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Western's New Deal: The Shaping of College Heights during The Great Depression

Sean Jacobson
Western Kentucky University, sean.jacobson980@topper.wku.edu

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WESTERN’S NEW DEAL:
THE SHAPING OF COLLEGE HEIGHTS DURING THE GREAT DEPRESSION

A Capstone Experience/Thesis Project
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
The Degree of Bachelor of Arts with
Honors College Graduate Distinction at Western Kentucky University

By
Sean T. Jacobson

Western Kentucky University
2016

CE/T Committee:
Dr. Patricia Minter, Advisor
Mr. Bradley Pfranger
Ms. Siera Branschreiber

Approved By:

Advisor
Department of History
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ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses the Great Depression’s impact on public higher education by analyzing developments at Western Kentucky State Teachers College. It also seeks to understand factors leading to the enshrinement of Henry Hardin Cherry as a larger-than-life figure upon his death in 1937. An investigative study into primary materials found that the New Deal projects on campus provided a boost for Cherry’s leadership and charisma in his community. The concurrence of his death with the construction of a classroom building funded by the Public Works Administration determined his memorialization for posterity. The building, Cherry Hall, emerged as an institutional symbol and attached the college’s identity to the character of its founder. The results provide insight and discussion to the New Deal’s implementation in a local context. In the case of this research, historical memory often highlights the achievements of great individuals while downplaying the role of government assistance, underscoring a tension in public higher education between the need for public funding sources and confidence in private support.

Keywords: Henry Hardin Cherry, Western Kentucky State Teachers College, Cherry Hall, Great Depression, New Deal in Kentucky, Monuments, Historical Memory
Dedicated to the students, faculty, alumni, and friends of Western Kentucky University.
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Lastly, to my mother, Peri Jacobson – thank you for your constant encouragement and love. Thank you for reading through my drafts and helping me push through even when this project felt so daunting and impossible to finish. I love you so much, and thank you for being my greatest supporter and confidante.
VITA

December 7, 1993................................................................. Born

2012................................................................. Whitefield Academy,
                                                  Louisville, Kentucky
                                                  National Merit Scholar
                                                  Cherry Presidential Scholarship
                                                  Western Kentucky University

2014................................................................. Harlaxton College,
                                                  Grantham, United Kingdom
                                                  Intern, Historic Interpretations, Frazier History Museum,
                                                  Louisville, Kentucky

2015................................................................. Sol Education Abroad,
                                                  Buenos Aires, Argentina

2016................................. James H. Poteet Award for Excellence in
                                                  the Study of History
                                                  Western Kentucky University
                                                  Intern, National Museum of American History
                                                  Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract..................................................................................................................... ii

Dedication................................................................................................................... iii

Acknowledgements....................................................................................................... iv

Vita.............................................................................................................................. vi

List of Figures.............................................................................................................. viii

*Western’s New Deal: The Shaping of College Heights During the Great Depression*

  Introduction.............................................................................................................. 1

  1. Bowling Green and the College Before the Depression................................. 4

  2. The Power of “Spirit” in a Broken State............................................................. 26

  3. Western’s New Deal: Implementing Federal Projects on Campus.................... 47

  4. Building a Temple............................................................................................... 77

  5. The Immortalization of Henry Hardin Cherry.................................................. 102

Epilogue.................................................................................................................... 120

Bibliography.............................................................................................................. 130
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Campus map featuring Henry Hardin Cherry, circa 1935 ......................................................... 3
Figure 2: 1908 Architectural plan of Western Kentucky State Normal School ........................................... 7
Figure 3: Auditorium of Van Meter Hall, 1911 .......................................................................................... 8
Figure 4: Cherryton apartment .................................................................................................................... 12
Figure 5: Recitation Hall ............................................................................................................................ 18
Figure 6: College Heights Foundation building, circa 1930 ...................................................................... 21
Figure 7: Kelly Thompson, field representative and Cherry protégé ............................................................ 22
Figure 8: Promotional painting for Kentucky Museum ............................................................................. 23
Figure 9: Kentucky Building under construction .................................................................................... 30
Figure 10: President’s Home, circa 1931 .................................................................................................... 34
Figure 11: Henry Hardin and Bessie Cherry in President’s Home, 1931 .................................................... 38
Figure 12: L.T. Smith ................................................................................................................................. 58
Figure 13: Earl Moore and H.H. Cherry at a chapel broadcast .................................................................. 66
Figure 14: H.H. Cherry in the partially demolished Recitation Hall ........................................................... 76
Figure 15: Image of Cherry Statue in plaster ............................................................................................. 78
Figure 16: Groundbreaking ceremony for New Classroom Building, March 5, 1936 ............................. 81
Figure 17: Men work on foundation of PWA classroom building, Summer 1936 .................................... 88
Figure 18: PWA Classroom Building cornerstone laying ceremony, October 27, 1936 ......................... 90
Figure 19: PWA Classroom Building under construction, 1937 ............................................................ 95
Figure 20: Public funeral of H.H. Cherry in Van Meter Hall, August 3, 1937 ......................................... 104
Figure 21: Ogden Vault floral offering to H.H. Cherry, Fairview Cemetery, August 1937 ....................... 104
Figure 22: Duplicate Cherry Time Capsule ................................................................................................. 110
Figure 23: Henry Hardin Cherry, oil painting, E. Sophonisba Hergerheimer, 1939 .............................. 116
Figure 24: Campus R.O.T.C. with veiled Cherry statue, November 1937 .............................................. 116
Figure 25: Cherry Statue unveiling, November 16, 1937 ..................................................................... 118
Figure 26: WPA Music Hall in relation to campus .................................................................................. 121
Figure 27: Completed Kentucky Building Interior, circa 1939 ............................................................... 124
Figure 28: Completed Cherry Hall lecture room used to instruct Army Air Corps trainees, 1943 ...... 126
Figure 29: College seal featuring Cherry Hall, designed by Kelly Thompson, 1948 .............................. 128
INTRODUCTION

The American college campus creates an interesting environment where the diffusion of knowledge connects with the cultivation of community identity. These connections often manifest through symbols ranging from visual motifs such as colors and mascots to verbal expressions in the form of mottos and maxims. In religious terms, these symbols might even be classified as “totems” or “icons” if they promote certain spiritual ideals or loyalty to a particular group. Because these symbols are often entrenched into a campus over its history, they can be subconscious forces that drive the institutional culture, acting as a filter to historical memory.¹

The institutional culture of Western Kentucky University in the city of Bowling Green is a prime example of higher education’s symbiotic relationship to community identity through the use of symbols. The campus’s physical geography on a hill belonging to the “Hilltoppers,” the architectural motif of the cupola, the red towel, the “Big Red” mascot, its mottos “Life, More Life” and “The Spirit Makes the Master,” among other traditions, permeate its identity within the regional

community and beyond. Despite heavy promotion of these campus traditions, many thousands who have walked WKU’s hilltop campus, known as College Heights, know very little about how this culture was constructed.

This thesis addresses the development of some of these symbols and posits the years 1930-1937 as the pivotal period in the formation of an institutional culture. Under the aegis of the New Deal starting in 1933, campus improvements brought about during this time resulted in the construction of Henry Hardin Cherry Hall, now one of WKU’s most recognizable infrastructural symbols. In front of the building stands a larger-than-life statue of the building’s namesake, WKU founder and first president Henry Hardin Cherry, whose memory also became an institutional symbol during this time.

A closer inspection of the campus culture during the 1930s reveals how the relationship of outside political and economic forces played out with the internal affairs of the institution to direct WKU’s cultural development. In this light, this work also serves as a case study of the New Deal in a localized context, since Western Kentucky State Teachers College (as it was known at the time) acted as a center of New Deal programs in the largely undeveloped, agricultural south-central Kentucky region. Though this narrative retains its focus on the development of one institution of public higher education, this thesis will hopefully inspire further research both into the New Deal’s impacts on higher education and the broader developments of institutional cultures in the American South.

For general readers, this project seeks to provide an enlightening and enjoyable journey into the lives of those who walked the College Heights campus
eight decades ago. While most lived ordinary lives in ordinary places, their stories
nevertheless constitute an integral part in the mosaic of the greater American
experience.

Figure 1: 1935 Campus Map featuring Henry Hardin Cherry. Image Source: “Aerial View,” 1935, UA1C1.32, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky.
CHAPTER 1

BOWLING GREEN AND THE COLLEGE BEFORE THE DEPRESSION

Bowling Green, Kentucky, circa 1930, was a small town of about 12,000 people. A stop along the Louisville-Nashville Railroad in the south-central region of Kentucky, the small town, nestled among the limestone hills close to the Barren River, was known primarily for “agriculture and schools” according to Bowling Green’s mayor at that time, John Rodes. For its relatively small size, Bowling Green’s downtown boasted a modernized center of culture in the region, featuring a hotel, city hospital, modern buildings for elementary through high school students, a railroad station, a golf course, packing plants, paved streets, access to Mammoth Cave, churches of multiple denominations, a Chamber of Commerce, and a Rotary, Kiwanis, and Lions Club. Outside the town’s center, however, lay a highly rural landscape dominated by farmland.

Seventy percent of the state of Kentucky was rural around 1930, with Louisville being the only true urban area. Compared to other states, Kentucky lagged behind in industrialization and urbanization. Fewer than one third of all roads in the

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2 Broadcast No. 14 “Western Kentucky State Teachers College,” WHAS Radio, Louisville, KY, aired December 31, 1935, Earl Moore Personal Papers, Box 1, Folder 4.
3 Ibid.
state were paved. Many places even around the Bowling Green area had no access to electricity or indoor plumbing. Though the “Jazz Age” of the 1920s was considered a time of prosperity, modernization, and extravagance for America, most of agricultural Kentucky hardly shared in this wealth. Even before the stock market crash of 1929 that catalyzed the nation into economic depression, Kentucky’s two main industries – distilling and coal mining – were already in serious decline.  

The glimmer of hope that made Bowling Green stand out was its institutions of higher education. On College Street just a couple blocks from the city’s fountain square was the privately-run Bowling Green Business University housed in a notable castle-like structure. Up the street on a limestone-cropped hilltop south of town was the state-funded Western Kentucky State Teachers College. Crowning a hill popularly known as College Heights, the teachers college had inherited buildings from private predecessor colleges and added on several other structures to create an impressively sized campus relative to the town. Presided over by the charismatic Henry Hardin Cherry since its founding around twenty-five years prior, the Western Kentucky State Teachers College, simply known in the community as “Western,” was one of the largest teachers colleges in the country by the 1930s.  

The growth Western had experienced in its first twenty-five years was remarkable considering the challenges the school faced being in an underdeveloped region of the state. As an act of the Kentucky General Assembly of 1906, Western

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began as one of two State Normal Schools as part of the Progressive-era initiative to improve the quality of training for school teachers, which was particularly needed in a mostly rural state where many counties lacked proper teachers and high schools. Previously operated by private funding under the name Southern Normal School, the new state-sponsored institution came as a personal victory to Henry Hardin Cherry, who had been a leader of the battle to create public support for the normal school movement.

Born in 1864 and raised on a farm some ten miles outside of Bowling Green as the seventh of nine children, H.H. Cherry was of a rugged personality built upon staunch principles of hard work ethic and democracy. With the help of his older brother Thomas Crittenden (or T.C.), Henry Hardin --without ever receiving a formal four-year education -- revitalized the once struggling Southern Normal School. Through his charisma, determination, and uncanny way of recruiting supporters of his cause, attendance increased and a proper building was created despite a meager budget.6 The growth of the school after state purchase continued at a steady pace. Within three years of the school's existence as “Western,” its governing Board of Regents purchased land on Vinegar Hill for over $100,000 to relocate the school for anticipated growth.7

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7 Board of Regents Minutes, March 12, 1909, UA2/1, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky.
The purchase of Vinegar Hill included two existing structures that previously belonged to the Potter College for Women. Though the state’s appropriation of $150,000 was considered generous for the time, the vision that H.H. Cherry had for Western’s campus on the Hill far exceeded the scope that state appropriations were then providing. Before the finalization of the purchase, Cherry made the acquaintance of landscape architect Henry Wright of St. Louis and Louisville architect Captain Brinton B. Davis. Henry Wright’s 1908 draw-up of a College Heights campus included a magnificent acropolis of buildings ringing around the highest hill in that region of the state(Figure 2).  

Cherry’s relentless vision for the new state institution manifested in the aggressive character he took with capital expansion. Initiating the dream Cherry mapped out with Henry Wright and Brinton Davis, the first building constructed for the Western Normal School was Van Meter Hall. Though the cost to construct this

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8 Harrison, 34-35.
administration building far exceeded the 1910 state appropriations, Cherry and the Board of Regents continued with the project. With dauntless determination to see the school’s growth come to fruition, Cherry began a tradition of personally going to the state capital in Frankfort to lobby in front of the General Assembly – often with great resistance from state legislators. Once the state finally agreed to compensate the construction costs through a mortgage bond, the new Van Meter administration building was completed. On February 6, 1911, the entire student, staff, and faculty body made a momentous trek up College Street, carrying all sorts of books, furniture, and classroom supplies, and commemorated the move with the first chapel service in Van Meter auditorium (Figure 3).  

Figure 3: Auditorium in Van Meter Hall, circa 1911. Source: Hesse Studio, “Van Meter Hall,” 1911, UA1C2.89.25, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky.

Though the magnificent new administration building designed by Brinton Davis far outshone the less impressive buildings from the old Potter College, many of the Normal School students who now inherited the Hill were of much humbler origin compared to the other local schools such as the Ogden College for Young Men

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9 Harrison, 37.
on the east side of the hill or even the Bowling Green Business College. Many students came from surrounding rural counties that did not have opportunities for adequate education. These predecessor private institutions had only been available to the “upper half of the affluent,” and the arrival of poorer, rural students at the Normal School challenged the conservative notion of who should receive an education. Because the Western Normal School provided cheap boarding houses that often fed students soup, the name “soups” became a derogatory word used by the social elite.10

Despite such derision, the Western Normal School gradually prospered on its new hilltop campus. After the First World War, the school truly began to expand in population, funding, curriculum, and infrastructure. By the 1920s, secondary education in Kentucky had improved to make normal schools less of a necessity. The heavy expansions to Western’s curriculum allowed it in 1922 to begin granting four-year bachelor’s degrees and add the designation “Teachers College” to its official name.11 The transition to a teachers college came with significantly greater financial demands. Between the 1922-23 and 1928-29 fiscal years, the total college expenditures accelerated at around a 130% faster rate than the increase in the official state treasury appropriations.12 To compensate for the rapid increase in

10 Kelly Thompson, interview by Carlton Jackson, October 26, 1976, WKU Oral History Committee.
11 James Cornette, A History of Western Kentucky State Teachers College, republished in Teachers College Heights Vol. XIX, No. 1 (1941), 161.
12 This rate is calculated by dividing the rate of increase in total expenditures (345%) between the 1922-23 and 1928-29 fiscal years by the rate of increase in State Treasurer Expenses allocated to Western (264%) between those same fiscal years. Data taken from Records of the Bursar, cited in Tables 19 and 20 in Cornette, 162-163.
expenditures, the state treasury also provided significant outlays for capital construction projects, while outside community receipts also helped alleviate expenditure costs. Despite the influx of income into the young college’s bursary, the school still had a deficit of $197,440.80 in 1927-28 and $13,999.39 in 1928-29.13

A good portion of the increasing budget was used for the greatly needed capital construction. The construction of Potter Hall, housing the first girls’ dormitory and dining facilities, sparked a construction boom that lasted throughout the 1920s up to the onset of the Depression. Within one decade, the emerging teachers college and normal school expanded its hilltop campus from two classroom buildings, an administrative building, and one girls dormitory in 1920 to a sprawling and impressive array of multiple classroom buildings, a library, student center, a football stadium, a separate model training school and model rural schoolhouse, two dormitories, a college farm, and a central heating plant by the start of the Depression. The lease of the private Ogden College campus to Western in 1928 added two more classroom and laboratory buildings, expanding the number of subject fields and facilities for the teachers college.

The campus expansions during the 1920s greatly correlated with rise in attendance. From 1923 to 1931, the school experienced constant increase in enrollment, going from 2,139 enrolled students in 1923-24 to 4,253 students in 1930-31. The faculty size more than doubled during this period as well. Much of Western’s increased enrollment still came from Warren County and the surrounding

13 Calculated from data in Records of the Bursar, cited in Tables 19 and 20 in Cornette, 162-163.
rural counties, though slow inroads were being made with prospective students in more distant parts of the state.14

Because many of these students did not come from affluent backgrounds, the escalation of housing prices following the post-war discovery of oil in Bowling Green created a housing crisis. The boarding houses near campus would not suffice for all of the growing student population, particularly for married students. As a solution, President Cherry coordinated a rather unusual initiative to provide cheap housing that typified his values for frugality, democracy, and community effort. Without receiving any special appropriation, Cherry approved for the Manual Training Department to plan and construct around 70 temporary apartments south of the Hill for students, particularly for married couples. Each of the student cottages came at a monthly rent of $2.60, provided the students stayed there for four years. The innovative project was largely realized by student labor and resolved the housing issue. The village of cottages/shacks came to be colloquially known as “Cherry-town” or “Cherryton” (Figure 4).15

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14 Records of the Registrar and Reports of the President, cited in Cornette, Tables 22, 25, 28.
15 UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 2, Folder 27, Special Correspondence 1933; Harrison, 38-39.
Such was one example reflective of an emerging culture of solidarity and camaraderie in the Western community. A major pull factor for students and faculty was the charisma of Henry Hardin Cherry himself. One student said of him, “He had the kind of background which could have very easily made him an outsider with the faculty if he hadn’t had this strong personality and this great leadership ability.”\textsuperscript{16} The fact that Cherry never had a formal education perhaps allowed his students to hold him in such a humble and esteemed light. As Tom Ellis, a football player from the class of 1929 put it, “He was president but he was one of the everybody. He didn’t put himself above anybody… He was class. He had the people, he was the most popular educator in the state of Kentucky.”\textsuperscript{17}

Traditions such as the annual campus clean-up day and daily chapel in Van Meter provided opportunities for the entire campus body to share communal

\textsuperscript{16} Kelly Thompson, interviewed by Carlton Jackson, October 26, 1976, WKU Oral History Committee.
\textsuperscript{17} Tom Ellis, interviewed by James Bennett, July 11, 1978, WKU Oral History Committee.
experiences and instill spiritual virtues. In Cherry’s eye, the participatory nature of maintaining the campus put everyone on an equal playing field. Future President Kelly Thompson remarked, “His great desire to keep that type of class segregation from ever occurring at Western built this strong philosophy that everything on campus had to be very democratic.” 18 For Cherry, public education and democracy were inextricably tied together. One of his most famous expressions, “Life, More Life,” summarized the explicit mission of the teachers college paraphrasing the words of Jesus Christ – “that the school children of Kentucky might have life and have it more abundantly.” 19 Providing the best educational experiences to the future teachers of Kentucky was the key to propelling democracy and American patriotism for the next generation. “Life, More Life” became a great selling point Cherry used to fight for support of his institution:

No man can turn his back on the American school, upon the education of the American child, without turning his back upon the American government…. I challenge the patriotism of any citizen who is not interested in the education of the people, who does not hear the call for life, more life of the boy or girl who lives in the lowly cabin on the hill side, and who is not willing to make a moral and material contribution to those agencies that seek to develop and educate a righteous citizenship... 20

Cherry’s ideal of education and democracy producing a “righteous citizenship” juxtaposed with his paternalistic leadership style in which students and

18 Kelly Thompson, interviewed by Carlton Jackson, October 26, 1976, WKU Oral History Committee.
19 O.J. Wilson, A Factbook of Western Kentucky University, printed in 1967, WKU Archives, Library of Special Collections, Western Kentucky University, 141; H.H. Cherry, speech at Annual Banquet of WKSNS, June, 1910, in Cherry Speeches, Box 1, Folder 4.
20 Henry Hardin Cherry, address to Kentucky Education Association general session, April 21, 1933, Louisville, Kentucky, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 1, Folder 112, Special Correspondence.
professors alike had little to no voice when it came to management of the school’s affairs. In contrast to his deification of Democracy, Cherry controlled the campus as if he were a divine-right monarch. There were no student government associations or teachers’ unions at Western during the Cherry days.\textsuperscript{21} Years after Cherry’s death, former English department head Gordon Wilson commented, “President Cherry talked democracy, but didn’t practice it.”\textsuperscript{22} Though the biweekly campus publication \textit{College Heights Herald}, begun in 1925, was largely student produced, it acted more as an event newsletter.\textsuperscript{23} A major exception for students or faculty to speak came through daily chapel services in Van Meter Hall, when Cherry at times opened the podium for student and faculty to speak words of wisdom and inspiration. More often he simply called up someone to speak impromptu. A 1930 Western catalog cited that “a fine democracy pervades the [chapel] assembly,” and that “each is free to speak his thoughts and to challenge the thoughts of others.”\textsuperscript{24}

Ironically, no voice at the chapel services carried more influence than the host himself. Cherry’s words resonated so much with his students that in 1925 they appealed him to compile his most important speeches into a single published volume titled \textit{Education: The Basis of Democracy}. The book, though not able to reproduce the deep, resonating voice and physical animism of his live speeches, still conveyed powerful language that surely contributed to his larger-than-life mystique.

