harkey and Virgil Browne; Virgil Browne to Maimee Lee Browne, Sept. 23, 1916, Mrs. Browne's Collection.
- ⁴Margaret Browne to Virgil Browne, 1916, Browne Collection; Maimee Lee Browne to Virgil Browne, Jan. 20, 1917, Browne Collection; Autobiography III, p. 58; Virgil Browne, personal interview with the author, Dec. 3, 1973.
- ⁵Harry [???] to Virgil Browne, Oct. 3, 1917, Browne Collection; Benkalso Manufacturing Co. to Virgil Browne, Nov. 9, 1916, Browne Collection; Harry [???] to Virgil Browne, Nov. 22, 1916, Browne Collection; Benkalso Manufacturing Co. to Virgil Browne, Nov. 27, 1916, Browne Collection.
- ⁶Autobiography III, pp. 58-60; Virgil Browne, personal interview with the author, Dec. 3, 1973.
- ⁷John J. Riley, Organization in the Soft Drink Industry: A History of the American Bottlers of Carbonated Beverages (Washington, 1946), pp. 65-67.
- ⁸Autobiography III, p. 59; Virgil Browne, personal interview with the author, Dec. 3, 1973.
- ⁹Virgil Browne, personal interview with the author, Dec. 3, 1973; Gottschaldt-Humphrey Inc., Advertising to Virgil Browne, Apr. 4, 1928, Browne Collection; H. R. McBride, General Manager National Fruit Flavor Co., to Virgil Browne, Sept. 21, 1928, Browne Collection; Ibid., Oct. 2, 1928; Sam McDaniel to Virgil Browne, Feb. 27, 1928, Browne Collection.
- ¹⁰H. R. McBride, General Manager National Fruit Flavor Co., to Virgil Browne, Oct. 8, 1928, Browne Collection.
- ¹¹Virgil Browne, personal interview with the author, Dec. 3, 1973.
- ¹²John Browne to Virgil Browne, Feb. 3, 1945, Browne Collection; Ira B. Harkey, penciled memo to Virgil Browne, Feb. 16, 1961, Browne Collection; Virgil Browne, personal interview with the author, Dec. 3, 1973.

¹³Virgil Browne Interview, Catalog No. 5, Living History Collection, Oklahoma Christian College.

¹⁴Ibid.; Description of Oklahoma Coca-Cola Bottling Co.

¹⁵D'Arcy Advertising Company to Oklahoma Coca-Cola Bottling Co., Apr. 23, 1924; The Daily Oklahoman, June 10, 1967, p. 9.

¹⁶Autobiography III, p. 68; Description of Oklahoma Coca-Cola Bottling Co.

¹⁷Autobiography III, p. 69; The Daily Oklahoman, June 10, 1967, p. 9.

¹⁸Browne Interview, Living History Collection; Autobiography III, pp. 65-66; Minutes of the Board of Directors of the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, July 19, 1934 (hereinafter cited as Board of Directors).

¹⁹Autobiography III, pp. 69-70; Description of Oklahoma Coca-Cola Bottling Co.

²⁰Autobiography III, p. 69; The Daily Oklahoman, June 10, 1967, p. 9.

²¹Autobiography III, p. 70; Virgil Browne, personal interview with the author, Apr. 7, 1973.

²²"Perfect Bottling Plant, Oklahoma Co. Boasts," The Southern Carbonator and Bottler, XIX, No. 12 (Dec., 1923), Browne Collection.

²³Autobiography III, p. 70.

²⁴Ibid., pp. 63-64.

²⁵Virgil Browne to Joseph R. Flynn, "Is it to be a Big Bottle, or a Little Bottle?"

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid.; Virgil Browne, Speech to the Bottlers of Missouri and Oklahoma; Browne, "How to Build a Greater Beverage Industry," p. 13; Riley, Organization of the Soft Drink Industry, pp. 141-49.

²⁸Virgil Browne, Presidential Address, American Bottlers of Carbonated Beverages, Jan. 1931.

²⁹Riley, Organization of the Soft Drink Industry, pp. 146-49.

³⁰Virgil Browne, personal interview with the author, Dec. 3, 1973.

CHAPTER VII

MRS. BROWNE AND HER ACTIVITIES

The old adage that behind every successful man is a good woman can be reversed to state that behind every successful woman is a good man. For Virgil and Maimie Lee Browne both statements apply. Mrs. Browne stood by her husband during his long hard climb to success, which began in a drugstore in Mount Pleasant, Texas. As Browne became successful, he was able to open more doors of opportunity for his wife. Financial success provided the necessary funds to employ someone to help with the housework and the caring for the children. It also provided the means for covering the expenses she incurred in pursuing her various interests. Thus the success of one depended upon the other.

Mrs. Browne had many interests which ranged from poetry to genealogy, but most of her time and talents were used to assist children. While in Fort Worth, Texas, she became active in the Parent-Teacher Association. While she was in that organization, the war in Europe of 1914-1918 and the poverty of many children became her special concern, and she took the lead in several worthwhile projects. After the PTA meeting on "Morals of High School" in January 1916, the president, Mrs. R. B. West, and the program chairman, Mrs. E. A. Watters, asked Mrs. Browne to take a handful of literature and work out a "Child Welfare" program to present at the February meeting. The president asked that special emphasis be placed on thrift. Mrs. Browne unenthu-

siastically agreed to the two women's request, but "an ounce of missionary spirit" began to generate interest.¹ She returned home where a house guest, Mr. W. V. Klein, told her about the success of school savings' programs in Washington. Mrs. Browne soon turned her whole interest into developing a school savings' program for Fort Worth and the state of Texas. This became the first such program in the South.²

She realized that a school savings' program would teach the students the value of money, develop the habit of saving, encourage money-earning projects, and provide the students with a savings account. This would help create sound business habits which would aid students to achieve material success. To achieve these goals, she found it necessary to convince the other members of the PTA that the project was worthwhile. This she accomplished at the February meeting, but convincing the women of her organization was only a small beginning, for it was the men who controlled the offices of the school. For the thrift project to succeed, she had to win the teachers' support. To get this support, she began an extensive investigation of various savings programs and accounting systems which had been used in other states. The "Automatic Receiving Teller," manufactured by the American Banking Machine Corporation, offered the best method of saving and accounting. The installation of the machines in the schools also provided the PTA with an opportunity to receive commissions which would help finance the organization. After gathering all the necessary information, she was able to get the banks to agree on the use of the machines, the teachers to support the program, and the school officials to sanction the effort. By September a department of thrift was established in the PTA and everything seemed to be in readiness.³

At that point Mrs. Watters began working against the Thrift Project, and on the issue of commissions she came close to destroying the program. Mrs. Watters' effort had no more than been quieted when other problems beset the plan. Mrs. Browne had negotiated an agreement with a local paper mill to purchase scrap paper. A paper drive was scheduled for October as a project for the students to earn money to save. But the saving machines could not be delivered on time. The paper drive was postponed to November and then to December. Finally, after two months of delaying and a significant drop in enthusiasm for the thrift program, the drive was held. The paper was collected and a substantial amount of money was put in the saving machines; however, one of the machines did not work. Despite all this confusion and delay, however, the thrift program was established by the spring of 1917 when Mrs. Browne moved to New Orleans. Through this initial effort she had learned much about organization and promotion. She had also become a firm believer in the idea of teaching savings in the schools.⁴

While Mrs. Browne was working on the school savings project, she also was active in promoting physical education in the schools. During World War I several state and local governments and school officials considered requiring military training in the public schools. The Woman's Peace Party, of which Mrs. Browne was a member, strongly opposed the requirement. The International Committee of Women for Permanent Peace of the Woman's Peace Party was headed by Jane Addams and Carrie Chapman Catt. This organization tried to start peace negotiations, and it was a strong promoter of many of the ideas which President Woodrow Wilson later included in his famous Fourteen Points. The organization was a pacifist movement, and Mrs. Browne was one of the organization's

leaders in Texas.⁵

The promotion of military training in the schools in Fort Worth was primarily an issue argued before the school board. Through the contacts Mrs. Browne had with the school board and in the community, she was able to promote physical activity in the schools. But by the late fall of 1916, as war fever mounted in the Nation, it became more difficult to maintain strong pacifistic organizations aligned with the Woman's Peace Party. At that time Eleanor G. Karsten, the office secretary for the party based in Chicago, began writing Mrs. Browne to enlist her assistance in holding the organization together. One of her assignments was to go to Wichita Falls, Texas, and regenerate enthusiasm with the Wichita Travel Club. How successful her efforts were is not clear, for by the spring of 1917, when the nation entered the war, her pacifism had given way to active support for the war effort. However, Mrs. Browne's association with the Women's Peace Party made her a life-long supporter of international government--first the League of Nations and later the United Nations.⁶

After moving to New Orleans in 1917, Mrs. Browne wasted little time in taking a role of leadership in the state and national defense councils. By the beginning of the fall school term, she was chairman of a committee on special school work in war savings under the auspices of the Woman's Committee of the Council of National Defense, Louisiana Division. She also became chairman of the Department of Education for the Woman's Committee of Louisiana. By November she was in communication with Carrie Chapman Catt in an effort to coordinate the effort in the food drive and the Liberty Loan Campaign. In these two offices, and with both national and local assistance, she began promoting a Depart-

ment of Thrift which encouraged the sale of War Bonds and War Stamps for school children.⁷

During the war she also organized several paper drives which provided income for children to save along with rummage drives to provide articles which could be repaired and given to disadvantaged children. She also encouraged home gardening and canning to assist in the relief programs for war-torn Europe. To promote conservation and to make Louisiana a better place to live, she took a lead in planting memorial trees along Jefferson Highway. The end result of these efforts was quite successful. Over \$250,000 in War Savings Stamps were sold in New Orleans, and almost \$15,000 was put into school savings. When the war ended, Mrs. Browne was still filled with the missionary spirit.⁸

Soon she contacted several insurance companies to promote a policy which would insure a child's college education. By the fall of 1920 Crawford H. Ellis of Pan-American Life Insurance Company had become sufficiently interested in insuring college education that his company began offering the Child's Educational Policy. The middle class and upper class were the only people who could afford the policy, but to these groups it filled a useful purpose. After establishing the thrift program and the insurance policy, Mrs. Browne's attention then turned to other interests.⁹

In its annual report in 1919 to the Department of Education, the Committee of Americanization, of which Mrs. Browne was Acting Chairman, noted that "If our boys fought on foreign soil for democracy surely we women can carry democracy, which is love and good will in our neighborhoods."¹⁰ The report pointed out that many of the immigrants who lived in New Orleans could not speak English. This led to a breakdown in

communications and a heightening of tension. To solve this problem, Mrs. Browne and the Committee of Americanization began encouraging night schools for the aliens. Soon two schools agreed to hold classes if twenty men or women were enrolled. Mrs. Browne then obtained the names of several aliens and began informing them of the educational opportunity. What began as English classes soon grew until the schools were offering a full set of night courses designed to make naturalization easier.¹¹

This concern for naturalization led to yet another project. Mrs. Browne organized and promoted the first Naturalized Citizenship Ceremony presented in the United States. She believed that one of the biggest events in the life of a naturalized American was the day that citizenship was bestowed on him. Since the day was so important, she felt it should include more than a dry court process; the day should have color and pageantry. The newcomers should be welcomed. To carry through with her idea of welcoming the new citizens, she arranged for an elaborate program presented in Judge Rufus E. Foster's court. The date chosen for the swearing in and celebration was Washington's birthday, February 22, 1922. At this ceremony songs were sung, speeches given, and flags presented.¹²

Before the nation entered the war, Mrs. Browne had taken an active part in attempting to keep the nation neutral. When the men went to war, she tried to carry her share of the load at home; after the war she tried to bring about a lasting peace through better understanding. Several years later she saw President Franklin D. Roosevelt place a wreath at the tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery. She was moved by the ceremony to write a poem which gave an insight into

her thoughts.

ARMISTICE

Again with stately measured tread
 We honor our immortal dead;
 With banners high, with purpose great,
 We read your names on bronze and slate.
 You gave for us your own red blood
 When life was sweet. You marched
 With measured feet to drum and fife,
 To preserve our treasured way of life.

A hero's body, 'neath flowers and tears,
 We laid you here, and through the years
 You're known by a number, not your name.
 But each year we return and pledge again
 The world's hope for freedom,
 That you died not in vain.
 You died for ideals, that man might be free.
 You died for me, as Christ died on Calvary.

The high, the low, the good, the great
 Assemble here 'neath banners of state,
 With martial music and supplication
 To thank God for your life.
 The prayers of our nation
 Bless you, and pledge you
 To keep alive the flame
 Of the freedoms you died for,¹³
 Though we know not your name.

In 1923, a year after her husband purchased the Oklahoma City Coca-Cola bottling plant, she and their six children moved to Oklahoma. Two years later she read an article titled "Spanking the Parents." The gist of the article was that many problems in education occurred because parents are not sufficiently informed. Mrs. Browne realized that educational philosophy and methodology were changing like everything else, and that parents needed refresher courses in education periodically if they were to remain abreast of current thinking. She decided to do something about this need.¹⁴

She called on Dr. William B. Bizzell, President of the University of Oklahoma, and requested assistance in getting qualified university

professors to instruct parents. Dr. Bizzell agreed to furnish the teachers, and Mrs. Browne scheduled a series of lectures which were attended by eighty-seven mothers. The idea expanded until by the end of the school year different classes were being offered to mothers: mothers of preschool children attended a course entitled "Mothercraft," mothers of grade school children attended "The Child and His Nature and Needs," and mothers of high school children attended "The Trend of the Teens." During the summer of 1926, when Mrs. Browne took an extended vacation and was not in the city to organize classes, nothing was done.¹⁵

After her return she succeeded in organizing an intensive one-week program for "School Parents" which was held in Central High School during February of 1927. The response to the class was so strong that the school board appointed a full-time director of parent education for Oklahoma City's public schools. Residents of Oklahoma City could become informed on secondary school philosophy and methodology, but the world of the university and the college still remained untouched. To provide a method for better contact between residents of the city and the universities, Mrs. Browne, as a representative of the Federated Women's Club talked to Dr. Bizzell about organizing a forum.¹⁶

The objectives of the University Forum, which started in 1930, were to provide an outline of college education for those women who had not attended college, to provide a continuing contact between residents of the city and the colleges of the area, and to provide an opportunity for people to get together. During that first year, thirty-four professors from Oklahoma University met with the Women's Club twice a week for fourteen weeks. Attendance the first year was excellent, and soon the

idea of the University Forum began to gain wide support throughout the state. By 1935 the meetings were being held in the convention room of the Hotel Biltmore. Soon the speakers at the Forum came from all the state institutions of higher learning, and some national and international figures appeared. By 1937 more than 400 people were in regular attendance, and the meetings were sponsored by thirty-seven organizations. The first meetings were free, but by 1935 each member of the forum was charged \$1.50 to cover expenses. Most of the money was paid to the speakers, who originally had donated their time and effort. Seven years after its beginning the organization had more than met its goals. It was far bigger and more useful than the founders had originally envisioned.¹⁷

Mrs. Browne's success with the Forum was accompanied by other successes. She and her husband attended a large Rotary Club meeting at the Colosseum where the members and their guests were entertained by a four-year-old girl who had recovered from polio. The Rotarians had helped with the treatment of the girl. When Samuel McDaniel of Ardmore introduced the child, he called her Rotary Ann. The name of the girl and the effort of the organization to help crippled children moved Mrs. Browne to begin organizing the wives of the Rotary Club members; she felt they should become better acquainted, have fun, and work on worthy projects. After gaining the approval of Tom McGee, the local Rotary president, Mrs. Browne contacted the wives of other members. By October 1929, the Rotary Ann Club of Oklahoma City began functioning. Soon Rotary Ann Clubs were organized around the world.¹⁸

One month after the Rotary Ann Club began, Mrs. Browne received a letter from the executive secretary of the American Association of

University Women requesting that she serve as a delegate to the Fifth Conference on the Cause and Cure of War, which was meeting in Washington in January 1930. Mrs. Browne gladly accepted the invitation. The White House Conference called to start action against poverty and deprivation at home as well as abroad. This was a call for action on a worthy cause, and the Rotary Ann Club was looking for something to do. Mrs. Browne soon combined the two.¹⁹

In the fall of 1931, Oklahoma Governor William H. Murray called a conference of representative organizations to report on the follow-up of the Washington Conference. The Rotary Ann Club and the Oklahoma Federation of Women's Clubs were represented by their leader, Mrs. Browne. The Oklahoma City Rotary Anns had worked with the state's Blind Commission to improve conditions for the blind and the "hard to see." Five women had learned to read braille so they could work with sick people who were blind, and several books for the blind had been purchased. Glasses and other medical attention were furnished individuals who could benefit from them. Moreover, the Rotary Anns had found employment for thirty-seven blind people, a great accomplishment during the depth of the depression. While working with the Blind Commission, the Rotary Anns contacted the Department of Charities and Corrections. Through this department the women learned of a need for suitable parents to adopt children. While working with the blind, the service organization also looked for homes for children.²⁰

The Federation of Women's Clubs had two projects to report to the governor. A nursery school had been fenced to keep the children out of the street, and, to keep the children busy, they had furnished toys and playground equipment. The Women's Clubs also arranged for a fulltime

kindergarten teacher to be at the playground, and a story-telling hour which met twice a week was established. Free milk was given the children in an effort to prevent undernourishment. The second project was establishing home Bible classes for more than 200 people. Mrs. Browne saw that the classes were lectured on the Bible and on Child Welfare, Public Education, Literacy, Juvenile Protection, Public Health, and a wide variety of other subjects. Through the Bible classes which Mrs. Browne organized, she was able to marshal more support for other worthwhile projects.²¹

The evidence indicates that the Oklahoma City PTA was not directly associated with the White House Conference, but Mrs. Browne was the state vice president, and in one of her annual reports she noted that organization had undertaken the sale of pencils in the "schools to finance the Student Loan Committee" ²² The organization was concerned with providing adequate clothing, food, and school necessities to disadvantaged children. To aid them the Loan Committee had a revolving fund. The PTA also arranged to have a woman make over clothing which was secured each month in a drive held by the children. The PTA also worked hard to get the school dropouts back in school and to persuade other children to stay in school.²³

Mrs. Browne's scope of vision was not limited to the problems of children in Oklahoma City or Oklahoma. She was active in the Oklahoma League of Nations Association whose purpose was "To develop an understanding of the League of Nations, the World Court and International Affairs . . . [and] to cultivate a public opinion favoring American adherence to the World Court, world-wide disarmament and American Co-operation with the League of Nations."²⁴ The organization's head-

quarters were in Tulsa, with prominent figures such as Dr. Henry G. Bennett, President of Oklahoma A. & M. College, and Senator Elmer Thomas as members. In 1931, Mrs. Browne tried to get George W. Wickersham, the national president, to make a speaking tour through Oklahoma. The following year she organized a tour of national leaders to Oklahoma City to encourage membership and to draw attention to the Oklahoma organization.²⁵

In cooperation with Mrs. Catt, who had been co-chairman of the Woman's Peace Party in 1932, Mrs. Browne led in organizing a state Marathon Round Table which took part in a national Round Table on "The Cause and Cure of War." In Oklahoma the Round Table became closely associated with the National Council of Women who were seeking one million signatures on a petition to convince foreign governments that American women were supporting the International Congress of Women, which then was meeting in Chicago during the World Fair. The number of signatures received in Oklahoma was disappointing to the sponsors, but for Mrs. Browne it was another effort at preventing war and promoting better international relations.²⁶

The Oklahoma City Federation of Women's Clubs, the Kindergarten Council, the Council of Parents and Teachers, and the Rotary Anns in 1933 promoted a doll-dressing contest. By having school children make authentic clothing and dress dolls for display in downtown stores, it was hoped that world friendship among children would be encouraged. The dolls represented people in Japan, Mexico, the Philippines, and China; the organizations promoting the display were also able to obtain dolls from the governments of the countries represented.²⁷

For the occasion Mrs. Browne, who was a leading figure in all of

the sponsoring organizations, wrote a poem which captured the spirit of the event:

A WORLD OF FRIENDLY CHILDREN

Come let us teach our children,
 In the city, in the town,
 To fill their lives with melody
 And sing, the whole world round.
 'Though they cannot speak the language
 Of the children across the sea,
 They can sing the songs,
 The whole world love.
 Fill their souls with melody
 Singing songs of love and beauty,
 'Till the whole world feel akin,
 Bringing peace and understanding,
 Singing binds the hearts of men.²⁸

The success of the doll-dressing contest and a desire to continue working for world friendship among children encouraged twenty-one Oklahoma City residents to organize a Childrens' Museum. In 1934, Mrs. Browne was president of the organization, an office she held until 1948. The museum, which soon had more than 500 items on display, provided visual material as well as written matter for all levels and classes offered in the schools. For a geography class on Japan the museum would supply mineral samples from the nation, pictures of the land, and dolls of its people. The Childrens' Museum was located originally in one room of the Irving School, but it soon grew until it occupied one floor and was sending traveling displays to other schools. Originally all the displays depended upon donations from private citizens, but people who traveled to foreign countries were encouraged to bring back items which accurately displayed some phase of the nation's activities. By displaying these items, the leaders of the Childrens' Museum hoped that people who could not afford to travel would become better informed on how people lived in exotic lands.²⁹

Although the projects which Mrs. Browne encouraged did not prevent the war from setting the world aflame in the 1930's and 1940's, she and her organizations did make the world a better place for some school children; they did help some of the blind; they did aid the homeless; and they did work with some preschool children. On the national and international level she spoke out and worked with those groups which she hoped would further the cause of world peace, and she promoted better understanding among people. In all these activities she matched her words with her deeds by taking positive action to make the world a better place in which to live.

While working with the various organizations to promote world peace and to improve child welfare, Mrs. Browne learned of a woman who at age thirty-three had ten children. The woman sought information about birth control from an Oklahoma City social worker. The social worker gave evasive answers to her questions, and the woman died the following year, 1934, in her eleventh pregnancy. The information the woman needed was available, noted Mrs. Browne, to those people who could afford a private doctor. Not until 1936 was concrete action taken in Oklahoma to solve the problem of providing birth control information, and not until 1937 was a clinic started. By 1938, however, a strong Planned Parenthood organization was operating in Oklahoma City. The success of this organization during the early years depended much on Mrs. Browne.³⁰

She was able to convince several influential citizens that planned parenthood would cure other social problems. She also was aware of several preparations and devices that were sold to prevent pregnancy, but many of these preparations and devices were of little use and often were dangerous. To prevent this fraud, she felt a clinic which provided

accurate and useful information was needed. The number of abortions in the city was believed to be high, and most of these were extremely dangerous. Birth control could prevent this hazard to life.³¹

The Oklahoma City Maternal Health Center in the Perrine Building, which Mrs. Browne helped found, treated more than 500 women in its first year of operation. In interviewing the women it became obvious to many that the program was quite necessary and more action should be taken. In 1938 an extensive membership drive to aid in financing the clinic was mounted. At the head of the drive was Mrs. Browne; she was able to raise the necessary money and create interest and support for the project among many city residents. For several years she remained important in the Planned Parenthood movement in Oklahoma, serving as president of the organization from 1937 to 1954.³²

The number of organizations and activities with which Mrs. Browne was associated could continue until a large volume was filled. The topics, besides those already mentioned, would include founding of the Louisiana Congress of Parents and Teachers and the organization of the Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish Fellowship Organization. Her poem, "The Redbud Tree," resulted in the state of Oklahoma adopting the tree as the state tree. Her work with the state genealogical collection helped make it one of the best in the nation. And she was elected to the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1938. The list goes on.

