

O.J. CURRY

First dean's zeal brought success, growth

By Pat Colonna

Dr. O.J. Curry saw — and created — many changes in the College of Business Administration in his 25 years as its first dean.

When he arrived at NT in 1942, "The college (NT) had built exactly one building between World Wars I and II on the whole campus. (NT) had a department of business education and taught methods of teaching typing, shorthand and penmanship," he said.

When Dr. Curry left in 1967, business administration was a separate college that was the third largest in Texas and one of the nation's top 25 business schools. It had 73 full-time and 38 part-time faculty members, including 37 doctorates, 11 certified public accountants and six law school graduates.

The college that Dr. Curry had begun in the basement of the old Manual Arts Building now had its own building with as much classroom space as all of NT had when he came to the campus.

Dr. Curry came to NT from Michigan in 1945 after a series of annual letters from Dr. W. Joseph McConnell, then-president of NT, asking Dr. Curry to come to Denton to teach in the business education department and "turn it into a good school of business."

NT had potential, Dr. Curry decided. Its proximity to Dallas and Fort Worth would give it the support it would need to build a good school of business.

And Dr. Curry knew about good business schools. He had spent the war years teaching at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Business, then and now one of the nation's most prestigious. He earned his doctorate from the University of Michigan.

His office at NT was in the basement, down the hall from the tin shop. Dr. Curry said, "I scouted around and found a second floor men's room that was just huge. I went to Dr. McConnell and told him I wanted to build a Dean's Office there, and he said, 'I'll have the carpenters there next week to put

in partitions.'"

Dr. Curry gathered a staff that included Katie Hendley, his right-hand woman and secretary, faculty member Tom Rose and bookkeeper Gertrude Lowe. He credits them and other dedicated faculty and staff members with the morale and tone they set for the college.

Recruiting faculty after the war was not easy, but enrollments that doubled each year spurred Dr. Curry to be creative. "We were short of faculty. All schools were. So, I looked around and we had these veterans — men and women who had been captains, majors and such — as students. I thought, 'They didn't get to be officers without having something personalitywise and brainwise.' So, I would call them in and ask them if they'd like to teach a course or two. I think we got them 30 cents an hour.

"A number of these part-time teachers were good — liked university life, and we would help them get fellowships at prestigious universities. After completing doctor's degrees, most of them rejoined our faculty."

Dr. Curry also took care of his students by helping them find jobs when the Placement Office at NT, which was still a teacher's college, was geared toward finding students jobs as teachers.

"I would send our students over to placement, and they would come back and say they were told if they had 12 hours of education, they could help them get a job in teaching.

"I went to President (J.C.) Matthews and I told him there was a placement directors' meeting in San Antonio and I thought we (the placement director) should go. He said I'd better go myself, so I took John Brooks with me. He was teaching marketing at the time. I told John we'd reduce his teaching load and for him to take over helping our students get jobs."