\textsuperscript{21} Harrison, 156-57, 163.
\textsuperscript{22} Gordon Wilson, interviewed by O.J. Wilson, March 1, 1967, WKU Oral History Committee.
\textsuperscript{23} It would not be until the 1960s before the \textit{Herald} had the leverage to cover more controversial matters or be critical of the administration. Harrison, 165-167.
\textsuperscript{24} Teachers College Heights, 50
that permeated the institutional culture. One of his most famous speeches titled, “That Other Thing,” summarized a principle he wanted impressed on the heart of every human:

I do not know what ‘that other thing’ is except that it is an intangible spiritual force that largely determines every human success... It is the invisible equipment and universal surety of the human being... ‘That other thing’ is the thing above the rim. It is the plus of the soul. It is the plus in democratic education and in Democracy. It is the plus in the life of every great teacher. It is the spirit of good measure and a square deal that holds the civic, social, and industrial world together and gives every human being a chance to live, a chance to grow, and an opportunity to enjoy the blessings of life.25

The fundamental principle in this speech was encapsulated in a phrase that became the school’s motto and cherished tradition – “The Spirit Makes the Master.”

The endearing yet paternalistic quality of Cherry’s leadership, coupled with the conservative Bible Belt culture of the South, also reflected in a tight moral code regimented for students on and off campus. Dress codes were very formal by twenty-first century standards, girls’ dormitories had strict conduct rules and curfews, dancing in general was discouraged, and radios were prohibited in Potter Hall even into the 1930s.26 With professors, Western had no established salary or tenure system at the time; Cherry himself decided individual salaries. James Poteet, who joined the History department faculty in 1931, said, “He said it was no one’s business to know anything about salaries except his own, and he didn’t

26 Penciled note in letter by Philip Schneck to Henry Hardin Cherry, Feb 24, 1937, indicated that student Grace Schneck moved out of Potter Hall into Mr. Strahm’s home because she wanted to have a radio. Marginalia, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 3, Folder 2, Special Correspondence.
want faculty members discussing their salaries...”

Teachers who tried to negotiate salary increases had hardly any success, as Cherry believed professors should consider it an adequate honor to even be teaching at the college. Most of these underpaid teachers were given a demanding load of courses to teach. Even Cherry acknowledged his frugality when it came to overseeing where expenses went:

> Of course it is the policy of the school to save every dollar possible... I make no concealment of the fact that out of a desire to economize and use as much of the annual appropriation as possible for equipping the school and for providing a fund to supplement the general appropriation to be used in the purchase of grounds and the erection of buildings, we have overworked the teaching force of the institution and we have failed to provide for a few needed teachers and have frequently permitted some of the classes to be over-crowded...

No other building on campus exemplified the overcrowded and overworked atmosphere better than Recitation Hall (Figure 5). Before Western’s purchase of the building, this Victorian-era structure had served as instruction space and living quarters for the Potter College for Women and was hardly designed for a larger teachers college. On this plot of 1.82 acres, the Geography, Education, English, History, Penmanship, Math, Chemistry, Physics, and Art Departments, along with the bookstore and the post office, all shared close quarters, with two single stall toilets in the entire building that did not flow into sewage.

Access to classrooms was complicated. Many classrooms could only be accessed from an outside portico or hazardous narrow staircases. According to a report given by Dr. Arndt Stickles of the

28 Quoted in Cornette, 155.
29 According to Jonathan Jeffrey, local historian and Dean of the Library of Special Collections at Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green did not have a sewage system until the 1930s, interviewed by author, December 10, 2015.
History Department, up to six professors had to share a single office at times, making it near impossible for faculty to carry out their own research. By the 1930s, 97% of the building was in continual use, the Chemistry and Physics labs had inadequate equipment, and the influx of students forced a fifth of classes to seek alternative meeting places. Cherry himself said, “For many years I have been uneasy that a fire might occur at any time and many lives be lost as a result of it.”

One can only imagine what miserable heat conditions students and faculty experienced in that building during the 1930 summer terms, when a severe drought and heat wave hit Kentucky, taking a toll on both bodies and spirits.

It may seem surprising that the replacement of Recitation Hall with a better equipped classroom building was not a higher priority in the capital construction boom of the 1920s. In these formative years of Western as a teachers college, however, the limited infrastructure simply did not provide a space for classes to relocate during such a transition. Shortage of state appropriations during the school's rapid growth caused certain necessities such as a library building not to be completed until 1927. To save expenditures for capital projects, which were already creating large budget deficits during the late 1920s, certain materials would be recycled when one building was demolished to create another, such as the case with

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30 Specifications on Recitation Hall taken from undated blueprints created by “Y.R.C.”, OS Box 1, Folder 24, Library of Special Collections; Dr. A.M. Stickles’ report on Recitation Hall quoted in M.C. Grise, letter to Mattie McLean, November 20, 1933, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 2, Folder 27, Special Correspondence; H.H. Cherry, letter to W.H. Hopkins, July 19, 1935, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 2, Folder 27, Special Correspondence.

31 H.H. Cherry, letter to George Cherry, August 25, 1930, UA3/1/7, Cherry Personal Papers, Box 1, Folder 16.
the Home Economics building, which used limestone from the demolished Cabell Hall when the library was built.\textsuperscript{32} Other ways the college saved money was repurposing existing buildings, such as moving the Music Department into a former private home on Normal Drive. Though the Music Department was a significant program, it did not receive its own structure until the New Deal.

![Figure 5: Recitation Hall. Source: Franklin Studio, “Recitation Hall,” UA1C2.66.5, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky.](image)

Even with Western’s coffers struggling to sustain a campus adequate to the needs of its students and faculty, the teachers college’s low cost of attendance was highly attractive to prospective students. Standard for state institutions at the time, no tuition fees were charged for Kentucky residents, but Western Teachers College’s cost of attendance was cheaper than other schools. Compared to Eastern Kentucky State Teachers College’s cheapest student cost of around $119 per semester, a student could attend Western for as low as $103 cost of living per semester in the

\textsuperscript{32} Cornette, 196; Harrison, 71.
For deserving students unable to support their education, President Cherry helped to create a loan foundation for this explicit purpose.

Frugal as he was in the administration of the college, Henry Hardin Cherry believed nonetheless that every student should be allowed the financial means to complete their education, even if his own money helped pay those expenses. The first recorded instance of President Cherry loaning money to a student was in 1907. Cherry called Herman Donovan into his office and gave him a starting loan of $50 to prevent him from quitting school due to financial trouble. Years later, around 1920, a former faculty member presented Cherry one hundred dollars to loan to deserving students. These served as inspirations for the College Heights Foundation.

The $100 given to Cherry became a revolving loan system. In 1923 the Board of Regents approved the establishment of the College Heights Foundation for the purpose of awarding student loans that would be paid back with six percent interest. Immediately a campaign began within the faculty as well as the outside community to pledge support. Cherry's salesmanship and charisma with the local community evidenced in the moral imperatives given to the citizens of Bowling Green.

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33 Costs of attendance are calculated from the cheapest options of room and board plus an incidental fee of $5 at each school and a low estimate of $10 cost for books. Eastern Kentucky State Teachers College, "1930-31 Catalog" (1930), Undergraduate Catalog, Book 18, 34, [http://encompass.eku.edu/ug_cat/18](http://encompass.eku.edu/ug_cat/18), accessed April 13, 2016; WKU Registrar, "UA45/1/1 Teachers College Heights Vol. XII, No. 3" (1930). WKU Archives Records. Paper 4037, 42 and 58, [http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/dlsc_ua_records/4037](http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/dlsc_ua_records/4037), accessed April 13, 2016.

34 Harrison, 76-77.

35 Board of Regents Minutes, April 4, 1923, UA2/1, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky.
Green and Warren County in a pamphlet calling for the community to fulfill a civic duty in pledging support to the Foundation. The purpose of the campaign:

...turning into reality a vision that will make [Western Kentucky State Teachers College] one of the outstanding educational plants in the South, a show spot of Bowling Green and a professional West Point for the training of the teachers who will instruct the children of the Commonwealth, saying nothing of the material value of the institution, [...] its mission and place in the development of a Greater Kentucky largely justifies a most earnest and loyal support.36

Such a call to action worked. Within a few months after establishment, the College Heights Foundation received over $75,000 in pledge money from faculty, alumni, and the greater community. Eventually housed in a little shack between Recitation Hall and the Training School, the Foundation received a flood of loan applications over the next few years. By 1930, it had helped thousands of students stay in school. One such student was a boy from Lebanon, Kentucky, who in 1928 had gone to Western to play football for Coach E.A. Diddle. His name – Kelly Thompson. When an injury his freshman year ended his football career, Thompson feared being sent home for not having the money to continue his studies. Coach Diddle found him and helped young Thompson receive a $25 loan through the College Heights Foundation.37

36 College Heights Foundation, “Important to the Citizenship of Bowling Green 1923, Box 4, Folder 7, College Heights Foundation, WKU Archives.
37 Harrison, 77, 139; Kelly Thompson, interviewed by Crawford Crowe, January 2, 1977, WKU Oral History Committee. Harrison’s account, taken from Thompson’s interview with Carlton Jackson, June 27, 1977, says that the $25 came from the Bowling Green Bank and Trust, and that E.A. Diddle endorsed the note written by the bank president. Thompson’s earlier interview with Crawford Crowe, January 2, 1977, claims that the CHF provided Thompson the loan. It is possible that the loan initially written by BG Bank and Trust was later processed through the Foundation office and was accredited as one of the Foundation’s loans.
As magnanimous it was to create a student loan fund, Cherry did not believe in giving handouts. He was adamant about students returning the investments they had received through the Foundation. On rare occasions when someone was delinquent in returning his or her loans after graduation, Cherry had no qualms in writing ultimatums threatening to embarrass or even take legal action on a former student.\textsuperscript{38} Though the Foundation was technically a private foundation, Henry Hardin Cherry acted as its first president and chairman of the Board of Directors until his death. It is unclear whether Cherry himself was responsible for placing himself as chairman or if he was asked to head it. In either case, Cherry being the face of both the public college and the private foundation certainly reinforced a culture of a dominant and pervasive president at Western. From its establishment in 1923 through the present day, every chairman of the foundation has been an active WKU president, former president, or direct descendent of a WKU president.\textsuperscript{39}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{image}
\caption{College Heights Foundation Building next to Recitation Hall. Source: Franklin Studios, "College Heights Foundation Building," November 1931, UA1C2.16.1, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{38} Harrison, 77.
\textsuperscript{39} “Past Presidents,” College Heights Foundation, \url{http://www.wku.edu/chf/presidents/}, accessed January 8, 2016. Interestingly enough, the Board of Directors for the CHF has been entirely white since its founding and largely male dominated into the 21st century.
The loans awarded through the College Heights Foundation by the summer of 1930 had exceeded over $125,000 in value, which in today’s money was just under $1.8 million. In addition to student loans, the Foundation also received administration of the campus bookstore as a revenue source and had the purpose to create memorial structures. Cherry’s vision called for constructing grand buildings to the Commonwealth of Kentucky. After years of dreaming for a “Kentucky Building” on Western’s campus, Cherry convinced himself and the other foundation board members that such a structure could be created entirely through community funding without having to ask for a state appropriation. Cherry called upon his architect friend Brinton Davis in Louisville, who had already designed many campus buildings on the Hill, to draw up renderings of this memorial building reminiscent of a colonial mansion.

![Figure 7: Kelly Thompson, field representative and Cherry protégé. Source: "Kelly Thompson," UA1C3.1.20, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky.](http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm)
In 1928, a massive campaign for a Kentucky Building began and became the highest priority of the College Heights Foundation, with two thirds of all its receipts going toward Cherry’s new project. Needless to say, much of the money normally available for student loans was now siphoned off for the new construction project. If anyone had critical thoughts of this move, however, the criticisms did not make it into any print outlet. By employing student Kelly Thompson (Figure 7), with whom Cherry had already begun a mentor-disciple relationship, to be a field representative for the building campaign, Cherry made sure that the colorful pamphlets calling upon the support of friends and alumni reached far and wide across the state (Figure 8). These illustrated pamphlets described a grand building that would act as the headquarters for the College Heights Foundation, a museum and library to Kentucky history and culture, and classroom space, surrounded by colonial gardens and a recreation of a pioneer log cabin.

Figure 8: Promotional Painting for Kentucky Museum issued in building campaign. Source: “Kentucky Building,” 1929, UA1C2.96.12, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky.

41 Cornette, 173; Harrison, 77.
42 Kelly Thompson, interview by Crawford Crowe, January 2, 1977, WKU Oral History Committee.
43 College Heights Foundation, “The Proposed Kentucky Building,” circa 1930, Box 4, Folder 7, College Heights Foundation, WKU Archives.
The effective marketing of the campaign prompted various newspapers to present seemingly unilateral praise for the building project. An editorial in the Louisville *Courier-Journal* recognized the Kentucky Building project as an imperative to preserve Kentucky's frontier past and the fundamental roots of Kentucky. The *Park City Daily News* in Bowling Green commented on the symbolic value to the project, calling it “a local and state shrine” that would receive national attention as “no state south of the Ohio River has such a building.” Given that Kentucky was already in many ways a depressed state at the time, many supporters viewed the Kentucky Building both as an economic opportunity and as a cultural, spiritual project to boost Kentuckians' morale. The student newspaper *College Heights Herald* reported in an opinion article, “A Kentucky building which shall be a Kentucky museum, a visible chronicle, a pious preservation of the past – what more apt or more needed? This is the dream which has come to Dr. H.H. Cherry, a man with the happy habit of seeing his dreams come true.”

The dream that Cherry envisioned for his hilltop campus was becoming more and more of a reality, and his aspirations seemed to keep growing with every new initiative. By the end of the 1920s, Western Kentucky State Teachers College was quickly emerging as one of the largest and finest teachers colleges in the nation. Western’s success and publicity had already prompted several colleges from places ranging from New York, Iowa, Florida, and Minnesota to request catalog info to model academic programming. Colombia University in 1930 applauded Western’s

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Training School among the top 25 in the nation. With subscriptions for the Kentucky Building flowing in and a continually rising student population, it seemed hardly anything could break the optimism in the air.

As the 1920s came to a close, people in Bowling Green perhaps speculated what the 1930s would bring. The infamous Black Tuesday that witnessed the stock market’s collapse may not have appeared as ominous in the Park City Daily News amidst the many department store ads and other local gossips. A storm was coming, but Western Kentucky State Teachers College’s growth showed no signs of anticipating the Great Depression.46

45 Irving Perkins, letter to H.H. Cherry, October 23, 1928; Ruth Pieper, letter to H.H. Cherry, March 6, 1930; Walter J. Matherly, letter to H.H. Cherry, June 24, 1932; W.E. Peik, letter to H.H. Cherry, August 14, 1930, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 1, Folder 104, Special Correspondence; Harrison, 71.
46 The Park City Daily News, October 29, 1929.
CHAPTER 2

THE POWER OF “SPIRIT” IN A BROKEN STATE, 1930-1933

Kentucky’s large agricultural base delayed some of the most immediate impacts of the stock market crash, but the already depressed market value for crops did not make the Depression any less gloomy. Politics quickly developed into upheaval in the state capital of Frankfort, where Republican Governor Flem Sampson proved ineffective when faced with a Democratic General Assembly.

Similar to President Herbert Hoover, Governor Sampson trusted in the power of private enterprise and charities to resolve economic problems and did not quite realize the seriousness of the Depression until too late.\textsuperscript{47} By the start of the Depression, the ill-fated governor was already dealing with charges of partisanship over controversies dealing with the state highway commission and conservation efforts. His overt partisan dealings even led to an indictment for having a “conflict of interest.”\textsuperscript{48} Though escaping these charges in circuit court, Flem Sampson created irreparable antagonism between him and the Legislature.