Mrs. Browne tried to make this a better world by attempting to improve the educational system, by attempting to increase understanding between people, and by giving to those who were less fortunate than herself. But her ability to organize and promote good works depended to a large degree upon the success of her husband. In fact, it was his

membership in the Rotary Club which resulted in the organization of the Rotary Anns. The success of one depended upon the other, and they were a team--but the players were highly individualistic.

FOOTNOTES

¹Mrs. Virgil Browne, Report on the History of Thrift Program, Mrs. Browne's Collection.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.; S. M. Pitther, Sec. American Banking Machine Corp., to Mrs. Virgil Browne, Oct. 24, 1916, Mrs. Browne's Collection; Ibid., Oct. 27, 1916.

⁵Harriet P. Thomas to Mrs. Virgil Browne, Apr. 29, 1916, Mrs. Browne's Collection; Jane Addams, Peace and Bread in Time of War (New York, 1945), pp. 49-52.

⁶Eleanor G. Garsten to Mrs. Virgil Browne, Sept. 5, 1916, Mrs. Browne's Collection; Ibid., Sept. 28, 1916; Ibid., Oct. 7, 1916; Ibid., Nov. 18, 1916; Ibid., Nov. 29, 1916; Representative Oscar Callaway to Mrs. Virgil Browne, Mar. 30, 1930, Mrs. Browne's Collection.

⁷File on Council of National Defense: New Orleans, Mrs. Browne's Collection.

⁸Mrs. Virgil Browne, Chairman, Conservation Report for First District, State of Louisiana [1919? Council of National Defense?], Mrs. Browne's Collection.

⁹J. E. Huhn, Liberty Insurance Bank, to E. G. Simmons, Pan-American Life Insurance Co., Nov. 2, 1920, Mrs. Browne's Collection; E. G. Simmons to Mrs. Virgil Browne, Nov. 4, 1920, Mrs. Browne's Collection; Harry H. Roy to Mrs. Virgil Browne, Nov. 24, 1920, Mrs. Browne's Collection; B. B. MacFarland, Pan-American Life Insurance Co., to Mrs. Virgil Browne, Dec. 8, 1920, Mrs. Browne's Collection; Ibid., Jan. 31, 1921.

¹⁰Mrs. Virgil Browne, Acting Chairman, Comments to City Committee of Americanization under Department of Education, July 4, 1919, Mrs. Browne's Collection.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²T. P. Magruder, Commandant, Eighth Naval District, to Mrs. Virgil Browne, Feb. 10, 1922, Mrs. Browne's Collection; Rich K. Camball, Commissioner of Naturalization, to Mrs. Virgil Browne, Apr. 15, 1922, Mrs. Browne's Collection; Program for Naturalization Ceremony, Feb. 22, 1922, Mrs. Browne's Collection.

- 13 Maimee Lee Robinson Browne, So Much I Wished to Say, p. 49.
- 14 File on Oklahoma University Forum, Mrs. Browne's Collection.
- 15 Mrs. Virgil Browne to Miss Francis Mitchell, Sec. Extension Dept., Oklahoma State University, Oct. 2, 1926, Mrs. Browne's Collection; File on Oklahoma University Forum.
- 16 Unidentified newspaper clipping in File on Oklahoma University Forum.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 "The Story of the Rotary Ann," The Rotary News (Oklahoma City), L, No. 23 (Dec. 3, 1962), p. 2.
- 19 Belle Rankin to Mrs. Virgil Browne, Nov. 19, 1929, Mrs. Browne's Collection.
- 20 Report of the Rotary Anns of Oklahoma to Governor William H. Murray, n.d., Mrs. Browne's Collection.
- 21 Report of the Federation of Women's Clubs to Governor William H. Murray, n.d., Mrs. Browne's Collection.
- 22 Mrs. Virgil Browne, Vice President's Report to the Oklahoma City P.T.A., n.d., Mrs. Browne's Collection.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Letter to Mrs. Virgil Browne, Apr. 14, 1932, Mrs. Browne's Collection.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Mrs. J. M. Tuggey to Mrs. Virgil Browne, Jan. 5, 1933, Mrs. Browne's Collection; Lena Madesin Phillips to Mrs. Virgil Browne, Feb. 3, 1933, Mrs. Browne's Collection.
- 27 Extensive correspondence in File on International Doll Display, Mrs. Browne's Collection. For origins of the Oklahoma City project see letters of Miss Caroline Bahr, World Friendship Among Children, to Mrs. Virgil Browne, May through Aug., 1932 in the file.
- 28 File on International Doll Display.
- 29 Mrs. Virgil Browne, Copy of a Radio Address, n.d., Mrs. Browne's Collection.
- 30 The Oklahoma News, June 3, 1938, p. 12.

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid.

CHAPTER VIII

A COMMUNITY BOOSTER

Shortly after taking over the Oklahoma City Coca-Cola bottling plant, Virgil Browne began devoting a significant amount of time, money, and talent to the improvement of the city. Although he was not an extremely wealthy man at the time--worth approximately one-half million dollars in 1927--he felt secure that his children would not know the poverty and discouragement he had known as a boy in Houston. That had been a long time ago, and the road to success had been difficult. Through hard work, quick thinking, and luck he had climbed to financial security. He was ready to help the city become a better place to work, to live, to visit, to grow. The Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce offered him a means through which he could become active and constructive.

To attract new members, the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce invited several businessmen, including Browne, to a luncheon. At this meeting in 1923, Stanley C. Draper and Ed Overholser explained the financial situation and goals of the Chamber to their guests. Browne commented after the meeting that "he was going to like this organization because he had spent his whole life working with deficits."¹ He realized that to move forward effectively the businessmen of the city needed to present a united front. He believed advancement could be accomplished only through an agency with a central organization in which the

best energy and thought of the community was focused on accomplishing a common purpose. The Chamber of Commerce was involved in a multitude of programs which aimed at improving the lives of everyone in the city and state. These were men who "made no little plans." They made "big plans."²

During the 1920's, Browne served on several committees of this organization, at which time he proved his skill and dependability as a leader and builder. In 1932 he was elected to the Board of Directors, a position he retained for the rest of his life--receiving a lifetime membership in 1963. Although he was on several committees and elected president in 1937 and again in 1938, his biggest contribution, because of continuance in office, was in finances. He served on the finance committee, the budget committee, or as treasurer for the Chamber from 1932 until 1958 with the exception of his two terms as president. In a very real sense he was able to control the priorities of the Chamber through the budget. Because he did effective work which expressed the wishes of many members, he was able to maintain these offices for more than twenty-five years.³

The year Browne joined the Chamber of Commerce, it was recognizing the advantages of aviation and its importance for the future. Railroad transportation played a key role in the early development of the city, but air transportation promised a similar role in the future. Inasmuch as air transportation was just developing, Oklahoma City needed to be recognized as an important center at that time and not wait until terminals and routes were firmly established. To take advantage of this opportunity, the Chamber of Commerce organized an Aviation Committee in 1923 and leased a half section from Bertha Akin. Here the organization

built a municipal airport. The original goals of the committee were to provide a field to attract a military training camp, to provide a place for residents to learn to fly, and to provide hangars for planes. The field was maintained for the common good of everyone. Within a few short years, as aviation advanced, the committee's objectives became much broader. The development of the airport and the securing of a military training camp took several years, and these involved several men; Browne did not play a leading role in the Aviation Committee during the formative years, but his activities on the committee and in aviation did attract the attention of other members of the Chamber of Commerce.⁴

The combination of self-interest and a desire to help the city in a worthwhile endeavor pointed Browne in the direction of aviation. He had been in the city only a short time when Paul Braniff stopped by his office to sell insurance. The two men began talking about planes and their future. Braniff explained that he was a pilot, and he suggested that Browne purchase a plane to fly to New Orleans when business required such trips. The plane could be chartered during periods when he was not using it. Braniff would fly the craft. The bottler was not especially interested in the deal because his business would not justify the purchase, but to humor the salesman, he approved checking into the price of various planes. Braniff found a low-cost plane, the Eagle Rock, which was offered for sale by a firm in Colorado. He contacted the Coca-Cola bottler, and they reached an agreement to purchase the ship. While buying the aircraft, the pilot took an agency to sell the planes in Oklahoma. Once the plane reached Oklahoma City, a hangar had to be constructed for it--the first one at the Municipal Airport located on South 29th Street. Also, someone had to be hired to care for the craft.

Burl Tibbs agreed to service the plane. Eventually Tibbs bought the Eagle Rock and started a charter service. Meanwhile, Browne organized the Southwest Airplane Corporation to protect himself from personal liability, one of the first airplane corporations in Oklahoma City.⁵

Braniff became enthusiastic about the future of air transport and talked Browne into promoting an airline between Oklahoma City and Tulsa. Lewis H. Pritchard and Harvey P. Everest were also interested in the venture. With the three men backing him, Braniff traveled to Detroit where he purchased a Detroit Stinson. The plane was a six-passenger closed-cab ship, the first in Oklahoma City. Pritchard and Everest soon lost interest in the commercial aspect of the plane, and finally Braniff found other financial backing and purchased the Detroit Stinson to begin Braniff-Universal Airlines which served Oklahoma City and Tulsa.⁶

The Braniff-Universal air service, which included air transportation and flight schooling, began to expand its trade, and by 1928 Thomas E. Braniff, who ran an insurance and brokerage business in Oklahoma City, became interested in flying. To get money for maintenance and expansion, Tom Braniff organized a B-Line Club which sold a limited number of stock to select individuals in Dallas, Oklahoma City, Kansas City, St. Louis, and Chicago. This stock later was resold for a profit--usually to the original buyers. Through the club Braniff was able to obtain the necessary capital to make his company a major airline. Browne, Everest, William (Billy) Hightower, Ned Holman, Frank Buttram, and Fred Jones purchased part of the stock in the club. Browne was elected president of the organization at the first meeting, but he had to decline the office because he had already sold his stock. A few days before he was elected president, he met Hightower and Holman at

one of the banks. They informed Browne that they had sold their stock, which was up three points. The men also discussed the rumor that Braniff would not allow his associates much of a profit. By 1935, Braniff had put all the company's revenue back into the airline, not returning the investors a good profit. At this point Browne dropped out of playing an important part in the development of Braniff Airlines, but the meeting between the Coca-Cola bottler and the insurance salesman had paved the way to the organization and promotion of a major company.⁷

While owner or part owner of the Eagle Rock and the Detroit Stinson, Browne became involved in manufacturing aircraft. In the mid-1920's, Derring Marshall came to Oklahoma City to start a company to build monoplanes. He was able to interest Hightower and Harrison Smith in the company; they purchased an old wagon factory which was vacant and organized the Coffman Monoplanes, Inc. The wagon factory suited requirements to build the planes, but there was no place to test the finished models or to demonstrate the planes. The men approached Browne and offered to trade him stock in the company for his hangar. He agreed to the trade. Because none of the financiers were willing to spend money to develop the Coffman Monoplane business, the company never achieved its potential, and during the depression of the 1930's it failed.⁸

Although there was a demand by oil men for good transportation to several points in Central and West Texas, railroad connections were poor. The Wichita Falls, Texas, Chamber of Commerce recognized the opportunity to provide good connections and to assure the city a prominent place on an airline. It invited other Chambers to send repre-

representatives to a meeting in April 1928. Browne was one of the representatives from Oklahoma City. At that meeting the people there decided to investigate the possibility of starting Petroleum Air Line, which would fly between Bartlesville, Oklahoma, and San Angelo, Texas. A month later Browne attended another meeting in Tulsa where the idea of an airline was reviewed and definite plans were made for completing a feasibility study. Petroleum Air Line was organized by several Chamber of Commerces to provide a needed service for the people. Although the plan never fully developed, the route it laid out and the ground work it accomplished were used by Braniff when he began service from Brownsville, Texas, to Kansas City and Chicago.⁹

Airlines and plane manufacturing gave Browne a personal interest in development of the municipal airport, and because of his interest he became involved in the Chamber of Commerce's Aviation Committee which was responsible for assuring that the city gained all possible advantages from the new industry. The committee was responsible for building, promoting, managing, and protecting the air field until the city government became sufficiently interested to undertake the responsibilities of looking out for the people's welfare.¹⁰

Within the general responsibilities of the committee was the obligation to assure, as far as possible, that aircraft businesses which moved to Oklahoma City were legitimate and not simply promotion schemes. In 1929, after serving his apprenticeship, Browne was made responsible for investigating a company which D. H. Fechtman was trying to move from Wichita, Kansas. After a thorough check on its assets and future prospects, the company was rejected. At that time no plane had been constructed by the company, although several thousand dollars had been

spent by Kansas businessmen to develop the craft. These men were not willing to allow the partially built plane to be moved unless they were reimbursed for their investment. Nor was it certain the plane would fly after it was built. A year later Browne, along with other members of the Aviation Committee, ran a check on the Oklahoma Short Line Airways. They decided that the company was probably a promotion scheme, and the Chamber of Commerce should not encourage the business until it proved its good intentions.¹¹

The biggest single boost to the dreams of making Oklahoma City an air center came on May 12, 1926, when National Air Transport began airmail service to the city. When the service began, the entire nation was sending about 800,000 pounds of airmail per year. Five years later approximately 8,000,000 pounds of mail per year were flying. That first year there were less than 10,000 scheduled miles of air service; by 1931, however, there were ten times more scheduled miles. Planes had become faster and able to carry greater loads. In 1927, there were only 400 privately owned airplanes in the United States; by 1930, there were more than 5,000 privately owned planes. During the same period the use of technical devices, such as radio signals and lighting fields, made air travel safer and more dependable. The number of employees in the industry increased many fold. Most of the benefits which came directly from the growth and development of the airline was in communities served by airmail.¹²

Getting airmail service and keeping it were two different problems. The Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce had a difficult struggle keeping the community on a direct airmail route. Its major competitor, Tulsa, came close to establishing itself as the air center of Oklahoma. Tulsa

received airmail service at the same time as did Oklahoma City. The Tulsa service was not authorized by the Postal Department, but the mail was flown there anyhow. From this questionable beginning, Tulsa advanced at a tremendous rate in airport development while the capital city struggled along. As a result airlines began moving to Tulsa.¹³

One of the keys to keeping air service was sending or receiving a large amount of airmail. To promote the use of airmail, the Chamber of Commerce celebrated the first anniversary of the service in Oklahoma City. There were bands, flags, and speeches. A parade was held in the downtown section, as was an air show at the Municipal Airport. Although attendance at the various events was good, the use of airmail did not increase. Members of the Chamber thereupon decided early in 1928 to take a more direct approach. The Aerial Mail and Aerial Transportation Subcommittee, chaired by W. E. Bleakley, was organized under the general auspices of the Aviation Committee. Browne was a member of the subcommittee. It worked with the local postmaster and other Chamber committees to increase the use of airmail, but the poundage of mail remained about the same.¹⁴

In the spring of 1929, the promoters of the Municipal Airport realized that the eleventh hour had arrived; if many of the problems were not solved, the community soon would lose any chance of becoming a major air terminal. That year the federal government was selecting the route for its New York to Los Angeles airmail service, and National Air Transport was threatening to discontinue direct mail service to Oklahoma City. The east-west routes under consideration were New York, Memphis, Dallas, and west or New York, St. Louis, Tulsa, Dallas, and west. On the southern flight Oklahoma City was completely bypassed, as

it would be on the northern flight. While the government was holding hearings on the east-west airmail route and Oklahoma City was struggling to be included, National Air Transport, which delivered airmail to the Southwest, began planning a new daylight flight. The new schedule was to go from Kansas City to Tulsa and on to Dallas. Wichita, Ponca City, and Oklahoma City were placed on branch lines reaching out from one of the centers. If the new schedule was completed without including the city, it stood a good chance of losing all aviation advantages to Tulsa.¹⁵

To prevent National Air Transport from placing the city on a branch line and to take advantage of the proposed airmail route, decisive action along many lines was necessary. The use of airmail had to be increased to the point that Oklahoma City became a profitable stop, and more people had to become dependent on airmail if the service was to be maintained. The Chamber of Commerce organized the Air Mail Club under the leadership of O. N. Dailey. The organization divided into several smaller groups: Executive Committee; Radio, Advertising and Distribution; Information and Direct Mail; Publicity and Good Will; Civic Clubs and Schools; Jobbers, Wholesalers and Manufacturers; Utilities, Industrial and Financial; Retail Stores and Shops. Thus the club was working on a broad front to achieve its objectives. One of the most effective methods was through personal contact. At the weekly meetings each member was given the names of two people to contact. The member was to determine if the contacts were using airmail and if the individuals knew how to use the mail. After the first contact, a follow-up meeting was held.¹⁶

The door-to-door salesmen were supported by a massive advertising

campaign. Signs and posters were placed at several points in the city. Literature on the advantages of airmail was distributed throughout the city. The three city radio stations began broadcasting the cost of postage, how to address letters, the type of envelopes and stamps to use, airmail schedules, and the advantages of airmail. Stickers promoting airmail were placed on everything possible, including the backs of some wagons. Advertising literature and postcards were placed under the mirrors in the rooms of all the principal hotels. The writing tables in the hotel parlor rooms were supplied with airmail paper and envelopes and instructions on how to address such letters. To increase airmail poundage yet more, a Bus Lines Subcommittee was established to encourage the buses to pick up airmail at nearby communities and bring it to the city for processing. Most of the bus lines were hesitant to handle airmail letters, and the railroads looked with disfavor on the idea, but the Ardmore-Oklahoma City bus agreed to carry such mail. After several test runs, the owners applied for a permit to handle mail, but they were rejected by the Corporation Commission.¹⁷

By July, the Washington Bureau of the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce reported that the east-west mail line was definitely going to miss the city unless something was done and done quickly. Dailey's committee acted by contacting 500 local businessmen and encouraging them each to send a letter to the Assistant Postmaster General urging the establishment of an east-west mail line with Oklahoma City as a terminal. To assist the businessmen in writing their letters, a model letter and addressed envelope were provided. The political pressure kept the project alive, but it was far from hale and hearty.¹⁸

At the end of the year, the Committee on Aviation and the Air Mail

Club reported that the use of airmail had increased, that the question of the east-west airmail route was still open, and that the problem of National Air Transport putting the city on a branch line had not been fully decided. National Air Transport had started a direct daylight flight from Kansas City to Dallas via Tulsa. The new schedule was served with the most modern planes. A Curtiss Falcon, with a cruising speed of 115 miles per hour and capable of carrying 750 pounds, was used on the route. Oklahoma City lost the glamorous flight to the rival city, but the night airmail flight still came directly into the city.¹⁹

As the depression began to tighten its grip on the nation in 1930, the importance of being a terminal on the new east-west airmail route loomed larger in the minds of community builders. The terminal meant jobs and investment. The Oklahoma City Air Mail Club continued its work, fully realizing the importance of the terminal and recognizing the difficult task that was before it. The southern route was selected for the first east-west route, but a second route was being considered. To get a place on the line, it was mandatory that the use of airmail continue to increase. The club maintained its personal contacts and follow up. More than 500 people were encouraged to send at least one letter by airmail, and many people became regular customers, and some 20,000 airmail post cards with a picture of an oil well gushing millions of barrels of oil were placed in hotel rooms.²⁰

The club maintained a booth at the Oklahoma State Fair which featured an airplane and a talking mail box. Through the courtesy of the National Air Transport, a movie titled "Flying the Air Mail" was obtained and shown at the annual Teachers Convention in Oklahoma City.

The film was distributed by Paramount to theaters throughout the state. Because of these intensive efforts to increase the use of airmail and other important activities, the Washington Bureau was able to get the city placed on the east-west airmail route. To celebrate the occasion, a massive parade through the downtown section was held. It was a day of victory for several men who had labored for years to promote Oklahoma City as an aviation center. They celebrated a victory, but the war was not over. Other battles remained to be fought.²¹

The joy expressed by Oklahoma City residents was not shared by other air-minded people in the state. At Waynoka a \$300,000 hangar had been built to provide a nucleus for aviation development. Here planes landed and transferred the mail to trains which carried it west during the night. East-bound mail was taken from the railroad and sent on by air. When the new schedule started on October 25, 1930, the airlines moved to Amarillo; thus the community had an expensive hangar and fond memories. Waynoka failed because it did not produce a large amount of airmail; it served only as a transfer point for the mail.²²

The use of airmail was important to the development of Oklahoma City as an aviation center because it attracted people's attention and made people dependent upon the service. But the service was not the type which stirred men's blood and fired their imagination. Ballyhoo was necessary to attract attention; then more practical application could be used to develop the plans. The 29th Street airport was in operation less than a year when F. D. Bowhan of Wichita began negotiations to transfer the headquarters of his Chief's Flying Circus to Oklahoma City. He wanted to unite stunt flying with commercial flight, thus combining the unusual with the practical. From that date on, the

thrilling events were used to promote the more stable activities. One of the most exciting events in which Browne played an important part was the ballyhoo of 1927.²³

That year the National Air Tour contest for the Edsel D. Ford Reliability Trophy arrived in the city with a great deal of fanfare. Following an air tour, the Chamber sponsored a large picnic at the airport to attract attention and to have fun. The picnic was highlighted by airplane rides, airplane stunts, and parachute jumps. The picnic was the prelude for the main attraction. Charles Lindbergh and the Spirit of St. Louis were coming to Oklahoma City. Lindbergh Day, September 28, 1927, was a major festive day for the city with more parades, bands, speeches, traffic jams, and general excitement.²⁴

The suggestion of something big was promoted for all it was worth. A local boy, B. H. Griffin, planned to better Lindbergh's accomplishments by flying to Japan via Hawaii. Two local men, George Henshaw, Jr., and Fred Capshaw, were willing to finance a large share of the cost if others would also contribute. The necessary money was not raised in the city, but even the suggestion of the flight stirred the imaginations and drew attention to aviation.²⁵

The following year the city hosted the Transcontinental Air Race, and the winners of "Class B," Erle Halliburton and his brother, John Halliburton, came to the city for a victory celebration. But not all the aviation dignitaries who visited the city were primarily interested in promoting the use of airplanes.²⁶ The Mexican Goodwill flier, Louis Melgoza, was "trying to create a better feeling between Mexico and the United States and also uplift that part of his Country's population now living in the United States with whom they are associated."²⁷ He was

well received in the city.

