

Western Kentucky University

TopSCHOLAR®

---

Faculty/Staff Personal Papers

WKU Archives Records

---

12-14-1967

## UA37/44 Diary to Kelly

Gordon Wilson

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/fac\\_staff\\_papers](https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/fac_staff_papers)



Part of the [Advertising and Promotion Management Commons](#), [Entrepreneurial and Small Business Operations Commons](#), [Higher Education Administration Commons](#), [Oral History Commons](#), and the [Social History Commons](#)

---

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by TopSCHOLAR®. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty/Staff Personal Papers by an authorized administrator of TopSCHOLAR®. For more information, please contact [topscholar@wku.edu](mailto:topscholar@wku.edu).

December 14, 1967

Today I have tried to remember how we knew when classes were to be changed. I do recall that, after we moved to the hill, two boys paid their way through school by ringing a farm-like bell, which stood on a post near a small little house where the boys roomed, just about where the walk today passes between the Training School and Cherry Hall. Just when electric bells were set up I do not remember; it was probably not much before World War I started.

One of the funniest memories is of the program that was made out every term. There was a good-sized movable blackboard, which was lined off and then crosschecked. In the spaces would be printed with crayon the names of the classes: Gram. 2, Hist. 1, Th. and Prae., Phys. Geog., etc. Uncle Ed, our man-of-all-work, was known to everybody. Some jokester slipped into the auditorium or out in the hall after the courses were organized and added: "Sweep 1--Uncle Ed," "Dust 2--Uncle Ed." Corny humor like that was the rule in those days. That blackboard could hold all the schedule and have room for classes to be added. I have known some cranky student to get up at chapel and demand that a class be moved from where it was to some hour that would suit him better; and patient Dr. Kinnaman would try to adjust this one fellow to the whole scheme of things. And, occasionally, some nutty student<sup>who</sup> would not get what he wanted and where he wanted it would pack his duds and go home. I have known several such cases personally.

From the very earliest days of my being a student most classes were very large, especially those on the lower levels, actually beginning high-school courses. The size of the room more than anything else determined the size of the class; but even that was not always followed; I taught a class once that overflowed out into the halls of the old barracks, down where the Training School now stands; students took turns in sitting in or out to accommodate each other. I must have developed

some of my auctioneer voice in those days. We held classes in every available space: on the stage of the auditorium, in the anterooms there, out in the balcony, and, but largely to stress the need for more room, in some tents set up one summer out in the fort. Rather oddly, I can still remember people who were in classes of mine that I taught on the stage and in other queer places. Some of my very best students grew up in these cramped quarters.

The problem of textbooks was a great one. There were two bookstores down town when I came, and each one of them pretended to handle the books we used. The proprietor of each one was tricky and might not order any set of books requested by the teacher of a course. At best he might order half as many as wanted, believing, or pretending to believe, that the other store would do the same thing. It was a fortunate class that had enough books or enough until the term was well started. Borrowing books or studying together often saved the day. From the maddening conditions ultimately grew up our bookstore, and it was welcomed by students and faculty alike. You may not know the whole history of it. L. Y. Lancaster started a book exchange of his own: he would take in used books, with suggested prices that they would bring; records would be carefully kept, and when the book was sold, he would take, by agreement, ten per cent of the gross price. And everybody was glad to patronize his exchange, run in his room, for that meant actual books to use. President Cherry heard of this and was very much pleased; he suggested that the bookstore be started, with Lancaster in charge. And the bookstore prospered from the start, and the bookstores down town had to turn to some other way to get money. I should say that one of the bookstore men had failed completely somewhat early in the game, and another store, owned and operated by the Munkle family, grew up where the American National Bank now stands. But the Munkles, though ever so much better to deal with than Messrs. Bevil and