Meanwhile in Bowling Green, Henry Hardin Cherry’s thoughts were on his school and on his family. Writing to his wife Bess in February 1930, while she was

\textsuperscript{47} Blakey, 16-17.
spending time with her sister in St. Cloud, Florida, H.H. Cherry said, "The school is enjoying a wonderful enthusiasm and enrollment... It is the largest attendance we have ever had for this season of the year. My great regret is not being able to be at home more..."\(^\text{49}\)

Though he wished he could join his wife in Florida, Cherry had stayed in Kentucky so that he could prepare lobbying for a $200,000 appropriation for yet more campus improvements – a Physical Education Building and a new boiler for the central heating plant. He realized that the hotly debated Highway Commission was about to cut the budget, but Cherry held confidence that the legislation would pass the desired appropriation.\(^\text{50}\)

Cherry took many back and forth trips to Frankfort in the next month. Though he aspired to keep Western out of politics, the unfortunate timing placed him in the middle of an ugly scene. Writing to his younger brother George in Oregon, Cherry commented, "The political situation that exists in Kentucky and especially during the session of the Legislature was without question the most chaotic ever known in the history of the Commonwealth.... The Governor was handled severely..."\(^\text{51}\) The General Assembly censured the governor of partisan speech and through a series of "Ripper Bills," stripped his control on multiple commissions. The Democratic legislation moved in a new direction including reorganization of the

\(^{49}\) H.H. Cherry, letter to Bess Cherry, February 8, 1930, UA3/1/7, Cherry Personal Papers, Box 1, Folder 1.
\(^{50}\) H.H. Cherry, letters to Bess Cherry, February 12 and 15, 1930, UA3/1/7, Cherry Personal Papers, Box 1, Folder 1.
\(^{51}\) H.H. Cherry, letter to George Cherry, March 31, 1930, UA3/1/7, Cherry Personal Papers, Box 1, Folder 16.
highway commission, implementing a gross sales tax, and the acquisition of
Mammoth Cave for creating a national park. In the remainder of his term of office,
the vehement Governor Sampson retaliated by vetoing twelve legislative bills – only
to be overridden eleven out of twelve times by the Assembly.52

Even in the horribly divided atmosphere, somehow President Cherry won an
appropriation of $250,000 for capital construction. “I was in the most intense fight I
have ever entered in all of my life on last Thursday,” he related. “I have won not only
for myself, but for every other Teachers College in Kentucky.”53 Because of the
volatile political scene that was exacerbated by the onset of the Depression, Cherry
realized all the more the necessity of the four teachers colleges and the University of
Kentucky “to work as a unit and not be classified with any faction” in order to
preserve the advancement of higher education.54 When learning of a $50,000 budget
cut from a decrease in estate tax revenue, Cherry maintained a pragmatic optimism
of the situation: “It is going to require retrenchment and economy, but I really think
it will work out all right, especially if a few millionaires will die during the next few
years.”55

As uncertain as politics and the economy were at the start of 1930, nothing
could diminish the continuing optimism and growth happening at Western Teachers

52 Blakey, 17; Klotter, 290-92.
53 At this point, the four teachers colleges in the Commonwealth included Western
Kentucky State Teachers College, Eastern Kentucky State Teachers College, Murray
State Teachers College, and Morehead State Teachers College.
54 H.H. Cherry, letter to Bess Cherry, February 30, 1930, UA3/1/7, Cherry Personal
Papers, Box 1, Folder 1; H.H. Cherry, letter to George Cherry, March 31, 1930,
UA3/1/7, Cherry Personal Papers, Box 1, Folder 16.
55 H.H. Cherry, letter to George Cherry, March 31, 1930, UA3/1/7, Cherry Personal
Papers, Box 1, Folder 16.
College. Within a month of securing the generous appropriation, ground broke for the new Health Building next to the football field. Another work of architect Brinton Davis, the limestone building lined with an ornate terra cotta frieze would house a larger and more permanent home for the emerging athletics department, notably the basketball team coached by E.A. Diddle, whose legendary career would bloom in the next decade. Though Cherry himself was not an avid sports follower, he was nevertheless fully invested in the success of athletics as a key to achieving more national recognition for the school and stimulating the “Western Spirit.” The new court for the Hilltoppers was ready to be played on by the spring of 1931.56

Though the school’s increasing population merited the larger space of the Health Building for athletic events, special gatherings, and concerts, the college severely lacked adequate space for classes, so much so that some classrooms had to be partitioned in two to find places for professors and students to meet.57 Despite such cramped space, the relationships between the students and faculty stayed “friendly and informal” according to James Poteet of the History Department.58 Western’s expanding population and growing curriculum also began to attract students not intending to enter a teaching profession, with an Arts and Science baccalaureate degree begun in 1930.59

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56 Harrison, 73, 84; Kelly Thompson, interviewed by Carlton Jackson, October 26, 1976, WKU Oral History Committee, 27.
57 H.H. Cherry, letter to Bess Cherry, March 31, 1930, UA3/1/7, Cherry Personal Papers, Box 1, Folder 1.
59 Cornette, 185.
The need for a new classroom building was still put aside in favor of other developments. Funds for the Kentucky Building were still coming steadily, but Cherry attempted to receive another $50,000 state appropriation for the project, only to be denied. Since the funds received from the campaign still looked promising, ground broke for the Kentucky Building in August 1930, and the bidding process began. Several regional construction companies also gave their own donations to the building fund. Over the 1930-31 school year, the exterior brick and stone quickly rose on the western edge of the campus (Figure 9).  

![Figure 9: Kentucky Building Under Construction. Source: Franklin Studio, “Kentucky Building,” UA1C11.29.594, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky.](image)

Throughout the Depression’s onset, Cherry’s larger-than-life image continued to swell among his cohorts. The successes he continued to achieve despite an uncertain time caused his name to achieve the status of sainthood. Meeting at the luxurious Seelbach Hotel in downtown Louisville, the Board of Regents in May 1930 unanimously voted to consecrate Cherry’s birthday, November 16, as Founder’s Day,

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60 Harrison, 77-78.
hallowing the “Founder of the School and the Father of Teachers Colleges in Kentucky,” recommending that a holiday be celebrated annually by the college as “Cherry Day.”61 Though he was present at that particular meeting, Cherry was not aware of another development to enshrine his name into legend. Without his knowledge, a committee led by Biology department head J.R. Whitmer and consisting of other faculty and administrators had covertly begun planning the creation of a memorial statue in his likeness. By 1930, Whitmer had made contact with Lorado Taft, a nationally famous sculptor in Chicago, who agreed to create a live sculpture of Western’s president for a discounted price of $10,000. Whitmer at first hesitated to approach Cherry directly on the matter since he was “so absorbed in the campaign of the Kentucky Building.” The committee finally revealed their plans to Cherry sometime early 1931 when the time came for Cherry to visit Chicago to model in Taft’s studio. The proposed monument took Cherry aback. He did not want the statue initially, but his adamant supporters convinced him to allow it on the condition that it would not be installed until after his death. The committee began sending $100 monthly payments from their own pockets to Lorado Taft to create a bronze sculpture.62

The institution of “Cherry Day” and the unveiling of plans to erect a statue in his likeness, on top of his previous approbations over the last few decades, gave

61 Board of Regents Minutes, May 9, 1930 UA2/1, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky.
62 J.R. Whitmer, correspondence with Lorado Taft, Jan 16, 1929, December 10, 1930, February 28, 1931, UA1B3/5, Cherry Statue Committee Papers, Box 1, Folder 3; H.H. Cherry, letter to George Cherry, October 18, 1935, UA3/1/7, Cherry Personal Papers, Box 1, Folder 16.
semblance of a cult of personality particular to Western Kentucky State Teachers College. Though worshipped as a savior to the cause of education, the man was not immune to episodes of embarrassment that could have jeopardized his career and his school. In February 1931, Cherry was on a business trip in Louisville with director of the extension department W.M. Pearce when he crashed an automobile outside the Seelbach Hotel. As the car tried to drive away, the police arrested both men, and a bottle of whiskey was found in Cherry’s pocket. He was charged with drunk driving and Pearce with public drunkenness. Though Cherry’s good relationship with Louisville mayor William Harrison got both him and Pearce out of police custody, the issue for a court appearance created a media stir. The *Cincinnati Enquirer* said that Cherry was “on the verge of a nervous breakdown” and failed to appear in police court the following day. Cherry denied charges of intoxication and possession of whiskey in his pocket. The following week, their attorney appeared at a special session of court and paid three dollar fines for both men on amended charges of a traffic law violation and a “breach of peace.” The bottle of whiskey belonged to Pearce and was returned to him since it was bought, officially, for medicinal purposes.63

Even after escaping charges, the entire incident had caused quite a gossip all over the state. While a few editorials gave scornful reviews, many of Cherry’s loyal followers denied that such a great figure could have committed such a shameful

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Herman Donovan, the student to whom Cherry had given the first loan in 1907, now the President of Eastern Kentucky State Teachers College, wrote, “I feel that the press has been manifestly unfair to you... I hope that you will have the courage to ignore it and not let it affect you in any manner whatsoever.” Later writing to his brother George, H.H. Cherry reflected, “This experience has taught me the value of friendship as nothing else has.”

The incident was perhaps the closest Cherry ever came to destroying his otherwise highly revered name. It was also the closest time Cherry’s relationship with alcohol ever came to the public light. Though in public Cherry had been a temperance proponent, even preaching against the evils of alcohol in chapel speeches, what he did in private was a different matter. Cherry kept most of his private life away from public scrutiny, but some who knew him personally suggested that the famed educator may have had drinking problems in his later years. Kathryn Gilbert, a student at the Training School who knew the Cherry family personally through her friendship with Cherry’s son, Henry Hardin Jr., said that she remembered times when everyone had to stay away from Dr. Cherry when he had been drinking in the evenings.

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64 Harrison, 106; H.H. Cherry, letter to George Cherry, March 9, 1931, UA3/1/7, Cherry Personal Papers, Box 1, Folder 16.
65 H.H. Cherry, letter to H.L. Harman, June 2, 1910, Cherry Speeches, Box 1, Folder 6; Kathryn Gilbert, interview by Glenda White, September 26, 2015.
Regardless of any defamation attempt or vice, none of this deterred the continuing appeal Western’s president had with his many followers. The school was approaching its 25th anniversary as a state institution in 1931, and Cherry had been the greatest constant in all of that time. The plans to erect a Cherry statue became more concrete once Cherry made his first visit to Lorado Taft’s Chicago studio in May to model for the sculpture. In June, the Board of Regents decided to set aside $30,000 of the budget to build the president a campus home designed by Brinton Davis (Figure 10). Cherry acquiesced to the decision, stating that the home would best serve the needs of institution by providing a larger gathering place to receive students and other visitors. The President’s home was completed by the end of that year, built on the western side of the hill with a prominent view of the Kentucky building still under construction for Cherry to gaze upon. As further evidence of Cherry’s personal attachment to the Kentucky Building, J.R. Whitmer’s correspondence with Lorado Taft concerning the bronze Cherry sculpture indicated
plans to locate the statue between the President’s Home and the Kentucky Building.\textsuperscript{66}

In the public eye, the well-maintained and growing physical plant at Western Teachers College gave the appearance of prosperity even as the state and the country were descending into the worst economic depression in its history. Governor Sampson, following the precedent of President Hoover, was trying to deal with the rising unemployment and bank failures through committees to do surveys and recommend solutions at the local levels. Some industries were affected worse than others. To the east in Appalachia, the plight of the coal miners in Harlan County led to bloodshed. As Governor Sampson ordered the Kentucky National Guard in spring 1931 to put a violent end to a miner’s union rebellion (supposedly filled with Communist radicals) in an episode known as “Bloody Harlan,” the people in Bowling Green were meanwhile busy preparing for an elaborate spectacle showcasing Kentucky heritage. Called the “Pageant of Progress,” this magnificent performance of over 2,000 participants took place in Western’s colonnade football stadium that June as a means to lift people’s spirits and maintain a sense of pride. “I have really never seen College Heights in a better condition than it is today,” remarked Henry Hardin Cherry about the event.\textsuperscript{67}

With no inclination to cutting back in fear of a downward economic spiral, Cherry consistently pursued expansion of Western’s programs. Against the advice of

\textsuperscript{66} J.R. Whitmer, letter to Lorado Taft, May 1 and December 24, 1931, UA1B3/5, Cherry Statue Committee Papers, Box 1, Folder 3; Board of Regents Minutes, June 3, 1931, UA2/1, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky; Harrison, 73.

\textsuperscript{67} Blakey, 14, 17; H.H. Cherry, letter to George Cherry, June 17, 1931.
others, including President Herman Donovan of Eastern Kentucky State Teachers College, Cherry determined Western was ready to add a graduate program in education administration. He pushed this agenda despite great opposition from the state and, in particular, the University of Kentucky, which at that time was the only public university in Kentucky allowed to grant graduate degrees. The Board of Regents agreed to institute the graduate program in April 1931, but it soon acknowledged that much more money would be required for materials like books. Plus, there was the problem of not enough teachers being qualified to teach at the graduate level and salaries being too low. Many of Cherry’s peers might have realized such a program was an unnecessary added expense considering other gaping needs, such as the lack of classroom space and educational equipment, but if any of those concerns reached Cherry’s ears, there was no backing away from his dreams to set Western Teachers College above the other institutions in the state. Without any endorsement to the program, sixty-one students registered for the first graduate summer term in 1931.

As the fall term of 1931 began, the “Western Spirit” was still high even as the Depression’s effects were becoming more manifest. The school’s celebration of its 25th anniversary that Homecoming was held with great ceremony in the gym of the new Health Building and brought into town hundreds of visitors from across the nation. Bowling Green mayor John Rodes celebrated Western’s advancement of

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68 Harrison, 90-91; Board of Regents Minutes, April 16, 1931 and June 3, 1931, UA2/1, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky; Teachers College Heights, Vol. XII, No. 6 (July 1931), 2.
69 While the graduate program was not endorsed in 1931, it was endorsed two years later in 1933 by Griffenhagen and Associates. Harrison, 91.
education and the state and focused on the symbolism of the Hill, comparing College Heights to the Athenian Parthenon. Hallowing Western’s past growth likely made people forget the gripping economic realities of the day, but both students and administration were starting to feel a downward turn. The shimmery 25th anniversary edition of the Teachers College Heights publication, oddly enough, hardly mentioned any indication of hard times. Instead, it revealed master plans for extended campus growth south of the Hill as well as a proposed Memorial Tower at the Hill’s apex. A subsequent edition of the Teachers College Heights, however, acknowledged that the College Heights Foundation’s funds were nearly exhausted on the Kentucky Building and called for people to donate. By the time the Cherry family had moved into the new President’s home around Christmas of 1931, H.H. Cherry started acknowledging how serious the economic trials were becoming, though publicly, he presented an image of stability to the community in the image of him, his wife, and the family dog, included in the Christmas edition of the Teachers College Heights (Figure 11).

70 Wilson, A Factbook of Western Kentucky University, 157-158.
71 Teachers College Heights, Vol. XIII, Nos. 1 and 3 (November 1931 and January 1932); H.H. Cherry, letter to George Cherry, December 24, 1931, UA3/1/7, Cherry Personal Papers, Box 1, Folder 16. It is also worth mentioning that the Cherry family had an African American housekeeper named “Lee.” Cherry’s thoughts on race are revealing in his comment, “Lee has his faults but he has some unusually good traits even if he is a colored brother.” H.H. Cherry, letter to Bess Cherry, February 9, 1934, UA3/1/7, Cherry Personal Papers, Box 1, Folder 1.
The peak of Western’s receipts was in the 1930-31 fiscal year at $916,924.59. After that, the income dropped over $200,000 in 1931-32 and lost another $225,000 the next year. In 1932, the budget for salaries was cut by over $100,000. James Cornette of the English faculty suggested that the rise in student fees “partially offset” the decrease in state appropriations. Incidental expenses per semester went up from $6 to $10 in 1932. Though this increase does not seem significant in today’s terms, it seriously affected Kentucky students who were scraping every dime and nickel to afford staying in school. Many students sought employment at the school, with the most plentiful jobs found at the dining hall in Potter Hall’s basement, and worked anywhere between 21 to 35 hours a week. But with a quickly decreasing budget, there simply was not enough money to provide jobs for every student who needed money. Not surprisingly, total enrollment dropped by over 700 students between 1930 and 1932. Some of these attritions were caused by

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72 Budget reports, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 2, Folder 27, Special Correspondence; Harrison, 70; Cornette, 164.
education students who could only afford to take classes half of the year then quit to teach elementary the remaining half.\textsuperscript{73} The salary cuts inevitably caused a few professors to leave Western, but many of those loyal to the college stayed and kept a positive spirit. In the words of Sybil Stonecipher of the Foreign Languages Department, “If you just had enough to live on for the month, that was alright.”\textsuperscript{74}

The grim economic realities were fully noticeable by 1932. Herbert Hoover was entering the last year of his presidential term, while Kentucky had ousted its Republican Governor Flem Sampson with Democrat Ruby Laffoon from Madisonville in the December 1931 gubernatorial race. Soon after Laffoon’s election, Congress created the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC) in January 1932, a federal agency providing loans to state and local governments to then lend to banks, businesses, and other corporations. The RFC was intended to boost confidence in the hopes of stopping local business bankruptcies, who could then be equipped to help individuals. Governor Laffoon, hoping to take advantage of the new agency, told the RFC director he wanted to apply for $15 million worth of loans. The quickness and the size of Laffoon’s financial request created controversy with both Washington officials and the state of Kentucky. For one, some believed Laffoon was asking for too much federal money, and that he needed to have more faith in state agencies to provide relief. Others saw Laffoon handling loan money with his own political agenda to pay off state debt instead of distributing it for the good of all.

\textsuperscript{73} Harrison, 97; Records of the Bursar and Reports of the President, cited in Table 25, Cornette, 190; Walter Nalbach, interviewed by Lowell Harrison, December 7, 1976, WKU Oral History Committee, 26.

\textsuperscript{74} Harrison, 95; Sybil Stonecipher, interviewed by James Bennett, WKU Oral History Committee, 7.
Kentuckians. Though Laffoon tried to abate these charges, RFC officials often had a tepid relationship with the Kentucky governor. Still others, such as Bowling Green mayor John Rodes, received Laffoon and the RFC loans more positively, as it had helped provide employment to create many improvements to its city parks.75

Despite Mayor John Rodes’ optimistic view of how Bowling Green was coping through the worst year of the Depression yet, Governor Laffoon’s decisions about where the state needed to cut back on money did not sit well with educators. In late March, the State Superintendent called for a joint meeting of the Boards for the Teachers Colleges and the University of Kentucky to discuss a bill to cut all their budgets by 10%. Certain members, including the presidents, demanded an audience in front of the governor. Once in Laffoon’s office, Herman Donovan of Eastern Teachers College was the first to protest against such an action at the meeting, forcing the governor to admit that other state agencies could not manage with a 10% budget loss. After Donovan finished, “President H.H. Cherry jumped to his feet quite as angry as I was and he took up where I left off. He said he would stump the state and denounce such an action if our budgets were cut.”76

Though the protests worked to prevent the ominous budget cuts at the state level for the time being, Henry Hardin Cherry quickly took action to create an emergency budget and presented it to the Board of Regents in April 1932. In his presentation of the new budget, Cherry called for a complete halt to capital construction, a halt to all new academic equipment except in emergency cases,

75 Blakey, 19-22.
76 Harrison, 94; Board of Regents Minutes, March 28, 1932, UA2/1, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky.
cutbacks to all utility usage, a 33% cutback in monthly operating expenses, an increase in student fees, and universal cutbacks in salaries, from the janitor to the president himself. Cherry reduced his salary from $6,000 to $5,000. Despite President Cherry’s statement that the general policy of his retrenchment program was “the maintaining of a strong faculty and a fundamental course of study,” general salary cuts were so severe that many part-time faculty members lost their positions, and regular full-time faculty had to be placed on a nine-month basis. Classes were consolidated under fewer professors, causing a change in the mode of instruction with less recitation and more lecture. After the Board further recommended that cutbacks be made to athletics, Cherry’s retrenchment plan was approved and implemented beginning in the 1932-33 academic year.77

Reflecting on both his experiences in Frankfort and creating a retrenchment plan with his brother George, Cherry claimed to be “one of the targets they shot at during the entire General Assembly…” Maintaining a sense of pride and dignity, he said, “We will go forward and carry on. The only benefit we will get out of it is a spiritual birth – a regeneration. We have made up our mind to save College Heights even if we lose ourselves.” At the same time, President Cherry oscillated between a positive attitude and a spirit of despair. “At no other time in all of my life have I known the economic condition to be so pressing and trying as now. It has really grown depressing and I sometimes wonder what will come out of all of it.”78

77 Board of Regents Minutes, April 14, 1932 and May 26, 1932, UA2/1, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky; Harrison, 94.
78 H.H. Cherry, letter to George Cherry, April 28, 1932, UA3/1/7, Cherry Personal Papers, Box 1, Folder 16.
In another letter to one of his professors, Cherry gave a despondent assessment about the budget crisis:

I find a most serious situation – the worst that has ever been experienced on College Heights. To say it is serious does not express the real situation. It is more than serious. I cannot tell at this writing just how I am going to be able to carry on the organization. It is going to require elimination, retrenchment and most rigid economy and every other effort that can be devised and created. There will be heavy cuts in salaries, possibly twenty-five or thirty teachers will have to be eliminated. I know this sounds distressing... I am determined to carry on College Heights at any cost and at any sacrifice.\(^79\)

George Cherry in Oregon wrote back to his older brother encouraging words:

I saw arise back of that face, after forty years of unremitting toil working while others slept, through the sheer force of your indomitable and unconquerable WILL, the magnificent institution of which the good citizens of Bowling Green and the people of the State of Kentucky may justly feel proud. You have surely fought a good fight and have kept the faith, and you have laid up for yourself, my good brother, whether you know it or not, a crown too priceless to be estimated in any but the spiritual realm.\(^80\)

The spiritual imagery portraying Cherry as a beaten martyr to the cause of education and democracy reinforced the public approbation he received.

