



## Joseph G Masters, 1873-1954

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Article Summary: Masters, born to pioneer parents on the Kansas prairie, managed to get a formal education. He taught at various schools in Indian Territory and eventually became principal at Central High School in Omaha.

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Photographs / Images: Joseph G Masters; the Masters family en route to the mountains, 1919

## JOSEPH G. MASTERS, 1873-1954

By HELEN GENEVA MASTERS

**T**HE various drives of the pioneer—to venture, to explore, to escape tyrannous practices, outgrown rituals, and undesirable social pressures, to establish himself in greater freedom and security—these influences were strong in the inheritance of Joseph G. Masters. Although in his life the current of purpose took a different direction from that of his forebears, still his characteristic confidence, his dynamism, and his faith in life and in the future of man's attainment may be traced to the familial source.

His parents came of English, Scotch, and Irish stock, settlers in Pennsylvania, Virginia and Maryland, who moved in their separate ways into Kentucky and Ohio and thence to Illinois. In 1867 when Joseph Tilford Masters was mustered out of the Union Army, returned to his home near Bloomington, and there married Ellen Mitchell, the two adventurous strains were united. The young couple, both capable and unafraid, took pioneering for granted.

The westward movement was in full swing. New land was being opened, railroads were in process of construction, homesteads were waiting. Joseph and Ellen joined the family caravan that halted in Miami County, Kansas. In this region many of them made permanent homes, but for Joseph and Ellen it was only a four years' stopover.

In 1871 Joseph and a cousin William journeyed by wagon another one hundred and fifty miles west and in the blue-stem area of Harvey County, Kansas, located homesteads suitable for farming and stock raising, made a few improvements, and filed their claims. Newton, a mushrooming cow

*Mrs. Helen G. Masters, Smethport, Pennsylvania, is the widow of the late Joseph G. Masters.*

town just seven miles distant, would soon become the temporary terminus of the Santa Fe' Railroad and the shipping point for cattle driven from Texas up the Chisholm Trail. The two young men returned to Miami County and in the spring of 1872 brought their families to this new land of the unbroken prairie.

Joseph and Ellen already had two little sons, born in Miami County. On February 20, 1873, in the new homestead another son was born. They named him Joseph Gallio.<sup>1</sup> In later years many of his friends and family called him "J.G."

Successful pioneering on the Kansas prairie, as well as elsewhere, required the utmost physical vitality, skill in organization and planning, and a strong supporting sense of cultural and religious values. In retrospect J. G. wrote of those early experiences:

No one in these far-off days of 1947 can ever recount or imagine the struggles, the hardships and limitations that my Father and Mother experienced from the time they moved into that wild prairie-grass region with almost no neighbors in the spring of 1872: building a house, a stable, corrals, poultry pens, making fences, breaking up the heavy sod of the prairie so that it could be planted, and plowing later with a small stirring plow and two horses, sowing wheat and oats, planting corn and a garden, setting out apple, peach, pear, cherry and plum trees, grapes, gooseberries and blackberries, milking the cows, caring for other cattle, hogs and horses, putting up the long bluestem prairie hay and cutting corn for fodder through the winter. Besides the usual housework Mother made butter, looked after the chickens, ducks and turkeys, and fashioned clothes for the children to wear to school and Sunday School. From the wild sand plums she turned out a delectable spread for hot biscuits.

It was often difficult to find a market for the poultry, cattle and horses. I recall that Mother sold young frying chickens at fifteen cents each and that the biggest turkey brought only a dollar ten. Corn was as low as ten cents a bushel and wheat often fifty cents. But the worst of all were the years of drouth when there was no rain in August, when the creeks would dry up and we would have to dig wells for the horses and cattle, or the hot winds from the southwest would burn the corn up in three days. In the late summer of 1874 the grasshoppers came in such great clouds that they obscured the sun. When they alighted on the rails of the railroad they made the rails so slippery that the engine could not pull the train. In two days they

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<sup>1</sup>The middle name was in honor of the father's captain.

ate the corn and any vegetables remaining in the garden. Farmers were without feed and desperate. They had nothing to sell.<sup>2</sup>

Then there were the prairie fires:

About March each spring some settler would want to burn off an area so that he could plow the land for crops. Very often the fire would get away from him and go sweeping across the country, heating the air in front of the smoke and flames. I can just dimly remember my father rushing out, mounting a horse and riding away to help fight fire. After one of those big fires we would go out across the blackened prairie and find scores of birds' nests with eggs still in them burned and of course abandoned.<sup>3</sup>

There were spring floods also when creeks were driven out of their banks and water poured down every gully.