DEANS 1947-1989

O.J. Curry
1947-1969

Clifford Hutton
1969-1971

Barry King (acting)
1971-1973

Marvin Berkeley
1973-1983

Horace Brock (acting)
1983-1984

Jay A. Smith Jr.
1984 to present

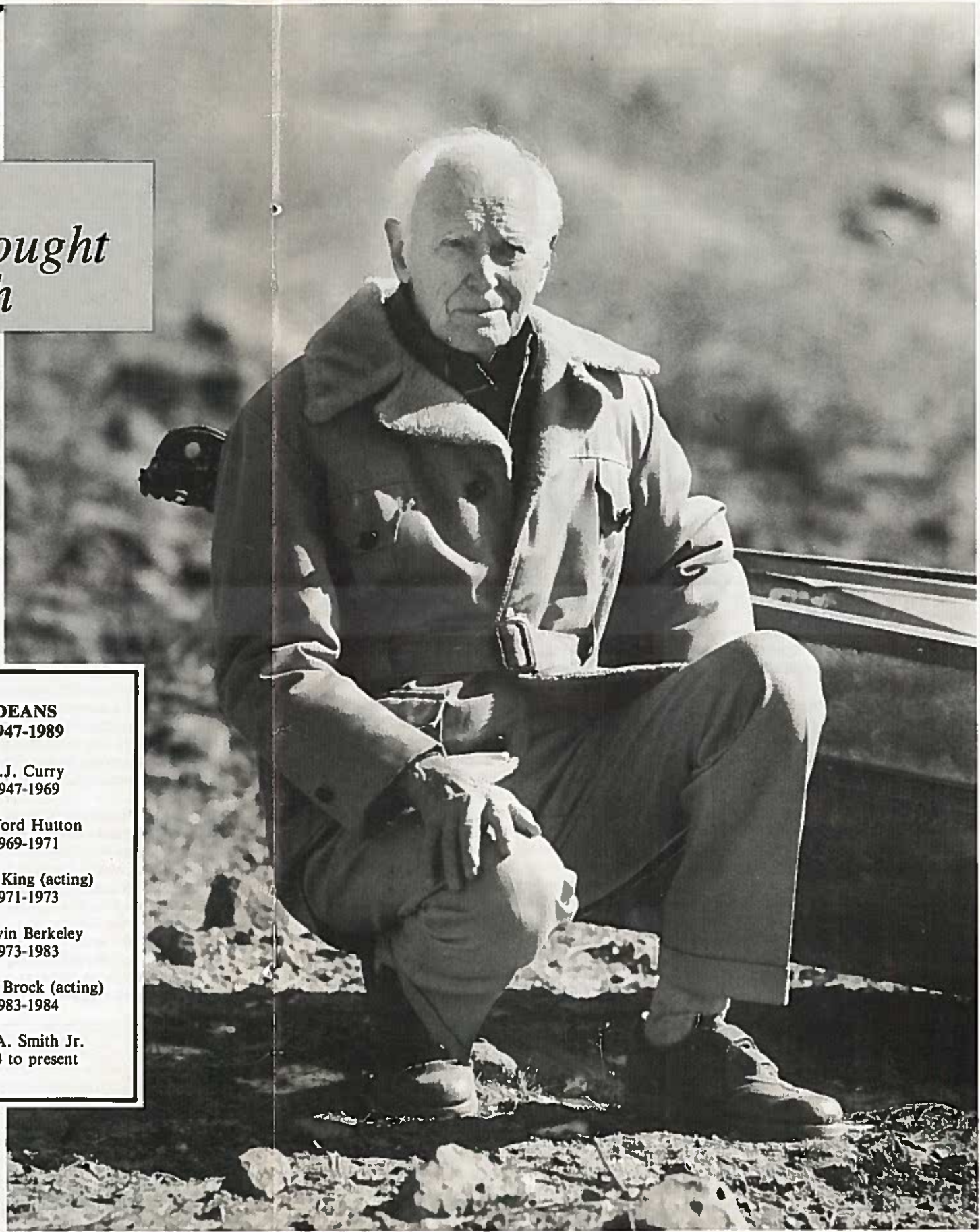


Photo by Dan Santema

Brooks went on to run the placement office for the whole university.

In 1961, Dr. Curry reaped some of his reward: Both the undergraduate and master's programs of the college were accredited, and the college moved into the new Business Administration Building.

During his last year as dean, he saw the college's first Ph.D. students graduate. In 1970, the O.J. Curry Chair of Accounting, the university's first chair, was established. In 1972, Dr. Curry was given a national award, "Outstanding Educator of America."

Dr. John Carrell, who taught in the college from 1959 to 1983, said of Dr. Curry, "I cherish the memories of working with him. He was my ideal of a dean of a college of business." Dr. Carrell is now on modified service with the College of Education.

He said Dr. Curry "developed a good spirit within the faculty" with his "laid-back" leadership style. Despite this casual approach, Dr. Carrell said his former boss was "truly a gentleman in the finest sense of the word" and gave his faculty freedom to teach and respect for being experts at what they did.

"His office door, to my knowledge, was never closed. You never really called for an appointment. With Dean Curry, you just walked in and said, 'I want to talk about some things.'"

The same openness was extended to students, Dr. Carrell said. "He felt that we were in business for the students, not the reverse of that. He kept that in mind in everything he did."

David Bayless Sr., a 1947 graduate and member of the President's Council, said, "I could almost attribute the success I had in getting out of school to Dr. Curry."

Bayless said he would seek out Dr. Curry for encouragement after his statistics classes.

"There was a lot of admiration for him by all the students," Bayless said. Dr. Curry had a knack for remembering names, and his open-door policy was extended to students.

"I would say that most of us knew him almost intimately. We had no qualms about walking into his office just about any time," Bayless said.

While Dr. Curry gave his students a lot of personal attention, counting the students is a measure of progress for him as well. "When I retired as dean, there were 3,500 to 4,000 students. Now, there are more than 6,000" in the college.

"I am delighted with the college of business today. As new ideas came in, it has adapted. I was happy to say when I left that we've got a good foundation, take it from here to where it's destined to go.

"I couldn't be happier with the quality of the faculty they have at the college of business now. There is no reason it can't continue being one of the best in the nation."