Though cast as the immutable image of the college with a tenure longer than most in the academic world, Henry Hardin Cherry could not hide his own frailty as a man approaching his seventies. As someone who had already spent over half of his life transforming a small and nearly bankrupt private normal school into one of the largest leading teachers colleges in America, he vowed not to let his work crumble. It is unclear how much the stress caused by the Depression affected Cherry’s outward demeanor. Though always a commanding personality, his students did not

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\(^79\) H.H. Cherry, letter to H.F. McChesney, April 22, 1932, UA3/1/1, Cherry Papers, Box 19, Folder 27, General Correspondence.

\(^80\) George Cherry, letter to H.H. Cherry, May 30, 1932, UA3/1/7, Cherry Personal Papers, Box 1, Folder 16.
necessarily see him often outside the Administration Building. According to Walter Nalbach, a student who later became a faculty member during the Depression era, many students in the 1930s were afraid to approach Dr. Cherry unless they had something of substance to say. Those students who did come to his office often demanded a campus job, many of whose requests he was unable to meet. One major exception was student Kelly Thompson, “Dr. Cherry’s fair-haired boy,” hand-selected to be his office assistant and campus tour guide. Western’s president still maintained daily chapel, and though it was never mandatory, he was known to sometimes round people up who were caught socializing during chapel hour.\footnote{Walter Nalbach, interview by Lowell Harrison, December 7, 1976, WKU Oral History Committee, 22; Wendell Butler, interview by Carlton Jackson, November 22, 1977, WKU Oral History Committee, 4; Harrison, 97; Ward Sumpter, interview by James Bennett, December 15, 1976, WKU Oral History Committee, 13-14.} In his work papers, Cherry, who had fine penmanship, created a habit of doodling calligraphy, and his doodling seemed to have increased during his later years. This may have been one small way Cherry released some tension as he sat at his desk in the Van Meter administration building.\footnote{Marginalia, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, author’s observations of marginalia.}

When the entrenchment budget took full effect by the fall semester 1932, Cherry had accepted the trial of the Depression but was determined to meet it head on. When the building funds for the Kentucky Building depleted after not enough people could donate to the College Heights Foundation, Cherry was forced to put the project on an indefinite hiatus. The exterior shell that the Cherry family could look at from their campus home was complete, but the interior would have to wait. What little money was still coming to the Foundation was spent on continuing the student
loan program. The inability for many recipients to pay back loans on account of the Depression diminished the numbers and amounts of the loans.\(^{83}\)

Even with the increased enrollment fee for students, *The Lexington Herald* noted that the student cost at Western for the 1932-33 year was $161.02 compared to Eastern Teachers College’s $224.12 student cost. The large difference was attributed to “the fact that Eastern has been paying much higher salaries than has Western.” The report also mentioned H.H. Cherry’s salary as the “highest rate of anyone for teachers colleges,” and cited that “recommendations for changes in general and financial administration were made.”\(^{84}\) The *Teachers College Heights* publication produced by the college claimed that the semester costs would be the “cheapest” yet, but it recommended a change in spirit rather than a change in administration. The magazine, its front covered by the Liberty Bell, heralded Cherry’s idea for a “Ring the Bell” campaign for the school year that implored students to keep alive the “Western Spirit” by taking specific actions to ensure the important work of the college to the entire community. Among the calls to action included a pledge to be “personally responsible of one or more students at Western next year,” a pledge to come alongside the faculty “in cheerfully accepting heavy cuts in their salaries, greater responsibilities, more hours of work, and in joining in a resolve to carry on at any cost the work of the institution,” a pledge to seeing the

\(^{83}\) Harrison, 97-98; In the 1929-30 fiscal year, the Foundation awarded $23,368.00 to 614 students (approx. $38 per capita), while in the 1931-32 fiscal year, the Foundation awarded only $5,133.75 to 143 students (approx. $36 per capita). Loans reached an all-time low of $4,251.65 for 1933-34. R.H. Seward, Secretary-Treasurer’s Annual Reports of the Student Loan Fund and Kentucky Building, 1924-1937 Range, UA9/4, College Heights Foundation, Box 1.

Kentucky Building come to a realization, and a pledge to write to H.H. Cherry himself, “telling him you are going to be a real ‘bell ringer’, and sending him such information as you may have that will aid in the advancement of College Heights.”  

The incoming new students made a surprisingly large presence at the fall orientation, with many transfers from other colleges, possibly for financial reasons. Homecoming festivities for 1932, though still spirited, were much humbler than the previous year’s celebration of Western’s 25th anniversary. A “Depression Supper” was served in the Physical Education building for only eight cents a plate. The positive spirit that everyone was sharing the burdens together made an impression on President Cherry, who remarked after Homecoming that the “spirit of the student body is unusually fine and their attitude one of high interest and support.”

Cherry’s letter to his brother George that fall painted a balanced assessment of the state of things:

Concerning the depression, with but few exceptions, it has hit everyone... There has never been a more serious attitude among students and faculty on College heights than exists now. We are really doing better work than we have ever done. The cut in salaries and many other things is serving a real hardship upon many of us, but notwithstanding all of this, I really believe that a new life, a new vision and a higher objective will be the rewards that will come to us as a result of the depression. I have never known anything but war and difficulties since I was a child, and I am not objecting to a contest at this time. I really think that the depression with all of the hardships and suffering it has caused will in the end bring a blessing to humanity. At any rate, this is the optimistic way to look at it.

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85 Teachers College Heights, Vol. XIII, No. 5 (July 1932), 2, 12.
86 Teachers College Heights, Vol. XIII, No. 6 (November 1932), 7, 11; H.H. Cherry, letter to O.R. McGuire, November 14, 1932, UA3/1/1, Cherry Papers, Box 19, Folder 27, General Correspondence.
87 H.H. Cherry, letter to George Cherry, October 25, 1932, UA3/1/7, Cherry Personal Papers, Box 1, Folder 16.
By viewing the Depression as yet another challenge to his life mission, Cherry allowed the circumstances to relate back to his educational mantra of restoring balance to society by cleansing out the hoarders of material wealth and establishing a leadership of teachers who put “the spiritual above the material.”

If Cherry used his own executive charisma and the “Spirit of Western” as coping mechanisms for his community during the Depression, many more soon found a greater source for change. As banks and businesses continued to shut down across the nation, many Kentuckians from the anonymous unemployed worker to Governor Laffoon began finding inspiration in the governor of New York who was running against President Hoover on the Democratic ticket. At the 1932 Democratic National Convention, U.S. Senator Alben Barkley from western Kentucky delivered a keynote address in full support of Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s nomination for U.S. President. Kentucky became one of the 42 states that cast electoral votes for Roosevelt in the November elections, allowing him to handily defeat Herbert Hoover. Though the Depression was approaching its lowest point, many across America, including those at Western Kentucky State Teachers College, began to perceive a glimmer of hope for the future as the March 1933 inauguration approached.

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89 Blakey, 23-24.
CHAPTER 3
WESTERN’S NEW DEAL: IMPLEMENTING FEDERAL PROJECTS ON CAMPUS

Captain Brinton B. Davis of Louisville, the architect rightly nicknamed “the hill builder” for his design of a majority of campus buildings from the Kentucky Building and Van Meter Hall to the football stadium colonnade and the heating plant, was very optimistic coming into the year 1933. Though the budget cuts of last year had officially halted capital construction, he still regularly corresponded with Henry Hardin Cherry and hoped to continue future projects with him. Although recognizing that some kind of federal intervention was necessary if there was to be any further improvements to the college, Davis, like Cherry, believed that the individual spirit was just as important to the fight.

In my humble opinion we have reached that stage of the struggle where recovery requires that each and every one of us must roll up his sleeves, grit his teeth, and sail gaily into the tasks and the troubles of 1933...90

Up until Roosevelt’s inauguration, Davis figured that the college should seek appropriations for capital projects through the RFC but feared that type of funding would not be available long after the new government took office. Davis, like many Americans, likely could not anticipate what types of relief and recovery programs

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90 Brinton Davis, letter to H.H. Cherry, January 5, 1933, UA3/1/1, Cherry Papers, Box 20, Folder 15, General Correspondence.
Roosevelt’s proposed “New Deal” would bring. Davis also believed the next need was additional on-campus housing, but Cherry indicated in his response the need for a new recitation classroom building over the need for a new dormitory as “the next item of capital improvement.”\(^91\) Though a replacement for the old Potter College building had been a critical need for several years already, this seemed to be one of the first instances on Cherry’s part to commit to this idea as a higher priority, despite the distressing conditions of the Depression.

Three days before Franklin Roosevelt’s presidential inauguration, Ruby Laffoon declared a bank holiday in all Kentucky on March 1, following the lead of other states in stopping frantic bank runs and anticipating the changes that were to come with the new Roosevelt administration. Soon after Roosevelt was sworn into office, he issued Proclamation 2039, a nationwide bank holiday. The banks were to be slowly reopened once the new Congress could meet in special session, and the American people could develop renewed confidence in the banks. This special session of Congress, famously known as the “First 100 Days,” created many of the New Deal programs that would bring about unprecedented opportunities at Western Kentucky State Teachers College. One of the first acts of the new legislation was to create the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) in July 1933 in to safeguard people’s bank accounts against future financial collapses.\(^92\)

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\(^{91}\) Brinton Davis, letter to H.H. Cherry, March 8, 1933; H.H. Cherry, letter to Brinton Davis, March 9, 1933, UA3/1/1, Cherry Papers, Box 20, Folder 15, General Correspondence.

\(^{92}\) Blakey, 25-28.
A couple months prior, Roosevelt signed into legislation the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), out of which issued numerous programs directly benefitting the Western community. To avoid the notion that the federal government was creating handouts, many FERA agencies revolved around temporary employment on projects geared toward local and state infrastructural improvements that could utilize cheap, often unskilled labor. Within the next year, FERA’s subdivision, the Civil Works Administration (CWA), started creating opportunities for student employment at Western. Though ultimately short-lived, dissolving less than a year after its creation, the CWA helped 175 male students in the fall 1933 to stay enrolled in the college.\(^9^3\) FERA funds, however, continued to be used at Western until the agency’s dissolution in 1935, after which it was superseded by the Works Progress Administration.

The New Deal’s work relief programs did not enter Kentucky as smoothly as one might imagine. Harry Hopkins, the chief administrator of FERA in Washington, D.C., did not simply provide relief programs to any state or local official who asked. Acquiring programs for government employment was a highly competitive process, causing a “poker-playing” relationship among the governors in as Louisville Mayor Neville Miller described it. Ruby Laffoon was one such governor that had a troubled relationship with Hopkins and FERA. Hopkins threatened to withdraw federal aid if Kentucky did not do its share in state appropriations for the unemployment crisis. A disproportionate amount in the state treasury was still going to the highway

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\(^9^3\) H.H. Cherry, letter to Ida Hodges (CWA Director, Bowling Green office), April 4, 1934, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 1, Folder 118, Special Correspondence.
commission instead of relief efforts, and Laffoon protested that those types of budget changes could not be made until the following 1934 fiscal year. This did not suit Hopkins, and the situation became grimmer when FERA money temporarily stopped coming to Kentucky in August 1933. Desperate, Laffoon invited Harry Hopkins himself to speak directly to the Assembly in Frankfort on the importance of raising state funds to qualify for federal aid. As hundreds of angry, unemployed Kentuckians congregated in Frankfort in the following days demanding answers, Governor Laffoon recommended a sales tax to create state revenue for relief projects. This idea divided many in Frankfort, including Lieutenant Governor Albert B. Chandler, who opposed Laffoon. The legislation did not pass the sales tax proposal, but FERA money returned to Kentucky once many in Frankfort pledged to earmark a liquor tax revenue after Prohibition’s imminent repeal.94

Ruby Laffoon wired Hopkins and Roosevelt that November, declaring Kentucky essentially bankrupt. The state government’s inability to support itself, as well as the documentation by Hopkins’ field agents who reported false figures in the state emergency relief offices’ books, led to the nationalization of FERA programs in Kentucky. Hopkins appointed Thornton Wilcox as the new state director. Nevertheless, Washington still mandated Kentucky to do what it could to increase state allocations to relief efforts. When the ratification of the 21st Amendment in December 1933 made legal once again the sale and manufacture of alcoholic beverages, Kentucky’s government could once more tap into its no-longer-dormant distilling industries to raise revenue toward relief. Even this was not enough,

94 Blakey, 47-51.
however. By next June, a special session of the Assembly passed the sales tax the
governor had proposed for. Nevertheless, Governor Laffoon still had a contentious
relationship with FERA agents throughout the remainder of his term. From its start
in May 1933 to the end of 1935, FERA provided $35 million worth of relief funds,
while Kentucky state funds only provided $2.5 million.95

Though the debacles in the state legislatures made relief funds and projects
very sporadic, Henry Hardin Cherry remained determined to make the most
opportunity of whatever aid was available for advancing public education in
Kentucky. Though Cherry wished to avoid politics most of his life (apart from his
short-lived candidacies for governor in 1915 and 1919), his agenda to advocate
education as the key to restoring American patriotism and democracy could not
have been clearer in his powerful address to the Kentucky Education Association
(KEA), of which he had once been president. On April 21, 1933, Cherry presented a
rousing speech of Shakespearean proportions in front of the educational leaders of
the state in the Crystal Ballroom of the Brown Hotel in Louisville. His closing
paragraph hit this imagery hard:

The depression is challenging our souls and testing our patriotism. It is
calling upon us to adjust our lives and efforts to the conditions that exist and
to have a sympathetic and constructive interest in every worthy program
designed to solve the economic crisis that confronts us. It is our duty to have
a discriminating vision of the needs and inherent rights of the child and, at
the same time, to interpret our deeds, and even our salaries, in the terms of
the present economic crisis. It is our duty to rededicate our lives to the noble
cause we represent and to make any sacrifice necessary to avoid a
moratorium on education, which in the language of another would mean ‘a
moratorium on civilization.’ It is our duty to mobilize every human energy
behind the school – to be of one heart, one mind, one body, creating a
necessary and militant morale. It is our duty to recognize any wrongs that

95 Blakey, 53.
may exist in the system of education, and to correct them; not to apologize for what we have done, but to confront the foes of the school with a child, a schoolhouse, a flag. It is our duty to fight, not to run; to advance, not to retreat.\(^{96}\)

Whether these words created actual change in the state government’s attitude or if it was just a powerfully composed pep talk to lift the spirits of educators is up for interpretation. Regardless, economic conditions for Western’s budget were abysmal. The day before Cherry gave that speech, he conferred with the Board of Regents about his decision to let go part-time faculty and reduce the term lengths for the summer school sessions. Economic concerns were so bad throughout 1933 that the Board was concerned with excess water usage and having money to pay the city of Bowling Green for the paving of roads next to campus. They even postponed a decision on whether or not Western’s campus could afford a new sewer system that the city was implementing. L.T. Smith, the head of the Industrial Arts Department, expressed concerns over the negligence of maintenance issues because of the Depression, most notably the hazardous and heavily trafficked porch behind Recitation Hall that needed to be repaired or better yet, taken down.\(^{97}\) Even with these severe concerns, the Board was fully committed to taking advantage of federal money through the New Deal.

The most immediate solutions for many of the campus maintenance issues came through the Civil Works Administration. By the end of 1933, the Board had applied for fourteen projects ranging from new seats for the football stadium,

\(^{96}\) H.H. Cherry, address at Kentucky Education Association general session, April 21, 1933, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 1, Folder 112, Special Correspondence.

\(^{97}\) Board of Regents Minutes, April 20, May 31, July 19, Oct 7, 1933, UA2/1, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky.
various interior building repairs, beautification of the grounds, and constructing roads and stone walls around campus. The concern over the costs of connecting campus to the new city sewer system was apparently resolved as one of the campus projects was excavating ditches for this very purpose. It was only a short-term fix, however, as the CWA in Kentucky ceased after that school year, partly due to conflict over the balance of state and federal funding.

In contrast to the short-term projects in the CWA and FERA, the college’s intent to take advantage of the New Deal for longer-term improvement reflected in the near immediate response to an opportunity provided through the Public Works Administration (PWA). The Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, as it was first called when created by Congress in June 1933 under the National Industrial Recovery Act, received much less political attention compared to FERA and sought stimulation to the economy through large construction projects rather than short-term relief works. Its federal director, Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, was a conservatively-minded man who wished to avoid any allegation of wasteful spending or corruption, and the projects under his administration tended to be fewer and more slowly planned out compared to Harry Hopkins’ efforts in FERA and its successor agency the Works Progress Administration. Some of the most nationally known projects to emerge from Harold Ickes’ Public Works

98 Board of Regents Minutes, December 12, 1933, UA2/1, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky; Board of Regents Minutes, February 1, 1934, UA2/1, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky; CWA Correspondence, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 1, Folder 118, Special Correspondence; Thornton Wilcox (FERA State Director), telegram to all Kentucky college presidents, February 16, 1934, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 3, Folder 6, Special Correspondence.
Administration included the Grand Coulee Dam, the Lincoln Tunnel, the highway connecting the Florida Keys, among several others.\footnote{Blakey, 72-74.}

In Bowling Green, Cherry received a government pamphlet detailing the process for submitting an application for a PWA project.\footnote{Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, Circular No. 2, “Information Required with Applications for Loans to States Counties, Municipalities, and Other Public Bodies,” August 1, 1933, in UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 1, Folder 127, Special Correspondence.} With no application fee, there was nothing to lose and everything to gain. Brinton Davis had also received word of the opportunities for building projects through the PWA and wrote Cherry in September that it was “a patriotic duty to build [new school buildings] now”:

The younger generations have suffered much... We owe them a great debt, the repayment of which will enable them to obtain an education which in turn will make them useful and independent citizens of the future.\footnote{Brinton Davis, letter to H.H. Cherry, September 18, 1933, UA3/1/1, Cherry Papers, Box 20, Folder 15, General Correspondence.}

Cherry recognized an opportunity not only to create a new classroom building but complete the Kentucky Building as well. With the Kentucky Building, Cherry implored that construction should resume at once “to relieve the congested conditions existing in the college.” In order to take the most advantage of New Deal money, the board for the College Heights Foundation agreed to turn over construction funding to Western’s Board of Regents. During the fall semester, the Board of Regents met several times to arrange for submitting an application to the PWA as soon as possible. By October, the application was already in the works. Henry Hardin Cherry and attorney and former mayor John B. Rodes were selected
as the chief arbiters for the application, with Brinton Davis contracted as the chief consulting architect and engineer.\textsuperscript{102}

There was no doubt that the need for a new classroom and laboratory building was a central selling point in this application. Recitation Hall was “totally inadequate in every respect. A commodious, fire-proof, modern building is needed to take its place.” As standard with most applications for projects of this nature, the request called for 30\% of the PWA funds to be received as a grant for construction and labor costs, with the remaining money to be loaned through the purchase of bonds, at which the building would be the property of the federal government until the loan was paid off over a period of 30 years at a 4\% interest rate. Excluding the 30\% grant, the total requested loan amount of $725,000 included the estimated costs for the new classroom building in addition to two small student apartment buildings and an estimated $125,000 for completing the Kentucky Building. For the Kentucky Building, the application argued the value in this building’s cultural advancement of the Commonwealth in light of its overall lag behind other states.\textsuperscript{103}

The application came together with meticulous care and attention to detail. Its purpose was very direct:

The college has no funds for the erection of these building either now or in any reasonable time in the future and is without borrowing capacity for such purposes and the institution considered as an educational institution will be seriously crippled in its efforts for the education of western Kentucky from

\textsuperscript{102} Board of Regents Minutes, October 24, 1933, UA2/1, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky; Resolution document, October 26, 1933, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 2, Folder 27, Special Correspondence; Undated petition, 1933, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 1, Folder 127, Special Correspondence.