At such times we would rush barefoot down to see the bridge across the creek below our barn . . . Soon it would be pulled loose by the current, farmers would run with ropes, pull it ashore and tie it to the willows to save the lumber. Fish became stranded in small pools as the flood subsided. We were soon up and down the stream for a mile picking up a lot of fine fish for dinner that day.<sup>4</sup>

Other natural hazards had to be met.

On the Kansas farm about 1880 I used to see whole wheat fields covered with geese, so much so that farmers would drive the geese away to save their grain. Ducks would fly by the hundreds and prairie chickens would be all over the stacks of hay or spread out in great flocks in their mating antics. At sunrise in the spring we would hear their booming for miles over the meadows.<sup>5</sup>

J.G.'s father and mother helped to establish church services in the Hutchings Schoolhouse and later to build the Baptist church in the village of Walton five miles distant from the homestead. J.G. always remembered the bell.

This church had a big bell that could be heard for miles and that was tolled for funerals. The day this church was dedicated the bell was rung early and long. The whole countryside came—many with flowers on that June day. Each Sunday morning the bell pealed out across the prairie and called us to worship.<sup>6</sup>

In 1880 J.G. and his father drove back to Miami County and got a load of apples at Grandpa Masters' farm. This was an eventful pilgrimage for the little boy. He always held it

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<sup>2</sup>J. G. Masters papers, Bush Hill Farm, Smethport, Pa.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*

in fond memory and described it in detail annually to his grandchildren.

In spite of the pressure of work to make a living the father and mother in the Masters' home gave the children due attention. J. G. wrote:

Father and Mother somehow always had time for us youngsters,—time to take us to school with riding horses, to Sunday School, celebrations, picnics and usually two or three days at the County Fair. Here we saw exhibits of stock, poultry, canned goods, grains, fruits and vegetables, and also (maybe of greater appeal) many stands of red lemonade and piles of fried chicken. Entertainment featured trotting races, running races, chariot races, Wild West shows, the Deadwood Stage robbery, live-pigeon shoots by the Newton Gun Club, and even races among the farmers against the slick city boys as we drove to or away from the fair grounds.<sup>7</sup>

When J.G. was five years old—while covered wagons were still frequently passing the house on their way farther west—he started to Sugar Grove School one and a fourth miles away. For the most part he taught himself to read and, since there were few books and these the same from year to year, he committed to memory much of his favorite, Barnes' *United States History*.

I got to attend Sugar Grove School only about five months each year but kept going until I was eighteen.<sup>8</sup>

From January to June in 1892 he attended the eighth grade in Newton:

Here I wrote my first composition, "Unearned Blessings are a Curse."<sup>9</sup>

During these years of working on the farm and going to school, J.G. became a hunter of considerable skill. His "call" to be a hunter came when he was five or six years old. Writing in 1947 he recounted the incident:

It was in the early fall before corn-husking and great heavy ears were hanging from all the stalks. I started out between the rows slowly . . . As I looked down on the ground about six feet from me I saw a big brown jack-rabbit with a sort of grim visage sitting in a clump of grass, as if frozen there. The very first sight of his face and long brown coat fired me with tremendous excitement. I drew back the heavy chunk of wood that I was carrying and let drive with all the force that I could muster. The rabbit gave one leap and in a second was lost in the corn.

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<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*

I was still terribly excited. I rushed home and upbraided the family, why did we not have a gun on the place?<sup>10</sup>

It was not very long until the boy was trading some oddments and maybe paying a little money for a gun. The first one was an old Zulu shotgun. As time went on he acquired better equipment and sometimes brought in two or even three dozen quail a day. Some he sold to the stewards of the Santa Fe' dining cars—at five cents per bird. He was still very young when he shot his first mallard and proudly received a dime from his mother—and probably much encouragement from the whole family when they shared the feast she made of it.

Sometimes it seemed to his father that the boy was more interested in hunting than in doing the necessary farm work. J.G. recalled:

Father pictured to me a rather sad end for an irresponsible boy who was always running around the country with a gun on his shoulder.<sup>11</sup>

The years on the Kansas homestead provided the rock foundation of J.G.'s character and career. High moral and religious principles were built into the life of the household; community helpfulness was taken for granted; self-reliance, determination, courage and work were considered the necessary accompaniments of aspiration. "Unearned blessings" were not expected. The idle dreamer or the self-accusing introvert did not last long on the frontier. J.G.'s sense of hard reality, his shrewdness, and the pragmatic character of his thinking (later encouraged by his study of William James, his work under John Dewey and Professor Judd at the University of Chicago) were, I believe, natural outgrowths of his inheritance and early experience.