The year the depression began was an especially active year for attention getting activities in Oklahoma City. The promoters of aviation were involved in trying to secure passage of a municipal airport bond issue, and every effort to get a favorable vote, which would make the city responsible for construction of a modern airport, was being made. One of the main attractions at the State Fair that year, therefore, was an air show. This was followed by a series of national broadcasts featuring recognized leaders in aviation. In July, Oklahoma Negroes held an air show north of the state capital. Although the Chamber of Commerce did not contribute to financing the program, Browne and other members contributed small amounts to cover the cost. By selling aviation hard, the Chamber did get the bond issue passed by a narrow margin, but court cases prevented any immediate action.²⁸

The crucial year of 1930 saw many thrilling events. Eleanor Smith, the eighteen-year-old girl who held the world's solo record for endurance and altitude flying, visited the city. More important for future plans were the arrangements made between the Aviation Committee and Major Clarence L. Tinker at Kelly Field for a visit of three flights of cadets.²⁹

Tinker, later the major general for whom Tinker Field was named, was an Osage Indian raised at Pawhuska, Oklahoma. While serving as assistant military attaché in London in 1926, he dashed into the flaming wreckage of a naval plane and carried the injured pilot to safety. For this courageous act he was awarded the Soldier's Medal for Heroism, and received several scars which he carried the rest of his life. While commander of the Hawaiian Department in 1942, Tinker appointed himself

flight commander on a very dangerous mission. He was killed at the Battle of Midway. Major General Tinker did not ask his men to do what he was not willing to do.³⁰

More sensationalism came with the Goodyear blimp which visited the community, and much was made of Wiley Post's victory in the non-stop Los Angeles-to-Chicago air race. The following year Wiley Post and his promoters began working for his round-the-world flight, which was completed early in the summer. Oklahoma City businessmen and the Chamber of Commerce were deeply involved in Post's flight. The Wiley Post and Harold Gatty Day, July 10, 1931, was a big occasion in the city. Although there were later celebrations, this was the last of the great ballyhoo celebrations designed to promote aviation in Oklahoma City.³¹

The air shows, parades, and airmail were able to draw attention to aviation in Oklahoma City and make the people dependent on air service, but the airport was the most important single factor in achieving or losing any advantages of air service. Although a hangar was built and some other improvements completed, the Municipal Airport in 1927 was little more than a cow pasture. During wet weather the runways were so deep with mud that planes could not land or take-off, and drainage was so poor that it took several days for runways to dry. Along the east side, trees and power lines made take-offs and landings impossible except in extreme emergencies. The National Air Transport flight was a night flight, and, of course, the runway was not well lighted and other technological aviation advantages were not available to pilots. The condition of the airport was one reason that National Air Transport wanted to place the city on a branch line, and why the federal government was not including Oklahoma City in its planned stops for the east-

west airmail route.³²

The Field and Equipment Subcommittee of the Aviation Committee, of which Browne was a member, began a program in 1927 to improve conditions at the field, but because the Chamber of Commerce had very limited resources and the organization wanted the airstrip to pay its own way, only the most vital improvements were achieved. Early that spring the committee tried to get local contractors and the city to donate time and equipment for grading and draining the runways. But little was accomplished. The committee finally appealed to the Board of Directors of the Chamber of Commerce for assistance. In the summer, M. A. Swatek and Company was awarded a contract to grade and drain the runways, and Oklahoma Gas and Electric moved part of the power lines. At best these were only stop-gap measures.³³

After advancing to the Executive Committee of the Aviation Committee in 1928, Browne and several others worked relentlessly to improve the air field. The work on the runways continued with gravel being placed on the face to reduce the mud and dirt hazards. The loading area was graveled, and drainage ditches were improved. Through the efforts of the committee, the city agreed to gravel part of the road to the airport. Thus the field became more accessible to the public. The committee also started updating the lighting and radio service at the field. The problem of lighting became involved in municipal laws. Setting on top of the Huckins Hotel was a beacon which confused pilots. On numerous occasions pilots were preparing to land on the hotel before they realized their mistake. Because the federal government was developing regulations on beacons, the city government, the Chamber of Commerce, and the manager of the hotel reached an agreement to remove the

light without taking formal action. At the same time the airport was being marked with better lighting. In the fall, construction on a radio shack and equipment was started at the National Air Transport hangar. When the work was completed in 1929, the ground control was able to assist the pilots and improve air traffic. At the end of the year the Aviation Committee reported several improvements, but the Chamber of Commerce obviously did not have the resources to make all the necessary improvements.³⁴

The formative years of the aviation industry were passing, and it was time for the city to take full charge of the Municipal Airport. The Chamber of Commerce recognized the developments and on May 25, 1929, approved a resolution requesting the City Council to ask the voters to approve a municipal airport bond issue for \$450,000. Members of the Chamber encouraged the Rotary Club, of which Browne was a leading member, the Lions Club, and other civic groups to pass similar resolutions. The City Council agreed to ask for \$425,000. On July 30 the bond issue passed by a narrow margin. A telephone conversation recorded by Ed Overholser, Manager-President of the Chamber, indicates the general public's attitude towards the election:³⁵

The Airport Bond election [was] absolutely being lost by default. Our report up to two o'clock show[ed] the smallest vote ever cast in any election in Oklahoma City, not averaging over ten to the precinct. So closely divided [was] the vote that in all probability the bonds [were] defeated unless you [took] some radical action between now and seven o'clock, when the polls close[d].³⁶

Although the voters approved the bonds, the decision was challenged in court. Since air routes were being decided and aviation services were threatening to leave Oklahoma City, a quick, favorable court decision was vital to Oklahoma City. Through the efforts of the Chamber

of Commerce and Carl C. Magee's Oklahoma City Times, the courts acted quickly with the state supreme court handing down a favorable decision in 1930.³⁷

The Chamber of Commerce had accomplished much since the lease for land for an airport was agreed on in 1923. Airmail service was started, and employment for city labor was provided. In 1929, Braniff Airlines-Universal employed seventy-four men with an annual pay roll of \$180,000. Southwest Air Fast Express, a Tulsa based company, employed five men with an annual pay roll of \$17,000. National Air Transport employed three men with an annual pay roll of \$5,700. Curtiss Flying Service employed twenty-four men for \$50,000 annually. Tibbs Flying Service employed ten men for \$11,700. Universal Flying School had ten men with a pay roll of \$5,400. Coffman Monoplanes, Inc. employed seventeen men for \$31,200. Browne played an important part in three of the industries--Braniff Airlines, Tibbs Flying Service, and Coffman Monoplanes.³⁸

By 1930 everyone recognized that the city would take over the Municipal Airport as soon as the legal gamut was run, but the Aviation Committee could not sit on its laurels. Meanwhile the Aviation Committee worked to improve service, regulations, and equipment at the 29th Street Airport. Although transportation to the field was provided by the Oklahoma Railway Company, few people used it. To provide better advertising, the committee placed markers on buses which read "Airport" instead of "Special." At street car and bus stops, signs were placed giving information on schedules and boarding places for the trip to the Municipal Airport. The information did increase the use of buses to the field.³⁹

A much more delicate task, one in which Browne as a member of the

Aviation Executive Subcommittee had a direct hand, was establishing and enforcing airport rules. Braniff-Universal, the largest home airline, used a considerable amount of space behind its hangar which it had not leased. No one took issue with the airline until it began denying visitors the right to park on the land. Universal also was violating its lease and other's franchises by selling gas to visiting planes. Another group had purchased the concession to sell gas. If the regulations were not enforced, the Chamber would be in trouble. But if the largest airline threatened to move to some other city, the value of the airport would be reduced. Following an executive meeting, members of the committee met with the Braniff-Universal men and worked out an agreement. The airline was allowed to use the land without lease, but visitors were allowed to park, and the airline could sell gas when the concession pumps were closed. Quiet and careful diplomacy solved the problem. This was the type of work at which Browne was most adept.⁴⁰

Once the new 640-acre Municipal Airport (presently Will Rogers International) actually began construction, the city government became the leader in promoting Oklahoma aviation. During the period of construction and transfer, the Chamber continued to operate the old field. Through its efforts, better radio and teletype service was provided flyers. More accurate and up-to-date weather reporting equipment was installed at the new airport. The Aviation Committee conducted an extensive study on proper airport lighting and persuaded the city to follow the plan. A multitude of other tasks was completed by the Chamber in order that the new air terminal would be a credit to the community. In 1933 the new facility was completed. At that time the

responsibility for providing safe, dependable, and useful air service to the residents of Oklahoma City became the responsibility of the people through their city government.⁴¹

Like the city itself, there was nothing preordained which made Oklahoma City one of the major air terminals in the Southwest. Tulsa, Wichita, Dallas, Wichita Falls, Ponca City, Fort Worth, and many other communities were working hard to deny Oklahoma City an important place in the new industry. Only through hard work, talent, and risk was the city able to achieve its share of the trade. During the formative years of aviation, it was the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce which took the lead in fighting for a municipal airport which could be enjoyed by everyone and which would serve everyone. The Aviation Committee and its subcommittees provided the work and talent which brought direct airmail service, entertainment, and air service. These men placed the city in an important position and encouraged the city to take its rightful place at the head of the effort. One more pillar was set in place in the continuous process of building the man-made community--Oklahoma City.

Browne played an important role in advancing aviation in Oklahoma City. He built the first hangar; he brought a charter service to the community; he helped promote Braniff Airlines; and he encouraged local airplane construction. As a member of the Aviation Committee and several of its subcommittees, he provided much of the "leg work." During celebrations he helped police areas and park cars. To promote airmail, he contacted many people. As a member of the Executive Committee he provided needed talent. Although he never was a chairman, his work for aviation was his apprenticeship for later, more important roles.

FOOTNOTES

¹Stanley C. Draper, personal interview with the author, Nov. 2, 1973.

²Oklahoma (Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce), XXII, No. 1 (Jan. 13, 1938), p. 4.

³Virgil Browne, President, First address to the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, Jan. 1937, Browne Collection; Various records of Committee membership, Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce; Stanley C. Draper, personal interview with the author, Nov. 2, 1973.

⁴"Airport Means Another Basic Industry for City," Oklahoma (Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce), XIII, No. 29 (July 25, 1929), pp. 6-7; Copy of lease between Bertha Akin of Oklahoma City to Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, July 31, 1923, in Municipal Airport: Development and Operation under Oklahoma City C. of C. Aviation Committee, 1924-1932 (hereinafter cited as Municipal Airport); Resolution of City Park Board, Dec. 4, 1924, Municipal Airport.

⁵Autobiography III, pp. 71-72; Browne Interview, Living History Collection.

⁶Autobiography III, pp. 72-73; Browne Interview, Living History Collection.

⁷Autobiography III, p. 73.

⁸Ibid.; Stanley C. Draper, personal interview with the author, Nov. 2, 1973.

⁹Minutes of the Aviation Committee, Mar. 14, 1928, in Minutes of Aviation Committee Air Mail Club, 1928 (hereinafter cited as Air Mail Club, 1928); Ibid., Apr. 25, 1928; Ibid., May 4, 1928.

¹⁰Committee Responsibilities and Membership, Municipal Airport.

¹¹Minutes of the Aviation Committee, Oct. 30, 1929, Municipal Airport; Ibid., May 21, 1930; Ibid., May 28, 1930.

¹²Lester D. Seymour, Vice-President and General Manager, N.A.T., Inc., Address to Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce Membership Luncheon, May 8, 1931.

¹³Erle P. Halliburton to Hon. W. Irving Glover, Second Assistant Postmaster General, July 5, 1929, Municipal Airport; B. H. Griffin to Stanley C. Draper, July 27, 1929, Minutes of Aviation Committee Air Mail Club, 1929 (hereinafter cited as Air Mail Club, 1929); Stanley C. Draper, Statement on the Oklahoma City Aviation, Air Mail Club, 1928.

¹⁴Minutes of the Aviation Committee, May 12, 1927, in Minutes of Aviation Committee Oklahoma City C. of C., 1927 (hereinafter cited as Aviation Committee, 1927); Aerial Mail and Aerial Transportation Sub-Committee, Air Mail Club, 1928.

¹⁵Stanley C. Draper to Walter M. Harrison, July 25, 1929, Municipal Airport; B. H. Griffin to Stanley C. Draper, July 27, 1929, Air Mail Club, 1929; "N.A.T. Extends Southwestern Day Line," NAT Bulletin Board, IV, No. 29 (July 25, 1929), p. 1.

¹⁶O. N. Dailey to Stanley C. Draper, Dec. 27, 1929, partial annual report, Air Mail Club, 1929.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Glenn W. Cease and O. N. Dailey to Stanley C. Draper, Dec. 27, 1929, Air Mail Club, 1929; "N.A.T. Extends Southwestern Day Line," p. 1.

²⁰R. A. Billups, Jr., Annual Report Air Mail Club 1930 to the Board of Directors, Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, Municipal Airport.

²¹Ibid.

²²Oklahoma City Times, Oct. 8, 1930.

²³Minutes of the Aviation Committee, Apr. 16, 1924, Municipal Airport.

²⁴Minutes of the Aviation Committee, July 1, 1927, Aviation Committee, 1927; Ibid., Sept. 7, 1927, Ibid., Sept. 21, 1927.

²⁵Minutes of the Aviation Committee Executive Sub-Committee, June 6, 1927, Aviation Committee, 1927.

²⁶Minutes of the Aviation Committee, Sept. 19, 1928, Air Mail Club, 1928.

²⁷Ibid., Dec. 1, 1928.

²⁸Minutes of the Aviation Committee, July 3, 1929, Municipal Airport.

²⁹Ibid., Apr. 9, 1930; Ibid., May 21, 1930; Ibid., May 28, 1930.

30 W. E. Hightower, President, Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, to Chief of Air Forces, Aug. 21, 1942, Stanley Carlyle Draper a Friend of the Air Force.

31 Minutes of the Aviation Committee, Feb. 19, 1931, Municipal Airport; Copy of Proclamation signed by Mayor C. J. Blinn, July 10, 1931, Municipal Airport.

32 L. G. Fritz, Vice-President Southwest Air Fast Express, to Stanley C. Draper, Aug. 6, 1930, Municipal Airport.

33 Minutes of Field and Equipment Sub-Committee and Aviation Committee, Apr. 17, 1927, Aviation Committee, 1927.

34 Minutes of the Aviation Committee, Apr. 23, 1930, Municipal Airport; Ibid., July 16, 1930; Ibid., Sept. 18, 1929; Minutes of Aviation Committee, Sept. 19, 1929, Air Mail Club, 1928.

35 Minutes of the Board of Directors of the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, May 25, 1929, Municipal Airport.

36 Memo signed Ed Overholser, July 30, 1929, Municipal Airport.

37 Minutes of the Aviation Committee, Oct. 30, 1929, Municipal Airport; Carl C. Magee, "Turning on the Light," editorial, Oklahoma City Times, Apr. 11, 1930.

38 "Facts," Oklahoma (Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce), XIII, No. 29 (July 25, 1929), pp. 4-5.

39 Minutes of the Aviation Committee, Oct. 30, 1929, Municipal Airport.

40 Minutes of the Aviation Committee followed by Meeting of the Executive Sub-Committee of the Aviation Committee, Sept. 18, 1929, Municipal Airport.

41 Minutes of the Aviation Committee, Sept. 17, 1930, Municipal Airport; Annual Report of the Air Mail Club, 1930, Municipal Airport; Annual Report of the Aviation Committee, 1930, Municipal Airport; Air Traffic Club Annual Report, 1931, Municipal Airport; Aviation Committee Annual Report, 1932, Municipal Airport.

CHAPTER IX

OKLAHOMA CITY'S WATER PROBLEMS

Oklahoma City needed a plentiful supply of good water in order to grow and develop. Too much water in a raging torrent caused considerable damage, destruction, and misery, while droughts were equally destructive. Between 1923 and 1953, Oklahoma City suffered through twenty-eight floods of various severity. These floods caused millions of dollars worth of damage in the city and took fourteen lives. Moreover, in the mid-1930's, the city worried through a major drought. There was too much water at times and too little at other times. Since the floods and droughts were not confined to the city, the water problem concerned the people of several states. The story of the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce's water program began in 1923, one year after Virgil Browne arrived in the state. He did not play a vital role in developing the program, and he could not take full credit for implementing the plan; however, he did play a major role at key points in the long history of the "Oklahoma Plan."

In the Central Baptist Church, refugees from the Oklahoma City flood of June 7, 1923, were fed and sheltered until the water receded and they could return to their homes and begin cleaning up and rebuilding. These were the lucky victims of the floods, which swelled the North Canadian, South Canadian, and Arkansas Rivers, taking many lives and washing away millions of tons of precious top soil. The flood

washed out crops and left deep gullies in fields. Towns and cities were isolated when bridges, railroads, and roads washed out. While the water was doing its destruction and the refugees were worrying about their fate, a group of businessmen met at the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce to consider what should be done to prevent similar disasters in the future. Edward Overholser, Victor E. Harlow, Ernest E. Blake, and Stanley C. Draper were among the men present.¹

After the June flood waters receded, interest in any control project waned. Then in October the water in the North Canadian began rising again. Newspapers reported that the water would crest without doing extensive damage. Then it began to rain. Under the pressure of the water, an earthen section of the city water supply dam gave way and sent millions of gallons of water into the already flooding river. Before the water receded, several lives were lost and hundreds of homes destroyed. The June and October floods cost Oklahomans approximately \$100,000,000 in damages. Following the second flood, Blake was appointed chairman of the Chamber's Flood Control Committee. Under his leadership an extensive plan to control the water was developed. To aid the city in repairing the dam and water works, the Chamber appointed a Water Supply Committee. The two committees worked independently for several years.²

The Flood Control Committee asked representatives from several Oklahoma communities to attend a meeting called for November 27, 1923. The delegates were asked to help promote the Oklahoma City flood control plan. A statewide organization was formed to support the plan. When the state legislature met in 1924, the group was ready with a preliminary bill defining the government's role in flood control. The State

Drainage Commission was established. The commission was responsible for developing plans for drainage, irrigation, and flood control, and was further empowered to make all necessary surveys. The first chairman of the State Drainage Commission was Blake. Thus the leader in the Chamber became the leader in the state.³

While work on the state level was progressing, the Chamber's Washington Bureau called on the state Congressional delegation to get federal assistance, and in May 1924, the federal government authorized the examination of certain streams in Oklahoma and neighboring states. To aid in financing the work, the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce budgeted more than \$12,000 for preliminary studies. Additional appropriations were made until the Chamber had spent nearly \$50,000 in developing and promoting the plan.⁴

Survey work soon began and identified several basins along the North Canadian which were suitable for water storage. At the same time, the plans for controlling floods were completed, the limited steps toward controlling floods were taken. The Oklahoma Plan for Flood Control, as it later became known in Congress, called for:

1. Holding as much water as possible in the ground through terracing and contour plowing.
2. Establishment of farm ponds, lakes, and reservoirs.
3. Building of restraining dams across streams to check flood waters in their initial state and to release them slowly in line with the capacity of the river.
4. Impounding of flood waters in lakes and big ponds to be constructed in the uplands, and use of water from these lakes and ponds for irrigation of lands of lower elevation.⁵

During 1925 and 1926, the Washington Bureau and several individuals worked in the nation's capital to change the federal government's policy of flood control by building levees and drainage canals along the lower stretches of the major rivers. The federal government until that time

had not seriously considered controlling floods by building dams at the headwaters. Through a massive campaign, which involved extensive efforts by the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, the government by 1928 had reversed its older policy. Thus the way was open for federal action; however, there were no federally sponsored projects begun along the North Canadian River until the late 1930's.⁶

The men working for state flood control faced a crisis in 1926 when the Drainage Commission attempted to establish North Canadian Drainage Districts. The Farmers Union, led by John Simpson, and the Oklahoma Farmer-Stockman began an extensive campaign against the flood control project. These people and their newspaper argued that the Drainage Districts were not designed and ruled through the democratic process; thus the districts would be a threat to cherished institutions. The difficulty was compounded because the exact cost of constructing various dams could not be given, and people who lived on high ground were expected to pay part of the cost although they would receive little direct benefit. The battle soon became political in nature when Governor Martin Edward Trapp demanded Blake's resignation. When Blake refused, the governor threatened to call a special session of the legislature to abolish the Drainage Commission. At the same time, merchants in rural Oklahoma began boycotting Oklahoma City wholesale and retail businesses. Under this pressure Blake resigned, and the office was not filled by Trapp. After the Chamber was defeated, it began working primarily on the national level, waiting for a more advantageous time to renew its efforts at the state level.⁷

Inasmuch as the residents of the state were opposed to the original projects for controlling floods, the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce

in 1929 began considering methods which would protect the city from too much water. A special committee was established to look into the problem, and later that year Daniel W. Mead and John B. Hawley were hired to develop a plan. The following year the Mead-Hawley Plan was completed and adopted by the Chamber. The plan proposed construction of a series of levees and straightening the river through Oklahoma County, especially through the city. Levees seemed to be the only choice, but many members of the Chamber, including Browne, were not enthusiastic about the construction. If levees were built, the city would be divided from Capital Hill and Packing Town. Besides the cost of constructing the levees, it would be necessary to install and maintain pumps to get the city's drainage over the levees and into the river; yet this was the only possible plan which stood a chance of succeeding at that time.⁸

Late in the fall of 1929, the city Water Superintendent and member of the Chamber of Commerce, Charles E. Bretz, who had worked extensively on the flood control program since 1923, suggested that the city establish its right to water from Fort Supply. He realized that if the city continued to grow it would soon need additional water. If the city water needs were coupled with flood control, the community would benefit from both. Bretz's recommendation was the first time that anyone publicly united flood control and city water supply.⁹

When Browne became a member of the Board of Directors of the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce in 1932, the flood control plan for the entire state had been well developed, and much of the ground work had been completed; however, apathy towards flood control and city water supply was widespread until Lightning Creek flooded that year and took the lives of five people, destroyed 656 homes, and left 3,200 homeless.