\textsuperscript{103} PWA Application Draft materials, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 1, Folder 127, Special Correspondence.
which most of its student body is drawn, unless the projects contemplated herein assume form and the loan applied for is granted for that purpose.\textsuperscript{104}

As further argument for the college’s financial prudence, the application stated plans to reuse $9,566.60 worth of materials salvaged from the existing Recitation Hall to save money. Though great care was given to ensure the application would be as thorough and convincing as possible to Washington agents, nothing could diminish the urgency of submitting it. The application had been mostly completed and filed by the end of October, but by November 9, Brinton Davis was still waiting for Cherry to deliver him information so that he could draw up preliminary blueprints for the proposed classroom building. Davis prodded Cherry to make haste as “a flood of applications are being received by the Department in Washington and that applications will be acted upon in the order received.” The completed application for all construction projects was submitted in quadruplicate to the state PWA office in Louisville on November 30, 1933, to be processed and forwarded to Washington.\textsuperscript{105}

Cherry, Rodes, and the other major contributors to the application had reason to be optimistic about their proposals being approved. For one, it was one of the first PWA applications filed in the state of Kentucky. Additionally, George Meuth, the City Attorney for Bowling Green, Western alumnus, and a supporter of H.H. Cherry, had resigned his office that October to work for the federal PWA office as an

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.; Brinton Davis, letter to H.H. Cherry, November 9, 1933, UA3/1/1, Cherry Papers, Box 20, Folder 15, General Correspondence.
attorney, giving Bowling Green a personal advocate working in D.C. The success of having submitted an application was a welcomed hope to counterbalance the ongoing turmoil in Frankfort over trying to raise state funding for relief efforts. Though the official repeal of Prohibition that December was a Christmas gift to many worn souls and promised renewed tax revenue for Kentucky, the budget crisis in the General Assembly would continue to cause delays for the New Deal programs leading into the 1934 year.

The harsh winter of 1933-34 was one of waiting and anticipation. While the divided Kentucky assembly argued over items like the sales tax, Cherry and L.T. Smith (Figure 12), director of the CWA programs on campus, traveled to Louisville to negotiate opportunities for student employment with state administrator Thornton Wilcox. Meanwhile John Rodes was also making trips to Louisville to the PWA offices, only to be frustrated to find out that Western’s application was still sitting in the Louisville office, awaiting for a bill to be passed in Frankfort that would legalize the seeking of federal money for PWA construction projects. The Kentucky legislature did not pass the bill into law until March 25, 1934. Outside of New Deal projects, Cherry was also making regular trips to the battlefield in Frankfort for meetings with Governor Laffoon and to do everything he could to prevent further

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106 Congressman Glover Cary, letter to H.H. Cherry, October 8, 1935, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 2, Folder 28, Special Correspondence; PWA Application materials, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 1, Folder 127, Special Correspondence.
107 John Rodes, letter to R.V.L. Wright (State Engineer FEA of Public Works), January 10, 1934, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 2, Folder 27, Special Correspondence; H.H. Cherry, letter to Bess Cherry (wife), February 9, 1934, UA3/1/7, Cherry Personal Papers, Box 1, Folder 1; Board of Regents Minutes, April 6, 1934, UA2/1, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky.
cuts to education in Kentucky. Henry Hardin told his wife Bess how the situation in the state government were continually sour. “The situation is really quite serious. Many laws have already been passed calling for a rigid re-organization of every institution and department of the State.” If the stress of his job was not bad enough, Cherry was simultaneously dealing with unfortunate personal circumstances. February brought a severe winter storm that brought heavy sleet and single digit temperatures that made it “almost impossible to walk on the Hill.” The same winter, the near 70-year-old man was incapacitated when he broke his toe on a hammer, causing him great physical and emotional pain when he was unable to attend his daughter Elizabeth’s wedding. The next week, his teenage son Henry Hardin Jr. contracted scarlet fever, albeit he eventually overcame the illness.108

Though the college was in a dependent state in regards to awaiting news from the PWA, it still had enough power to exact its local control over more vulnerable populations during the Depression. Such was the case in Jonesville, an African-American neighborhood to the southwest of campus. When Western

108 H.H. Cherry, letters to Bess Cherry, February 27, March 6, March 14, 1934, UA3/1/7, Cherry Personal Papers, Box 1, Folder 1.
decided to construct a road across nearby railroad tracks, the Board of Regents forced Jonesville’s Mt. Zion A.M.E. Church in “an oral agreement” to tear down their church, relocate, and build a new church, only being provided $300 compensation in cash.\textsuperscript{109}

Meanwhile, other New Deal programs continued an impact on Western’s campus. The CWA projects had already been approved and begun maintenance work, though most of the types of labor favored male students over female. Though the CWA abruptly ended after the spring 1934 semester, the college also began taking a proactive role in the Civilian Conservation Corps, established the year prior. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was created with the dual purpose of providing employment for young men and to accelerate conservation efforts through the establishment of national parks. In Kentucky, the most notable product of the CCC was the establishment of Mammoth Cave as a national park, with four CCC camps within the extensive park zone located about 30 miles north of Bowling Green.\textsuperscript{110} The CCC also took an active role in providing educational opportunities for the young men who lived at the work camps. Colleges and universities located nearby could send instructors to teach courses in the evenings for men who wished to earn a degree. Western being a Teachers College, and its proximity to CCC camps in its region, allowed it to be a perfect resource. When the opportunity presented itself, Cherry began inviting recent Western graduates to partake in the educational programs. In March 1934, he invited several education supervisors from various

\textsuperscript{109} Board of Regents Minutes, December 20, 1933, UA2/1, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky.
\textsuperscript{110} Blakey, 84.
military bases including Ft. Knox for a meeting at College Heights “to discuss the problems connected with the work in these camps and arrange some method of working out a program.” He also requested their presence at chapel – a customary request for campus guests during Cherry’s presidency. Cherry began correspondence with federal CCC Director Robert Fechner by 1935, when students were already participating in the camps. In the summer of 1935, Fechner had authorized enrollment of “no more than 1400” Kentucky college students in the CCC camps. Cherry was enthusiastic about such participation, so long as it did not take away students from school.111

The campus itself still maintained an atmosphere of confident growth. The spring of 1934 saw the first “Senior Day” recruitment event, where thousands of high school students across many Kentucky counties assembled in the gym to be introduced to Western. Enrollment figures grew more consistently. Student organizations were increasing, and student demographics were broadening. Close to 200 students were in non-teaching programs in the fall of 1934, and the male-female ratio became nearly balanced – a rarity for most teachers colleges.112 As an increase in student clubs promoted more social opportunities that students used to cope with the Depression, the dynamics of the student body were changing in such a way outside the comfort level of Western’s aging patriarch. Gordon Wilson, the head

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111 H.H. Cherry, correspondence with Nat T. Frame (Educational Supervisor CCC, Fort Hayes, Columbus, OH), March 5 and 10, 1934; H.H. Cherry, correspondence with Robert Fechner (Federal CCC Director), May 29 and June 1, 1935, UA3/1/1, Cherry Papers, Box 24, folder marked “Civilian Conservation Corps”, General Correspondence.

112 Harrison, 97-99.
of the English Department and an alumnus from the Normal School years, commented that in the early years, a majority of students came from lower classes and little exposure to education and the outside world, and thus it was easy for Cherry to have such a powerful impression. Though Cherry still retained his charisma in the latter part of his presidency, the students were generally younger, more socially established and involved in their own activities, and responded less to old traditions like the annual campus work day. “The one great tragedy in President Cherry’s career,” Wilson said, “as far as some of us faithful ones could see, was that the school was outgrowing his range of thinking.”

The hard times of the Depression were not only changing the makeup of Western’s student body but also the balance of political power. Since the foundation of Western as a state institution in 1906, Cherry managed to keep a relative autonomy regarding the college’s curriculum development and influence in the public school system through the Normal Executive Council. When the General Assembly in 1934 created the Council on Public Higher Education, University of Kentucky President Frank McVey took a more prominent political role, clashing with Cherry over the issue of the graduate program at Western. The state government and the Council progressively favored the idea of allocating limited education funds to programs at University of Kentucky, much to Cherry’s dismay. Western still

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113 Harrison, 80-81.
promoted its graduate school, but its future continuation was in greater jeopardy
with the creation of this Council.\(^{114}\)

Brighter news came that summer when the Board of Regents announced a
purchase of a private farm south of campus that the school was already using on a
lease contract. The stringent budget changes of the previous two years, including
the letting go of part-time faculty from the last summer, allowed a $40,000 surplus
in credit at the end of the 1933-34 fiscal year that was used to purchase the farm
property at $33,529 for the use of the Agriculture Department and as a producer for
the on-campus dining facilities. When other last minute expenses were filed, the
leftover “cash on hand” for the 1934-35 fiscal year was no more than six cents!
Despite this alarming figure, the Board also decided for next year to lower tuition
rates for the Training School, construct a two-room model schoolhouse for $10,000,
construct nine asphalt tennis courts with fences for $5,520, replace the library roof
for $1,200, purchase china and glassware for the President’s home for $250, order a
$100 radio for the student center in the Cedar House, among other campus
improvement projects adding to a total of $25,652.37. No indication was given for
increasing salaries, though Cherry did hire new faculty members for the fall as well
as introduce the first retirement option for faculty members over 70.\(^{115}\)

The labor costs for some of the campus projects, notably the tennis courts on
the south part of campus, were to be provided through FERA and delegated by L.T.

\(^{114}\) Acts of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Kentucky, 1934, Chapter
65 (Frankfort: The State Journal Company, 1934), 317; Harrison, 91-92; Board of
Regents Minutes, July 14, 1934 UA2/1, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky.
\(^{115}\) Harrison, 96; Board of Regents Minutes, June 23, July 14, November 2, 1934,
UA2/1, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky.
Smith. FERA-sponsored projects employed 157 students needing relief during that semester, a slight decline from the 175 students the previous winter. Even this number was apparently high for certain FERA officials, who in correspondence with President Cherry suggested there might have been concern about exploiting cheap labor by spreading FERA money too thin with too many student workers. Cherry assured the FERA agents that Western’s projects were “in line with the policies and the spirit of the Relief Administration...” The planting of trees, repairing of walks and streets, replacement of sod, and the general improvement of the natural and of the physical equipment of the college, will prove of genuine benefit in the future.” If anything, there was more probability of the student employment opportunities showing favoritism to politically influential families, and Cherry and L.T. Smith handpicked which students to provide employment to.116

All the while, no update had been given regarding the status of the PWA application for the classroom building, the Kentucky Building, and the two student dormitories. Throughout the summer, both Cherry and attorney John Rodes had taken personal trips to Washington to find any news, but apparently their inquiries reached deaf ears. They were not the only ones getting impatient. The architect Brinton Davis was losing his patience because the Board of Regents had yet to pay him for his work on the plans and specifications for the classroom building. An October 25, 1934 telegram to Cherry stated, “I am certainly entitled to prompt

116 Board of Regents Minutes, November 2, 1934, UA2/1, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky.; H.H. Cherry, letter to Dr. Alderman (FERA Agent), October 17, 1934, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 1, Folder 128, Special Correspondence; Harrison, 98.
action and a square deal as promised in your letter on July 25, 1934.” Cherry repeatedly neglected to respond to Davis’ demands, and in December the situation reached a breaking point. Davis filed a lawsuit against Western Kentucky State Teachers College to pay him, even though the defendants insisted that his payment was “contingent on a loan being made by the United States Government for the completion of the improvements which his proposed plans covered.”\textsuperscript{117} Presumably, the situation abated, as no further indication of Davis carrying out his lawsuit was found.

Despite the grant and loan application still hanging in the doldrums of the federal PWA offices, Cherry was determined to have the Kentucky Building completed and opened by Homecoming 1936, even if that meant taking matter into his own hands. It seemed that the Kentucky Building was the highest construction priority on Cherry’s agenda, and he made plans at the beginning of 1935 to reopen the campaign for donations to the College Heights Foundation. Evidently there was also an offer through FERA to fund employment of “skilled and unskilled labor in sufficient amount” for completing the Kentucky Building, the the CHF Board resolved to accept the offer. The Board decided to formally withdraw the $125,000 loan request from the PWA for completing the Kentucky Building and refine the application solely for the proposed classroom building to occupy the site of the existing Recitation Hall. The Board also debated whether to renew its relationship

\textsuperscript{117} Brinton Davis, telegram to H.H. Cherry, October 25, 1934, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 3, Folder 6, Special Correspondence; Board of Regents Minutes, December 14, 1934 and January 1, 1935, UA2/1, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky.
with Brinton Davis due to the lawsuit fiasco from the past winter or hire a new architect. They decided to stay with Davis after Cherry had a conversation with him over the specifics of a renewed contract that promised him 3.5% payment of the construction cost for his services once a loan had been secured and a final aggregate payment of 6% of the construction costs once the project came to fruition. Attorneys John Rodes and Rodes Myers renewed their contracts for the charge of presenting and advocating the loan to the PWA in Washington, D.C. with the college covering travel expenses.\textsuperscript{118}

With the Kentucky Building advancing toward completion, and the PWA loan for the new classroom building refined and solidified, the future looked bright for Western in the summer of 1935. The Depression had created immense obstacles for the teachers college’s advancement, but the tenacious “Western Spirit” and the opportunities provided through the New Deal relief and recovery programs were setting the college in a modern direction. That same summer, the entry into modernity was further enhanced when the Board approved the partnership of Western with WHAS radio station in Louisville to produce a weekly 30-minute program. A program of this nature allowed for the college to expand its reach in the Commonwealth and gave a first-time opportunity for people to hear chapel meetings and the voice of Western’s president over the air. Cherry approached Earl Moore of the English Department and asked him to direct (or, as customary with Cherry’s relationship with faculty, simply told him he was going to direct) the radio

\textsuperscript{118} Board of Regents Minutes, January 1, May 29, June 18, 1935, UA2/1, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky.
programs, though he had no prior experience with radio. Western was proud to announce its entry to the modern media world when the “College Heights” alma mater song first played over the radio October 15, 1935 (Figure 13).\footnote{Earl Moore Personal Papers, Box 1, Folder 1; Earl Moore, interview by James Bennett, September 28, 1977, WKU Oral History Committee.}

![Figure 13: Earl Moore and H.H. Cherry shake hands at a chapel broadcast. Source: Franklin Studio, "WKU Radio Broadcast," UA1C11.29.338, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky.](image)

In the national arena, the summer of 1935 also brought about changes in the federal administration of the New Deal. Though overwhelmingly popular in the minds of countless Americans, Roosevelt’s executive dominance had created opponents, particularly in the Supreme Court. The judicial branch had declared the National Recovery Administration unconstitutional, though this did not undo the PWA, which by then had become a separate branch. Even an attempted reversal of the New Deal by the Supreme Court did not stop a wave of new congressional acts, sometimes referred to as the “Second New Deal.” Included were the National Labor
Relations Act, establishing the rights for private sector workers to form unions that had particular effect on Kentucky’s coal mining industries, and the Social Security Act, providing the groundwork of welfare for the disabled and elderly. Slightly earlier that year, Roosevelt issued an executive order creating the Works Progress Administration (WPA) for the purpose of providing work opportunities for unskilled labor in construction projects as well as employment in carrying out projects of cultural enhancement and preservation. The largest and most expensive of the relief programs of the New Deal, the WPA largely supplanted the work of FERA, which phased out by the end of the year. Keeping continuity with FERA’s administration, Harry Hopkins became the head of the WPA and maintained a prominent role as one of President’s Roosevelt’s chief advisors for the next few years.  

In Kentucky, the WPA continued similar types of work relief projects as had the CWA and FERA, but projects were broader in scope. Certain funds enabled the creation of heritage projects, such as the Kentucky State College’s interviewing of surviving former slaves, and copying Kentucky newspaper archives onto microfilm reels. The WPA brought more direct impacts to Western Kentucky State Teachers College’s campus. Roosevelt’s establishment of the National Youth Administration (NYA) in June 1935 as an autonomous sub-unit of the WPA intended to provide employment and vocational training for high school and college students as an incentive to keep students from dropping out of school. Compared to the more publicized Civilian Conservation Corps that drew young people away from cities and

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120 Blakey, 58, 155.
121 Blakey, 70.
schools, the NYA made full use of college campuses in placing students in apprentice-like roles under a staff or faculty member. In August 1935, NYA State Director Frank Peterson called together all the presidents of Kentucky colleges eligible for student aid to arrange implementation of the program. Within the first year, around 2,800 Kentucky students had qualified for part-time employment under NYA aid.\footnote{Blakey, 90-91; Frank Peterson, letter to H.H. Cherry, August 23, 1935, UA3/1/1, Cherry Papers, Box 24, Folder marked “National Youth Administration,” General Correspondence.}

Many of the NYA work programs on Western’s campus were divided by gender. Male students were often involved in woodworking or auto mechanic shops under the supervision of persons like L.T. Smith or E.A. Diddle, while female students often worked as library assistants with librarian Margie Helm or in sewing or typing. Most NYA students could work for a maximum of fifteen dollars a month and had to be enrolled in at least three quarters of a normal class load and in good academic standing. Another place at Western that utilized NYA student employees was in the Office of the President, where they often worked under Mattie McLean, secretary to President Cherry as well as the Board of Regents. The student labor made possible through the NYA greatly aided the livelihood and productivity of the teachers college. Cherry later remarked to State Director Frank Peterson, “This institution has been enabled to accomplish a large amount of work through this group which could not have been accomplished in any other way because of insufficient funds with which to employ these workers.” Even Miss Mattie McLean lamented once on how badly the student work was missed at the start of one
holiday break. By the spring semester 1936, the NYA had provided student employment to around 300 young men and women at Western in its first year on campus. Even so, limited funds meant many applications were denied.123

The onset of the WPA and the NYA on Western's campus happened in conjunction with a heated gubernatorial election that same year. Ruby Laffoon, unable to run for a consecutive term in accordance with the Kentucky constitution at the time, had already suffered much popularity loss with his overt partisanship that divided the Democratic party, making Lieutenant Governor Albert B. Chandler one of the leading opponents. Laffoon's near constant conflicts with both federal agents and the Kentucky general assembly led the aging governor to fatigue with his position, even spending time in Louisville's Waverly Hills sanatorium after the 1934 general session. If Kentucky was to progress, it needed stronger leadership. Laffoon wanted his successor to uphold the state's control over its own economy and did not want Lieutenant Governor Albert Chandler, who was more enthusiastic about federal programs in the state, to be on the Democratic ticket. Despite Laffoon's attempts to prevent Chandler's nomination, Chandler's political savvy and popular appeal won him the nomination in September 1935 after two primaries. The ensuing gubernatorial race between “Happy” Chandler, as he was nicknamed by his supporters, and the Republican nominee King Swope was an important one that