At the age of eighteen his vague but compulsive ambition to achievement was strong within him. He knew that what he wanted most was more education. As others might want more land and larger herds, he wanted education. During his few months in Newton he had gained confidence from the notice he attracted for his knowledge of history. His mother gave him quiet encouragement, and now his father lent him some money. From January to June of 1893 he studied in the academic department of the Kansas State Normal School at Emporia. And in September he went

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<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*

with a cousin to the World's Fair in Chicago. The boy from Harvey County had definitely raised his sights.

By examination he obtained a certificate to teach, and District Forty-six of Harvey County hired him for the fall term. Even then he found teaching both a fulfilling and a challenging experience. He must have a greater fund of information and a knowledge of the art of teaching. He would go back to Emporia, he would study and ask questions and he would turn the answers over in his mind. For nine years then he taught school, helped on the farm somewhat, and spent all the time he could at Emporia. He received the diploma for the academic course and in 1904 the diploma for the Latin course. The latter carried with it a life certificate to teach in Kansas. The friendliness of the atmosphere at Emporia was notable. Opportunities to stretch the mind and to try abilities abounded. And there was William Allen White, already diffusing over everyday scenes his genius for humor and perspective. In a letter of October 13, 1953, J.G. wrote to his brother, Ira H. Masters:<sup>12</sup>

When William Allen White came back from Estes Park and said he had to wear a top coat in the dog days of August, we were sure that was so much baloney, just to add glory to a trip while the rest of us sweltered and sweat it out in the fierce heat of summer school.

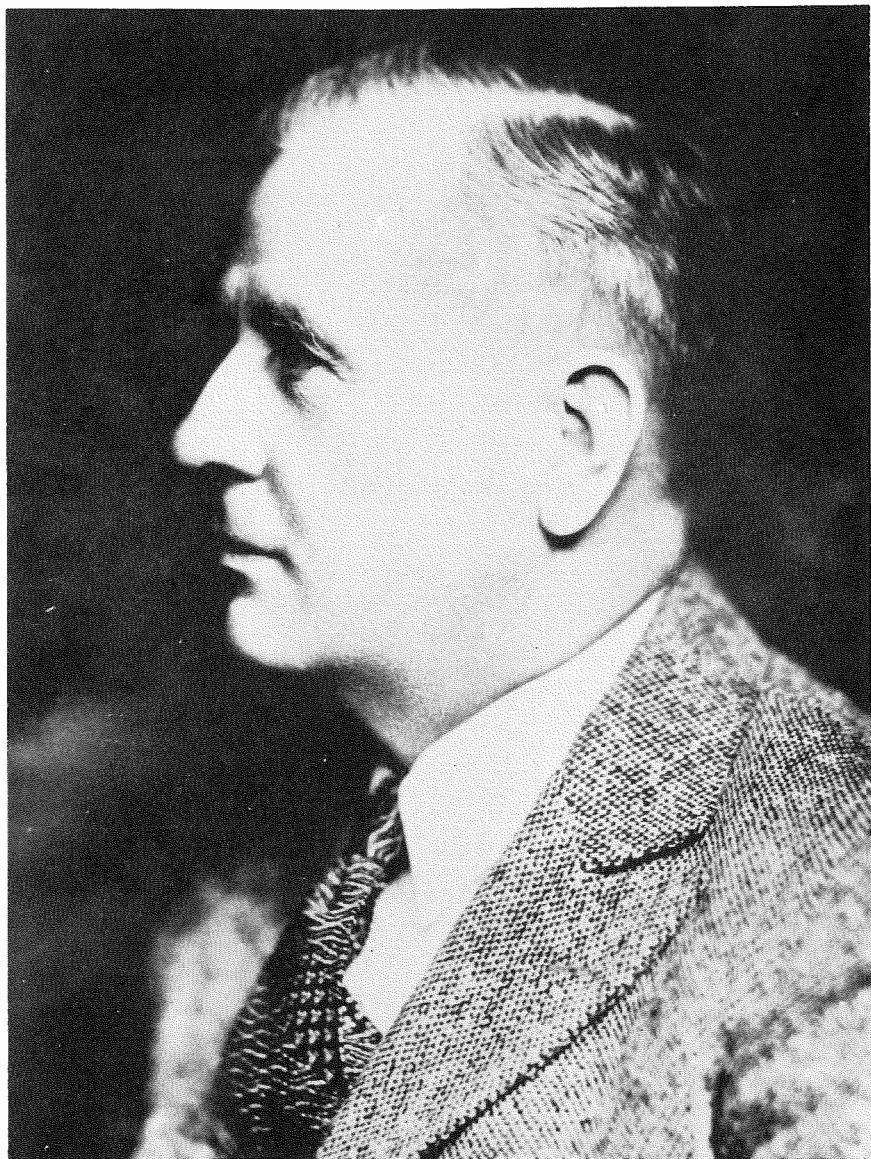
Indian Territory at this time offered a wide field for educational pioneering. The Baptist Home Missionary Society had established Bacone College at Muskogee, Indian Territory, and an academy at Atoka. J.G. taught in both of these schools. November 18, 1953, he wrote his brother:

