

His Career At The News Recounted

At his home at 122 North Winnetka, John Knott, a cartoonist known all over the nation, nursed a cold Wednesday.

At his elbow was an oil painting that he was working on. Nearby was a table scattered with tubes of oil paint and a chess board with the men set to play. And behind him was 50 years of work with The Dallas News.

At 76, Knott is a tall, stooped man with white hair and an absent-minded looking, gentle face. In the years since he joined The News, his cartoons have been reprinted almost everywhere that newspapers are written in English. He has won awards from the Pulitzer prize committee, the National Headliners Club and a score of lesser organizations. He has created Old Man Texas, a famous and frequently borrowed archetype of Texans.

In Knott's eyes, very little had happened to him since Dec. 1, 1905, when he walked in, a big, vigorous square-faced man of 25, and first took up his pencil for The News.

"There just isn't very much story there," he insisted Wednesday.

• In addition to becoming a national personage, Knott in his 50 years has become something of an amiable legend to his fellow workers on The News. They tell of his lack of interest in anything except the job at hand; he still hasn't unpacked from the move The News made to its new building in 1949. They talk of his disregard for honors. There was the time in 1939, for instance, when he won the gold plaque of the Headliners Club.

The newspaper learned of it in a wire service dispatch from Atlantic City, and a reporter went to see Knott for details. Knott gently replied that he had never heard of any such award. The reporter read him some of the details.

"Oh, yes," he said. "I believe I did get some letter about that."

He turned to the correspondence-laden table at the other side of the room from his drawing-board, fished around the letters for awhile and came up with the notice of his prize.

And his fellow workers talk of old escapades and old cameraderies, for Knott is that rare sort who is both a shy and a companionable man.



GERMAN
"REPENTANCE"



HIS POST-WAR PROGRAM
... IS SIMPLE.



PREVIEW OF THE SIGNING



GETTING,
SMALLER AND SMALLER

[illegible]

He spends much of his time at the brown-kimmed, white-trimmed house on Winnetka. His children



Dr. John Knott at work, and (above) some of the cartoons for which he is famous.

Europe of work with a scythe at the harvest while the figure of Death lurked nearby. Boyd wrote him a caustic letter, pointing out that people cut wheat with a cradle not a scythe.

"I knew that," said Knott, "but I couldn't draw one of the darn things."

During all these years, Knott has amicably done just as he pleased.

He never had the heart to turn down many suggestions and was always taking on some job that he had very little intention of doing. People who checked on it later invariably would get an enthusiastic "Shall do! Shall do!" It got to be a sign that nothing was forthcoming.

Younger cartoonists who sought his advice always got an immediate and enthusiastic, "Good idea!"

For years, Knott liked to go to Colorado on vacation, there to play chess and talk with Artist Maxwell Boardman. On one such trip, he got too interested to return in time. The office began sending letters urging his return, and each got an affable reply: "Am rushing back; will be there shortly." He returned some six weeks later.

He has always had a distaste for publicity and for compliments. When the National Safety Council gave him its award, he said he didn't believe he'd be able to go to Chicago for it. When they offered to give him a dinner in Dallas, he said that would put them to too much trouble. They ended up by leaving the award at his office while he was out.

And on his fortieth anniversary as a News employee, the news-

"Beer and sturdies," said Knott in later years, with a grin. "That's the life I wanted. It's still good if you can get it."

His money ran out, however, after three semesters in Munich, and he came back to his job at The News. He came back a painter

of distinction and amused himself at the art all his life. He taught painting for almost twenty years in the Dallas public evening schools.

He began drawing daily cartoons during Woodrow Wilson's first campaign for the Presidency in 1912. For years, they appeared on the first page of the paper.

With the first World War, he suddenly commanded national and international attention. His cartoons on the Kaiser and the German warlords had in them something of the bite of Daumier, whom Knott then admired. They were rather strange ones for Knott, for his cartoons generally have been goodhumored. He has liked and hated the vast majority of the tactics of mankind. Since cartoons as his Christmas "piece for 1917," showing numberless ranked young men with a spectre and the scythe in the background, and another depicting a mother and her children sorrowing at a coffin with the Kaiser in the doorway imperiously ordering, "Celebrate!"—these cut savagely at the conventional. They were reprinted in countless newspapers, and the *Literary Digest*, in *Review of Reviews*. After the war, Knott published a book of them.

For forty years, he turned out a cartoon a day, seven days a week. As he worked, his style became finer and finer. Among other cartoonists, he was admired for his economy of line and for the instinctive composition of his drawings. They were never mere preservations.

The light of an original personality lit each of them, and he had a broad understanding of public affairs that lent them point.

In those years, he turned out the drawings incredibly fast, standing at the drawing board so relaxed that he looked listless, his pencil working absently but unerringly. As he worked, he might chat with a friend, talking in an amiable mumble around the cigar that he seemed to smoke ceaselessly, his eyelids drooping sleepily, his face gently quizzical.

He had created Old Man Texas early in his career. The model was Uncle Jimmy Boyd, a Lancaster deer hunter who used to send venison to members of The News staff. Knott met him one day when Boyd came in to see Harry Lee Marriner, the staff poet, and made a sketch of Boyd's head. He lengthened Boyd's body a little, added a broad-brimmed hat and introduced Old Man Texas. The character became famous.

During the depression years, he produced a cartoon of Old Man Texas standing in the ruin of the dustbowl with a caption that cried out, "This Is My Land." That one won Knott a Pulitzer citation. Boyd remained Knott's friend throughout his life. Late in the 1950's, Knott drew a picture of