123 Blakey, 93; H.H. Cherry, correspondence with Frank Peterson, April 2 and 7, 1936, UA3/1/1, Cherry Papers, Box 24, Folder marked “National Youth Administration,” General Correspondence; Mattie McLean, letter to H.H. Cherry, November 25, 1936, UA3/1/1, Cherry Papers, Box 24, Folder marked “Mattie McLean,” General Correspondence; NYA Application materials, UA3/2, Garrett Papers, Box 2, Folder 10.
would largely determine the New Deal’s future in Kentucky. To boost his campaign, Chandler sought to portray himself as a Roosevelt loyalist commissioned to be an extension of New Deal programs in Kentucky.\footnote{Blakey, 175-179; Gubernatorial campaign poster, 1935. Photograph in Blakey.}

These developments made all more pertinent the securing of the PWA grant and loan for Western Teachers College’s new classroom building. Though President Cherry was remaining positive of the situation, he was probably overworking himself. “I haven’t had a minute to rest,” he told his wife that June. “My desk has been literally swamped with work.” Apparently he was walking and standing so much that his feet were beginning to suffer chronic pain, so much that they were bound up in tape, and he briefly had put them in steel braces until the pain was too much to bear.\footnote{H.H. Cherry, letter to Bess Cherry, June 13, 1935, UA3/1/7, Cherry Personal Papers, Box 1, Folder 1.} His stress levels were certain to take a toll when his office received a notification on September 10 that the PWA had rejected Western’s application due to it not meeting a labor wage standard set by Washington officials.\footnote{H.H. Cherry, telegram to Alben Barkley and Marvel Logan, September 10, 1935, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 2, Folder 28, Special Correspondence.}

Enraged, Cherry telegrammed a protest to this apparent injustice directly to Franklin D. Roosevelt himself. Brinton Davis was also very upset:

Already it is clear that Kentucky will obtain a relatively small portion of the Public Works appropriation. Present ruling of wage per man per year required on similar projects will cut out educational projects and perhaps others in Kentucky and result in considerable injustice to the State.\footnote{Brinton Davis, letter to H.H. Cherry, September 10, 1935, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 2, Folder 28, Special Correspondence.}
Cherry immediately got both U.S. Senators Marvel Logan and Alben Barkley involved. He implored them to confront Secretary of the Interior and federal PWA director Harold Ickes in Washington about the matter. It was absurd to think that their application had been looked over in the appropriations. Western's application to the PWA had been one of the first filed in the state, had received special state legislation just to make sure all the legal barriers were removed, and waited for an answer for close to two years. Not only that, but the University of Kentucky, along with all the other public colleges in the state who made funding requests, had been granted PWA appropriations. “Western is the only State Educational institution in Kentucky that has received no consideration,” reported the Park City Daily News in Bowling Green.\textsuperscript{128}

President Roosevelt’s office responded to Henry Hardin Cherry’s irate telegram five days later and told him that “as the result of conference recently held,” Director Ickes decided for certain applications to be reexamined “in the light of certain requirements.” In order to be approved, the project had to comply with four requirements: 1) that construction “contracts be let by December 15, 1935,” 2) that “projects be complete within a year,” 3) “located in [an] area where there are enough registered on relief to finish the project,” and 4) a “$850 per man-year limitation.” Though Cherry personally doubted that the classroom building could be

\textsuperscript{128} H.H. Cherry, telegram to Alben Barkley, September 16, 1935, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 2, Folder 28, Special Correspondence; Glover Cary, letter to H.H. Cherry, October 8, 1935, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 2, Folder 28, Special Correspondence; Sterrett Cuthbertson, letter to H.H. Cherry, September 16, 1935, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 2, Folder 28, Special Correspondence; “An Unjust Discrimination,” The Park City Daily News, October 1, 1935, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 2, Folder 28, Special Correspondence.
completed in one year, he made sure that the application followed all these specifications set out by Secretary Ickes. Attorney John Rodes telegraphed Brinton Davis, “Please wire Senator Logan and Sec. Harold Ickes that Teachers College project can be started before December 15 and completed in one year.” After talking with the District Reemployment Office, Cherry telegraphed Senator Barkley, asking him to assure Ickes that Bowling Green had a heavy amount of unemployed skilled workers and stone masons registered on relief that qualified for the PWA project.\textsuperscript{129} This flurry of correspondence all occurred on the same day, revealing the intensity and urgency of the entire debacle.

Probably because of the effort to get Washington to reconsider Western’s PWA application, H.H. Cherry had fallen behind payment to Captain Davis, who already had a volatile history when he was not paid. In the middle of the dialogues with senators, attorneys, and federal offices, Davis demanded his due payment and told Cherry he had ignored his previous requests. Agitated, Cherry told his architect not to write him again about payment for his services, to which Davis paid no heed. “Pardon my insistence, Doctor, but I am wondering if the members of the Board [of Regents] realize that I have spent far in excess of the amount of compensation awarded me under the contract dated June 25\textsuperscript{th} of this year.” Still, the conflict between the two men did not stop Davis from trying to help the college secure

\textsuperscript{129} Thomas Carroll, letter to H.H. Cherry, September 16, 1935, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 2, Folder 28, Special Correspondence; H.H. Cherry, letter to Marvel Logan, September 16, 1935, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 2, Folder 28, Special Correspondence; John Rodes, telegram to Brinton Davis, September 16, 1935, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 2, Folder 28, Special Correspondence; H.H. Cherry, telegram to Alben Barkley, September 16, 1935, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 2, Folder 28, Special Correspondence.
funding. "The rejection of Western’s application is a rank injustice and should be remedied.” He offered a radical suggestion that every student and their relatives individually write to Secretary Ickes about the importance of this project.

“Washington will be quick to sense the temper of a large group of citizens in Kentucky at this particular time and will undoubtedly respond favorably.”

Though it never came to that, Cherry was very vocal about his anger about the situation. “My program is to go out and set the leaves on fire in Kentucky... I am not going to stand for it. I will get me an automobile, a talking automobile, one with a loud speaker, and I'll go myself.” Many others in the community sympathized with how Western Teachers College was being treated unfairly compared to the other public colleges. When people in the college had apparently blamed Senator Logan for not securing the funds, Logan wrote Cherry, “It grieves me very much to hear rumors on every side that your institution is criticizing me very severely.”

It is little surprise that the stressful situation damaged some relationships. Davis’ patience had worn thin to the point that by the end of October, he had lost hope. After Cherry had sent him a $1000 check, Davis demanded a settlement payment. When Cherry failed to respond once more, he threatened to take matters into his own hands. “I am entitled to a prompt settlement of the account.” Cherry’s patience with Captain Davis had grown thin as well. Cherry sent him another check,

\[130\] Correspondence between H.H. Cherry and Brinton Davis, September 12 and 25, October 2 and 9, 1935, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 2, Folder 28, Special Correspondence.

\[131\] Harrison, 102.

\[132\] Marvel Logan, letter to H.H. Cherry, October 25, 1935, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 2, Folder 28, Special Correspondence.
but threatened to terminate the contract. “In view of your attitude,” said Cherry, “Would you be willing to accept this as payment in full for the work you have done and step out of the picture entirely?” Davis telegrammed Dr. Cherry the next day with defeatist words: “I have definite information that [the] application has been rejected. I have performed my part of the contract and it remains for the institution to perform its part.”

Cherry, on the contrary, refused to give up. Quite on edge by this point with time running short, Cherry was beginning to lose his faith in the Board of Regents, which he claimed to be “helpless in doing anything.” In his dialogues with the senators and district representative, Cherry was more than ready to go to Washington personally to fight for getting federal funds for the new classroom building. With Western’s president anxious about the deplorable state of the existing Recitation Hall, the old building that once evoked sentimental nostalgia had now become an irritating reminder that his battle was not yet won. “If I had the power to tear down the old building, I would do so before the sun goes down and relieve myself of some of the anxiety I have had... If coming to Washington will do any good, I want to come, otherwise I do not.”

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133 Brinton Davis, letter to John Rodes, October 24, 1935, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 2, Folder 28, Special Correspondence; Correspondence between Brinton Davis and H.H. Cherry, November 1, 5, 11, and 12, 1935, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 2, Folder 28, Special Correspondence.
134 H.H. Cherry, letter to Marvel Logan, November 14, 1935, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 2, Folder 28, Special Correspondence; H.H. Cherry, letter to Glover Cary, November 14, 1935, UA3/1/2, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 2, Folder 28, Special Correspondence.
Less than two weeks before Cherry said this, “Happy” Chandler had won the gubernatorial election, securing an improved relationship with the federal New Deal programs for countless people in Kentucky. Though entirely a coincidence, Chandler’s election foreshadowed a turn of events for the better. On November 18, 1935, the PWA approved docket number KY-1043 for the creation of a classroom and laboratory building on Western Kentucky State Teachers College’s campus.\textsuperscript{135} The Board of Regents quickly met to open up the bids for excavation and foundation contracts that had to be leased no later than December 15. By the December 14 Board meeting, the PWA agents present at the meeting approved for bids to be contracted to the George H. Rommel Company in Louisville. Cherry telegrammed Senator Logan that day, “I am the happiest man in Bowling Green.” Even Brinton Davis, whose pessimism had nearly ended his 25-year relationship with Dr. Cherry, had been reconciled and attended the meeting to draw up the construction contract with Cherry.\textsuperscript{136}

Three days later at chapel on the last day before the Christmas holidays, President Cherry joyously announced the news to the students and faculty in Van Meter Auditorium, though the word had most likely already spread beforehand. Soon after the students went home for the break, a crew of workers that included

\textsuperscript{135} Coincidentally, November 18, 1935 is also the same day Cherry said he was willing to visit Washington, D.C. with Senator Logan to lobby. However, a gap in the primary sources yields no evidence to if Cherry in fact traveled there, and if so, if that had any influence in the decision.

\textsuperscript{136} Blakey, 179; George Sager, telegram to H.H. Cherry, December 17, 1935, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 2, Folder 28, Special Correspondence; H.H. Cherry, telegram to Marvel Logan, December 14, 1935, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 3, Folder 6, Special Correspondence; Board of Regents Minutes, November 29 and December 14, 1935, UA2/1, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky.
students quickly demolished Recitation Hall through funds approved by the Works Progress Administration, ironically, months prior. The 19th century structure from the old Potter College for Women had at last been removed from the crown of the Hill. Henry Hardin Cherry himself posed for a photograph within the ruins, undoubtedly proud of this major accomplishment after years of fighting through politics to secure a much needed expansion to the institution he had built (Figure 14).137 As Western Kentucky State Teachers College entered its 30th year of existence since the 1906 act of the Legislature, the top of the Hill looked barren as seen coming from downtown Bowling Green. The New Deal at last provided a means for the college to declare its permanency and resilience to the Great Depression.

Figure 14: H.H. Cherry in the partially demolished Recitation Hall. Source: UA1C11.40.8, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky.

137 H.H. Cherry, telegram to George Sager, December 17, 1935, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 2, Folder 28, Special Correspondence; H.H. Cherry, telegram to Alben Barkley and Marvel Logan, September 10, 1935, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 2, Folder 28, Special Correspondence.
CHAPTER 4
BUILDING A TEMPLE

Months before securing the funds to erect a classroom building through the Public Works Administration, plans for the statue of Henry Hardin Cherry had greatly progressed. J.R. Whitmer and his clandestine committee of faculty and friends were still making regular payments to sculptor Lorado Taft in Chicago, albeit their pocketbooks were increasingly scarce. Over a third of the $10,000 costs to create the statue had already been raised by 1935, and the committee decided for the sculpture to be ten feet, sculpted in bronze, and unveiled in front of the Kentucky Building for its planned opening in November 1936. As customary for quality sculptures, Taft had Cherry model for him live in his Chicago studio on multiple occasions, where Taft soon found out that Cherry could hardly sit quietly for long periods of time without talking about work.\textsuperscript{138} Though H.H. Cherry cooperated with the project, he was never greatly fond of the idea. The plaster molding had been completed by Taft by the fall of 1935, and the subject of the sculpture refused to comment on his appearance. “I am inclosing [sic] a photo of a

\textsuperscript{138} J.R. Whitmer, correspondence with Lorado Taft, September 10, 1931, November 8 and December 28, 1934, April 22 and May 29, 1935, UA1B3/5, Cherry Statue Committee Papers, Box 1, Folders 3, 4, 5.
dead man made in bronze,” Cherry facetiously remarked in a letter to his brother George in Oregon (Figure 15):

The statue will not be put up until after I am dead. I am not willing for folks to throw gravel on it and make marks on it and tell things about me until after I am dead. There has been real pressure brought upon me to allow it to be put up at once. This I will never agree to. I am not willing to walk around on this live campus and look at its dead president, especially in bronze.¹³⁹

Though the statue was clearly intended as a physical monument to Cherry’s accomplishments in Kentucky higher education, the man himself believed that his monument was going to be something more intangible:

If I have a monument it is an invisible one – it is in the hearts and lives of those young men and women who have come to this institution and have

¹³⁹ H.H. Cherry, letter to George Cherry, October 18, 1935, UA3/1/7, Cherry Personal Papers, Box 1, Folder 16.
been a part of its life and leadership. It is in this great Hill, the most beautiful in the South. The only way you can understand the beauty of the Hill is to be here. It is a complete panorama that enables one to have far reaches of landscape and beauty.\textsuperscript{140}

The panorama once described by former mayor John Rodes as akin to the Athenian Parthenon was changing once again with the demolition of the Potter College recitation building and the beginning construction stages of a new classroom building that was to be the largest building in Bowling Green yet. The year 1936 seemed to herald a new age of modernity and resilience against the Depression. On the college’s 1935 New Year’s Eve episode of its new WHAS radio program, Rodes proudly announced about Bowling Green over the air, “Here there is no desperate or greedy struggle for wealth. There are no greatly rich and under ordinary conditions few extremely poor. This is a city of good homes and of happy and contented people.”\textsuperscript{141}

While that broadcast very well may have painted an overly rosy picture to listeners, Henry Hardin Cherry at least was a happy man. The PWA had awarded $252,819 in grant money for the new classroom building and gave permission for the Board of Regents to issue $309,000 in bonds. Cherry had a rough start to 1936 when he contracted the flu after a trip to Washington, but he recovered in time for the Board of Regents meeting that issued bonds, making more imminent the groundwork excavation for the new building, which Cherry said was going to be “a very, very attractive one.” The Board awarded 309 bonds of $1,000 each to Almstedt

\textsuperscript{140} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{141} O.J. Wilson, 157-158; Broadcast No. 14 “Western Kentucky State Teachers College” WHAS Radio, Louisville, KY, aired October 26, 1937, Earl Moore Personal Papers, Box 1, Folder 4.
Bros. and J.J.B. Hilliard & Son of Louisville at a 4% interest rate and $5000 premium to be repaid over a period of 30 years. In addition to repayment coming from the Board’s budget, it was also decided to add a $5 per semester student fee for the building revenue fund.¹⁴²

On March 5, several spectators gathered around the top of the Hill to watch H.H. Cherry himself make the first excavation shoveling for the new classroom building (Figure 16). This new building was going to be much grander and far more modern than its predecessor. Brinton Davis’ plans for the three story building included 50 classrooms, 16 laboratories, 60 offices, ample space for the Bookstore, Post Office, and the Registrar’s office. Not only that, but the modern design provided for ventilated classrooms and bathrooms with plumbing! Corresponding with landscape architect Henry Wright, who had worked with Davis and Cherry for decades, President Cherry wanted not only the building itself to be impressive but also its surroundings. It was going to occupy the visible seat of College Heights, and Cherry understood that its central location was going to make a huge first impression for campus visitors. “The building is going to look like a capitol on a hill,” he said to his wife Bess, “with the outside terraced and beautified in many ways.”¹⁴³

¹⁴² Board of Regents Minutes, January 25 and March 23, 1936, UA2/1, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky; H.H. Cherry, letter to Amabel Price, January 7, 1936, UA3/1/1, Cherry Papers, Box 24, Folder marked “Amabel Rhoads Price,” General Correspondence.
In the construction interim, however, where were the students and professors supposed to have their classes? In real terms, there was not sufficient space for this, but the campus community came up with creative if not haphazard ways to accommodate. Other campus buildings provided some classrooms, but the unfinished Kentucky Building was crucial for providing needed space for many classes. The Manual Arts Department under L.T. Smith had hastily worked to make the interior bearable for this interim, but it was clear that further work on the building had to quit for the time being. Many classes were partitioned solely by a curtain not even reaching the ceiling, and voices from other classrooms persistently carried throughout the building.\(^{144}\)

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As inadequate as these class provisions were, the construction of the new classroom building would not have been possible if not for the progress already made on the Kentucky Building. R.H. Seward, the secretary-treasurer of the College Heights Foundation, used this very fact as “sufficient reason to justify all the effort and expense” made on the Kentucky Building through private donations. The original intention to finish the structure for Homecoming 1936 had to be pushed back a year to accommodate for the classroom building construction. Seward, very confident about continued pledge money coming in through students and alumni, assured that “[t]he Federal government will contribute nothing toward the completion of the project, it being necessary that the Foundation raise the entire amount through voluntary contributions.”

Seward’s insistence against the possibility of federal money for the Kentucky Building was not necessarily a repudiation of the New Deal. The College Heights Herald gave a great amount of credit to George Meuth, the Western alumnus and federal PWA agent, for helping to secure the PWA funds for the classroom building project. The campus certainly had enthusiasm about the New Deal, but this did not overshadow the confidence in the community’s own “spirit of Western.” The culture of positive pride most likely explains why the College Heights Foundation in particular resisted government aid. Even still, the fact that the Kentucky Building

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146 “Much Credit is Due Geo. Meuth For PWA Grant,” College Heights Herald, Vol. XII, No. 9 (February 9, 1936).
The project had been on the original PWA application contradicted the Foundation’s rhetoric of absolute assurance in private financial support.

The confidence in the Western community reflected in the positive spirit emanating that spring semester. The air of modernity and a brighter tomorrow was undoubtedly invigorated when aviator Amelia Earhart visited the campus and spoke about her flight adventures and the safety of air travel to 900 people in Van Meter Hall.\textsuperscript{147} Though no one could deny the reality of the Depression, over 300 students were benefitting through the NYA campus projects, earning on average $12.50 a month for 50 hours of work. The NYA state director Frank Peterson even spoke at chapel that March on the good works being accomplished through the projects. During the spring semester, not only did the NYA provide student employment for clerical work and landscape improvement projects, but it also helped six graduate students and twelve undergraduate students to conduct research under department heads.\textsuperscript{148} The New Deal continued its advance on the Hill in other ways that spring when the Board of Regents made a contract with the Kentucky-Tennessee Light and Power Company, a creation of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), to supply all electricity on campus.\textsuperscript{149}

These positive developments through the New Deal were counterbalanced by the unfortunate fate of the graduate school. Since its start in 1931, the audacious

\textsuperscript{147} “Amelia Earhart Lectures Here on January 20,” \textit{College Heights Herald}, Vol. XII, No. 8 (January 24, 1936).

\textsuperscript{148} Frank Peterson, letter to H.H. Cherry, April 7, 1936, UA3/1/1, Cherry Papers, Box 24, Folder marked “National Youth Administration,” General Correspondence; John Welch, “Statistics are Available on N.Y.A. Program,” \textit{College Heights Herald}, Vol. XII, No. 17 (June 19, 1936).