Almost the whole of the Indian Territory belonged to the Five Civilized Tribes. The whites who by 1901 had moved into the towns or to the Indian farms had no schools. Bacone and Henry Kendall College and a little later Atoka were the only schools that offered any high school or college work . . . I wrote the whole governmental, economic, political and organizational set-up of the Five Civilized Tribes for the Standard Cyclopedia.

From 1902 to 1905 J.G. was principal of Jones Academy, a school for Choctaw boys at Dwight, Indian Territory. In season he still pursued quail hunting and always self-education. With a knowledge of only the rudiments of German he made his way through *Faust* with only the help of a German dictionary.

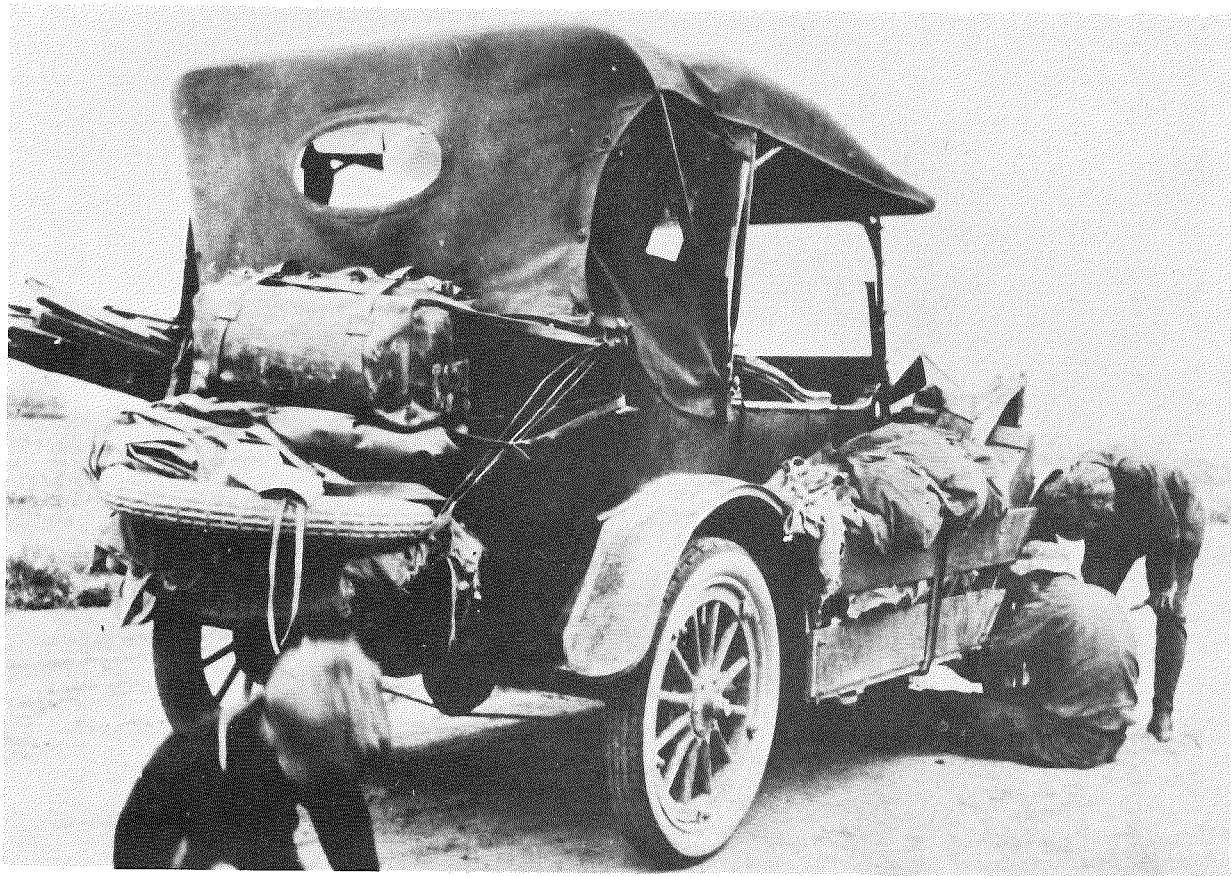
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<sup>12</sup>Ira H. Masters, secretary of state, Boise, Idaho.