This disaster, coupled with the national depression, was extremely hard on the residents of Oklahoma. But with the New Deal legislation of 1933, the Chamber saw an opportunity to do something about the disastrous floods. At that time Browne performed a key task.¹⁰

A large delegation of Oklahoma City residents went to Washington in May of 1933 to confer with government officials concerning many of the New Deal programs which were starting. They divided into groups to work on flood control and soil conservation, phases of relief work, aid to Oklahoma Indians, development at Fort Sill, and oil programs. Browne met with W. Dub. Brookings, Manager of the Natural Resource Production Department, Chamber of Commerce of the United States, to determine what would be the best method of changing the reforestation relief programs to include flood control. Brookings suggested a meeting with the Major Ranger of the Reforestation Department. After scheduling an appointment, Browne went to the office where he met and discussed flood control with Fred Morrow, Assistant Forester. The meeting led to a series of talks with the head of the United States Forest Service, Major R. Y. Stuart, and District Forest Inspector H. J. Eberley. The foresters were interested, but they wanted to see extensive plans which showed the sites of relief camps, number of man-hours of work, type of work to be done, and the overall costs. This information would be presented to a review board, which would consider establishing a series of Civilian Conservation Corps camps to help control floods as a part of soil conservation.¹¹

After running the gamut of the Forest Service, Browne began working his way through the Department of Agriculture's Soils Department and finally emerged with a handful of forms. Next he turned to Robert

Fechner, Director of Emergency Conservation Work, where he received a favorable hearing. Fechner explained the past and pending legislation and provided concrete information on how the Oklahomans should proceed. The federal government's inattention to flood control was surprising to the visitor, but he was able to do the vital spadework which soon began to produce concrete results.¹²

By July, the Army Corps of Engineers recognized that reservoirs on the North Canadian River were possible and economical if the water supply was worth more than \$1,280,000. The Chamber of Commerce began immediately to work for the construction of dams at Fort Reno, Bluff Creek, and Mustang Creek. The Fort Supply and the Optima dams also were maintained as possibilities. The manager-director of the Chamber, Stanley Draper, sent a telegram to Harry I. Hopkins on July 24, 1933, asking that work on the Fort Reno Project begin at the earliest possible date. The project would provide work relief, flood control, and water supply. The project actually included two dams, one at Fort Reno and the other either on Bluff Creek or Mustang Creek. While promotion of the dams was continuing, Civilian Conservation Corps camps started planting native grasses in exposed watershed areas and working on levees through the city.¹³

The entire program seemed to be going well, and Newt Graham of Tulsa and others were supporting the scheme when Henry M. Waite, Deputy Administrator of Public Works, refused to approve flood control projects because they were uneconomical. He preferred to use the funds to construct roads in the Panhandle and western Oklahoma. Senator Elmer Thomas met with Waite, and the two men agreed to consider reservoirs on Wolfe Creek and at Optima. Thus the Fort Reno project began having

trouble.¹⁴

The Lightning Creek flood provided the impetus for more concern in flood control, and the drought which began in 1934 provided a sense of emergency for water supply. Lake Overholser was quite low. The city government and the Chamber of Commerce began looking for emergency sources of water. One suggestion was that all the privately owned deep wells be joined to the city water mains and that more wells be drilled. Browne, who had a deep well at his Coca-Cola plant, was opposed to the use of wells because "if the cost of operation to the city was similar to his own cost of operation, such would be excessive . . ."¹⁵ He also pointed out that no major city depended on wells for a permanent supply of water. He thought the drought provided an opportunity to begin work on securing a more ample amount of water at a more reasonable cost. His argument met with the approval of the members of the Board of Directors during an emergency meeting, and the idea was tabled.¹⁶

With the city water supply running low and the Fort Reno Project in trouble, the Chamber tried to get El Reno's full support for the dam. A group headed by Harlow, including William E. Price, Mayor J. Frank Martin, George Barnes, and Browne, met with a group from El Reno. The El Reno men assured the Oklahoma City delegation that they were for the dam. A joint resolution then was sent to the Oklahoma Congressional delegation, which likewise pledged full support. In Washington the representatives and senators were working hard for the Fort Reno dam as first choice, but Congress was not ready to act. Thus the year ended without much accomplished.¹⁷

Hope for the Fort Reno dam and other flood control projects was high early in 1935 when the President promised to present a program to

Congress for extensive conservation and flood control work in the western United States. By spring the Optima, Fort Supply and Fort Reno projects were united by the Oklahoma Congressmen to form one project. At the crucial point, Representative Jed Johnson began opposing the Fort Reno dam. Johnson objected to the project because he believed that the town of Calumet and valuable land at the Remount Station would be flooded. He also objected to having been excluded from a meeting with the President when the other delegates were invited. To quiet Johnson's fears about what land would be flooded, the Oklahoma City Chamber arranged to run surveys which would mark the limits of the reservoir during high water. They discovered that Calumet would not be hurt, but that the water line was near the community when the lake was full. A small part of the Remount Station would be covered. Johnson had suggested that the dam be lowered six to eight feet, thereby reducing the capacity from 400,000 acre-feet of water to approximately 300,000 acre-feet. During the crisis the Oklahoma Citizens decided to have another meeting with representatives from El Reno.¹⁸

Delegates from the two cities' governments and Chambers of Commerce met on May 21 to discuss the problem. Price, Browne, and George Barns represented the Oklahoma City Chamber, while Martin, Dr. G. A. Nichols, Harlow, Orval Moser, and M. D. Cunningham represented the city itself. The meeting went into a complete discussion of the land to be flooded, its value, taxes, and increased land value along the banks. The effect the dam would have on El Reno and the type of construction planned were considered by the men, and the advantages from flood control to the rest of the state were presented at the meeting. Both groups agreed to support the Fort Reno project, and the Oklahoma City people believed that

opposition in Washington would decrease as a result of this conference. A sense of emergency came to the program two days after the meeting when the North Canadian flooded and did extensive damage below the proposed site of the dam.¹⁹

On May 26, Felix West, a former Canadian County Agent, and Francis Porta, an El Reno attorney, called a meeting to protest the proposed construction. Several Oklahoma City residents, including Browne, attended and were able to get about half the people there to sign a motion for construction. Later, 189 El Reno farmers who lived near the river signed a petition supporting the project and sent it to the state's Congressmen. The only thing apparently blocking approval of the reservoir was Congressman Johnson. He began suggesting the Canton project as an alternative. The Canton dam was not completely surveyed and would not receive the Corps of Engineers or Congressional approval. Finally, Hopkins decided to drop the Fort Reno Project and recommend half a million dollars worth of work on the Fort Supply and Optima dams. Congress considered flood control in an omnibus bill which finally passed in 1936. Thus the Fort Reno project which was near Oklahoma City and could easily be used as a source for storing water was lost, and the promoters of flood control and water supply relief were forced to reevaluate their options.²⁰

After city officials attended the flood control hearings in Greer County in the spring of 1936, Oklahoma City leaders decided that there was no hope to get water from Canton and emergency action had to be taken. The city council ordered two deep water wells drilled near Lake Overholser and planned to develop the use of underground water; at the same time the city began exploring ways to pump water from eastern

Oklahoma. A bond issue to install pumping equipment south of Ada was considered. Moreover, the city started leasing pumps and pipe to construct a shorter line to the upper Blue River, and work on the project actually began. This was the first attempt to bring water from southeastern Oklahoma to Oklahoma City. From this emergency concept, the idea developed into a major project. In the late 1950's the city started building the massive Atoka Water Project to bring large amounts of water from the southeastern part of the state to the city. Although a permanent solution to the city's water needs was not provided in 1936, the year did mark the beginning of projects which eventually became very important in the city's efforts to find a permanent solution to its water needs.²¹

Browne in 1937 was elected president of the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, and the organization's top project that year was the effort to find a suitable supply of water while promoting flood control and conservation--relief had been removed from the prime objectives. In January, the Chamber's representative in Washington, R. A. Singletary, discovered that water supply was not part of the approved projects at Wolf Creek and Optima. In Oklahoma City, local leaders learned that the city's claim to water on Wolf Creek had expired. The Washington Bureau, headed by Singletary, had the Corps of Engineers determine the feasibility of including 90,000 acre-feet of city water in the Fort Supply flood control dam. The Engineers agreed that the added construction was possible and that water was available, but that the city would have to pay for the increased costs of construction and the purchase of additional land. This would require approval of a bond issue of \$2,350,000. In the fall of 1937 the economy of the city turned downward and made the

prospect of the passage of such an issue very slim. But the Fort Supply project was to begin construction and offered the only hope for securing a large amount of water for the city. After getting approval for the city to participate in the project, the State Conservation Commission of Oklahoma was asked to grant the city the water rights. This was accomplished.²²

While the problems over construction of the dam and securing necessary water rights were being handled, new questions began to arise. Two different engineering groups studied the river bed to determine if enough water to benefit the city could be brought down the stream during years of drought. One firm, Burns and McDonnell, believed that only 9,000 to 13,000 acre-feet would reach the city if the entire 90,000 acre-feet was released at once from Fort Supply--which would leave no reserve for following years. The engineers further believed that Wolf Creek only ran 50,000 acre-feet of water during good years. If this report was correct, the city would waste its money on the project. Another group of engineers, Hinderlider, Knapp and Burnham, reported that it was possible to deliver a minimum of 17,000 acre-feet of water from Fort Supply to Lake Overholser. They also claimed that Wolf Creek carried more than 90,000 acre-feet of water. They approved the plan. The Chamber had to decide which plan to accept. On August 27, Colonel Eugene Reybold, District Engineer, Southwestern Division, United States Department of Flood Control, addressed the Friday Forum, a businessman's club in Oklahoma City, and stated that in his private opinion it was possible to deliver enough water from Wolf Creek to meet the city's requirements during a severe drought. On the basis of Reybold's statements, the Chamber decided to ask the city government to call for a bond

election with only one issue on the ballot. The city council agreed to call the election on December 7, but questions concerning expansion of city water lines, improvement of the city sewage system, and a new fair grounds also was placed on the ballot.²³

Leaders in the Chamber of Commerce felt it necessary to spend a large amount of money in campaigning and have a good campaign organization if the bond issue was to be approved. Browne, as president of the Chamber, began picking the men to handle the campaign, and when contributions were not sufficient, he, Dan W. Hogan, and E. K. (Edward King) Gaylord, as members of the Chamber Executive Committee, approved more than \$13,000 of unappropriated funds to finance the campaign.²⁴

The campaign faced a major crisis on November 5 when President Franklin Roosevelt stopped construction on all flood projects which did not have specific Congressional appropriations. Fort Supply, the dam which was to be constructed, suddenly was not to be built. The Chamber's Executive Committee under Browne's leadership began telling officials in Washington that the Fort Supply dam was much more than a flood control project: it also was a desperately needed city water project. Roosevelt agreed with the Chamber and approved continuing construction, but one of the major selling points in the campaign received damage on the eve of the election.²⁵

On December 7, the voters went to the polls; 10,891 voted yes; while 9,303 voted no. The voters approved the Fort Supply water project with a fifty-three per cent majority, but a sixty per cent majority was required. On March 12, 1938, the voters again expressed their opinion of the water issue. This time they rejected the project with a majority vote. Oklahoma City was still in search of a satisfactory

water supply, but the fight for city water had saved the Wolf Creek dam from federal economizing and some flood control was established.²⁶

During Browne's second term as president of the Chamber, the efforts to find a satisfactory solution to the need for water supply and flood control continued, but the water question became more complex and placed the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce in an awkward position when Tulsa asked for assistance in promoting the Arkansas River Project. Tulsa had helped get flood control legislation and appropriations through Congress, and the Arkansas River Project was a flood control measure of immense proportions. In the closing days of the Congressional session of 1937, the Tulsa Chamber was able to get a bill passed which required that the Corps of Engineers again reopen the studies on the Arkansas River Project. The engineers set hearings at Tucumcari, New Mexico, and Amarillo, Texas, for September 6 and 7, 1938. The hearings received evidence on constructing a series of locks which would give Tulsa a river port. The Army had rejected the project once, and Tulsa's only hope of success on the second attempt was through public pressure. To demonstrate popular support, the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce was asked to endorse the project. If Tulsa was connected with the river system and could offer shippers water rates, businesses in Oklahoma City would begin moving to Tulsa, and new businesses would locate in Tulsa. The result would be loss of employment, investment, and opportunity for the residents of Oklahoma City. Tulsa had helped Oklahoma City in the flood control effort, and cheaper freight rates would help the entire state--but would hurt Oklahoma City.²⁷

To pressure the city into supporting the Arkansas River Project. Tulsa newspapers and sales personnel began a campaign stating that

Oklahoma City was only concerned with itself and not interested in the state as a whole. Businesses and residents of the state began boycotting Oklahoma City merchants. Faced with this dilemma, Browne called an Executive Committee meeting. He and his colleagues could not afford an open rejection of support, nor could they give full support. After a lengthy discussion of the problem, the Executive Committee sent a letter which stated that the people of Oklahoma City were in favor of anything which would help the residents of the state and which would improve flood control and conservation. A specific reference to the Arkansas River Project was not included in this statement. At the hearings the city representatives simply stated that they had read the Army Engineers' report and believed it correct; however, Oklahoma City had not further investigated the project. Thus the issue was side-stepped.²⁸

Oklahoma City's support of the Arkansas River Project probably would not have assured the approval by the Army, but by not giving wholehearted support the city was able to assure the defeat of the project. Oklahoma City was able to look forward to continued competitive freight rates, but any further cooperation between the cities on flood control was doubtful.

The problem of an adequate city water supply remained a difficult question. In 1938 the Chamber decided to reevaluate the Mustang project, the dredging of Lake Overholser, or the building of a dam on Bluff Creek. A large portion of the preliminary work had already been accomplished. After getting the Engineer Club, a subsidiary of the Chamber, started on the studies, the city leaders could do nothing more until all the facts were in.²⁹

Late in the fall of 1939, Guy B. Treat, Chairman of the Engineer

Club Committee, offered its findings to the Chamber. The engineers recommended the Bluff Creek project rather than dredging Lake Overholser because nearly twice the water could be stored for about half the price on a per-acre-foot basis. The Chamber asked the city council to call a bond election. Everyone agreed that an all-out campaign, one considering the benefits of the project from every angle, was necessary. The Chamber could not afford another defeat. In January 1940, Browne sent several letters to select individuals and asked that they meet to form the Citizens Committee to campaign for the Bluff Creek Project. At the meeting C. C. Day was elected temporary chairman, and the work of organization began. Browne was placed on a committee of seventeen to select the right people to be on the speakers' bureau, publicity bureau, and other groups. As a result, the Citizens Committee was hand-picked to assure that every person on it was strongly in favor of the project and would do the necessary work. Browne assumed the vital role of collecting money to finance the campaign and let others work on the promotion.³⁰

About three weeks before the election, some of the speakers began acting like the issue was a debate over which project should have top priority. These men were not selling the voters on the Bluff Creek project. Draper was able to straighten the speakers out on their mission, and Robert S. Kerr became head of the campaign. Three years earlier, Browne had appointed Kerr to the Flood Control Committee and Water Supply Committee. While a United States Senator, Kerr built his reputation on land, wood, and water. Six days before the election, the fact that Gaylord and Dr. G. A. Nichols owned part of the property, which would be bought by the city to build the dam, became an issue. Opposition in Ward 4 was strong because the Daily Oklahoman supported

Bluff Creek. At the time of the election the chances of success were about fifty-fifty; however, the bond issue was approved because of the work of Virgil Browne and other far-sighted city leaders.³¹

Victory at the polls did not assure success of the project, however, for the opponents of the dam began a long series of court cases. The chairman of the Committee on National Defense, Browne, addressed an appeal to the public to drop court action because this was jeopardizing the city's chances of getting national defense projects which were being located throughout the Southwest. The air base, which later became Tinker Field, was one of the defense programs which was in danger. But Browne's appeal had little effect. The State Supreme Court ruled in favor of the bond election in December, 1940, but the opposition began a series of District Court cases. By March 1941, the future of the dam at Bluff Creek was still in doubt when the leaders of the Chamber decided to make the construction program a National Defense Project and have the Reconstruction Finance Corporation purchase the bonds. This was a daring move, but it did break the opposition, and on July 24, eighteen months after the election, bids for construction were opened. The Bluff Creek reservoir was later named Lake Hefner. Oklahoma City could look forward to several years of an adequate water supply.³²

At the end of World War II, Gaylord, Browne, Kerr, and others became concerned over the effects the Arkansas River and Trinity River Projects would have on Oklahoma City. At that time, Gaylord suggested a central Oklahoma Waterway, and Browne gave his full support. The Chamber of Commerce organized a group of engineers to study the feasibility of the project. At that time and at later meetings the waterway became a major project of the Chamber. In 1957 the Chamber organized

the Water Development Foundation of Oklahoma, Inc., and began extensive work on getting the locks and lakes built. The Atoka project, which brought water to Oklahoma City from southeastern Oklahoma, originally was designed as a waterway. After Kerr became a Senator, work on making Oklahoma City safe from floods was completed. By 1953 he had secured federal aid for work on the North Canadian River through Oklahoma City.³³

A disaster in 1923 set in motion a long series of projects, group efforts, and individual efforts to make the state free from floods. The drought of the 1930's started the "city builders" seriously looking for a large supply of water. The success story of Oklahoma City's efforts in flood control spanned many decades and involved many men. Obstacles were overcome which would have defeated lesser men, but the builders of Oklahoma City were men who dared to make big plans and seek the rewards no matter how long or how difficult the task. Virgil Browne, Stanley C. Draper, Ed Overholser, Victor E. Harlow, Ernest E. Blake, E. K. Gaylord, Robert S. Kerr, R. A. Singletary, and a host of others played vital roles in the history of Oklahoma City's quest for freedom from floods and droughts. Browne was vital in 1933 when the federal government was interested only in reforestation projects. He led the opposition to levees as a permanent solution to flood control; he found the money to support the bond campaigns in 1937 and in 1940; he called the meeting which started the Bluff Creek campaign in 1940; and he gave vital support to others during the critical years of the 1930's and 1940's. He, with many others, sought methods and gave freely of his time, talent, and money to provide hundreds of thousands of people of all races with one of life's necessities--water.

FOOTNOTES

¹Oklahoma City Times, June 7, 1923, p. 1; Ibid., June 8, 1923, p. 1; Ibid., June 9, 1923, p. 1; Ibid., June 14, 1923, p. 1; Ibid., June 16, 1923, p. 1; Minutes, June 7, 1923, Board of Directors.

²Oklahoma City Times, Oct. 8, 1923, p. 1; Ibid., Oct. 9, 1923, p. 1; Ibid., Oct. 10, 1923, p. 1; Minutes, Nov. 1, 1923, Board of Directors; Report of the Meeting on Flood Control, Nov. 27, 1923, Minutes of Flood Control Committee, Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, 1923-1926 (hereinafter cited as Flood Control Committee with date).

³Ibid.; Extracts from Records of Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce Relative to Flood Control and Water Supply 1923-1937, p. 2.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., p. 9.

⁶Ibid., p. 5.

⁷Carl Williams, "Those Flood Control Plans," Oklahoma Farmer-Stockman, XXXIX, No. 3 (Feb. 1, 1926), p. 3; "Governor and Flood Commissioner Clash," Harlow's Weekly, XXVIII, No. 13 (Mar. 27, 1926), p. 6.

⁸Minutes of the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors, Aug. 14, 1931, Flood Control Committee, 1930-1932.

⁹Daily Oklahoman, Nov. 8, 1929, p. 2.

¹⁰Oklahoma (Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce), XXXVII, No. 7 (Feb. 12, 1953), p. 1.

¹¹Conferences with Washington Officials Concerning Reforestation, Flood Control and Soil Conservation, May 13, 1933, Flood Control Committee, 1933.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Extracts from Records . . . Relative to Flood Control . . ., p. 34; Stanley C. Draper to Hon. Harry I. Hopkins, Federal Relief Administrator, July 24, 1933, telegram, Flood Control Committee, 1933; Flood Control Committee Annual Report, 1933, Flood Control Committee, 1933.

¹⁴Elmer Thomas to R. A. Singletary, Oct. 13, 1933, telegram, Flood Control Committee, 1933; Ibid., Oct. 14, 1933.

¹⁵Minutes, July 19, 1934, Board of Directors.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Projects for Flood Control Committee, 1934, Flood Control Committee, 1934.

¹⁸Minutes, May 16, 1935, Board of Directors.

¹⁹Memorandum Concerning Meeting Between Oklahoma City and El Reno Citizens at El Reno, May 21, 1935, Board of Directors.

²⁰Extracts from Records . . . Relative to Flood Control . . ., p. 56.

²¹Ibid., p. 60; Oklahoma City Times, Aug. 18, 1936; Ibid., Feb. 7, 1957; Draper's File on Atoka Project, Heritage House.

²²Gen. E. M. Markham, Chief of the Army Engineers, to Senator Elmer Thomas, Jan. 29, 1937; Conference between F. G. Baker, City Manager, and R. A. Singletary, Feb. 15, 1937; Minutes, Feb. 18, 1937, Board of Directors; Ibid., Aug. 27, 1937.

²³Burns-McDonnell Report; Hinderlinder-Knapp-Burnharm Report; Minutes, Aug. 27, 1937, Board of Directors.

²⁴Memorandum Concerning Water Bond Campaign Election, Dec. 12, 1937, Minutes of the Executive Committee, Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, 1932-1948 (hereinafter cited as Executive Committee).

²⁵Record for Nov. 10, 1937, Oklahoma City Improvement Campaigns 1937 and 1938, Vol. 1: Bond Election Dec. 7, 1937-Mar. 12, 1938, Fort Supply Reservoir (Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce).

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Minutes, June 22, 1938, Executive Committee; Ibid., Aug. 31, 1938.

²⁸Ibid., June 22, 1938; Ibid., Aug. 31, 1938.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Minutes, Nov. 6, 1939, Board of Directors; Virgil Browne, letter announcing Citizen's Meeting for Jan. 9, 1940, Minutes of the Citizens Committee, Jan. 9, 1940, Bond Campaign Upper Bluff Creek Water Reservoir Feb. 20, 1940 (Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce).

³¹Carl G. Magee to Stanley C. Draper, Feb. 3, 1940, Bond Campaign Upper Bluff Creek; Harlow Gers, Remarks, Feb. 14, 1940, Bond Campaign Upper Bluff Creek.

³²Virgil Browne, Chairman of the Committee on National Defense, Address to the Public, n.d., Bond Campaign Upper Bluff Creek; Stanley C. Draper to W. E. Hightower, Mar. 4, 1941, Bond Campaign Upper Bluff Creek; R. A. Singletary to Stanley C. Draper, July 1, 1941, Bond Campaign Upper Bluff Creek.

³³Minutes, Nov. 1, 1945, Board of Directors; Record of Water Development Foundation of Oklahoma Inc., Feb. 5, 1957, Draper Collection, Heritage House; William M. Cain testimony before Senator Kerr, Feb. 6, 1957, Draper Collection, Heritage House.

CHAPTER X
PERSONAL LIFE, POLITICAL ACTIVITIES AND
MORE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

As the depression settled across the nation, Virgil Browne was in the enviable position of having a growing business, and he could ignore many of the worries which he had faced in earlier depressions and recessions. He could afford to live the life of the wealthy. After he and Lewis H. Pritchard sold their interest in Coffman Monoplanes, Browne suggested that they buy a yacht. Although neither man knew what he was getting into, they decided to form the Oklahoma City Yacht Club and purchase a craft. Harvey P. Everest was talked into joining the venture.¹

Through a brokerage agency, Browne found a 110-foot, twenty-four-guest, ten-crew craft in New York which sold for a "ridiculously low price."² For the maiden voyage to Galveston, Texas, several members of the Browne family and their friends gathered in New York. Before they could sail, the captain insisted on new uniforms for the crew. With a box compass, a radio, 3,000 gallons of fuel, and \$400 worth of groceries, Browne was certain he had enough supplies to reach a Florida port. He only made it to Norfolk, Virginia. At Norfolk, Browne wired Pritchard and Everest for money to help him out. Pritchard sent \$1,500 and Everest quit the whole business.³

After leaving the Virginia port, the ship ran into rough weather

which stirred the sediment in the fuel tanks and plugged the gas lines, killing the engines. The yacht rode the storm out, but its owner and his guests spent the night fearing for their lives. After the winds subsided, the motors were started and the craft headed for Georgetown, South Carolina, to get the tanks cleaned. While the tanks were being cleaned, an explosion occurred in the engine room doing extensive damage. Since it would take several days before the ship could sail again, the party broke up.⁴

After the yacht had been repaired and the gas tanks cleaned, a second group planned to board the ship and sail to the Texas port. When the engineer started the motor, he blew a cylinder head. More delay and expense were encountered. Finally the yacht reached its home port. The maiden voyage had cost \$17,000.⁵

The yacht provided Browne and his guests with entertainment and prestige for several years. In order to cover the cost of operating the boat, the owners would pay the captain and buy the fuel. The guests would pay the crew and the costs of food and drink. Charles R. Anthony and Frank Buttram became part owners of the yacht within a few years, and Everest re-entered the yacht club. The first yacht was destroyed by a hurricane without anyone hurt, and Browne purchased a second ship. In 1960 he contracted for the construction of the world's largest fiberglass boat--the Maimie Lee. The craft was delivered the year before his wife died in 1963, and after her death, the boat was not used much. Finally in 1969, Browne sold his last yacht. His boats had cost him an average of \$50,000 per year to keep, and when he used them the cost was much higher.⁶

During the depression the Brownes became world travelers. In 1935

they sailed to Australia, and the following year Mr. and Mrs. Browne sailed to Europe. The notes Mrs. Browne kept of the voyage were perceptive and revealing. When they stepped off the train at Grand Central Station in New York City, it seemed like a normal event; the excitement and surprise of her first trip to the city in 1910 long since had vanished. In their room in the Hotel New Yorker there were letters from Kelsey Lee Browne and Willie Smith,

cigars from Mr. V. V. Harris, flowers from the Coca-Cola Company New York, (Mr. Culpepper President), a lovely box of candy and nuts from Jim Evans. ⁷ . . . A lovely gardenia corsage from Mrs. Elizabeth Arnold.