Garvin had been, could not afford to stock up on things as could the bookstore after it was started. Bevil, Garvin, and Munkle all ultimately went out of business, as did Smith, the father of our good friend Herbert. I never took up cussing as a habit or profession, but I am sure that my enormous, though squelched, vocabulary got some of its best growth in those days. I can't recall just when the bookstore became a reality at Western, but I know it was considerably after I began teaching, for the room in the Potter College Building (Recitation Hall) that was used had long been one of my teaching rooms; it was long and narrow and locally called the "gun barrel." And another thing that makes me know that this crazy book condition lasted long was that, though we moved to the top of the hill on February 3, 1911, and I began teaching in that room in 1912, Lancaster did not even enroll here until January, 1916, and certainly had to develop some grades and standing before the bookstore deal was carried through.

Not only did the bookstores gyp us on all occasions, but the owners of some of them spent most of the time we were in the stores bemeaning President Cherry and his school. One old fellow made such a habit of this that President Cherry, at chapel one morning, said, "A certain old devil is saying so and so." The students cheered loudly, for they knew what was meant. Another bookstore man did this scurvy trick, and I was the victim, purely because I was green. I wanted a book ordered and asked this manager to order it for me. Normally, I know now, the book would have been billed to him at from 20% to 40% discount, and he would have charged me the list price. But this pious old hypocrite added the postage on top of that, making my book, listed, say, at \$1.50 and costing him not more than a dollar, cost me \$1.80. When I would see that old fellow waltz down the aisle at church, I would have my doubts about his soul's salvation, to put it mildly. One of the few times I ever heard Uncle Billy Craig say

really ugly things about a man was when I was far along toward being through my course here. He said that this same well-dressed old man was--and you can imagine six to ten appropriate epithets and maybe an epitaph or two. Still another bookstore man worked this trick: one of my classes gave me, on the last day of the term, a copy of the poems of Alexander Pope and said that, if I had one already, I could exchange it at \_\_\_\_\_'s Bookstore. Naturally, I went down the next day to get the book exchanged, for I had one exactly like it. When I handed the book, stamped on the flyleaf with the bookstore's own stamp, to a young lady clerk, she accepted my explanation and very generously said the store would gladly exchange; as she was on her way to put that book (list price \$1.00) on the shelf and get a copy of some other book in the same series, the manager stopped her gruffly and said the book did not come from his store and could not be exchanged. And that in spite of his own stamp on the inside, as plain as the nose on a man's face. The girl clerk looked her disappointment, but she would have lost her job if she had said a word. Naturally, I never entered that store again, and many students said that they had received treatment similar to the way I had to grin and bear. (I still have that book.) Such things as these show how necessary it was to establish a bookstore. And they also show how some of the business people of Bowling Green regarded the school, its teachers, and its students.

This may seem to you like the wobbly memories of an old man. I wish that I could say that I made these up on the spur of the moment, but they were so much like others that I have not mentioned that I sometimes wonder how I remember them at all. One more thing should be mentioned about books and bookstores: the "old devil" who ran one of them took a big ad for the ELEVATOR when I was its editor, half a page, which ran for every issue of the school year. When I went into the



90

store to settle for the ad, I was told that he had never authorized the ad in the first place, that it was run wholly without his knowledge or consent. When I mentioned that I had brought a dummy copy of the paper and had each person sign the space he wanted, he swore and ordered me out of his store. I still have a file of ELEVATORS in which BEVIL'S BOOKSTORE occupies a half page on the back of the cover. And that was another store that we students quit patronizing. And it, like Garvin's and Smith's, folded up. Our particular trade was not enough to make the managers fail, but, I heard from other people, some of them other business people, that the same policy had been used against the citizens and had brought about the downfall of the businesses. (This has never been written down in full or even told before; I just felt that you ought to know it.) The Munkle Store ultimately closed, partly because the American National Bank wanted the space and partly because a grasping old scoundrel came to Bowling Green and got his hands on everything the Munkles had, including one of the daughters. And so ends the story of the bookstores of Bowling Green and their tragic connections with the Normal School.