Joseph G. Masters





**Touring the country—1919 Style**  
**(The Masters family en route to the mountains.)**

In 1905 he became Superintendent of Schools at Wilburton, Indian Territory.

In the summer of 1903 he had discovered the University of Chicago and the cool lake breeze there. He knew that he had found something. Here was a blend of scholarship, discussion, experiment, and democracy that suited his spirit and his powers. He began to try to get credit for his Emporia work toward a degree from Chicago. It took a good many summer sessions, but in 1912 he had his Ph.B. with election to the honorary educational fraternity of Phi Delta Kappa and in 1915 his A.M. degree also from the University of Chicago.

In 1906 the booming oil town of Tulsa, Indian Territory, elected J.G. to the superintendency of their schools. The town was growing so rapidly that classrooms had to be found in churches, storerooms, and basements. The best teachers available were secured, and in that welter of oil, politics, wealth and poverty, a sound school system was established and accreditation with the University of Chicago was secured. In the summer of 1910 J.G. spent a month in Europe and returned first cabin on the *Lusitania*. (Evening dress for dinner, of course. The young man from Harvey County took it in his stride.)

It was on the campus of the University of Chicago that J.G. and I—then Helen Geneva Smith—became acquainted. We were married November 11, 1911, while he was in residence at the University for the year. In the August following, he was elected principal of Central High School in Oklahoma City. Jose' Dexter Masters, the first of our four children, was born there August 28, 1912. In 1914 J.G. was president of the Oklahoma Educational Association. Summers were still spent in Chicago in my mother's home which was almost on the university campus.

While we were there in the summer of 1915 a member of the schoolboard of Omaha, Nebraska, came to interview J.G. and to invite him to become a candidate for the principalship of Central High School there. Thus it eventuated that in August we went to Omaha, and we made our home there for twenty-eight years. In this high school and in this midwest region J.G.'s mature ability, his educational skills, his genius for friendliness, and his essential pioneering drives were called into full power. The school was pri-

marily a college preparatory school, and its faculty was of the choicest quality. His problem as a principal, therefore, was, not to organize from scratch, but to maintain and if possible to improve standards and to enlarge the usefulness of the school. By appreciation, encouragement and leadership the confidence of the faculty was engaged. As years went on, almost a family atmosphere prevailed. If a criticism must be made it was made without personal animus and without rancor, for beneath the surface there existed a firm stratum of mutual respect and confidence.

Omaha doubled in population during our residence there. Three great new high schools were built; South and Central were enlarged. Student enrollment in Central reached twenty-four hundred, and the faculty was increased to one hundred. New teachers were chosen with the greatest care and usually were soon integrated into the staff. Mr. Frank Rice, now a department head in Central, wrote me last June:

When I came to Central High School to teach, there was an air of freedom and an inspiration to do one's best about the school. I thought that such an atmosphere was usual in a large city high school. How mistaken I was! Only after Mr. Masters' retirement and my wider acquaintance with other city high schools did I appreciate the fact that so pleasant a working environment was due to Mr. Masters' personality and philosophy and that it was, indeed, rare.<sup>13</sup>

The teachers soon caught the infection of J.G.'s enthusiasms: to enlarge their fields of specialization by reading and discussing significant current books in education, psychology and the social sciences; to promote greater social democracy among the student body; and to use their resources and opportunities for building character by giving the students more chances to test their talents and to take responsibility. J.G. maintained:

If youth is to learn citizenship and develop ethical character, then it must be by the practice of those qualities of honesty, fair-dealing, give-and-take, thoughtfulness, unselfishness, cooperation and industry such as are made possible in what we have pleased to call extra-curricular activities."<sup>14</sup>

These activities were so organized in Central that the

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<sup>13</sup>Letter from Mr. Frank Rice to Mrs. J. G. Masters, June 15, 1954.

<sup>14</sup>Masters, *op. cit.*

backward, the diffident, and the shy might be drawn in and have as large a part as the bright and alert student. The faculty sponsors were advisory, and, as far as possible, were only advisory. Getting out the high school paper, including the drive for advertising; gathering material for the annual; working up programs for the various clubs and for the assemblies; try-outs for the Road Show; the opera; the orchestra; dramatic productions; debating societies; the French, the Latin, and other department clubs; taking control of the halls and the cafeteria—these activities under guidance became instruments for character education. Various techniques grew out of these efforts of student body, faculty and principal working together for a more effective citizenry. J.G. was asked to contribute articles on this subject to various educational journals, to expand an article into a book, and to provide annual reports on character education for the Nebraska State Teachers Association from 1932 to 1937. In the introduction to an article by J.G., "Getting Their Value out of the Extracurriculars," in *The Educational Review* of January, 1928, the editors note: "The author has for some years gone far in social science, adolescent interests, and in harnessing pupil instincts to worthwhile ideas."