After their ship sailed on the cruise of the Northern Wonderland, which took them to within a few hundred miles of the North Pole, then south along the coast of Norway, Mrs. Browne recorded:

Sunday June 28

Bridge last night, and what a game! One of the most embarrassing I ever experienced. Virgil was in high spirits and wanted to educate me on the fine points of the game. . . . I sometimes wonder what he would think if he were an onlooker instead of being the actor. . . . I can't understand why Virgil tried to make me feel so simple.⁸

The diary described the people on the ship and the objects seen from the deck or porthole. There was an elderly woman who had recently lost her husband and sat lonely on the deck day after day. Mrs. Browne also wondered how the Germans, who owned and operated the ship in a friendly and peaceful manner, could ever think of war. The Pirate Ball and Spanish Night promised to be a welcome break from the endless games of bridge. Mrs. Browne wanted to dance very badly--"just one dance would be so much fun"--but her husband would only look on.⁹ She wrote, "It is fine to be an onlooker but I had rather be one of the crowd any time."¹⁰

The Reliance anchored at Kings Cross Bay to allow the passengers a chance to tour the monuments and hangar from which several European and American North Pole expeditions had started. The Brownes were walking with a family. When they stopped to allow the children to catch up, Virgil walked on ahead. "Needless to say we did not see him any more. He so often does these school boy tricks."¹¹ To overtake her husband, she tried a short cut across a steep hill of loose gravel. Her foot slipped, and while she was in that awkward position several people took pictures of her. She "laughed but . . . felt like crying."¹² After reaching the monument she learned her husband had already left. "Well there was only one thing to do, just walk back alone. . . ." She "was so hurt with Virgil [she] . . . was choked by tears."¹³ At another anchorage she commented on her dependency for money from her husband:

Virgil gave me \$5.00 this morning downtown. With the exception of \$1.00 he gave me in New York, this is the first he has given me. Of course he always buys everything I want, but it feels good to have a few cents without asking for it, well, I had it awhile. He borrowed \$2.00 of it back before the day was over.¹⁴

Theirs had been a long struggle to economic success since the drugstore in Dallas had gone under in 1902, but material success had been achieved. Mrs. Browne had been left alone then, and in 1936 she still was being left. Virgil had never learned to give his wife the things she wanted most--love and companionship. He was in too big a hurry.

After returning from their trip, the family resumed its routine of social activities and civic work. Virgil began attending the bridge parties with the old gang: Stanley C. Draper, Frank Buttram, William Hightower, James F. Owens, and Dr. G. A. Nicols. Later that fall their

daughter, Kelsey Lee, married a prominent Tulsa doctor, James Evans. Both Mr. and Mrs. Browne were nominated for the Most Useful Citizen award. Mrs. Browne was considered for organizing the University Forum, while Mr. Browne was placed on the list of nominees for his generosity and service in civic and humanitarian movements. Neither of the Brownes won the award that year, but the following year Mrs. Browne was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame. Her husband received the same honor in 1961.¹⁵

The year that Virgil Browne became president of the Chamber of Commerce, 1937, his father, Spill, died of a heart attack at his son's home north of Oklahoma City. Spill had lived with his son since 1922, and Mrs. Browne was deeply hurt by the loss. In his honor, she wrote a poem about him and the trees he had planted. The next year she was listed in The Biographical Dictionary of Contemporary Poets: The Who's Who of American Poets.¹⁶

Although Browne was financially secure, he continued to expand his business interests. He became a member of the board of directors of Liberty National Bank, and he and Ira B. Harkey bought the controlling interest in Citrus Juice and Flavoring Company, a California fruit drink and soda water business. Then he and Harvey Everest bought the Glencoe-Vacherie plantation at Franklin, Louisiana. Later Browne purchased the entire plantation along with some shares in the Sterling Sugar Company. At the plantation he entertained many dignitaries and important people.¹⁷

He was able to sell his airplane company to Morris Greenspun, the same man who had taken Parker-Browne Company from Browne. Despite their sharp deals, the two men continued to invest together for many years.

In 1932 they and five others controlled the Midland Building Company of Oklahoma City. In 1936 Browne, his son, Henry, and Greenspun established a joint stock account for the purpose of buying and selling of shares. The joint venture lasted until well into the 1940's. Through their forty years and more of business deals, both men were able to continue working together, although each had death the other some rough times. During these years, Browne never let religious intolerance dominate his thinking. Greenspun was a Jew, and in the days just before World War II, Jews faced a difficult time. Paul and Tom Braniff were Catholics, but Browne bought a plane with Paul during the years when the Ku Klux Klan was active and powerful in Oklahoma.¹⁸

In 1935 Virgil Browne began venturing into a new and promising field of business. Carl C. Magee needed money to operate his Dual Parking Meter Company. Browne, R. J. Benzel, and Harvey Everest bought the controlling stock in the company. Browne had refused to buy stock at first, but when he was assured that the company had a basic patent and competition could not enter the business, he thought the company would be profitable. He believed that the biggest profits could be made by retaining ownership of the parking meters and allowing the city fifty per cent of the total revenue. Magee had been selling the meters outright to cities. The patent was not a basic patent, and soon the company became involved in court action. By 1942 when the federal government restricted the supply of material used in the construction of the meters, Browne was willing to get out of the business.¹⁹

The political activities of Browne were masked behind the veil of the Gridiron Club. The Gridiron Club was the Democratic Party organization of many of the leaders in the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce.

In a letter bearing the name of Frank Buttram, Mrs. Jack M. Hull in 1935 asked Browne to chair the Patron and Patroness Committee's fund-raising drive honoring President Franklin D. Roosevelt's birthday. Buttram was head of the Citizens League which supported a city manager government. Jack Hull was in charge of the Research Division of the Chamber of Commerce. Browne, a respected businessman and a strong supporter of Roosevelt, in 1936 made a substantial contribution to the State and National Democratic Party Campaign Fund.²⁰

Browne supported the President, but he was not in favor of many of the New Deal programs. The following poem which Browne collected expressed his feelings towards much of the New Deal:

DEMOCRATIC DIALOG

Father must I go to work?
 No, my lucky son,
 We're living now on easy street
 On dough from Washington.

We've left it up to Uncle Sam,
 So don't get exercised,
 Nobody has to give a damn--
 We've all been subsidized.

But if Sam treats us all so well
 And feeds us milk and honey,
 Please, Daddy, tell me what the hell
 He's going to use for money.

Don't worry, bub, there's not a hitch
 In this here noble plan--
 He simply soaks the filthy rich
 And helps the common man.

But, Father, won't there come a time
 When they run out of cash
 And we have left them not a dime
 When things will go to smash?

My faith in you is shrinking, son.
 You nose-y little brat,
 You do too damn much thinking, son
 To be a Democrat.²¹

He believed that the problems of government and economics could not be solved by blaming all ills on the government or its officials. To improve conditions, people had to look at things objectively. He wrote, "There must be honest and unselfish cooperation between these three important groups--Government, Business, and Labor."²² He felt that one of the big stumbling blocks to ending the depression was

nearly every citizen [was] a member of some organization or group that [was] trying to protect its own particular interest or position and striving to promote its own welfare without proper consideration of the interest of others or the public in general.²³

The danger he saw in the condition "lies in the fact that the stronger and more powerful an organized group becomes, whether it be industrial, political, or labor, in serving its own interest it loses sight of the interest or right of the others."²⁴

He did not feel that the recession of 1937 was the result of the tight budget policy of the government; rather he believed that business had raised prices too rapidly to make a good profit, and labor had taken that time to strike for higher wages and shorter hours. Because business and labor were seeking selfish gain, the public, which was not willing to pay the higher prices, went on a "quiet strike,"²⁵ buying only necessities. Only when business and labor were willing to do their share and work together could the government stop relief work. Taxes could not be lowered until the public debt had been lowered. He felt that he, along with all other businessmen, had an obligation, and until business carried its share of the load it could not blame others who were carrying the load. When the movement to dump Roosevelt for a third term began, Browne gave his support to the President.²⁶

During the first year of Roosevelt's long career as President,

Browne and the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce became active in supporting the National Recovery Administration. Frank Buttram became the state chairman, and Ancel Earp was second in command. Browne announced the goal and objectives of the local National Recovery Administration to the city residents. To promote the federal program, the newspapers, radio, and billboards were used extensively. A Blue Eagle Day was held with parades, speeches, and entertainment. Members of the Chamber were encouraged to take part in the effort and to encourage other businessmen to comply with the regulations and display the Blue Eagle. Leaders at the Chamber hoped that their effort and superior organization would attract wide attention, and that when the business and trade organizations encouraged by the law were established they would locate their offices in Oklahoma City. During the early days of the National Recovery Administration, Oklahoma City did lead the rest of the state and many of the cities in neighboring states in support of the National Recovery Administration.²⁷

After getting off to a fast start, enthusiasm for the National Recovery Administration began to wane, however. Local businessmen were deeply concerned over Section 7a which gave labor the right to organize. The law also set wages and hours for many businesses. For the most part, the larger businesses found methods to avoid the labor regulations while displaying the Blue Eagle, but small businesses became the most open and blatant violators of the code. Most of these were not making sufficient profits to pay the higher wages and the increased labor force necessary to meet National Recovery Administration standards. The small firms, which already were losing money but riding the depression out, were forced to close their doors and release their employees.

Through the Chamber's Committee on Interpretations of the National Recovery Administration, several attempts were made to reach working agreements between labor and management without having to go to the National Recovery Administration State Adjustment Board. In most cases in dispute the business was allowed to display the Blue Eagle.²⁸

The Blue Eagle, which was displayed in the window of firms which supposedly had complied with all the requirements of the law, was intended to assist the business in attracting customers. Businesses, especially grocery stores, began using the Blue Eagle in their advertising in a way designed to damage other businesses, even those which also had the Eagle. One business would claim that the other was not meeting the requirements of the law. This type of activity was against the National Recovery Administration rules, but difficult to prevent. It became the responsibility of the Chamber as the sponsoring agency to enforce the regulation. As a result, the Chamber was placed in an unfavorable light. Thus a combination of factors caused the Chamber to lose its enthusiasm for the program. During the time the Chamber was actively involved, Browne replaced John A. Brown as Chairman of the National Recovery Administration State Adjustment Board. John Brown was a leading merchant in Oklahoma City and active member of the Chamber.²⁹

The success or failure of the National Recovery Administration depended to a large degree on the enthusiasm for the program that local leaders could generate. During the early days of the program, the Chamber of Commerce accepted the national approach and made the cause a patriotic duty to accept and promote. Anyone who openly opposed the law bordered on treason, according to the propaganda. Roosevelt was

presented as a man whose word should be accepted without question. He was the commander-in-chief, and all other National Recovery Administration officers had military titles. To sell the idea cost a lot of money. Browne played his usual vital role by raising more than \$14,000 to carry out the campaign.³⁰

The wage increases demanded by the National Recovery Administration caused Blacks in Oklahoma City to be apprehensive. They feared that the increased wages and shorter hours would result in White labor replacing Black. The Board of Directors of the Chamber voted to recommend to

the employers of the city not to displace their negro workers and help with white employees because of the increased wage scale, but to continue the employment of colored workers in all the occupations and positions in which they have worked heretofore.³¹

The Board also recommended Black representation on the National Recovery Administration and establishment of a Black organization which could maintain contact with the Chamber to aid both Blacks and Whites. There was no effort to end segregation nor to increase Black employment. The Board only wanted to prevent Blacks from losing what they already had.³²

Section 7a of the National Recovery Administration, if accepted by the Chamber of Commerce, would have required a major shift in labor relations policy. In 1920 the organization adopted the policy to

maintain Oklahoma City as an open industrial city supporting all employing institutions and employees in the operation of their business and their employment upon the basis which they may select, whether union, non-union or open shop, without coercion or prevention by any individual or agency.³³

To carry out this policy the Chamber established the Open Shop Committee. In 1929 the committee became inactive, but in 1935 the principles of keeping the city open were re-established in the Labor Relations Com-

mittee of the Industrial Committee. To assure the success of their effort, they maintained an employment bureau on "which employers may rely for obtaining employees if and when needed."³⁴

In 1936 a bill was introduced in the state legislature which allowed unions to organize, required closed shops, freed unions from court injunctions, and forced closing of business when a strike occurred. In an editorial in Harlow's Weekly, Victor E. Harlow labeled the bill the Labor Dictatorship Proposed for Oklahoma. A week later on February 27, the subject received considerable discussion at the meeting of the Board of Directors of the Chamber. Browne made a motion, which was seconded by George Frederickson, that the matter be referred to the Committee on Labor Relations. Harlow was chairman of the Industrial Committee which controlled the Labor Relations Committee.³⁵ At the end of the year, John D. Thomas, Chairman of the Labor Relations Committee, reported that "this year has been largely routine."³⁶

The open shop, which the majority of the Chamber, including Browne, supported, was based on the principle of individualism and freedom of choice. The preamble to the Constitution and By-Laws of the Oklahoma City Trades and Labor Council called for "emancipation of the laborer from the bonds of wage slavery. . . ." ³⁷ Many employers viewed this as an open declaration of war. The oath which all delegates to the Council were required to take stated:

Do you most sincerely promise in the presence of these delegates, upon your honor, as a man (or woman) that you will bear true allegiance to the American Federation of Labor and obey the laws of this council and be governed by the will of the majority?³⁸

The oath was viewed as a pledge which took control of the business out of the hands of the businessman who had taken the financial risk. A

labor union which risked nothing would run the business. To men like Browne, who had lifted themselves from poverty to wealth, the threat to individualism, to freedom of choice, to the wage system, and to investors' control could not go unopposed. Browne wanted teamwork between management and labor for the common good of all, and advancement based on merit, skill, and intelligence. Before the teamwork, which would benefit all, Browne believed it necessary to cure the disease of selfish propaganda.³⁹

It is being promoted by politicians, by business and labor leaders. It is in our daily press, magazines, trade journals, over the radio and even by word of mouth. It is so cleverly done at times that it is most difficult to recognize.⁴⁰

In its efforts to finance the New Deal, the federal government made several changes in its tax policies. One of the changes was a tax on corporation income. Browne believed that the tax should be repealed and that corporations should be taxed the same as partnerships and co-ops. He felt the tax reduced expansion, encouraged high prices, retarded employment, and hurt the small investor. Small firms which needed additional capital to expand and compete could not save the necessary money because of the tax on undistributed earnings. Higher prices would result because the corporation would try to pass the added tax on to the consumer. Higher prices would hurt America's position in world trade. Employment would be restricted because expansion and investment would be retarded. The small stockholder, middle class investor would have to pay a higher rate of tax on his investment before he received any dividends and paid taxes graduated to his income. Large stockholders would actually benefit from the corporate income tax because this would lower their tax bracket. Browne in 1937 wrote several letters to his Congress-

men asking that the tax be repealed, and he supported the Ruml Plan in 1944 which would restrict corporate income tax.⁴¹

During the depression years, Browne's social life was that of the wealthy; politically he was a supporter of the New Deal, although he opposed part of its measures. On the local level, he took an active interest in attempting to solve some of the pressing problems, especially those of the farmers and of soil conservation.

The Chamber of Commerce in 1932 asked county agents to recommend a list of projects which their organization, through the Committee on Agriculture and Livestock, could use as guidelines in aiding the farmers and soil conservation. The county agents recommended an all-out effort to encourage terracing, improved rural banking, surface irrigation, garden and farm home improvement contests, and year-round pasture programs. With these guidelines, Browne, as chairman of the Chamber Committee on Agriculture began working towards the objectives.⁴²

The Chamber and the Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College soon developed the Red Plains Soil Erosion Experiment Station near Guthrie, Oklahoma. This experiment farm was designed to demonstrate the advantages of terracing to prevent soil erosion. To assure that the public saw the project, Browne organized several tours of the farm. At the same time, the committee took the lead in promoting an organization of rural bankers who worked together to help solve the farmers' financial problems and allow financing for terracing and other improvements. The farm improvement contest which the Chamber sponsored was designed to encourage soil conservation.⁴³

Surface irrigation, vegetable farming, and gardening contests were combined to encourage new sources of income for farmers. To provide the

farmers with all possible data on irrigation, the committee compiled an extensive amount of information on Oklahoma County. The price of necessary equipment, the best sources of water, the methods of running the water, the price of seed, how to grow the crop, and where to sell the vegetables were included. After compiling the data and publishing it, the Chamber asked county agents to distributed it to local farmers.⁴⁴

To gain information on pasture improvement, the agriculture committee toured the Hughes County experiment. When Browne met with officials in Washington on reforestation in 1933, he promoted replanting grass as a flood control and conservation measure. The result of this meeting was putting the Civilian Conservation Corps workers to planting grass and working in flood control.⁴⁵

The Chamber realized that the future of the city depended to a large extent on a prosperous rural area, yet a high percentage of the area farms were operated by tenants. The tenant would move onto the farm and work it for all it was worth for one season then move on. The farm owners were aggravating the problem by charging high rent but not putting anything back in the farm. Thus natural resources were being exploited beyond their limits. The result was a condition which hurt the tenant, the owner, and the soil--everyone lost. To try to improve the situation, the Chamber leased a farm near Harrah and began an experiment which was designed to aid the people and the soil. From the time the experiment began in 1936 until it ended in the 1940's, Browne was very active in the project.⁴⁶

The Harrah experiment combined sound business principles with advanced farming technology and techniques. The Chamber had the soil tested, terraces planned, and crops rotated. After the work was com-

pleted, it invested in improving the property through fertilization, terracing, and providing the seed for the crops. The lease price to the tenant was based on a low rent charged after the costs of depreciation and other necessary expenses had been paid. The idea was to maintain the soil and improve the farm. The tenant was allowed enough to meet his necessary expenses. The remaining sum was divided between the land owner and the tenant as dividends were paid in a business. Although farm prices were low and farming was changing tremendously, the experiment did attract the attention of several land owners who lived in Oklahoma City. These proprietors began following the example set by the Harrah experiment. Thus the conditions of the tenant farmer, farm owner, and soil conservation were improved--although admittedly with limited success.⁴⁷

Browne realized by 1936 that the problems of conservation of all types of Oklahoma's natural resources was a bigger problem than one city's Chamber could handle. He suggested to the Plans and Projects Committee that the Tulsa and Oklahoma City Chambers work closely together to conserve resources. His suggestion was adopted for 1937 when he was president. Early that spring, arrangements for a joint meeting were agreed upon. After the legislature adjourned, the two held a series of meetings. The major objective of the delegates was to determine exactly what the group could accomplish and how it should proceed with the work. However, very little was accomplished because most of the delegates were not willing to work together. Each side feared that the other city might gain some advantage. A minority which included Browne was willing to forget the rivalry when the most important assets of the state and its people were at stake. Inasmuch as he was president of the Chamber,

he was able to keep the effort alive until Oklahoma City refused to support the Arkansas River Project in 1938.⁴⁸

As the depression ran its course and the dust bowl invaded Oklahoma, Browne and the Chamber of Commerce tried to do all they could to improve conditions in rural areas of the state. While the dust bowl was at its height, the Chamber took the advice of Dr. Henry G. Bennett, president of the Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College, and did all that was in its power to bring the problem to the attention of all Americans and to support all agricultural agencies in attempting to prevent the erosion which was leaving its path of destruction. In an effort to find new crops which would have commercial value, as well as control wind and water erosion, Browne and his associates organized a chemurgic conference. They hoped that the conference would provide information which would enable businessmen in Oklahoma City to take an active role in helping control the dust storms and improving the lives of hard-pressed farmers.⁴⁹

During the difficult days of the thirties, Browne and his friends worked long and hard to improve conditions for everyone, and, although the Chamber accomplished a great deal, these were difficult days for the organization. As the depression deepened, membership decreased and resources became limited. In an effort to attract new industries to improve the business of established firms and to increase employment, the Chamber employed the consulting engineering firm of Lockwood Greene Engineers. The consultants made their report in 1931, and the Chamber began working on its recommendations. The size of the task which lay before the community would require a well-organized and administered effort of all the city's resources.⁵⁰

One step in improving conditions was to attract new business which would stimulate other business and employment. But not all businessmen in Oklahoma City wanted new industries because these would compete for the same markets. To prevent competing businesses from entering, the Oklahoma Independents, Incorporated was organized. Thus there was competition between the Chamber and the Independents for membership and support. One wanted expansion while the other wanted the status quo. In 1934 the Independents offered financial aid to the Chamber if it would make a clear statement supporting their purposes. The Chamber Executive Committee was forced to face the crisis. In a carefully worded statement the Chamber pledged support for all progressive efforts. Browne and Harlow were selected to present the Chamber's position to the rival group and to answer all questions. If open competition between the two groups resulted from the meeting, the Chamber stood to lose much, for it could not afford to spend its resources and time competing for membership. Things were smoothed over by Browne and Harlow, but the threat of the Independents was not removed. Later in the year the Independents asked for a list of Chamber members, the amount of membership they paid, and other information concerning chain stores. The Executive Committee refused the information because it did not know exactly what was meant by chain stores, and part of the information requested was privileged and could not be given to other organizations.⁵¹

The rival group asked the Chamber of Commerce in 1936 to assist in preventing the Katz Drug Company from moving to the city. After investigation, the Chamber determined that there was a surplus of drugstores in the city and that Katz was not a reputable firm, but the Chamber

refused to take strong action because it feared it would only encourage Katz and work against the growth policies of the organization. Only moral support was offered at the time. The next year the Chamber started a school to teach small businessmen better merchandising methods and how to compete with the changing structure of the community's economic life. Thus the competition between the two organizations for membership did result in some positive steps which assisted several people.⁵²

By the late 1930's the Independents were not a major threat to the Chamber. With the return of more prosperous times, the membership and the resources of the Chamber improved. However, if the rival group had chosen to force the Chamber into a struggle for membership in 1934-1937, many of the resources (time, talent, and money) which were used to improve the city and state would not have been available. When Browne and Harlow met with the Independents, the course which the city would take in the future was settled. Because of their diplomacy, the search for new business and employment, the quest of flood control and water supply, the efforts at conservation and farm improvement, plus a host of other constructive activities, were allowed to continue. The meeting was one of the most important in Oklahoma City's history--it decided the direction the community would take in the future.