\textsuperscript{149} Board of Regents Meeting, April 25, 1936.
yet controversial graduate program for education administration had already fought in a losing battle against both economic pressures and the growing political influence of the University of Kentucky and the Council on Public Higher Education. In March 1936, the council met with the Governor, who approved the decision to terminate all graduate programs outside of University of Kentucky. Western’s one-year Master’s program terminated after its last commencement in summer 1936.\textsuperscript{150}

Meanwhile, as the foundations were being laid for PWA Project KY-1043R, discussions about what materials to be used for the construction became more pertinent. President Cherry and the Board wanted the building to be made with local Bowling Green limestone, both to alleviate the dormant masonry industry suffering from lack of jobs and to be aesthetically consistent with other buildings on campus. When the regents awarded Struck Construction Company construction bids at $287,500, it was decided to make use of Bowling Green stone. Additionally, it passed a unanimous resolution to name the building “Henry Hardin Cherry Hall” as a way to memorialize the president’s lifelong work in education for the state of Kentucky. This decision contradicted an earlier resolution made by the 25\textsuperscript{th} anniversary committee that declared no campus building was to be named after a living person. Cherry objected to having the building named after him. In an undated speech on the naming of public buildings, Cherry stated that to turn a government-funded building into a personal memorial was “breaking faith” with the people since

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{verbatim}
\textsuperscript{150}Over four hundred students, mostly mature professionals wishing to advance their education credentials, had been enrolled in the program in its five-year stint, though only about a fourth of those actually received degrees. Harrison, 92-93; Teachers College Heights, Vol. XV, No. 6, April 1936, 8.
\end{verbatim}
\end{footnotesize}
a government appropriation was made for an explicit educational purpose.\textsuperscript{151}

Naming the structure after Cherry was highly praised in the community, and one student writer in the \textit{Herald} said he deserved the building’s name since the Hill had been virtually “re-made in his image.” The \textit{Herald}, for all its appraisal for the name “Cherry Hall,” might not have received the memo from the the PWA when it reminded the college that it could not name the building after a living person to receive federal funding.\textsuperscript{152} The issue was then shelved in light of more pressing matters.

In order for the building project to be completed on the timetable allotted by the PWA, it had to meet all the narrow specifications outlined by the federal offices. Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes’ conservative tendencies manifested in the PWA’s meticulous specifications that aimed to avoid any unnecessary expenses on projects. Western’s desire to use local construction materials on Project KY-1043R was going to be more expensive than the cheaper Indiana Bedford stone that the PWA proposed. The PWA refused to pay for such added expense, and the option to use local limestone was going to cost the school an additional $38,000. State officials and even Governor Chandler got involved in the debate, stating the importance using local stone would have for reviving local industries and maintaining a sense of pride and aesthetics. The Washington offices did not budge. After exhausting all


\textsuperscript{152} \textit{College Heights Herald}, Vol. XII, No. 16 (May 22, 1936); Carmichael, letter to WKSTC, July 24, 1936, UA3/2, Garrett Papers, Box 15, Folder 2.
efforts, the Board conceded by July 1936 and allowed for the PWA construction to use Indiana Bedford stone.\footnote{Board of Regents Minutes, July 10, 1936, UA2/1, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky; Blakey, 75-76.}

This three month-long debacle had already set the classroom building project behind schedule, but another unfortunate event to occur was the sudden death of landscape architect Henry Wright, who along with Brinton Davis had worked with Cherry in the infrastructural development of Western since the very beginning of the campus on the Hill. Soon before his unexpected death that July, he had fortunately delivered to Western the landscaping blueprints for the PWA classroom building.\footnote{George Sager, letter to H.H. Cherry, June 25, 1936, UA3/2, Garrett Papers, Box 15, Folder 1.} Wright, though based in New York at the time of his death, had also been privy to J.R. Whitmer and the Cherry Statue Fund Committee. One of Wright’s last contributions to the statue’s development was his suggestion that the stone step entrance salvaged from the rubble of Recitation Hall be used in the statue’s base.\footnote{Henry Wright, letter to J.R. Whitmer, March 19, 1936, UA1B3/5, Cherry Statue Committee Papers, Box 1, Folder 9.} Wright’s death, though unfortunate, had at least occurred at a time in the construction process that his son, Henry Wright Jr., finalized the rest of his father’s last work on College Heights. Brinton Davis then took upon the remaining responsibilities of all architectural work.\footnote{H.H. Cherry, letter to George Sager, August 7, 1936, UA3/2, Garrett Papers, Box 15, Folder 2; Paul Garrett, letter to H.T. Cole, July 12, 1938, UA3/2, Garrett Papers, Box 15, Folder 4.}

The foundation construction occurring throughout the spring and summer of 1936 consisted of local skilled and unskilled labor that included both white and
African American workers. All wages had to fall under strict compliance with PWA regulations. For the classroom building’s construction, unskilled laborers such as hod carriers and watchmen received 30 cents an hour, skilled carpenters received 65 cents an hour, while the best paid jobs at $1.10 an hour were reserved for skilled masons, plasterers, plumbers, steam fitters, and the like. The federal government permitted these workers to only work eight hours a day for 130 hours a month. At that schedule, however, construction was lagging on foundation work, and Cherry requested changes be made. George Sager, the state PWA director, granted Cherry’s request, but only when applied to stone masons, who were already paid the highest wages. For a period of 30 days, stone masons were allowed to work on 40 hours a week, increasing the total monthly work capacity by 30 hours (Figure 17).

157There is need for more scholarly exploration into this subject, as there are very few materials that mention matters of race in Bowling Green during the Depression era. Jonathan Jeffrey, interviewed by author, December 10, 2015, Bowling Green, Kentucky.

158 H.H. Cherry, letter to George Sager, February 17, 1936, UA3/2, Garrett Papers, Box 15, Folder 1; George Sager, letter to H.H. Cherry, July 30, 1936, UA3/2, Garrett Papers, Box 1, Folder 2.
The construction delays that ran the risk of jeopardizing the college’s relationship with the PWA were diminished in light of the pomp and circumstance that was to surround the momentous laying of the cornerstone in the fall. Huge arrangements were made for the ceremony to be included in the WHAS radio program, and director Earl Moore had to order extra equipment just to be able to record from outside.\textsuperscript{159} The public ceremony on Tuesday afternoon, October 27, involved a band and choir, Cherry’s pastor from State Street Methodist Church to give an invocation, and remarks given by President Cherry, Board of Regents Chairman Harry Peters, PWA state director George Sager, and alumnus George Meuth, who came personally from Washington and had been influential in securing

\textsuperscript{159} Earl Moore, letter to Emmett Graft, October 14, 1936, Box 2, Folder 6, Earl Moore Personal Papers.
funding (Figure 18). The theme of Cherry’s speech was to “re-dedicate” the community to his spiritual mission of saving democracy through educating both the mind and the soul of the individual. He explicitly intended this classroom building to serve as an infrastructural symbol of service and democracy for future generations “who shall pass through its portals.” Cherry’s ideal of the spirit of the private individual as the basis of democracy contrasted with Meuth’s following remarks, who spoke more directly about the need for collaboration with national and state governments in making possible an “enlightened people.” As the cornerstone was placed, Cherry, Sagers, and Regent B.J. Borrone ceremoniously sealed it with mortar and placed a steel box inside, containing various documents from the teachers college’s history, notably Cherry’s address at the ceremony and the copy of the Board’s acceptance of the PWA grant and loan for the building. The event was simultaneously a celebration of the college’s expansion in a difficult economic time and a worship of its president, whose vision for the cultivated campus on the Hill was finally approaching completion. Though the use of New Deal money made possible the building’s construction, this fact was hardly highlighted in publications.\textsuperscript{160}

\textsuperscript{160} Note that the name “Henry Hardin Cherry Hall” was not used in the cornerstone laying ceremony nor in other published materials, probably due to the PWA regulations on naming buildings. At this point, it was still described as the “classroom and laboratory building,” H.H. Cherry, letter to Rev. Paul Powell, October 27, 1936, UA3/1/1, Cherry Papers, Box 24, General Correspondence; “Cornerstone Program Slated for 4 P.M.,” \textit{College Heights Herald}, Vol. XIII, No. 3, October 27, 1936; \textit{Teachers College Heights}, Vol. XVI, No. 2, December 1936, 36-39.
Instead of the construction memorializing the collaboration between the local community and the federal government, developments with the statue suggested the new classroom building was more likely to be enshrined as a monument to the cult of Cherry. Once the agenda for the building to be called Henry Hardin Cherry Hall reached public ears, the Statue Fund Committee considered the idea of altering the statue’s planned location between the President’s Home and the Kentucky Building to placing it in front of the classroom building directly facing downtown Bowling Green. When J.R. Whitmer passed the idea on to sculptor Lorado Taft earlier in August, Taft responded, “I suppose the new proposal is even more fitting. It should undoubtedly accompany the building named after the President.”\footnote{Lorado Taft, letter to J.R. Whitmer, August 30, 1936, UA1B3/5, Cherry Statue Committee Papers, Box 1, Folder 5.}

This was the last documented correspondence between Taft and the Committee before Taft’s abrupt death on October 30, three days after the cornerstone laying ceremony. Taft had finished plastering the live sculpture of Cherry, but it was not...
yet put into the forging process as the committee still owed $6,400 for its completion, transportation, and installation. Though by this time, the committee had recruited two leaders from every graduating class since 1908 to rally fellow alumni for support, Taft’s death and the uncertain fate of his studio only made the call for fundraising more urgent.\textsuperscript{162}

The urgency for fundraising the statue paralleled the urgency for getting the PWA building back to schedule. According to PWA standards, the project was supposed to be completed by December 15 of that year, though it was only 49% complete as of October 24. Despite the construction’s acceleration with the receiving of bids to furnish interior equipment, even George Sager understood the impossibility of finishing it in time and recommended that Western submit an extension on the agreement. Cherry submitted a request, and the PWA granted an extension deadline for October 1, 1937.\textsuperscript{163} The surprising ease and timely response of this request certainly came as a sigh of relief compared to the process of securing the initial funding. Roosevelt’s reelection to his second term that fall may indirectly have helped the situation too, as a change in the Oval Office might have jeopardized the continuity of New Deal programs.

\textsuperscript{162} J.R. Whitmer, letter to Mrs. Taft, November 10, 1936, UA1B3/5, Cherry Statue Committee Papers, Box 1, Folder 5; Cherry Statue Fund Committee meeting, October 13, 1936, UA1B3/5, Cherry Statue Committee Papers, Box 1, Folder 1; Mary Webster, letter to J.R. Whitmer, December 8, 1936, UA1B3/5, Cherry Statue Committee Papers, Box 1, Folder 5.

\textsuperscript{163} George Sager, correspondence with H.H. Cherry, November 11, 1936, and January 4, 1937, UA3/2, Garrett Papers, Box 15, Folders 2 and 3; Board of Regents Minutes, December 1, 1936, UA2/1, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky.
An expanded timetable on the PWA classroom building allowed the administration to consider other improvements to the school involving the New Deal. The Board decided to make use of much more easily attainable WPA funds for improvements on the agricultural pavilion on the south end of campus and the creation of a new Music Hall. The Board called upon a different architect, J.M. Ingram, for a new building. Though never stated why Brinton Davis was not selected again as usual, the tepid relationship over his payment and the lawsuit may have deterred some from wanting to work with him further. Ingram, based locally in Bowling Green, had already worked with other local New Deal projects and commercial and residential improvements in the surrounding region, making him a standout candidate for the position.

Prior to this, Cherry had employed the local architect for the design of a small colonial-style court on Normal Drive that was to be a retirement village for faculty, including himself. This project was a personal real estate enterprise not connected to the college in particular, and he planned to eventually move there for his retirement. One cannot help but wonder how Western’s president managed to have the financial ability to oversee such a project when considering that he never sought to raise faculty salaries after the retrenchment plan. Cherry sometimes griped about

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164 Board of Regents Minutes, December 1, 1936, March 20 and May 17, 1937, UA2/1, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky.
running low on all his money, but these ancillary projects indicated that the faculty
took a low position on Cherry's list of priorities.\textsuperscript{166}

The puzzling question for many was whether or not Cherry actually did plan
to retire. The campus had celebrated the aging man's 72\textsuperscript{nd} birthday on Founder's
Day 1936 with much decorum, with students and faculty giving eulogies to his most
famous speeches and adages as if they were passages from the Bible. His constant
presence as the head of Western Kentucky State Teachers College in its 30-year
existence, not including his presidency in the precursor Southern Normal School,
certainly attributed to his demagogue status. The man himself gave contradictory
statements about his possibility for retirement. “I am really thinking I will die in my
present position as I see no way of excavating myself at this time.” In another
instance, he admitted, “I have given half of my life to this work, but I am now
withdraw ing and sending others out.” The public image presented of him was an
immortal one, though his own mortality was becoming clearer in more private
spheres. Cherry’s health was not as stout as in earlier years. By 1936 he had begun
making trips to the therapeutic baths at Hot Springs, Arkansas to treat his neuritis. If
the claim about drinking habits was true, he may also have used whiskey as a
personal stress and pain reliever. Though still credited with almost the entire
success of the school, many of his administrative duties were by now delegated to

\textsuperscript{166}Dorothy Taylor Hanes, whose father Charles Taylor was an agriculture professor
during the 1930s, recollected that some faculty were paid in vegetables. The Taylor
family lived on Normal Drive and were neighbors with J.R. Whitmer. Dorothy Taylor
Hanes, interviewed by author, April 1, 2016, Bowling Green, Kentucky; Board of
Regents Minutes, March 20, 1936, UA2/1, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky;
“Cherry Erects New Apartments,” \textit{College Heights Herald}, Vol. XIII, No. 3; Harrison,
105.
people like Dean Finley Grise, Ogden Science Department Head M.C. Ford, Bursar Florence Schneider, Registrar E.H. Canon, and field representative Kelly Thompson.\textsuperscript{167} The deaths of Henry Wright, Lorado Taft, and his brother George in 1936 certainly impacted Cherry. With George’s death, Henry Hardin and his brother T.C., the director of the Bowling Green city schools, were the only ones left of the original Cherry family. Nevertheless, Cherry had no other known health concerns other than painful swelling on his feet and being overweight. A.L. Crabb, a one-time faculty and dean who had since moved on to Peabody College in Nashville, wrote to Cherry that if he stayed in his position until 1939, he would become the longest serving college president in America.\textsuperscript{168} The construction of Colonial Court as a retirement center suggested an eventual transition out of office, but Cherry’s attitude toward completion of his projects was too determined to suggest a retirement anytime in the near future.

Meanwhile, the construction of the classroom and laboratory building continued to shape at the start of 1937. The three-story limestone exterior was quickly rising, as was the fitting of a copper cupola that was to be the crowning feature of the impressive structure. Brinton Davis made a recommendation for the installation of chimes inside the cupola that would be the first of its kind on the campus (Figure 19).\textsuperscript{169} With each further stage of construction, Cherry’s admirers

\begin{footnotes}
\item[168] Harrison, 104.
\item[169] Board of Regents Minutes, March 20, 1937, UA2/1, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky.
\end{footnotes}
heralded the building even more as a personal monument. One Western alumnus, William Bass, drew a picture of the building as a personal offering to Cherry.

Another friend, Lena Grey Annis, lauded Cherry with these words:

You who have gone far beyond the toil and labor of others with a mind set to bring about that type of real education; an education that opens up life and more life... that causes them to uproot the old and inculcate some new... may I also say that the erection of a permanent monument by your friends and students at Western to commemorate your services is only a small task compared to the unlimited services, which you have performed for each of us.170

![Figure 19: PWA Classroom Building Under Construction, 1937. Source: Franklin Studio, UA1C11.29.424, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky.](image)

It was as if Western’s president and his institution were untouchable. A hint of criticism toward the institution was not tolerated in any way. When student Grace Schneck wrote a personal essay in February 1937 for an English class, she gave a scathing review of the institution. She called Bowling Green “practically uncivilized country,” the teachers “too ancient to teach school” and of a “feeble-minded” class, and cited being treated like an elementary child instead of an adult as she would

170 H.H. Cherry, letter to William Bass, May 4, 1937, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 1, Folder 116, Special Correspondence; Lena Grey Annis, letter to H.H. Cherry, June 15, 1937, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 1, Folder 105, Special Correspondence.
have in her home in northern Indiana. Her professor confiscated the essay and gave
it to Dr. Cherry, who wrote to her father saying he planned to remove her $40 music
scholarship towards out-of-state tuition. The father, Philip Schneck, wrote back
pleadingly to Cherry, apologizing for his daughter’s actions, saying he and his wife
had raised her to be a good Christian girl and that this was out of her character. Mr.
Schneck implored Cherry not to take away the scholarship because they did not
have any financial means to support her, and Grace was already working on campus
under the NYA. Cherry, in the role of a merciful father, pardoned her offense.\textsuperscript{171} It is
very possible that Grace Schneck had grounds for her negative opinions of Western,
but this episode revealed how serious Cherry took to protecting the image of his
institution.

A timely opportunity for boosting the campus’ civic image came with the
terrible flooding in the Ohio River valley in January 1937. Though the area around
Bowling Green was not as affected, cities like Louisville, Owensboro, and Paducah
faced horrible damage to infrastructure and loss of life. Many parts of downtown
Louisville were submerged in several feet of water, and the state prison in Frankfort
was demolished, causing a crisis leading to the construction of a PWA replacement
state prison in Oldham County.\textsuperscript{172} Governor Chandler declared a state of emergency
as thousands of refugees displaced by the flooding needed food and shelter. The
WPA, CCC, and NYA employed thousands across the state to help with evacuation,

\textsuperscript{171} Grace Schneck, untitled essay, February 1937, attached to Philip Schneck, letter
to H.H. Cherry, February 24, 1937, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 3, Folder 2, Special
Correspondence; H.H. Cherry, letter to Philip Schneck, March 2, 1937, UA3/1/2,
Cherry Papers, Box 3, Folder 2, Special Correspondence.
\textsuperscript{172} Blakey, 191.
levying, and other rescue work. Western Teachers College collaborated with the
American Legion and Red Cross to house and feed 425 Louisville refugees inside the
Health building, thoroughly “equipped with shower baths, lockers, pure water and
other modern necessities and conveniences.” The WHAS program during the flood
crisis showcased its own Kelly Thompson as the hero of the hour, interviewing him
about his daring rescue mission to Louisville to save family members out of the
flood. At the state level, the flood experience strengthened the bond between the
people and the federal government programs. On campus, though, it seemed to
heighten its own confidence in the spirit of its community with no mention of the
government: “Western believes in the people today as it has never done before. It
believes that vision, religion and education will solve every problem of life.”173

The positive, humanitarian image that the college presented to the public hid
the still-struggling financial situation. That March, there was already a budget deficit
of nearly $8,000 for the first nine months of the fiscal year. This figure, though
seemingly benign, was severe enough that Cherry decided there was not enough
money in the budget to pay faculty salaries that month. He even turned down
someone with a Ph.D. who wished to join the faculty on account that he could not
afford to hire more faculty, despite rising student attendance.174 Though Cherry did

173 H.H. Cherry, letter to Dr. J.W. Carr, February 2, 1937, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers,
Box 1, Folder 112, Special Correspondence; Broadcast No. 52 “Western Kentucky
State Teachers College” WHAS Radio, Louisville, KY, aired February 2, 1937, Earl
Moore Personal Papers, Box 1, Folder 13.
174 H.H. Cherry, letter to KY Department of Finance, March 13, 1937, UA3/1/2,
Cherry Papers, Box 2, Folder 24, Special Correspondence; H.H. Cherry, letter to G.W.
Campbell, March 13, 1937, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 1, Folder 112, Special
Correspondence.
not deny the hardships the economy brought to the school budget, he always had a way of putting a positive spin on things. “Western is enjoying an unprecedented success,” Cherry remarked to J.T. Carman, a member of the alumni association delegated with recruiting new students. “This is not only my opinion, but it is the universal opinion of the entire faculty and working force, as well as the students.”