In 1952, looking in perspective over the years, J.G. expressed his philosophy in these words:

It has always seemed to me that the best we can ever do is to set in motion a lot of good influences and help other folk develop to the utmost their own full potential.<sup>15</sup>

Let it be understood, however, that the continual endeavor to build character did not displace the drive for scholarship. Rather, each objective added a dimension to the other. J.G. looked upon each student as a whole personality, not as a bundle of separate interests.

Such thinking inevitably led him to a vision of a National Honor Society for secondary schools, a society that would in a general way correspond to the Phi Beta Kappa of colleges and universities. In a committee report to the National Association of Secondary School Principals in 1918 he suggested the following:

In order to encourage scholarship in the high schools of the country we recommend that an honor society be

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<sup>15</sup>Masters, *op. cit.*

formed and that the basis of such society shall be high scholarship coupled with either leadership in the school's activities or a manifestation of unusual originality and constructive ability.<sup>16</sup>

He was appointed chairman of a committee to find what unanimity of opinion there might be as to the goals and framework of such a society and to present a constitution. In March, 1921, the constitution was adopted, and its administration was put into the hands of a special committee of the secondary school principals. At once high schools began to apply for charters that they might elect from the spring graduating classes of 1921. According to the constitution, election to membership is determined both by scholarship in the upper quartile of the class and by outstanding qualities of character and leadership. By 1939 more than twenty-three hundred of the best high schools in the country had chapters of the National Honor Society. As the years passed and as J.G. added to his accomplishments, he still felt that his leadership in founding the National Honor Society was the distinction dearest to his heart.

J.G. developed a wide acquaintance with schoolmen over the nation. He served on various commissions of the North Central Association and at the invitation of the University of Pennsylvania he gave courses in special problems of high school teaching and general methods of high school teaching in the summer sessions of 1923 and 1925. It was, naturally, his business to know schoolmen and schools—high schools, colleges and universities—so that he could give sound counsel to the students who sought his knowledge and advice. I quote from a letter received in June from Professor Lowell Harriss of Columbia University, an alumnus of Central:

Your husband was an extremely fine man, one who helped me as he did so many others in countless ways, including an excellent example. I could now cite specific instances, the chief, I suppose, being his help in my selecting a college and getting admitted. I can see him so clearly in his Central High office (over 25 years ago now) with a smile and greeting.<sup>17</sup>

The pressure of administrative work was so great that

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<sup>16</sup>National Association of Secondary School Principals, *Yearbook*, II, 21.

<sup>17</sup>Letter from Lowell Harriss to Mrs. J. G. Masters, June 23, 1954.

J.G. could not visit classes so much as he wished. These visits became pleasurable interludes. Of them he wrote:

I think the greatest joy and the thing that I liked most while in Central High School was the fact that I could step into a class room and find a superior quality of instruction and a corresponding degree of learning taking place.<sup>18</sup>

As one desiring to promote a good and abundant life, J.G. naturally identified himself with the Y.M.C.A. as soon as he arrived in Omaha. While he had been Superintendent of Schools in Tulsa, Oklahoma, he had called together a committee to establish the first Y.M.C.A. there. For years in Omaha he taught a Friday evening class and helped with the annual campaigns for the support of the "Y." He identified himself also with the First Baptist Church and taught the Men's Bible Class there for some twenty years. He was no stickler for creed, and as time went on he threw much support to the broader aspects of religion. On page five of the report on social trends (1939) that he prepared in 1939 and in 1941 for the Nebraska Council of Churches he states:

Religion is a life to be lived. The final test of our religion is the kind of life we can live toward God and our fellow man. Unless our religion leads definitely to an intelligent, thoughtful, generous, unselfish and helpful life then we labor in vain.

The Lincoln *Sunday Journal and Star* of December 31, 1939, commented upon the report and characterized it as:

A challenge to so-called Christian society to turn away from untruth and greed and hatred and to allow religion its rightful place in the functioning of society . . .