The Chamber of Commerce in 1937 accepted the responsibility of saving Oklahoma City University from closing its doors. Although it was only a junior college, Browne and his associates believed that the school was vital to the city. The school was plagued with financial problems; the faculty members were receiving approximately two-thirds their base salary, and the school debt was very high. Because of the

split in the Methodist Church, the church was not giving adequate support to the school, and each year it was forced to operate on about one-fourth the money necessary to carry out its functions properly.⁵³

That spring the Chamber mounted a massive fund drive, but the results were short of expectations, and other avenues of approach were considered. One suggestion was to turn the school over to the city and make it a community college. The idea met stiff opposition because the state already had thirty-four institutions of higher education, nine of them within a few miles of the city. People who had made pledges to the school because it was a private institution began to demand their money back when the idea of making it state-owned was reported in the newspapers. Browne and other leaders met and planned a course of action which assured the survival of the school. From then until late in life Browne was a member of the board of trustees of Oklahoma City University.⁵⁴

The chronicle of events in which Browne played a part during the depression was long. Besides those already mentioned, he was active in Community Welfare Programs and finance conferences. At that time charity drives were separate and competitive. In 1935 he was chairman of the Community Fund when it brought most of the charity drives under one organization and reduced the competition and confusion. Thus he helped give a semblance of order and direction to charity drives in the city. He also was active in promoting the Art Center, and the Oklahoma Symphony was saved because of his effort.

He was a complex man. He was kind and gentle with the attributes of a true humanitarian, but he was not able to give his wife the open display of love she wanted and needed. He was a wealthy man who sup-

ported the President and the party--which did more than any other group to restrict the freedom of businessmen. Browne was not afraid to admit his own failings and to look for and accept better methods. Through the Chamber of Commerce he worked hard on a team effort to make the city and the state a better place in which to live, but he never gave up his strong feelings of individualism. He was a man with immense energy, which he did not waste by spreading it too thinly but concentrated it in one organization. As a businessman he was willing to take risks and promote improvement, although the economy was in a depression. Browne was a community builder who played a role of leadership during one of the most trying periods in Oklahoma City's history. He was not satisfied to hold the line or leave the task to others; he strove to move forward for the betterment of life in the city. He was a builder during the depression.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹Autobiography III, p. 74.
- ²Ibid.
- ³Ibid.
- ⁴Ibid., p. 75.
- ⁵Ibid., p. 78.
- ⁶Ibid., p. 82. (The story of the yachts is substantiated by the records in the Yacht File in the Browne Collection.)
- ⁷"Northern Wonderland Cruise," Notes by Mrs. Virgil Browne, June-Aug. 1936, p. 7, Mrs. Browne's Collection.
- ⁸Ibid., p. 9.
- ⁹Ibid., p. 13.
- ¹⁰Ibid., p. 14.
- ¹¹Ibid., p. 54.
- ¹²Ibid., p. 55.
- ¹³Ibid.
- ¹⁴Ibid., p. 62.
- ¹⁵G. A. Nichols to Virgil Browne, Nov. 2, 1936, Browne Collection; Virgil Browne's Scrapbook with wedding photos and newspaper clippings, Browne Collection; Browne File, Hall of Fame, Heritage House.
- ¹⁶Browne's Scrapbook; The Biographical Dictionary of Contemporary Poets: Who's Who of American Poets (New York, 1938).
- ¹⁷H. R. McBride to Virgil Browne, Oct. 5, 1936, Browne Collection; Virgil Browne, personal interview with the author, Sept. 15, 1973.
- ¹⁸Virgil Browne, personal interview with the author, May 28, 1973; H. C. Martin to Stockholders, Midland Building Co., Mar. 26, 1932, Browne Collection; O. A. Brightwell, Jr. to Miss Ruth Fariss (Browne's secretary), July 6, 1945, Browne Collection; T. E. Braniff, Speech for 20th Celebration, Draper Collection, Heritage House.

¹⁹Autobiography III, pp. 88-90; Carl C. Magee to Virgil Browne, May 16, 1935, Browne Collection; Virgil Browne to Carl C. Magee, Oct. 2, 1935, Browne Collection; Ned Holman to Virgil Browne, Oct. 7, 1935, Browne Collection; Carl C. Magee to Virgil Browne, Oct. 8, 1935, Browne Collection.

²⁰Gridiron Club Banquet Program, Browne's Scrapbook, Browne Collection; Mrs. J. M. Hull to Virgil Browne, Jan. 12, 1935, Browne Collection; Sam Battles, Democratic State Central Committee, to Virgil Browne, Sept. 21, 1936, Browne Collection.

²¹Poem sent from Roland V. Rodman to Virgil Browne, Browne Collection.

²²Speech prepared in Spring, 1938, Browne Collection.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Speech defending Roosevelt, 1944, Browne Collection.

²⁷N.R.A. Campaign in Oklahoma City, 1933-1934, Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, Draper Library.

²⁸Decisions by Committee on Interpretations, Oklahoma City N.R.A. Campaign, Aug. 8, 1933, N.R.A. Campaign in Oklahoma City.

²⁹Ibid.; Oklahoma (Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce), XVIII, No. 2 (Jan. 14, 1934), p. 4.

³⁰N.R.A. Campaign in Oklahoma City; Minutes of Emergency Meeting, Chamber of Commerce, Sept. 28, 1933, Board of Directors.

³¹Minutes, Aug. 31, 1933, Board of Directors.

³²Ibid.

³³Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Labor Relations Committee, Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, Feb. 27, 1935, Industrial Division--Labor Relations Committee--Industrial Research Committee Reports, Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, 1935.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Victor E. Harlow, "Labor Dictatorship Proposed for Oklahoma," Harlow's Weekly, XLV, No. 32 (Feb. 15, 1936), p. 1; Minutes, Feb. 27, 1936, Board of Directors.

³⁶John D. Thomas, Chairman, Labor Relations Committee, Annual Report, Industrial Division, 1936.

³⁷Constitution and By-Laws of the Oklahoma City Trades and Labor Council, Industrial Division, 1938.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Browne's letter to his employees, circa. 1938, Browne Collection; Virgil Browne, unpublished article, "Labor Relations," Browne Collection.

⁴⁰Speech prepared in Spring, 1938, Browne Collection.

⁴¹Virgil Browne, "The Corporation Income Tax should be Repealed," sent to Congressmen, 1938 and to Senator Elmer Thomas, Aug. 21, 1944, Browne Collection; Rep. Mike Monroney to Virgil Browne, Aug. 21, 1944, Browne Collection.

⁴²A. T. Burge to Stanley C. Draper, Jan. 12, 1932, State Fair and Agriculture Committee of the Chamber of Commerce, 1932.

⁴³Minutes of Meeting of Agriculture Sub-Committee on Projects for 1933 (annual report), State Fair and Agriculture Committee.

⁴⁴Annual Report of Committee on Agriculture and Livestock, 1932, State Fair and Agriculture Committee.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Minutes, Nov. [?], 1936, Board of Directors; Eugene P. Gum, Chairman, Demonstration Farm Committee, Annual Report, Nov. 30, 1937; Minutes, June 30, 1938, Board of Directors; Letters to Browne selecting new tenant, Oct. 1942, Browne Collection.

⁴⁷Minutes, Nov. [?], 1936, Board of Directors.

⁴⁸S. W. Hayes, Plans and Projects Committee, to Virgil Browne, Dec. 8, 1936; Copy of agenda, Tulsa-Oklahoma City Meeting, Browne Collection; Minutes, Apr. 22, 1937, Board of Directors; Virgil Browne, personal interview with the author, May 5, 1973.

⁴⁹Minutes, May 13, 1937, Subject: "The Dust Bowl," Board of Directors; Minutes, May 6, 1937, Board of Directors.

⁵⁰Oklahoma City Business and Its Trade Territory: A Study and Plan for Expansion (Lockwood Greene Engineers, Inc., 1931), Heritage House Collection.

⁵¹Minutes, Nov. 27, 1934, Executive Committee; Ibid., Dec. 19, 1934; Ibid., Apr. 3, 1936.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Minutes, Mar. 25, 1937, Board of Directors; Oklahoma City Times, Apr. 15, 1937; Minutes, June 9, 1937, Board of Directors.

⁵⁴Ibid.

CHAPTER XI

PREPARING FOR WAR

Virgil Browne and his associates in the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce greeted the news of the German invasion of Poland with mixed emotions. Their first reaction was that Americans should keep out of the war. One day in 1940, Browne cut from a paper an article describing the submarine warfare which was being fought in the Atlantic. No doubt, he was recalling the chain of events which had led to the United States' entry in World War I. He wanted to keep the nation out of the conflict, but the future looked dark and foreboding. Then, after Hitler's sudden and decisive victories in the spring of 1940, President Franklin D. Roosevelt began preparing the nation for battle. Although war required tremendous suffering and sacrifice by all Americans, defense industries provided an opportunity for Oklahoma City to break from the stagnation and apathy of the depression--defense projects in and around the city would provide new opportunity. For the community builders this meant a chance to build on a grand scale. They could make big plans and carry through herculean tasks.¹

The Board of Directors of the Chamber of Commerce met for a routine session on May 16, 1940. The men discussed the census, the financial need of the New Industries Committee, unemployment, a goodwill tour, Dairy Day, Oklahoma City Day, and the fund-raising campaign for Oklahoma City University. Among the routine business was a brief statement by

J. Wiley Richardson on the national emergency. He feared that a sudden move by the nation into war would result in a major industrial disaster. Although he made no specific recommendations, his comments and the events which were taking place in other parts of the nation shifted the Chamber into high gear. Several months would pass before it held another routine meeting.²

The president of the Chamber, Samuel W. Hayes, called a special meeting of the Board of Directors for May 20, at which time they decided what course of action the organization would take during the national emergency. Harvey P. Everest opened the meeting by stating that a large sum of money would have to be raised to send delegates to Washington to look out for the city's interests. Yet the question was what constituted Oklahoma City's interest. Hayes placed the question squarely before the Board: "What interest shall we take? Shall we offer the facilities we have? Shall we go further and call attention to the opportunities our community and this section of the country afford, or shall we let nature take its course?"³ He went on to ask: "Shall we undertake anything along this line other than that we can do without organization and expense; or shall we go after it hammer and tongs, and in earnest, to accomplish as much as can be accomplished?"⁴ To get a large share of the appropriations and to attract aircraft factories would be a highly competitive venture, for Tulsa, Dallas, Fort Worth, Wichita, and other cities were after the same appropriations and factories. Despite the competition, expense, work, and worry involved, the Board of Directors decided to "go after it hammer and tongs, and in earnest" ⁵ Before the meeting ended, \$650 was raised to finance R. A. Singletary's trip to Washington.⁶

The following Thursday, May 23, one of the largest Board meetings in years assembled to start laying the foundation for positive action. Other cities, Hayes pointed out, had established financial companies to assist in attracting new industries and providing a means for quick actions when opportunities presented themselves. Oklahoma City did not have this type of organization, and any concrete agreements had to wait until after a city bond election. Both the federal government and private industries did not care to make definite plans which could be drastically changed by a bond election. And the time lost between starting a defense base or industry and a bond election would damage plans for national defense. If Oklahoma City was to compete successfully against other cities, it had to establish an industrial finance company. John D. Thomas, C. C. Day, Virgil Browne, and Harold Josey were appointed to a special committee to look into all phases of financing problems and make specific recommendations. To meet any emergency expenses incurred before the committee had developed definite plans, a voluntary subscription was taken. At the meeting \$2,850 was collected.⁷

The next order of business was organizing a Council of Defense. "In event of invasion the first 100 planes coming over could put out of business our oil storage," commented E. K. Gaylord.⁸ He recommended making a study of the facts concerning the possibility of an attack and its effect on all the nation's defense and private industries. The Board agreed with Gaylord and granted the president of the Chamber the power to establish a National Defense Committee. Ancel Earp was appointed chairman of the special committee to work out definite recommendations. At the following meeting of the Board, Earp was not present, but many of the members questioned the advisability of setting up a Defense

Council modeled after similar groups of the First World War. These men believed that conditions had changed enough to make the old organization out-dated. They finally agreed to allow Earp's group to continue, but their support was not enthusiastic. Following the meeting, individual members began developing new ideas for a defense organization.⁹

All efforts for a national defense organization, financing new projects, and promoting defense bases were floundering for one essential flaw--lack of information. To obtain the needed data, the Chamber began teaming with the Works Projects Administration and the University of Oklahoma to survey the state's industries. The study would provide information on what the state and the city had to offer for national defense, what new ventures would benefit the effort, and how established firms and new firms could work together for mutual benefit.¹⁰

Thus when the nation began preparing for war, bringing an opportunity for growth and employment in Oklahoma City, the Chamber of Commerce was caught "flat footed." The members spent a month attempting to get organized and to determine the best methods of approaching the many problems. By mid-June the city leaders were beginning to get their bearings. At the June 20 meeting of the Board, Browne was appointed chairman of the National Defense Committee. He agreed to devote his full time to the task and to move into one of the offices at the Chamber of Commerce. He received the power to appoint the members of his committee, which was to make a survey of the state's industries and attempt to attract defense plants--primarily airplane factories.¹¹

At a special meeting held four days later to consider an emergency state-wide survey, Browne and his committee decided to ask for the joint sponsorship of the University of Oklahoma, the State Planning and

Resources Board, representatives of other Chambers of Commerce, and men from private industry. They also agreed that the survey would have to be much cheaper than the suggested cost of \$200,000. At the next regular Board of Directors meeting on June 27, a heated debate of the cost of the survey ensued. The entire effort came close to failing. Browne saved the project by agreeing to restrict his activities to assembling data already available. He would simply place the information in an usable form.¹²

In order to facilitate any further effort by the Chamber after the question of the survey was resolved, the meeting was opened to a round-table discussion of what national defense activities had taken place and what should be done. Work on attracting airplane and airplane accessories manufacturing had been started by the New Industries Committee under Victor E. Harlow. The staff of the Chamber was assembling information on war materials which could be manufactured by local establishments. Thomas E. Braniff was exploring the possibility of getting a direct east-west transcontinental airline service into Oklahoma City. Many people were actively working on getting a National Guard Air Squadron. Singletary was in Washington doing yeoman's work with the federal agencies. In his summary report dated July 1, he stated that Oklahoma City definitely was going to get one of the eight National Guard Air Squadrons as soon as Congress passed the necessary legislation.¹³

Several activities began to take shape and progress at a rapid pace by mid-July. The Executive Committee of the Chamber authorized sponsorship of an extensive vocational school program designed to train the local labor force for filling unexpected jobs in defense plants. These

leaders hoped that the school would assure the unemployed of Oklahoma City the full benefits from any industries. They also hoped that the school would help attract new industries by guaranteeing the needed skilled labor. To emphasize flying and to prepare people of Oklahoma for the "air age" which was about to begin in the city, a flight training school at Wiley Post Airport was established. To bring these activities and others under one committee, which could work cooperatively, Browne appointed several men to his committee. Braniff and Moss Patterson were to emphasize airport and aviation industrial development. L. H. Mann was assigned the task of cooperating with school projects and school development. General W. S. Key was placed on the committee to represent the Army projects. City Manager W. A. Quinn was added to the committee to assure close cooperation with the city government.¹⁴

One of the vital surveys was completed by Patterson by August 1, and plans for further action were able to move forward. The digest, entitled Supplemental Data Regarding Facilities at Oklahoma City Air Corps Bombardment Group Base and Air Corps Intermediate Station, provided facts on weather, housing, recreation, churches, shopping areas, air terminals, and available practice ranges. The work was completed just in time because the federal government was preparing to designate the locations of new Army Air Bases. With the information in his hands, Singletary convinced official Washington that a base should be established in Oklahoma City. By September 10 he was able to report that the base was secured as soon as Congress completed certain legislation-- primarily the Conscription Bill. Although Patterson was on Browne's committee, the credit for completion of the first survey was due primarily to the efforts of Stanley C. Draper, the manager-director of the

Chamber, and Patterson. Browne's committee had been unable to move forward at the speed required for successful completion of the task.¹⁵

The effort to attract airplane manufacturing began to run into problems in July. The Chamber was in contact with a firm which was interested in moving to the city, but it would require a great deal of water for its factory and for testing sea planes. Although the Bluff Creek project had been approved by the voters in February, the court action, which promised to delay the program indefinitely, had discouraged the airplane manufacturer from moving to Oklahoma City.¹⁶

The Board of Directors met on September 26 to review developments and to determine their course of action for the remainder of the year. The Army Air Base and the National Guard Unit were secure by late September provided the Chamber could remain on top of developments. The Navy was considering an interior base and an Aircraft Engine Research Laboratory, Fort Sill was designated to receive 47,000 troops, and plans were afoot to renovate Fort Reno with a cavalry unit. At the end of the meeting, Browne stated "that the Chamber's National Defense Committee [had] been working as individuals during the summer, but beginning Monday of next week will commence working as a unit."¹⁷

Finally, on October 1, the committee met. At this time the members decided that the city had little chance of attracting an airplane factory because current aircraft facilities were adequate to meet demand. But the committee would remain alert for any developments which might change the picture. Meanwhile the committee would go to work analyzing all possible conditions which would be useful in attracting industry at a later date. The study was to include information on taxes, employment, housing, transportation, natural resources, and natural advan-

tages. They further agreed that they should take what action they could to remove the bottleneck in water development. The committee had been slow starting, but it was now preparing to do its work.¹⁸

In May, Browne had been placed on a committee to explore possibilities for financing a development company. Following his appointment, he had completed several preliminary studies but had not made an official recommendation to the Board of Directors. On October 5, Hayes appointed Browne, Dan W. Hogan, Gaylord, Lloyd Judd, L. A. Macklanburg, and Patterson to a special committee to formulate methods for acquisition of land for aviation development. The committee agreed on the necessity of forming a trust to purchase and hold land until the city was in a position to take over. The Industries Foundation Trust, with Gaylord, Browne, and William E. Hightower as grantors and Frank Buttram, Everest, and Hogan as trustees, was established on November 7. The organization was established as a trust because it was illegal for a company to own agricultural land, and most of the land purchased was farm land.¹⁹

To prevent any excessive profits from being made by the Trust, a five-per cent limit was placed on the funds. And to prevent the Industries Foundation from developing a continuous program which might be damaging to the community, they agreed to liquidate the business in ten years. If at that time some form of financial company was thought necessary, a new one would be created to meet the demands of that period. Inasmuch as the investments were relatively secure, it was not difficult to get the required subscribers, and soon the Trust had sufficient funds to purchase the needed land and hold it until the city could take positive action.²⁰

By the end of the year, a tremendous amount of activity was going on at the airport. The government was constructing 118 buildings, 600 mechanics were working, and more than 5,000 other employees were employed at the airport. The daily pay roll was in excess of \$40,000. The building and construction trades, along with several other businesses, were booming in Oklahoma City. The Industries Foundation purchased or took an option on 640 acres north of Bethany, 480 acres adjacent to the airport, 320 acres south of the city, and 160 acres northwest of the city. The land at Bethany was being considered for a new municipal airport. The Foundation also was working on the purchase of more than a thousand acres for an auxiliary air depot. Eventually this land became the site of Tinker Field. "The Government wasn't interested in Oklahoma City. They were interested in other spots," stated Draper when summing up the year's work. "The only reason the government is here now is because of the initiative of the citizens of this community."²¹

The army was in the city, but a great deal of work remained. The site of the air depot was still undecided. Through the continuing efforts of the Washington Bureau and the activity of the Industries Foundation, which purchased 1,440 acres, the depot was awarded on April 18, 1941. To assist in the development of the land, the bus and truck lines began servicing the area immediately. The Oklahoma City-Ada-Atoka railroad began constructing a spur track to the depot. While work of acquiring the air depot was progressing, the voters were asked to approve a large Defense Bond. The Chamber did not want a close election which might end in court as had the water bond election. It planned to win and win big. As a member of the Executive Committee for the bond campaign committee, Browne played his usual vital role of collecting cam-

paign funds. The Daily Oklahoman of April 30 carried headlines that "Defense Bonds Approved by Vote of Nearly 19 to 1."²² This was a big victory for the community leaders because the city had voted to grow and to develop defense industries.²³

In May of 1941, Senator Elmer Thomas was provided with a completed digest of the facilities in the city for any aircraft manufacturing and assembly plant. The National Defense Committee had completed its work and stood ready to take advantage of any opportunity that appeared. In October, Senator Thomas advised the Chamber that Congress was about to act on legislation which would encourage development of aircraft plants in the interior, and said he felt it would be wise for the Chamber to begin taking preliminary steps. In compliance with this advice, Browne, Draper, Gaylord, Hightower, Fred Jones, and Jack Hull made a secret trip to the West Coast to talk to executives of leading aircraft manufacturing companies. Each business was sounded out, but Douglas Aircraft Company proved a promising prospect. Hightower was a close personal friend of George Stratton, one of the directors of Douglas. Although nothing concrete came from these meetings, they laid the foundation for future developments. After the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the nation went into full defense production, and in January 1942, Douglas announced it would build a plant adjacent to the Midwest Air Depot. At the meeting of the Board of Directors on January 29, Hightower commented that the aircraft plant was what the city had been waiting for and that industrial growth was assured. He believed that the plant would remain in operation after the war, for the planes manufactured there could easily be converted to commercial use.²⁴

The Douglas factory was completed early in 1943, and Oklahoma City

residents began producing C-47s for the war effort. They contributed their full share to making the home front an active and vital part of the drive for victory. While the plant was in operation, it built nearly 11,000 planes and at its height employed more than 20,000 people. At the war's end it had approximately 15,000 employees. Three days after Japan surrendered on August 14, 1945, some 12,000 workers were laid off. Many of the unemployed found jobs through the efforts of the Industrial Committee of the Chamber of Commerce and the expansion of Tinker Field. The employees left their jobs fully realizing that they had done their share to end the war. Hightower's prediction that the plant would remain proved false.²⁵

While the Chamber of Commerce was working to attract military bases and defense industries to Oklahoma, primarily to the city, the work of Earp to develop a Council of Defense progressed at a snail's pace. In June of 1941, the Chamber took stock of the Council's progress. Work in health, welfare, recreation, and related activities had been channeled into organizations to keep abreast of the situation. A defense job-training program had been established. But the problems associated with providing for civilian safety in case of attack had not been solved; in fact, the problem had not been seriously considered. If war came, there would be a need to sell bonds, but no local organization was ready to work with the federal government. The Defense Council had not developed plans for building morale among the citizens; without high morale a total war could not be fought. If the United States entered World War II, it would require total war and a total war effort to gain a victory.²⁶

In June, President Roosevelt appointed New York Mayor Fiorello H.

LaGuardia to head a National Defense Council. Oklahoma City Mayor Robert A. Hefner appointed L. C. Griffith as director of the central coordinating office of civilian defense. Griffith organized a group of local delegates to meet with LaGuardia and work out details on how the Oklahoma City Defense Council should be organized and how it could cooperate with the national organization. Browne was among the seventeen delegates under Griffith who met with LaGuardia during the first week of July. Following the meeting in New York City, the National Defense Council of Oklahoma City was established.²⁷

The new organization held its first meeting on July 23 and reviewed its responsibilities: what work had already been done and what work was in progress. The Council decided that its first effort should be with projects already started but not completed. One group checked on the Defense Job Training efforts and determined that skilled workers for industry were being trained, but that there was not training of people about what to do if an attack or other disaster occurred. The Council started training people for a job which would be vitally necessary in the event of an attack. Of course, these men hoped that the training would never be used in an actual situation. The Council also checked to see that a Soldiers' Center (USO) was provided for the men who were arriving in the city. One was under development and soon opened. Work to determine the condition of access roads and health and sanitation facilities was started. The organizational structure of the Defense Council had to be completed if full participation of all the people was to be assured. Once the organizational structure was completed, Browne was appointed chairman of the Industrial Resources and Production Division. Thus he became an intricate part of the National Defense Council of

Oklahoma City.²⁸

Early in the development of the Council, a National Defense Week to build morale was suggested. The original dates selected for the week were near the last of September. Because of the shortness of time, however, the week was postponed until the middle of November. Fate provided that efforts to build morale during National Defense Week came just a few days short of the United States' entry into the war.²⁹

At the Council meeting on November 18, the members voted to establish an executive committee responsible for the overall activities of the organization. Browne was not appointed to the top committee; as a result he was removed from the center of action. During that same meeting, however, he made a motion, which was seconded by Jones, that at the earliest possible date the executive committee should appoint a group to work on conservation. The conservation committee was responsible for preventing unnecessary waste of natural resources and thereby impeding the war effort.³⁰

The Council changed its name after the nation actually entered the war. It became the Oklahoma County-City War Council. From 1941 to 1945 it worked to keep morale high, to promote war bond drives, and to collect scrap metal and paper, and it promoted a host of other activities necessary for the war effort. It gave freely to make the task of the men fighting a little easier. Although the members of the Council never heard a shot fired in anger, they went to war and helped gain the victory.

