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# UA1B2/1 History of Western Kentucky University

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## History of Western Kentucky University

Daniel Lee Starnes

From the small Southern Normal School that taught students to become teachers, Western Kentucky University has grown into a diverse education center serving more than 16,000 students. The buildings throughout the university, such as Cherry Hall, Helm Library, Diddle Arena, Ogden College of Science, Thompson Complex, and the Garret Student Center give a glimpse of some of the visionaries that helped create the university that exists today.

The beginnings of growth trace back to 1906 when the Kentucky State Legislature provided the funding to create the Western Kentucky Normal School. Henry Hardin Cherry pioneered the funding that changed Southern Normal School into Western Kentucky Normal School and Cherry was elected to be its first president. This school was founded to be a teacher training school and in 1911, Western Kentucky Normal School moved up the hill to its present day home.

In 1928, the Western Kentucky Normal School acquired the financially weak Ogden College that was originally a male preparatory school for the young men of Warren County. With the merger, the name was changed to Western Kentucky State Teachers college. Under the direction of Dr. Paul Garrett, the name was shortened to Western Kentucky State College in 1948. Western Kentucky College underwent dramatic changes with Kelly Thompson as president and with the addition of the Bowling Green College of Commerce in 1963.

Under President Kelly Thompson's reign, three additional colleges were formed in 1965: the Potter College of Liberal Arts, the College of Education and the Ogden College of Science and Technology. In June of 1966, the Western Kentucky State College once again changed its nomenclature to the present day name of Western Kentucky University. At the present time the University has five colleges: Ogden College of Science, Technology and Health, Gordon College of Business, Potter College of Arts, Humanities and Social Studies, Education and Behavioral Sciences and the Bowling Green Community College of Western Kentucky University.

The history for Ogden College goes back to September of 1877 when the college opened its doors to the young men of Warren County offering a free education. The College was created by the will of the late Robert Ogden, a prominent farmer in Warren County. The will of Robert Ogden named his executors as regents of the school and created a board of trustees and granted them the power to elect their successors. The school occupied the Ogden Hall which was the former Thomas C. Calvert house and after Perry Snell made a large donation, the construction of Snell hall was completed.

Ogden College initially offered students college level work, but focused only on preparatory schooling during the years of 1902 through 1905 when the college level work was discontinued due to poor enrollment. Ogden kept a steady enrollment every year and had peak enrollment of 162 young men in the year 1918. In the years to follow, fiscal insolvency, and the lack of accreditation made competition with Western Kentucky State Normal School impossible. In November 1927, Ogden came under the umbrella of Western and became the Ogden Department of Science.

On the campus of Ogden College a large white poplar tree stood as the college's sentry for more than 150 years. In the 1960's, the tree had to be cut down, and the poplar wood was for the wood paneling in Thompson Complex North Wing. The Ogden College was leased to Western at no cost and the contract was renewed several times up until 1960, when a ninety nine year lease was drawn up. That same contract deleted the statement, "whites only," from the mission statement of the Ogden College. Also in 1960, the cherished Ogden Hall was in poor condition and that site was selected for the construction of the new science building. The old was removed for the new building. Snell hall was the Colleges main lecture hall with several offices and classrooms and a large auditorium. This lovely two story brick building is currently slated for demolition in with in the next two to three years if no funding can be found to renovate the building that has stood on "the hill" for more than eighty years.

Athletics have played an important historical role at Western Kentucky University. One of the most prominent and colorful men in athletics was Coach E.A. Diddle. Coach Diddle is most well known for his days as the men's basketball coach, but his coaching responsibilities also included the baseball, football, and woman's basketball teams. In his career he chalked up an impressive record of 1,040 wins, 487 losses and five ties. During his coaching time he was famous for his use of his red towel. During the years of 1931 to 1942 the Basketball team racked up 150 wins and only 24 losses. The basketball teams during those years accumulated nine KIAC championship titles. In the year 1942, Western participated in the Metropolitan Invitational Tournament at Madison Square Gardens. Western upset several highly ranked teams only to be defeated by West Virginia in the final game by two foul shots in the final seconds of the game.

Coach Diddle started waving the most identifiable characteristic of a Western Kentucky University athletics fan, the red towel. The towel was used to signal players, rally the crowd, absorb the sweat and tears and celebrate the victories of his teams. The crowd picked up this trend and began waving red towels and eventually the trend became a perpetual tradition. The logo that is now associated with Western Athletics was conceived by the athletic director John Oldham. Noted wildlife artist and faculty member of the physical education department, Dr. Chuck T. Crume drew the original makeup of the towel logo. The waving of the red towel is synonymous with the spirit of Western Kentucky University.

Through the structural changes and through the changes in nomenclature, the spirit of the institution never wavered or changed. To know where we are going into the future, it is important to know where we have been. Visionaries in the past created the spirit that exists to this day.

Sources:

The History of Western Kentucky University; Lowell H. Harrison  
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<http://www.wku.edu/history.html>

<http://www.wku.edu/redtowel.html>

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