Every fall J.G. managed to do a little hunting. With addresses before teachers' institutes in western Nebraska he could often sandwich in some duck and pheasant shooting. He identified himself with The Omaha Chapter of the Izaak Walton League, was active in its work for conservation, and one year served as president. When he retired from Central the faculty presented him with a handsome shotgun, a gift that pleased him immeasurably.

Calls for him to speak before various local clubs and societies, before teachers' institutes, at commencements, to write articles, and to serve on committees and commissions came with increasing frequency and, unless impossible, were

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<sup>18</sup>Masters, *op. cit.*

accepted. Many of these calls carried no financial return; many supplied only actual expense. He never haggled over a fee. He was primarily pioneering in the interests of education. Sometimes other, and more remunerative, positions were offered to him, but he was not in the market.

In 1918 we bought our first car, an open Chevrolet with side curtains in case of rain. Of course we were nearly always drenched before we could get the curtains adjusted. It was absurdly small; it was primitive compared with the cars of today, but it was valiant. Incidentally, it was while driving this car one day that J.G. was rebuked by the police for speeding. They said he was going at thirty-five miles per hour. Needless to say, this little brush made J.G. a "regular fellow" among the student body.

In August, 1919, we began the annual family camping trips, which have afforded us some of our happiest memories. The running boards of the car were built up with carefully fitted strips attached by bolts to the fenders so that a great deal of our impedimenta could be carried in the pockets so formed. In some ingenious fashion a large box was fastened to the rear—this was before the automobile manufacturers had thought of trunks—and the tonneau was filled to seat level with clothing and bedding. Then a canvas was spread, pillows were provided, and thus the children could ride comfortably. We had a tent, a good camp stove, a folding table, folding cots, folding stools, a folding double bed fitted with cables and springs (very comfortable until it collapsed), and a cook kit that if assembled in just the right way could be enclosed in a pan designed for dish washing. The Kodak and the medicine chest were always within easy reach.

Our car resembled an overburdened packhorse, and we took off slowly. There was only a laborious response to the throttle. Maybe we had expected too much of the little contraption. However, by the time we reached Elmwood Park we noted that the brake had not been released! When this oversight had been corrected we skimmed along at perhaps twenty-five miles per hour. Our cruise to the mountains was under way.

The D. E. Porter family, our friends for many years, were partners in this expedition, and their equipment was very similar to ours. We traveled with the hoods folded back most of the way, for the motors needed all the cooling

they could get, and this arrangement accelerated our frequent roadside investigations into the top secrets of the mechanisms. Before we could see the dim outlines of the Colorado Rockies we had patched and pumped up many a flat tire on the hot stretches of the Plains, adjusted, for better or worse, the brakes, carburetors and the "points," and had begun to list the extra parts we should carry on the *next* trip. Sometimes we made twenty miles a day, sometimes one hundred. But we were all hungry for the mountains and, once we were among them, the difficulties of the journey were transmuted into romantic adventures to be recalled with pleasurable nostalgia.

August after August, with better cars and improved equipment, always independent of restaurants and hotels, we struck out an hour or two after the close of summer school at Central. Each year we re-explored some place we had known and loved, or we made new explorations. In this way we came to feel a vested interest in the whole country. It was indeed our country. We were at home in Yellowstone, Yosemite, the Canadian Rockies, Glacier Park, Jenny Lake, the Tetons and the entire Jackson Hole area, the Minnesota Lake country and the Great Lakes, the Black Hills, the west coast from Vancouver and Victoria to southern California and Catalina, Santa Fe' and the Southwest including Acoma and the Navajo and the Hopi reservations, the Carlsbad Caverns, the Petrified Forest, the Mojave Desert, Mesa Verde, and the Grand Canyon. During our three weeks in Mexico we did not camp, but we soon felt at home there and always wanted to return. From Vera Cruz to Mexico City and Cuernavaca we followed the old trail of Cortes.

Once we met our friends, the E. E. McMillans, at Casper and traveled together to Jenny Lake, our favorite rendezvous in Jackson Hole. One late afternoon we all pitched camp in a little green paradise on Rock Creek, Wyoming. Mr. McMillan delighted in fishing, and from this mountain stream he secured a string of the choicest trout. J.G. brought in some young prairie chickens. So that evening in the cool stillness of the green valley we sat down to a feast indeed fit for the gods. J.G., at last having reached capacity, produced a pencil and a scrap of paper. "I must make a record of this menu," he said, "I don't want to forget it." With



quick wit Mr. McMillan rejoined, "Well, I don't have to make a record. I know that I'll never forget this."<sup>19</sup>

Usually we went alone, as a family. We would stop at nightfall on some open prairie, some desert, some mountain-side, some sandy beach or mountain stream. Often we were able to have a substantial camp fire and after supper to enjoy its warmth, the nearness of the constellations, pointed out by our daughter, and the beautiful melodies produced by our son on his violin.