In September 1939, on a continent far removed from Oklahoma City, World War II began its years of destruction and misery. In the wake of the Polish invasion came new opportunity for the city to grow, its

unemployed to find work, its capitalists to invest. When the nation began to prepare itself for the onslaught of war, the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce seized the opportunity to have military bases and defense industries in and near the city. Only through vigorous and innovative action was the opportunity of the moment captured. The man primarily responsible for the success was Stanley Draper. He could not have succeeded without the assistance of Virgil Browne, Singletary, Hull, Jones, Braniff, Patterson, Thomas, Gaylord, Hefner, and a host of others. Browne played a major role in the drama. He gave up his own work and office and began assembling needed data. He was a prime mover in organizing the Industries Foundation which made it possible to obtain the necessary real estate. Browne was among the men who laid the foundation for establishing the Douglas Aircraft factory in Oklahoma City. He worked hard for the sale of the Defense Bonds. He was one of the men who organized the National Defense Council for Oklahoma City. Much of the work which this Council did was accomplished by individuals working on their own. Browne was not the commander for the task assigned. When the positive achievements of the man are measured against the negative achievements, Browne's successes far out-measure his failures. He was a city builder who helped prepare his community for war.

FOOTNOTES

¹Browne's Scrapbook; Daily Oklahoman, May 19, 1940; Minutes, May 16, 1940, Board of Directors.

²Ibid.; Minutes of a Special Meeting, May 20, 1940, Board of Directors.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Minutes, May 23, 1940, Board of Directors.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.; Ibid., May 29, 1940.

¹⁰Daily Oklahoman, June 15, 1940; Ibid., June 17, 1940.

¹¹Minutes, May 20, 1940, Board of Directors.

¹²Conference of the Special Committee on the Proposed Statewide Emergency Survey, June 24, 1940, Board of Directors; Minutes, May 27, 1940, Board of Directors.

¹³Ibid.; R. A. Singletary to Stanley C. Draper, Summary Report, July 1, 1940, Board of Directors.

¹⁴Minutes, July 11, 1940, Board of Directors.

¹⁵Moss Patterson, Director of Aeronautics, Supplemental Data Regarding Facilities at Oklahoma City for Accommodation of Air Corps Bombardment Group Base and Air Corps Intermediate Station, Heritage House Collection; R. A. Singletary to Stanley C. Draper, Sept. 10, 1940, Board of Directors.

¹⁶Minutes, July 11, 1940, Board of Directors; Virgil Browne, Chairman of the Committee on National Defense, Address to the Public.

¹⁷Minutes, Sept. 26, 1940, Board of Directors.

¹⁸Minutes of the Meeting of National Defense Committee, Oct. 1, 1940, Board of Directors.

¹⁹Minutes, May 23, 1940, Board of Directors; S. W. Hayes to Members of the Committee, Board of Directors; Industries Foundation: A Trust: Declaration of Trust, Nov. 7, 1940, Board of Directors.

²⁰Ibid.; Minutes of Joint Meeting of the Board of Directors and Industries Foundation, Dec. 5, 1940, Board of Directors.

²¹Ibid.

²²Daily Oklahoman, Apr. 30, 1941.

²³Oklahoma City Times, Apr. 8, 1941; Bond Campaign for Aviation Development in Connection with National Defense, April 14-29, 1941 (Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce).

²⁴Report on Visit to Aircraft Companies in Los Angeles Area, Oct. 30, 1941, Board of Directors; Minutes, Jan. 29, 1942, Board of Directors.

²⁵"Editorial," Douglas Airview News (Oklahoma City), XIII, No. 20 (Aug. 17, 1945), p. 1; The Daily Oklahoman, Aug. 24, 1945; Minutes, Jan. 29, 1942, Board of Directors.

²⁶Memorandum Concerning Formation of Local Defense Council, June 3, 1941, Oklahoma County-City War Council, World War II, 1941-1945, Vol. I.

²⁷Oklahoma City Times, July 1, 1941; Times, July 3, 1941.

²⁸Minutes of National Defense Council of Oklahoma City, July 23, 1941; Ibid., Sept. 5, 1941.

²⁹Ibid., July 23, 1941; Ibid., Sept. 5, 1941; Ibid., Nov. 18, 1941.

³⁰Ibid.

CHAPTER XII

THE STATE BOARD OF AFFAIRS

In the fall of 1942, Oklahoma's voters chose Robert S. Kerr as governor. Kerr wanted to do all he could to further the war effort, bring efficiency to the state government, and pay the state's debt. To help him achieve his goal, he turned to his old friend and supporter, Virgil Browne, to head the important office of Chairman of the State Board of Public Affairs which controlled all state hospitals, orphanages, and penal institutions. Browne had already proven his ability to establish efficient operations; he was widely known and respected for his honesty; and he strongly supported the governor's program. Other members of the Board of Affairs were Vice Chairman Maude Richman Calvert and Secretary Henry A. Hewett. Mrs. Calvert had extensive experience in child development and education. She had been elected to the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1934 and was selected as The Most Useful Citizen of Oklahoma City in 1935. Hewett was a Republican from Durant with extensive experience in business and in the State House.¹

When Browne took office in 1943, he did not realize how much the office would demand, nor did he know that he would be required to make many decisions for which he had little preparation. The institutions under the control of the State Board of Affairs were in poor condition; repairs had been ignored, and the personnel were untrained, underpaid, and overworked. The heads of the institutions were generally political

appointees, and when Browne took office he was unable to break with this precedent. He had to handle many of Kerr's patronage positions, and he also was hampered in his search for competent people by the war, which was taking a heavy toll on manpower.²

He had been in office only a few months when Edward O'Brien, the warden at Granite Reformatory, resigned, charging that the institution was "called the hell hole of Oklahoma"³ and saying that the State Board of Affairs would do nothing to improve the sanitary conditions or pay the employees an adequate salary. He also charged that Fred Hunt, who had been transferred to McAlester as warden, had left the reformatory in a deplorable condition. Although the Board of Affairs had raised salaries \$12.50 per month, there was a great deal of truth in O'Brien's statements. After coming into office, Browne tried to get the Navy to take Granite for a Naval prison. He hoped that the federal government would spend the money necessary to rebuild the institution, and at the end of the war the state would get it back as surplus property. The Navy refused because it would cost \$500,000 to renovate the institution before it could be used as a federal prison.⁴

Another problem was the State Tuberculosis Sanatorium at Talihina, which was nearly forced to close its doors. Every three months seventy-five per cent of the employees quit work. The boiler for the power plant had completely stopped working. The X-ray machine was more than twenty-five years old. Diets for the patients were poor and inadequate. Recreation facilities were not available. Browne was able to get a new boiler and an X-ray machine, but the requirements for war materials prevented him from purchasing several needed items. Granite and Talihina are only two examples of the poor conditions which existed in the state

institutions when Browne became head of the State Board of Affairs with the intent of assisting Kerr in paying the state debt.⁵

Browne did not intend to pay the debt by depriving people of basic requirements; he planned to bring efficiency into the running of the institutions and to take advantage of opportunities which were available. The first step toward efficiency was to reorganize the institutions. The governor pushed through the state legislature a bill which allowed him to transfer inmates of the various institutions and to redirect the use of institutions. After this bill passed in the spring of 1943, Browne took steps to combine the orphanages at Helena and Pryor. By using the extra space at Pryor and by closing the orphanage's school, he provided living accommodations for the orphans. These children were to attend the public school, thereby providing them with a more normal life. And the boys at the state training school at Paul's Valley were moved to Helena. Browne planned improvements in living conditions at Helena and a new vocational education program designed to aid employment after leaving the school; the Paul's Valley school was known as a stepping stone to the prison, and Browne hoped to change the pattern. The epileptic patients in hospitals at Norman, Vinita, Fort Supply, and Enid were moved to Paul's Valley where they could lead a more normal life away from the stigma associated with a mental institution. The space created by moving the epileptics relieved the overcrowded conditions at the mental institutions and reduced the need for new buildings.⁶

The state institutions for black and white female juveniles and criminals were segregated on color lines. The Board of Affairs proposed to close the colored institution and move inmates to the white institution. One set of buildings and administrative staff would be discon-

tinued. "A much better job of management [could] be done for the inmates," Browne stated, "and at the same time at much less cost to the state."⁷ His was an elaborate plan for reorganization to establish more efficiency and reduce the cost while meeting the human requirements, but political pressure prevented the plan from achieving all its desired objectives.

To improve the prisons, he asked Lewis E. Laws, the former warden of Sing Sing Penitentiary and a recognized authority on prisons, to examine the Oklahoma penal system and recommend changes which would improve rehabilitation and make the system more efficient. Laws recommended that one of the institutions be made a maximum security prison to house the habitual criminals, while the other institution would emphasize rehabilitation. By segregating the hardened criminals, he believed that rehabilitation had a better chance of succeeding. Browne began to act on these recommendations by starting an extensive construction program at Granite. By the fall of 1944, he was ready to begin moving prisoners, but the project ran into political trouble when the institution became known as "Little Alcatraz." When he left office in 1947, the plan had not been fully completed, but the Granite Reformatory was a far better place for the inmates to live than it had been in 1943.⁸

The idea of relocating people fitted into another of Browne's plans for reducing the state debt. By an executive order in 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt had approved the use of state and federal prisons to produce war material. Large federal contracts would make a profit for the state, and the money, placed in a revolving fund, would reduce appropriations for prisons. The former assistant administrator of the State Board of Public Welfare, John Nelson, was appointed superintendent

of industries at McAlester penitentiary. He was responsible for a high rate and quality of production. In March 1943, Browne obtained a government contract to manufacture 750,000 military shirts, one that required about 800 men to meet the contract. McAlester had a prison population of about 1,900. To get the needed labor force, 200 men from Granite were transferred to McAlester. Since the prison was capable of producing a large quantity of food, a canning plant was installed. The food was used by other state institutions and sold for shipment to war-torn Europe. The Navy contracted for rope, rope fenders, and twine. Local farmers were unable to purchase bailing and binding twine on the open market, so the prison began supplying it. The shoe factory produced shoes for the war effort. In early 1945, the prison began manufacturing camouflage nets.⁹

These projects were massive in scope, but after an initial resistance to manufacturing war goods the prisoners gave their full support to making certain that Oklahoma did its share to win the war. The chief of the prison industries branch of the war production board, Major W. H. Burke, presented an award in 1946 to the men for their effort. Although the Oklahoma prison was smaller than many state and federal prisons, it produced the second largest quantity of war materials. The men at McAlester had helped fight the war and feed the starving. The more than \$800,000 worth of goods produced helped reduce the state's debt and supplied funds for needed improvements at the institution.¹⁰

When the war production program at McAlester started, the inmates were not enthusiastic supporters of the program. In August they went on a sit-down strike and refused to leave their cells. They demanded the removal of Warden Hunt. Governor Kerr, who was in Minnesota hunting at

the time, telephoned his full support of Hunt. Browne agreed with the governor and started making plans to stop all war manufacturing contracts. Finally, the strikers gave up and returned to their jobs. Soon Browne, who was not satisfied with the warden, removed him and placed R. B. Conners in charge of the prison. He also began paying the men for their work, and by the end of the war Oklahoma prisoners were the highest-paid prisoners in the nation. The leaders of the strike were quietly moved to Granite where they worked on the prison farm and in the rock quarry. When the strike failed, however, the prisoners found another way to resist. They did inefficient work; forty-two per cent of the first shipment of shirts was rejected. Very unhappy with the results, Browne wrote a strong letter to Nelson. Nelson responded by starting an honor system which broke the resistance, and by 1944 the McAlester Prison industries were in full production with high quality material.¹¹

Reorganization of state institutions and the manufacturing of war materials were only part of Browne's plan to reduce the cost of running the state government without reducing its efficiency. Since the state institutions had farms and each could produce large quantities of food, Browne tried to make them self-supporting. At the very least he wanted them to feed themselves. To supply meat for the state, he placed 600 steers on the range at the Stringtown Sub-Prison. These remained only one season. The federal government leased most of the prison for a prisoner of war camp. Inasmuch as most of the state-owned farms, as well as many private farms, needed limestone fertilizer, Browne ordered a rock crusher and screens installed at the quarry at Stringtown. During the first full year of production, 1945, the sub-prison produced more than 7,000,000 tons of fertilizer and 4,000,000 tons of lime rock.

The limestone fertilizer project was a big asset to Oklahoma farmers and ranchers.¹²

Browne also believed that increasing the production of vegetables on the state farms would aid the war effort and help reduce food costs for the consumers, as well as reduce the cost of running these institutions. The president of Panhandle Agricultural and Mechanical College, Edward Morrison, was employed by the Board to develop programs of increasing production. He advised installing overhead irrigation systems, and during the war all the state institutions under the Board of Affairs, except Stringtown, were equipped with sprinkler systems. By 1944 food production at the farms had doubled. The state hospital at Enid was especially successful. Much of the crop of 1944 was lost because there was no means of preserving the large quantity of food. A year earlier Browne recognized the possibility of losing a large crop, and a dehydrating plant was installed at McAlester. The plant was an excellent one, but Browne could not find anyone who knew how to operate it. He searched the entire nation for an operator.¹³

Food production and care of the patients and inmates was improved in several other ways. Dairy barns were renovated or built with modern milk processing plants installed. These helped assure the residents of safe, wholesome food. At the majority of the state institutions, kitchens were modernized and a concerted effort was made to keep them clean. The system of feeding the men at the prison was changed. When Browne took office, the prison tables were set and food served before the prisoners were allowed into the dining room. By the time they sat down, the food was cold and they had helpings which were not wanted. The system was replaced with a cafeteria which kept the food hot in steam trays and

allowed the men some choice of food. The cafeteria saved the state more than \$1,000 per month in wasted food and stopped one of the prisoners' major complaints--cold food.¹⁴

Reorganization, manufacturing, and increasing production were old and familiar topics to Browne, but much of the political activity which consumed a large portion of his time were new areas. One of the first problems to confront the Board of Affairs under his leadership was the use of convict labor away from the prison. Because of the wartime shortage of labor, the high wages paid in defense plants, and the desire to keep state expenditures at a minimum, convicts were used extensively in the kitchens and on the grounds at hospitals in Vinita, Norman, and Fort Supply. Political opponents of Kerr, along with people who believed that the situation was dangerous and should be changed, began a public attack on the use of convicts instead of a normal labor force. Although Browne agreed that the condition was dangerous, he defended it on the grounds of necessity. Until other labor was available and wages increased for state employees, he could not see how the use of convicts could be prevented. Between 1943 and 1946, wages were increased from thirty dollars per month to fifty dollars per month and working hours were reduced from nine to eight for most classes of labor in which convicts were used. Prison officials in 1946 were expected to work twelve hours per day, seven days per week. As a result, the quality of personnel at the state institutions was generally below that found in private industry.¹⁵

Farm labor was scarce in 1943 and Governor Kerr agreed to place convicts in the wheat fields during the harvest season. Browne went along with the governor, but the transfer of several convicts to western

Oklahoma threw his manufacturing program out of balance just when he was trying to get production running smoothly. The next two years he made arrangements with the federal government to supply people from the prisoner of war camps to aid the farmers in Paul's Valley. Thus his own production program was not upset by temporary conditions which had as much a political overtone as economic necessity.¹⁶

The use of convict labor in the state institutions and on the farms was still well within the area of Browne's knowledge and experience, but he was on much thinner ice when working with problems of discipline and education within the institutions. Fully realizing his shortcomings when he organized the State Board of Affairs, he placed Mrs. Calvert in charge of looking after matters concerning the treatment and advancement of children at the state training schools and state homes. She was widely recognized in the state for her interest and experience in child development and education. Hewett, as secretary of the Board, was responsible for all routine correspondence. Thus the Board was organized to operate effectively and with each person having his area of responsibility clearly defined.¹⁷

The strike at McAlester was hardly settled when an explosive incident occurred at the Tecumseh Training School for White Girls. The superintendent of the school, Mrs. Creighton Burnham, was accused of beating several of the girls. The Commissioner of Charities and Corrections, Mrs. Mabel Bassett, went to the school to investigate the charges. While she was there, Calvert and Hewett arrived and began interfering with Bassett's work. Despite this interference, Bassett was able to determine that twenty of the girls had been badly beaten. Yet the two members of the Board of Affairs supported the action of the superin-

tendent of the school, but Browne, who "was opposed to whipping grown girls and boys, whether in our institutions or in private life," supported the commissioner.¹⁸ The governor endorsed the whippings by quoting, "Spare the rod and spoil the child."¹⁹

The matter remained in an unstable condition when Bassett, Calvert, and Hewett returned to the school in December to investigate a disturbance caused by twelve girls who did not respond properly to several hours of meditation in the school jail. During the second investigation, some girls were serving the Board members dinner when a food riot occurred and trays of food were dumped over the Board members. Browne visited the school later in the evening and worked out an agreement to have the twelve girls taken to Norman Hospital until other arrangements could be made. While the girls were at Norman, Bassett made arrangements for the girls to be taken by relatives. The girls were to move directly from Norman to their new homes. Hewett and Calvert, who outvoted Browne, insisted that the girls be returned to Tecumseh before they were released. Bassett tried to override the authority of the Board, but finally the girls were returned to the school and released. Throughout the incident Burnham had been told she would be supported, but she was removed from her position and Grace Campbell became superintendent. Besides having the head of the school removed, Browne and Bassett were able to stop the whippings at the institution.²⁰

Browne, a humanitarian, opposed the harsh conditions which existed at the state school, but he was unable to ignore the position of the other Board members, nor could he override the governor. In any discussions with other Board members, he was faced by his own inexperience and Calvert's reputation for wide knowledge on the subject. Thus he

had to settle for a small amount of reform and improvement.

The whipping incident was hardly settled when Browne learned that one of the inmates at the state prison had made \$25,000 from the sale of illegal goods. The prisoner was able to get materials which were extremely hard to purchase on the open market. While investigating the case, he learned that the entire system of handling prisoners was appalling. Then in 1944 one of the prisoners identified the leaders of an extensive drug ring. Drugs, liquor, gambling, and illegal trade were common in the prison. In an effort to control these activities, Browne ordered that all cash be turned in to the warden and a limited amount of coupons be given the prisoners; the coupons could be used to purchase items at the canteen. However, the next year Browne admitted that his measure had failed.²¹

The State Auditor, John Rodgers, discovered that several current and past members of the state legislature owed the prison some \$325,000 for items bought on credit. He further estimated that only a small portion of the goods produced at the prison passed through the prison exchange center. Since Browne was determined to lower the state debt and to make the institutions self-supporting, he tried to collect the money. He soon learned that it would be necessary to start court procedures against at least 351 people. Attorney General Randall S. Cobb suggested that the Board seek legislation to collect the money. Browne took Cobb's advice but got nowhere. However, he was able to stop the practice of assigning prisoners to work for influential political figures, and about sixty men were returned to the prison.²²

When the war ended and the labor supply increased, Browne moved to improve conditions at the prison and to end the corruption. For guards

he wanted to employ returning veterans and to have them trained to be effective and efficient before they started work. In the last year he was in office, he arranged for the assistant warden at the federal reformatory at El Reno, Luther V. Porterfield, to spend several months at McAlester studying ways to improve the penal system. While Porterfield was making his study, the chairman of the State Board of Affairs started a program of assisting released prisoners in finding employment. If prisoners could find jobs and become self-supporting, Browne hoped they would gain some respect when released and that the number of repeat offenders would be reduced.²³

Since Porterfield's study was not completed until the fall of 1946, and Browne left office early in 1947, very few reforms actually were accomplished during the Kerr administration. But the study called for sweeping changes in the penal system. Vocational training schools were to be modernized with emphasis on helping the prisoner find employment once he was released. The concept of having the inmates work at jobs which helped support the state was to become a secondary objective. All prison officials and employees were to be professionals and not political appointees. The entire system of handling prisoners and prison industries was to be changed drastically. The canteen fund was to be regulated and other monies strictly supervised. During the remainder of his term in office and upon leaving office, Browne gave Porterfield full support. He believed that an efficiently operating penal system, one which emphasized rehabilitation, would be highly valuable to the state.²⁴

When the war ended and material became available, the state began an extensive building and remodeling of the state institutions. The state mental hospitals received extensive improvements; a prison hos-

pital was started at McAlester; and the dingy auburn and red paint in the living areas and hallways was covered with brighter and more cheerful colors. Since it was going to cost the state about a million dollars to rebuild Langston University, Browne favored moving the school to Oklahoma City in order that more Blacks could attend the school. The schools were not under his control and the idea did not get far. He was still attempting to save the state money while making its services more useful to its citizens.²⁵

During the last year he was in office, he provided yet another invaluable service to the state. After the war ended, the federal government began placing many of its facilities on the surplus list. Browne urged the acquisition of many of these. Stringtown was returned to the state as a sub-prison for trustees; the Naval Gunnery Range at Lexington was acquired for the Central State Hospital; the Clinton Navy Base, which included eight sections and several buildings, was placed under the state's control for no specific purpose; the Army Hospital at Okmulgee became part of the state hospital system; the prisoner of war camp at Tonkawa was obtained for an experiment station for Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College; the Naval Air Station became the North Campus of the University of Oklahoma; and the Naval Gunnery school near Purcell was added to Central State Hospital. In all the state received nearly \$100,000,000 worth of property.²⁶

When Virgil Browne left office in 1947, he could look back at his four year term with mixed emotions. The state debt had been paid, and a large revolving fund was available for state institutions. He had made the state farms more efficient through irrigation and fertilization. A needed limestone fertilizer plant was in operation at Stringtown. Many

of the state institutions had acquired needed facilities by obtaining surplus property. Through his efforts the state institutions had done a commendable job in aiding the war effort, and conditions at the institutions had been improved despite wartime shortages. Although he was able to take concrete steps towards making the state institutions more efficient and humane, his success had been limited: he was never able to complete his reorganization; political motives still determined who would hold state office; no sweeping humanitarian reforms were completed; and the state institutions were not run efficiently and effectively. Shortly before he left office, a reporter asked him if he wanted to remain as chairman of the State Board of Affairs. "I do not wish to continue in office any longer," he replied. "I have given four years to this job and this is enough. I want to rest now and not be tied down to any hours."²⁷ He would be seventy years old on his next birthday.

FOOTNOTES

¹Virgil Browne, personal interview with the author, Sept. 12, 1973; "The State Board of Public Affairs," Soonerland (Oklahoma State Penitentiary, McAlester), I, No. 11 (May, 1943), pp. 1-6.

²Virgil Browne, personal interview with the author, Sept. 12, 1973.