It was a natural transition for us to become intrigued by the old trails and the experiences of the fur trappers, the buffalo hunters, and the early settlers, and then to build our itinerary on the route of the Oregon Trail and later on the Santa Fe' trail. Mr. John Neihardt, poet laureate of Nebraska, with his *Splendid Wayfaring*, *The Song of Hugh Glass*, *The Song of Three Friends*, and *The Song of the Indian Wars* loosed an avalanche of interest in the drama and epic character of the westward migration. One felt a compulsion to find the actual marks of the trails, to interview any old-timers that might be left, to erect monuments and to do all one could to add at least to the footnotes of history. With J.G. this impulse became a mission.

As the centenary (1930) of the first covered wagon over the Oregon Trail approached, the Oregon Trail Memorial Association came into importance and activity. J.G. was made a regional director and awarded a life membership in the association in recognition of his service in preserving the western trails and "the traditions of our American pioneers." He was a speaker at the centennial celebration held at Independence Rock and prepared a brief history of the trail, of which five thousand copies were distributed.

Before teachers' institutes in Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas and Wyoming, before high schools, P.T.A.'s, service clubs, at dinners and banquets of various groups, J.G. strung up his big canvas map and expounded the geography, history and romance of the trails with the unquenchable enthusiasm of a true missionary. His daemon was education, whatever guise it wore. His program required the utmost vitality and dynamism, qualities of which he often seemed to have an

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<sup>19</sup>Mr. E. E. McMillan was principal of North High School, Omaha.

incredible endowment. Mr. D. E. Porter who knew him well wrote me last May:

It is impossible for me to think of Joe as dead . . . There are those personalities so vibrant and so vital that they persist in memory and in influence long after physical separation from this life . . . He will be alive to all who knew him well as long as memory lasts.<sup>20</sup>

In 1935 Ginn and Company published J.G.'s book, *Stories of the Far West*. It went into three printings and has been used extensively in schools and libraries. Much of his lecture material on the trails and many pictures that he took are found in this volume. In 1951 the Library of the University of Wyoming published his account of the Custer fight, *Shadows Fall Across the Little Horn*. J.G. felt that his chief historical contribution was to be found in his interviews with Indians and with old-timers who had been close to significant events.

In June, 1935, Sioux Falls College conferred upon J.G. the honorary degree of Doctor of Literature.

After retirement from the principalship of Central High School in 1939 J.G. served for a year as executive secretary of the Omaha Roundtable of Christians and Jews. From 1940 to 1942 he was W.P.A. Supervisor of Education in Omaha.

In August, 1943, we sold our house in Omaha and came here to the country home that my great-grandfather, Elisha Bush, had established in 1828. It seemed that Bush Hill Farm (a tree farm now) offered almost every advantage for retirement—comfort, quiet and beauty. However, to turn east instead of west, to leave our fireplace and our built-in book cases even for the ease of gas fires and other book cases took something of a pioneer's faith. But the household gods were going with us. The future still held promise.

J.G. was seventy; he was free from public pressures; and whatever responsibilities he assumed here were self-imposed. He did what most of us only dream of doing: he read the older books that he had always wanted to read or reread and the current books upon subjects that interested him;

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<sup>20</sup>Letter from Mr. D. E. Porter to Mrs. J. G. Masters, May 25, 1954. Mr. D. E. Porter was principal of Technical High School, Omaha.

he kept up a brisk correspondence with friends, wrote a column for *The Omaha Teacher*, and indulged his desire for an experimental garden. His delight in his fruits and vegetables soared to a climax when the children<sup>21</sup> and grandchildren came home each August and gathered around the old walnut table for a leisurely dinner.

Last winter he wrote to his brother and sister:<sup>22</sup>

It may seem strange to you, but now I seem to belong here.<sup>23</sup>

His life never fell into the sere, the yellow leaf. Arteriosclerosis stole upon him so slowly that nothing appeared particularly wrong until the first of the year (1954). In February he was eighty-one, somewhat disturbed, but still eager and enamoured of life. May nineteenth he passed in sleep.

"Whom the gods love die young." How well they loved him!

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<sup>21</sup>Jose' Dexter Masters, Jane Geneva Masters, Conrad Bush Masters, Helen Masters Dugger.

<sup>22</sup>Mr. I. H. Masters, secretary of state, Boise, Idaho; Mrs. G. L. Roark, Grinnell, Iowa.

<sup>23</sup>Letter dated Jan. 24, 1954.