³Edward P. O'Brien to Robert S. Kerr, July 23, 1943, Kerr Collection, Box 62, folder 3.

⁴Virgil Browne to Robert S. Kerr, July 24, 1943, Kerr Collection; Browne's unpublished reply to O'Brien, Browne Collection; Daily Oklahoman, Dec. 23, 1943, p. 6.

⁵Detailed Reports from State Tuberculosis Sanatorium Talihina, Oklahoma, 1943-1946, submitted to the Board of Affairs, Aug. 17, 1946; Miscellaneous Correspondence 1945-1946, Oklahoma State Archives. (The Oklahoma State Archive Collection on the State Board of Affairs, 1943-1947, is not indexed nor filed. Several of the documents are in unmarked file drawers and boxes. Much of the material is mixed.)

⁶Virgil Browne, personal interview with the author, Sept. 12, 1973; Everett Werner to Robert S. Kerr, Nov. 11, 1943, Kerr Collection; Virgil Browne to Everett Werner, Nov. 16, 1943, Kerr Collection; Extensive file on reorganization, OSP File, 1943, Oklahoma State Archives.

⁷Virgil Browne to Millard F. Caldwell, Governor of Florida, July 15, 1946, Kerr Collection.

⁸Virgil Browne to Robert S. Kerr, Oct. 15, 1943, Kerr Collection; Extensive correspondence between Hewett and Laws, Miscellaneous File, Oklahoma State Archives; Oklahoma City Times, Aug. 10, 1944; Claude F. Moore, Warden, "A Report on the Operation of the Oklahoma State Reformatory, Granite, Oklahoma, to the State Board of Public Affairs From January 1, 1943 to July 1, 1946," Miscellaneous Correspondence, Oklahoma State Archives.

⁹For "Supplemental Agreements . . ." of war materials see Minutes, State Board of Affairs File, 1943-1944, Oklahoma State Archives; Oklahoma State Penitentiary Annual Report, Aug. 15, 1946, OSP File, Oklahoma State Archives.

¹⁰Virgil Browne, Introduction of Major W. H. Burke, Browne Collection.

¹¹Daily Oklahoman, Aug. 4, 1943, p. 4; Ibid., Aug. 5, 1943, p. 5, Ibid., Aug. 7, 1943, p. 2; Ibid., Aug 10, 1943, p. 1; Virgil Browne to John Nelson, Oct. 7, 1943, OSP Inmate Correspondence, Oklahoma State Archives.

¹²Virgil Browne, personal interview with the author, Sept. 12, 1973; "Sub-Prison Activities, Jan. 1, 1943 to Aug. 20, 1946, OSP File, Oklahoma State Archives.

¹³Virgil Browne, personal interview with the author, Sept. 12, 1973; Douglas M. McBean to Virgil Browne, Oct. 24, 1944, Oklahoma State Archives; File with Dehydration Plant is unmarked in the Oklahoma State Archives.

¹⁴Report of Activities of Engineering Department of State Board of Public Affairs, 1943-1946, Oklahoma State Archives; Oklahoma State Penitentiary Annual Report, Aug. 15, 1946, Oklahoma State Archives.

¹⁵Oklahoma City Times, Feb. 26, 1943, p. 23; Detailed Report from State Tuberculosis Sanatorium, Talihina, 1943-1946.

¹⁶Virgil Browne to James H. [sic] Coddington, May 12, 1943, Kerr Collection; James W. Coddington to Robert S. Kerr, Kerr Collection; Virgil Browne, personal interview with the author, Oct. 17, 1973.

¹⁷"The State Board of Public Affairs," pp. 1-6.

¹⁸Daily Oklahoman, Nov. 11, 1943, p. 2.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Mabel Bassett, Commissioner of Charities and Corrections, Report to Governor Robert S. Kerr on Conditions at Tecumseh Training School for White Girls, Commissioner of Charities and Corrections (Bassett) Files, Oklahoma State Archives.

²¹Newspaper clippings, Browne Collection.

²²Ibid.

²³Luther V. Porterfield Recommendations to Virgil Browne, Nov. 26, 1946, Miscellaneous Correspondence, 1937-1946, Oklahoma State Archives; Ben F. Bland to Virgil Browne, June 29, 1946, Board of Affairs Institutional Files Correspondence, 1937-1947, Oklahoma State Archives; Virgil Browne to Ben F. Bland, July 1, 1946, Ibid.

²⁴Luther V. Porterfield Recommendations to Virgil Browne, Nov. 26, 1946.

²⁵Minutes, Sept. 4, 1946, Executive Committee.

²⁶Newspaper clippings, Browne Collection.

²⁷Ibid.

CHAPTER XIII

SLOWING DOWN AND LOOKING BACK

After leaving the office of Chairman of the Board of Public Affairs, Virgil Browne did begin to slow down. He realized that the torch of leadership in the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce was being passed to younger men--men more in tune with the changing social, economic, and political activities of the city, the state, and the nation. However, he still held his office as Treasurer of the Chamber and remained active on the Executive Committee and the Board of Directors. He continued to be an active part of the city's business life. But much of his time was spent with honorary chores, making contributions, and looking back over the successes and failures of his active life.

Duty, patriotism, and self-interest were the primary reasons for his becoming involved in politics. He much preferred the seclusion of private life to the searching inquiries of public life. Because he was a city leader, however, he found it necessary to be active in politics. He was a member of the Gridiron Club; through this organization and his personal friendship with Robert S. Kerr, he became Chairman of the State Board of Affairs. This office, his minor political activities, and his large contributions brought him invitations to the inaugural ceremonies in 1945 and 1949. As a friend of Kerr, he aided the Senator in his bid for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination in 1952. He was rewarded by an appointment as a state delegate to the national convention

in 1956. And, as he was a large contributor to the National Presbyterian Church, which held the presidential pre-inaugural services in 1957, he was invited to the ceremonies. Although he held an office and received honors, he was never an integral member of the city or state Democratic Party. After 1956 he became simply a member of the party who was carried on the mailing list as a "Dear Fellow Democrat." Mail from the party no longer referred to him by name.¹

The cornerstone of his political activities was his work in the Chamber of Commerce. He remained active in that organization by continuing his support of the Oklahoma Art Center, the Oklahoma City Symphony, the Cowboy Hall of Fame, and the Oklahoma Heritage Association. Through the use of federal and privately contributed funds, Stanley C. Draper in 1935 organized the Art Center as an experiment. Within a year the center, under the directorship of Nan Sheets, needed new quarters to meet its expanding responsibilities. Wartime spending ended federal aid for the Art Center, and private subscriptions were necessary to maintain the effort. At that time the Junior League became the major supporter. In 1946 the Art Center was incorporated, and in the early 1950's Mr. and Mrs. John E. Kirkpatrick donated \$250,000 for the construction of a permanent building for the center. From 1937 until late in the 1950's, Browne served on the Board of Trustees, lending his paintings to the center and donating generously. He was one of the men who solicited the Kirkpatrick donation.²

At a Chamber of Commerce meeting in 1942, after the federal government had discontinued support of the Art Center and the Oklahoma Symphony, Browne convinced other members that the symphony should be continued through support by private contributions. He also arranged for

the symphony to get public exposure by presenting a series of Sunday afternoon radio programs. Through the years he continued his active support of the group. When a group of men in Oklahoma City were working to construct the Cowboy Hall of Fame early in the 1960's, Browne was among the large contributors. And when Stanley Draper retired as executive director of the Chamber of Commerce and took over management of the Oklahoma Heritage Association, Browne became a member of its Board of Directors; in 1973, at the age of 96, he still was working hard to raise money for the association.³

While World War II was being fought, the leaders of the government and Chamber of Commerce in Oklahoma City began planning for the post-war years. A consulting firm was employed to develop a comprehensive plan for city growth and development; the Treat Plan, as this became known, recommended that Broadway be extended north and widened. At the same time a new home had to be found for the State Fair. In addition to the Treat Plan, the Board of Education wanted to build a new vocational school. Securing land for the fair grounds and the educational program was difficult inasmuch as the city did not have money for the projects. The Executive Committee of the Chamber of Commerce took the lead and worked out a complicated real estate deal between the city and the state for school land. The Chamber bought private land and made private improvements on state school property; this land then was transferred to the city. By the summer of 1948, a section of ground at 10th and May Avenue was available for a new fair ground and vocational school. On this quarter section the Chamber of Commerce and Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College built a demonstration farm. The Friends of the Land met in the city in October and were treated to a "Farm in a Day."

In one day, through the efforts of men in labor, business, military, and education, the quarter section was developed as a demonstration farm with all new facilities, including a modern house.⁴

The Broadway extension was a more difficult task. Through Oklahoma Industries Incorporated, the Chamber began acquiring land for the extension. Leaders at the Chamber feared that someone might purchase the open ground and begin construction of buildings before the city approved the transportation program. Thus they felt it necessary to gain control of key places and hold them for an indefinite period. One vital tract was twenty-six acres where 36th Street and Broadway meet; another key area was at 50th and Broadway; a third area was a twenty-foot-wide strip along Santa Fe Avenue. The efforts of Oklahoma Industries received some unfavorable publicity, and some members of the Chamber began to object to the acquisition of the land. To salvage the project, Virgil Browne, E. K. Gaylord, and Dan Hogan encouraged the Chamber of Commerce to take over the ownership of the strategic property. Through their effort the land was kept free of obstacles and ready for the transportation improvements which began in the 1950's. The Chamber and Oklahoma Industries sold the land to the city at cost plus the expenses of maintaining the land while they held it. Thus the city was able to save money once the project began.⁵

By 1950 the city was in desperate need of an industrial park for heavy industries. In the land exchange with the city for the Broadway extension and the widening of Santa Fe Avenue, city property on Reno Street was converted to an industrial park which attracted new industry. The successful completion of the Broadway extension from 23rd Street north was the last major project in which Browne played a leading role

as an Oklahoma City builder. At that time he was nearing four score years.⁶

Early in the 1950's several businessmen and leaders of the Chamber of Commerce realized that there were limits to the oil reserves in the United States. In a short time the nation would have to use other sources of energy. One highly promising source was atomic generators, but the study of atomic energy for peaceful purposes was not far advanced, and few people in Oklahoma had any training in the use of atomic energy. To learn all they could about the new source of power and to encourage other scientific research, the Chamber of Commerce helped organize the Frontiers of Science Foundation of Oklahoma. This organization, which Browne served as treasurer, worked to increase the study of atomic energy at Oklahoma University, and scholarships and other incentives were used to improve the teaching of science in the secondary schools. During 1957 the Foundation brought the "Atoms for Peace" display to Oklahoma City; this display was shown only in Oklahoma City and Geneva, Switzerland. Thus the Frontiers of Science Foundation helped improve education in Oklahoma, while taking steps to prepare the nation for a crisis.⁷

Art, music, transportation, and education were only part of Browne's efforts at improving Oklahoma City and the state during the later years of his life. He and his family purchased the Coca-Cola bottling business at Colorado Springs, Colorado, at the end of the war. While negotiating for this Coca-Cola plant, Browne became interested in establishing Oklahoma Airways to serve the smaller cities of the state, but Frontier Airlines secured federal approval for the service. After the airline effort was dropped, Browne, Charles R. Anthony, B. D. Eddie,

and others organized the Citizens State Bank and began construction at NW 23 and Dewey. Since 1947 the bank has grown and become an important asset to the city. Later the Browne family organized the May Avenue Bank to serve the people of Oklahoma City. Through his life Browne served on the Board of Directors of three Oklahoma City banks--Liberty National, Citizens State, and May Avenue. Despite his business ventures, however, the patriarch of the Browne family was slowing his pace. His youngest son, John R. Browne, who was managing the Colorado Springs business at the time, wrote his father a very diplomatic letter in 1953 suggesting that his age was beginning to show. He proposed that his father concern himself only with the operation of the plantation. The letter was gentle and kind, but suggested it was time to pass the torch of business leadership on to other hands.⁸

The years were beginning to increase, and they seemed to pass ever more rapidly. To honor Thomas E. Braniff and Braniff Airlines, Browne and other cronies at the Chamber of Commerce held a special celebration on the company's twentieth anniversary. In a driving rainstorm a small group of men from the Chamber and honored guests flew from Oklahoma City to Tulsa and back. It was a short and uneventful trip, but in 1927, when Browne was so closely associated with Braniff Airlines, that short flight was a high point in the struggle for aviation advancement for the city. After the celebration there were many honorary parties recognizing someone or some event which was a milestone in the history of building the city. In 1953 Browne was contacted by Who's Who in the South and Southwest, and from that came his idea of writing his autobiography. He made at least three different attempts on this project. In all three, he followed the same organization for the early years

before he arrived in Oklahoma City; one ended there, while the other two tell of his involvement with different events in the city--and he was active in so many activities which were important that he was unable to complete his work.⁹

The passage of time showed in other ways for the aging businessman. His old partner in National Fruit Flavor Company, Ira B. Harkey, penciled Browne a note in 1961 confirming the sale of the old company. The penciled note was nostalgic, for during the early years of the company Harkey had written many important letters to Browne in pencil on pieces of scratch paper. That same year Browne joined his wife in election to the Oklahoma Hall of Fame. The next year he and several friends of Senator Kerr held an elaborate appreciation dinner for the oilman-politician. At the end of the year the Senator died. The next year his wife also died. The years continued to fly by.¹⁰

The modern and efficient bottling plant which Browne had built in Oklahoma City in 1922 had become old and out-of-date. In 1967 the business moved into a new building on May Avenue across from the fair grounds. During the open house, Browne was honored as the senior American bottler of Coca-Cola. The Chamber of Commerce cooperated and held a Virgil Browne Day. J. Paul Austin, President of Coca-Cola Company, pointed out many of the positive contributions Browne had made to the bottling industry. Draper and Senator Mike Monroney recalled personal anecdotes and experiences they had with Browne. He had left his permanent mark on the bottling business and on Oklahoma City.¹¹

In an address entitled "Principles of Success" presented at the graduation ceremonies at Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College in 1949, Browne summed up his ideas for achieving success. The speech

in many ways paralleled his own life. It was divided into two sections: first, personal success, and second, the need for conserving natural resources. "Success," he cautioned the graduates, "is very exacting; it is a long hard row entailing many personal sacrifices, long hard work and many self-denials."¹² If a person thought and prepared himself for an occupation he was deeply interested in, said Browne, he had taken the first step towards success. Browne chose his occupation early, and he stayed with that occupation through his life although the early years in Houston, Mount Pleasant, Dallas, and Fort Worth had been difficult. He had used his mind to learn the business and to develop new lines of perfumes, concentrated flavors, and soft drinks. The second rule for success was being curious about your work and the work of positions above yours. By being curious about his work Browne had mastered the position he was at. By understanding higher positions he had been ready to take advantage of opportunities. While working as a soda jerk in Houston, he had prepared for pharmacy; he therefore was ready to seize the fleeting opportunity to work at the Mount Pleasant drugstore which resulted in management training. The combination of pharmacy and management had prepared him to head Parker-Browne Company. His work at Parker-Browne had paved the way for the National Fruit Flavor venture which resulted in big success.¹³

His third rule for success was hard work. An average amount of work resulted in average success, he said. Browne had worked hard and long to become materially independent. Self-denial was his fourth ingredient for success. Many of the pleasures of life were foregone by Browne in order to build his companies and to improve the soft drink business. Many joyful moments with his wife and children while they

lived in Fort Worth had been forfeited because of the pressing demands of his business. Thrift was the last ingredient Browne suggested as necessary for success. Saving had been a hallmark of both Mr. and Mrs. Browne, and when opportunity presented itself they had the necessary capital to invest. Browne concluded the first section of his speech by telling the graduates, "Your future is in your own hands."¹⁴ Another ingredient to success should have been added--bold audacity, for this was one of the keys to his success with perfumes, concentrates, business organizations, business purchases, preservatives, and soft drinks.¹⁵

In introducing the second half of his speech, Browne reviewed the business practices of his generation. "That was the era of rugged individualism;"¹⁶ a heartless period which wasted its human and natural resources. He was "glad that era is gone, and," he hoped, "gone forever."¹⁷

As the years passed into history, Browne might well have asked: was the struggle for success worth the battle? Were the hardships of building a city worth the campaign? And what deeds had he performed which were worthy of medals? In his own mind the battle for success definitely had been worth the struggle. He would have had it no other way. To later generations he is an example of an ambitious man who weathered the storms and hardships which blocked the road to wealth and fortune. He had been a destitute young man in Houston. By controlling his own future, as much as anyone can control his future, he had risen to a very secure old age. Browne would heartily claim that the campaign was worth the hardships necessary to make Oklahoma City a better place to live, to work, to play. He and his fellow workers at the Chamber of Commerce had striven mightily and had given freely of their time, talent,

and money to make Oklahoma City a great community. Oklahoma City's success was the story of a community which rose from nothing to great heights because ambitious men seized the opportunity of the moment and moved forward. The city had no natural advantages over its competitors or near neighbors. It was a man-made city.

During his business life he had helped organize several companies which provided their customers with something they wanted: concentrated fruit flavors, CO₂ for carbonation, Squeeze drinks, Coca-Cola. Each item provided utility, pleasure, and satisfaction to large numbers of people, making their lives a little better, while with his companies he developed new methods of production, advertising, and marketing. Water treatment plants, premix machines, six packs, vending machines are common and integral parts of today's soft drink industry; these items are commonplace in business because someone--Virgil Browne--experimented with them and proved their value. Sanitation, standardization, and purification were goals for the soft drink business when Browne and his colleagues labored to make their profession respectable at a time when it was not considered so. From the early days in 1907 with Parker-Browne Company through the presidency of the American Bottlers of Carbonated Beverages, Browne made a conscious effort to improve the quality of the drinks and bottlers in the profession. He developed a preservative which helped the bottling industry through the crisis of the First World War. He also introduced a whole new line of soft drinks to the American public. His recipes added variety to ice cream and candy flavors which were offered to the discriminating public. In his profession Browne earned the medals he won. He left his permanent mark on the business world.

In the campaign to build Oklahoma City, Browne was not the commander-in-chief nor was he the general of one of the armies. He was an able and dependable division and corps commander. Through the Aviation Committee and by his own private investments, he played a vital role in establishing Oklahoma City as a major air terminal and airmail center. Air service was indispensable to modern cities of major importance. From 1923 until 1933 Oklahoma City was uncertain that it would be among the select communities. Without Browne's contributions, the city might have failed to receive the coveted awards--air terminals and airmail centers.

In the long and arduous struggle to free Oklahoma City from the scourges of floods and drought, Browne was assigned essential tasks. In 1933 he took the crossroad and established a bridgehead which directed federal relief programs towards flood control along the upper North Canadian River. He secured the funds necessary to carry the work forward. He was a diplomat when the aid of other cities was necessary. He called the men together to mount the effort to secure approval for the Bluff Creek water supply project, and he was one of the early promoters of the Atoka project. He served his city well in its battle against floods and droughts.

When America was preparing for and fighting World War II, Browne helped improve the opportunities for employment and investment in Oklahoma City. He helped collect important data, finance real estate deals, attract an aircraft factory, and finance other programs. As a result, Tinker Field, with all its benefits to the city, became a reality. He also worked to make certain that the home front carried its share of the load in making the burden of the men fighting a little lighter and the

war shorter. As chairman of the State Board of Public Affairs, he made certain that the state did its part in the total war effort. At the same time he tried to make certain state institutions more efficient and humane. His work paved the way for later reforms and improvements in the state institutions. During the dark days of the 1940's, he served his city, his state, his nation with dignity, pride, and efficiency.

Other strategic tasks to which he was assigned he performed with merit. When the Oklahoma Independents Incorporated threatened to divert resources from the Chamber of Commerce in a struggle which would determine whether Oklahoma City would become stagnant or attract new business, Browne and Victor E. Harlow handled the necessary diplomacy with meritorious efficiency. The Chamber was able to continue moving ahead and use its resources for the growth and improvement of the city. Browne performed yeoman tasks in assuring the life and success of the Oklahoma City Symphony and Art Center. He helped see Oklahoma City University through the desperate days of the late 1930's. He was a major figure in assuring the success of the Broadway extension and the building of the State Fair Grounds. The honors he received in business and city building he can wear with pride for the world is a better place in which to live because Virgil Browne provided his time, money, and talent.

In short, Virgil Browne was a man who kept faith with his dreams. As a youth he learned that these should be big, that a man had to work to accomplish them, even to sacrifice to make them become a reality. He proved that the American system rewards those who plan, who sacrifice, who work. And in the process he shared his knowledge, his talent, and his wealth--as well as his dreams--with his fellow citizens for the benefit of all Oklahomans and Americans. His heritage can be that of all who would profit from his ideals.

FOOTNOTES

¹Items in Browne Collection: Program of Gridiron Club Silver Anniversary Banquet, Jan. 23, 1953; unidentified newspaper clipping telling of Jim Farley's 1944 visit to Oklahoma City; Speech supporting President Roosevelt; tickets to the Democratic Party 1944 National Convention; Invitations to 1945, 1949, and 1957 Inaugural activities; Matthew H. McCloskey, Democratic National Committee, to Virgil Browne, July 24, 1956; Paul M. Butler to Dear Fellow Democrat, 1960.

²"The History of the Oklahoma Art Center" (undated membership drive material), Browne Collection; King of the Beaux Arts Ball, 1949, Browne Collection; Virgil Browne, personal interview with the author, Apr. 7, 1973.

³Autobiography II, p. 49; B. D. Eddie to Virgil Browne, Feb. 17, 1961, Browne Collection; Oklahoma Heritage work of Virgil Browne the author has seen.

⁴Minutes, June 24, 1948, Executive Committee; A Farm in a Day, Draper Collection.

⁵Minutes, Oct. 9, 1947, Executive Committee; Ibid., Dec. 29, 1947; Ibid., June 24, 1948; Oklahoma City Times, June 10, 1949; Minutes, June 15, 1949, Executive Committee; Ibid., June 5, 1950; Ibid., July 13, 1950; Stanley Draper to Virgil Browne, May 5, 1954 (copy), Browne Collection.

⁶Memo to Stanley Draper from Paul Strasbaugh forwarded to Virgil Browne, May 30, 1950, Browne Collection.

⁷Frontier of Science Foundation literature in Browne Collection.

⁸Virgil Browne to John Browne, Aug. 23, 1946, Browne Collection; Exhibits of Oklahoma Airways, Inc. in the Texas-Oklahoma Proceeding CAB Docket No. 337, Et. Al. 1946; Virgil Browne, personal interview with the author, Nov. 5, 1973; John Browne to Virgil Browne, Sept 29, 1953, Browne Collection.

⁹Tom Braniff to Virgil Browne, undated Than You note, Browne Collection; The Daily Oklahoman, June 21, 1948; Braniff's Speech, Draper Collection; Who's Who in the South and Southwest to Dear Friend, 1953, Browne Collection; Autobiography I, II, and III.

¹⁰Ira B. Harkey to Virgil Browne, Feb. 16, 1961, Browne Collection; Hall of Fame File; Robert S. Kerr to Virgil Browne, June [?], 1962; "Mrs. Virgil Browne," The Mayflower Quarterly, XXVIII, No. 4 (Aug., 1963), p. 1.

¹¹Speeches by J. Paul Austin, Mike Monroney, Stanley Draper, June 9, 1967, Browne Collection.

¹²Virgil Browne, "Principles of Success," (Speech), Browne Collection.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid.

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