Dismissing any possibility that the faculty might have been upset at not being paid the month of March, Cherry framed this success largely on the creation of the PWA classroom building. “The magnificent half-million-dollar classroom... is going to look like a state capitol, located as it is on the host commanding position on College Heights. It is a very large building and will be modern in every way.” As always, he tied every work being done on the Hill to a moral purpose: “We are rededicating our lives to the cause of universal intelligence and righteousness.”

Cherry’s argument for this “unprecedented” success strengthened with the securing of both WPA funds and a $10,000 state appropriation to begin work on the new Music Hall south of the football stadium. Foundation work on Music Hall began less than a month later. In response to all the recent successes in building projects and campus improvements, R.E. Cooper, the former owner of a tobacco company in Hopkinsville and one-time member of the Board of Regents, made very explicit his worship of Cherry. “Future generations will recognize the College Heights as a Monument to President Cherry’s executive ability and dynamic personality, with power to inspire the faculty and student body in their chosen fields of endeavor...”

175 H.H. Cherry, letter to J.T. Carman, May 21, 1937, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 1, Folder 112, Special Correspondence.
Cherry, pleased with this message, remarked that “if I could have my way,” Cooper would be back on the Board.\footnote{Board of Regents Minutes, May 17, 1937, UA2/1, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky; H.H. Cherry, letter to D.D. Kirkland, June 12, 1937, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 2, Folder 15, Special Correspondence; R.E. Cooper & Co., letter to H.H. Cherry, June 17, 1937, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 1, Folder 112, Special Correspondence.}

If the intention to make the new classroom building, and more broadly the entire College Heights campus, a monument to its founder not explicit enough, the erection of the Lorado Taft statue put aside any doubts. Though H.H. Cherry was still adamant against its installation while he was still alive, the fact that the late Lorado Taft’s studio was sold to the University of Chicago kept a sense of urgency among the Statue Fund Committee. In an intense effort to retain ownership over Taft’s last sculpture, the committee extended from the alumni community to the broader Bowling Green and regional community, and the model arrived at a bronze foundry by June.\footnote{Mrs. Lorado Taft, letter to J.R. Whitmer, May 14, 1937, UA1B3/5, Cherry Statue Committee Papers, Box 1, Folder 6; Mary Webster, letter to J.R. Whitmer, May 21, 1937, UA1B3/5, Cherry Statue Committee Papers, Box 1, Folder 6; Leonard Grosse, letter to J.R. Whitmer, June 5, 1937, UA1B3/5, Cherry Statue Committee Papers, Box 1, Folder 7.} This news undoubtedly came as a sigh of victory for the Committee, who had now spent the past eight years planning to memorialize their most esteemed leader.

The air of optimism was very evident going into the summer of 1937. The new PWA building was scheduled to open in the fall semester, with a WPA music building soon to follow. The College Heights Foundation at last exceeded a total of 5,000 loans in its fourteen years of existence during the summer as well. With the
finishing of the new classroom building, the Foundation also anticipated the makeshift class spaces in the half-finished Kentucky Building to be vacated and the construction process to be continued. The college boosted the image of the Kentucky Building when it hosted an inaugural “Kentucky Day” on campus in July, where a production of the Stephen Foster “My Old Kentucky Home” story was played out on the back porch and the gardens for a large audience of two thousand. The summer school session boasted of having an expanded faculty to accommodate the growing student population (despite that enrollment was still lower than at the start of the Depression).  

Like the rest of campus, Cherry was enjoying the successes of the school. Other than a trip to Detroit for a convention for the National Education Association, he resided most of the time in Bowling Green, working out finalizing details to the completion of campus projects and keeping at bay with developments in the state. He even expressed in correspondence his desire for the graduate school to be brought back as soon as possible.

On Saturday, July 10, Henry Hardin Cherry was returning to his home when he apparently “stepped into an open concrete ventilator.” How exactly this occurred is left to hearsay of claims that he had been on one of his drinking binges and was trying to crawl through a window after his wife Bess had locked him out of the

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178 *College Heights Herald*, Vol. XIII, No. 17 (July 2, 1937); Cornette, 190.
179 H.H. Cherry, letters to D.D. Kirkland, June 12 and June 28, 1937, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 2, Folder 15, Special Correspondence; H.H. Cherry, letter to Fannie Harrington, July 10, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 1, Folder 133, Special Correspondence.
Cherry tripped on this window well and hit his head badly. Next Monday, the local paper reported that he had bruised his head, but “no bones were broken,” and Cherry hoped to recover quickly and get back to work. He started to improve in the first couple weeks after the fall, and the college insisted the community that his illness was “nothing alarming.”

Despite all the optimism, things took a turn for the worse. The swelling caused by his fall developed into cerebral meningitis, and Cherry became bedridden by the end of the month. A specialist from Nashville was consulted on the President’s dire condition, and his daughter Josephine and her husband came into town to be at her father’s side as he slipped into unconsciousness, never to wake again. On Sunday afternoon, August 1, 1937, Henry Hardin Cherry breathed his last in the President’s home. The famed patriarch of education in Kentucky was dead.

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180 This story was included in the autobiography of an unnamed alumni source presented to Sue Lynn McDaniel, the Librarian of Special Collections at Western Kentucky University.
CHAPTER 5
THE IMMORTALIZATION OF HENRY HARDIN CHERRY

In a town of about 15,000, news traveled quickly, especially when that news was about one of its own residents. Bowling Green church-goers on August 1, 1937 may not have been aware of Dr. Cherry's demise, but word-of-mouth undoubtedly spread later in the day of what had transpired. By the following morning, the rumors were confirmed all across the state. The *Bowling Green Times Journal* announced the headline, “End Comes to Dr. Henry Hardin Cherry Sunday Afternoon At Home Here.” Not only was the news announced in Bowling Green papers, but it reached to all corners of Kentucky, many parts of Tennessee, Michigan, and other states on the day after his death.\(^{183}\)

Because the second summer term was still in session with commencement two weeks away, the campus was populated at the time of Cherry’s death, making his absence all the more noticeable when students came to chapel on Monday and received the official news. The somber service consisted of a sermon from J.O. Williams, the pastor of First Baptist Church followed by remarks given by members

of the faculty. The reaction was an emotional one, especially for those who had a personal relationship with Cherry. “[It] was nothing unusual to see in a crowd of ten people half ’em crying,” said Kelly Thompson, who drove back from Kansas City with E.A. Diddle the night before when hearing the news. “I cried like everyone else. Unabashedly cried. It was like losing a father, a brother, certainly a dear loved one.” The next morning, Cherry’s casket was brought into Van Meter Hall for public funeral services, and the Bowling Green mayor ordered all businesses and schools closed for the event. Many dignitaries came to the funeral, including Governor Chandler (Figure 20). In the public eye, the governor’s presence might have appeared like an act of sympathy and support for the school, though in reality he had political reasons for his attendance. Cherry and Chandler had been at odds with each other, partly over the ordeal with the graduate school. Chandler did not want a college president with a non-deferential attitude that could challenge his policy as Cherry had, and therefore he had in mind to appoint one of his own friends to replace Cherry. As Cherry’s body lay in state after the funeral, Chandler accompanied the regents as they proceeded to a special meeting recommended by State Superintendent Harry Peters on the future leadership of the college. With hardly any time to process the loss, the Board of Regents created an emergency Executive Committee consisting of the two local regents plus three faculty department heads until a replacement president could be found. Dean Finley Grise

184 Kelly Thompson, interviewed by Carlton Jackson, June 22, 1977, WKU Oral History Committee, 12.
185 “Public Funeral Services For Dr. H.H. Cherry Will Be Held Tomorrow Morning,” The Park City Daily News, August 2, 1937, 1.
took upon the executive position pro tempore, signing all official documents that Cherry would have signed.\textsuperscript{186}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.6\textwidth]{figure20.jpg}
\caption{Public Funeral of H.H. Cherry in Van Meter Hall, August 3, 1937. Source: Franklin Studio, August 1937, UA1C11.29.445, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky.}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.6\textwidth]{figure21.jpg}
\caption{Floral Offering to H.H. Cherry, temporarily placed in Ogden Vault, Fairview Cemetery, August 1937. Source: Franklin Studio, August 1937, UA1C11.29.65, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky.}
\end{figure}

Meanwhile, the body of Henry Hardin Cherry, following three hours in Van Meter Hall and a private funeral at State Street Methodist Church, was taken to

\textsuperscript{186} \textit{The Bowling Green Times Journal}, August 2, 1937; Board of Regents Minutes, August 3 and 5, 1937, UA2/1, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky; Harrison, 108-109.
Fairview Cemetery to be temporarily placed in the vault of Robert Ogden, the founder and namesake of Ogden College, until a permanent burial place could be determined (Figure 21). A debate ensued on where the “father” of College Heights should be buried, as if his corpse were now the sacred property of the college. For a time, certain members of the Board and the Statue Fund Committee made a case for his body to be interred at the top of College Heights, further sanctifying the Hill as if his remains were religious relics that could infuse his spirit to the Western community. Others disagreed, saying “it was not suitable that the body rest on College Heights” and that “this was a matter for the family to decide.” After a short debate, the latter option was chosen, and Cherry was buried in a private grave elsewhere in Fairview Cemetery.187

Though the Hill was not to be the final resting place for Henry Hardin Cherry, cementing monuments to him served as the proper substitute. With the President now dead, nothing held back the immediate erection of the Lorado Taft statue. The Statue Fund Committee wasted no time to pass the news of Cherry’s death onto the bronze foundry in Chicago, saying, “We did not dream that we would need the statue so soon.”188 The committee determined to have the statue ready to unveil by November 16, Cherry’s birthday and Founder’s Day, and after a final

188 J.R. Whitmer, letter to Leonard Grosse, August 2, 1937, UA1B3/5, Cherry Statue Committee Papers, Box 1, Folder 7.
recommendation by the Board’s Executive Committee, the committee chose to place the statue in the front plaza of the new classroom building.\textsuperscript{189}

Cherry had lived long enough to see the PWA structure’s exterior more or less completed, though the interior still lacked many components. The decision to place the statue in front of the building now gave more impetus to christen the building with the man’s name. On August 21, three weeks after Cherry’s death, George Sager told the Executive Committee that the PWA central office approved the name of the building as “Henry Hardin Cherry Hall,” with almost no more time to spare on making an order for an inscription into the limestone above the front portico. The Board then made final arrangements to finish interior construction and equipment furnishing for the grand opening to take place later in the semester.\textsuperscript{190}

Thus, within a month of Cherry’s death, his followers transformed the once living man into a memory of bronze and stone. The apex of the New Deal’s success on the face of College Heights was now set to be a temple and crown jewel to its charismatic founder.

In the weeks following his death, a surge in support for the completion of the bronze statue came through the exerted efforts of the Statue Fund Committee and their extension within the alumni base. The committee sent thousands of support letters asking the greater community to help with a remaining $2,500 balance:

\begin{quote}
The great mass of flowers which were banked around his casket while it lay in state in chapel was evidence of our love for our great leader; these flowers have withered, but this bronze statue will stand through the ages as a permanent and constant reminder of our devotion to him and of the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{189} Minutes of Steering Committee, August 6, 1937.
\textsuperscript{190} George Sager, letter to Finley Grise, August 21, 1937, UA3/1/2, Cherry Papers, Box 1, Folder 117, Special Correspondence.
principles for which he stood, and as a continuous inspiration to the thousands who will come to the Hill.\textsuperscript{191}

A call for financial support also appeared in the first fall edition of the \textit{College Heights Herald}. It framed the call for funding the statue as an act of devotion:

\begin{quote}
It has been said that the Hill is Dr. Cherry's memorial, that he does not need a statue. That is true. Those who knew him know that which is to them more than a memorial. Not for these but for their children this memorial should be built. And Dr. Cherry's friends are erecting this memorial, not because of his need but because they loved him.\textsuperscript{192}
\end{quote}

The ardent love and respect held for Cherry after his death elevated him to a demi-god status within the college community, but he was not universally hailed to the same extent everywhere. Louisville's \textit{Courier-Journal}, which tended to be less celebratory of Western Kentucky State Teachers College, published a balanced review of Cherry's life a month after his death, focusing on adversity throughout and his rural and uneducated upbringing. It gave an overall positive impression, but “it cannot be said that H.H. Cherry and Western's faculty have been solely responsible for these advances [in education].” The Louisville paper did acknowledge, however, the impressive length of Cherry's tenure as well as his “unflagging enthusiasm” that were dominant forces in transforming the educational landscape of Kentucky.\textsuperscript{193}

Resolutions passed by various organizations in the months following Cherry's death remembered the man in many different ways. The Council on Public Higher Education, the same council that had decided the ill fate of Western's graduate program, said he had an "eloquent tongue" and that "the 'Hill' he loved so

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{191} Western Kentucky State Teachers College, support letter to community, UA1B3/5, Cherry Statue Committee Papers, Box 1, Folder 11.
\textsuperscript{192} \textit{College Heights Herald}, Vol. XIV, No. 1 (Oct 1, 1937).
\textsuperscript{193} Silas Bent, “His Memorial is Western State,” \textit{Courier-Journal}, September 12, 1937.
\end{footnotes}
devotedly tells the story of his noble life.” A meeting of the KEA’s Third District, at which Senator Alben Barkley was present, said it had “lost its most aggressive and militant leader.” The Bowling Green Kiwanis Club, of which Cherry had once been a member, remembered him for contributions specific to Bowling Green and Warren County, for transforming a wild hill into a cultivated landscape “valued now at several millions of dollars,” and for expanding higher education to countless men and women who otherwise would not have had any opportunities. Bowling Green mayor B.S. Rutherford passed with the Common Council a resolution to donate $500 to the bronze statue fund.¹⁹⁴

These resolutions were intended to create a memorial image of Cherry, but no resolution would have more staying power on future generations than the inscriptions made to the base of the Cherry statue. As support letters continued to bring in support from across the entire country, the Statue Fund Committee decided as to what should be on the statue’s base. An early draft called for his aphorisms “Life, More Life,” and “My son, give good measure,” to be included, as well as the title, “Seer, Executive,” though this last proposal did not make the final cut. Instead, he was to be remembered as an “Inspirer of Youth” and the leader of the normal school and teacher college movements in Kentucky. Friends and alumni pledging offerings to the statue fund elevated him beyond this in their letters. One donor

from Idaho said Cherry "is the idol of all who have come in close contact with him...,"
and a donor from Oklahoma called him “Kentucky’s greatest and most beloved son.”

Simultaneous with finalizing inscriptions on the statue’s pedestal, the Committee also made a motion for the creation of a time capsule to be encased in the base of the statue. Such a capsule reinforced the inseparability of the college’s identity to its leader and attributed practically the entire school’s development to him alone. The items carefully selected for the box was evidently a process of solely the committee members. Along with publications from the days of the Southern Normal School through the Western Normal School and Teachers College years, handpicked items also emphasized Cherry’s run for governor in 1915, the creation of the College Heights Foundation, his published writings and catechisms, his building projects, and the graduate program. The box was also filled with coins, news clippings, photos, and resolutions of his death, letters from his wife and the faculty, receipts from the bronze foundry, the first student registration of Herman Donovan, the president of Eastern Teachers College, group photos representing the dramatic growth of the college, and a list of all donors, including 270 current students, 172 faculty members, and countless more school children, alumni, community members, and companies who gave money to the statue. Even multiple

students representing every grade at the State Street Colored School were represented as donors (Figure 22).  

As impressively packaged the memorabilia to Western and Cherry must have been, the relatively low number of current students who donated (less than 10% based on the total enrollment of the 1936-37 school year) is remarkable. It suggested that hard times of the Depression made such a donation impractical or that such a memorialization was not seen as imperative to this younger generation that only knew Cherry as an aged man. Kathryn Gilbert, who was a childhood friend of Henry Hardin Jr., graduate of the Training School, and a freshman at the Bowling Green Business University when her friend's father passed away, remarked in a

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2015 interview that Dr. Cherry’s death was not particularly significant for her. She acknowledged the respect everyone in the community had for him, including her father who worked at the train station, but she also personally witnessed his drinking habits. Mrs. Gilbert attested that rumors circulated that Dr. Cherry may have been a snoop after being thrown out of a girls’ boarding house when he showed up uninvited.\footnote{197 Kathryn Gilbert, interview by Glenda White, September 2015.} While no written proof of such a scandalous episode exists, Kathryn Gilbert may have been representative of a younger generation that was less enamored with the cult of Cherry than the memorializing items suggested. The more extreme of the celebratory language given H.H. Cherry tended to come from those who had known him personally over an extensive period of years.

The spectacle involved in the process of Cherry’s memorialization overshadowed the quick resumption of normal life on the Hill. The interim Executive Committee rapidly proceeded with regular administrative decisions. Among the first items of business was the raising of several salaries of faculty members and giving permission for those pursuing graduate studies to go on leave – items that Dr. Cherry had not yet taken care of while he was still alive.\footnote{198 Board of Regents Minutes, August 11, 1937, UA2/1, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky.} Meanwhile, work still continued on the WPA Music Hall using salvaged materials from the old Recitation Hall. Cuts in NYA funding limited student employment opportunities to only 180 students.\footnote{199 Harrison, 113; \textit{College Heights Herald}, Vol. XIV, No. 2 (October 22, 1937).}
The most pressing administrative matter, however, was the selection of Cherry's successor. On September 1, the regents met in Governor Chandler’s office in Frankfort. In a very brief meeting, the Board elected one of Chandler’s political allies – Paul Loos Garrett. A native of Shelby County, Kentucky, Paul Garrett had no previous affiliation with Western or the teachers college movement. He had received his education from the private Georgetown College and had until recently served as the superintendent of city schools in Versailles, Kentucky in close proximity to the capital. The decision, quick and without an official search process, was not a unanimous vote, as chief regent and state superintendent Harry Peters objected and refused to change his vote for the record. It was one of the rare cases of a dissenting vote among the Board for that time.²⁰⁰

It was clear to all that Chandler had Garrett elected for his own political purposes rather than Garrett’s qualifications or the benefit of the college, though he officially denied such accusations. Regent Peters, the sole dissenting vote, suggested that Chandler made his recommendation for Garrett to the regents long before the meeting, where he threatened to replace them if they did not comply with his wishes. Most were shocked that a complete outsider like Garrett could have been selected over other qualified persons close to Cherry's counsel, such as M.C. Ford, Finley Grise, or Herman Donovan. Even worse in their eyes, Garrett had probably never met Cherry in person, having only accompanied Chandler to the funeral a month prior. In reality, political placements within the educational system were

²⁰⁰ Board of Regents Minutes, September 1, 1937, UA2/1, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky.
commonplace. Paul Garrett’s election might not have been nearly as controversial had it not followed the mythos of H.H. Cherry’s charismatic personality. In other words, Paul Garrett’s introduction was a clear departure from the cult of Cherry that had permeated the college since its founding.

Compared to Cherry’s dominant voice and fiery, commanding presence, Paul Garrett entered the scene as a meek and mild-mannered man who preferred to be left to his books than speak publicly and deal with faculty and administration. Though most had nothing against him personally, Garrett faced a highly polarizing atmosphere simply due to the political nature of his appointment and comparisons with his predecessor. Despite ill-feelings about the situation, few if any at Western publicly voiced discontent, and the faculty and students officially pledged their support of the new President Garrett, who himself pledged to maintain the work that Cherry had created. At his first chapel address, Garrett recognized the great shadow he now stood in and made no effort to disguise the fact: “I did not come here to fill Dr. Cherry’s shoes. In my judgment, nobody can do that. I have come here to do the very best that I can do as president of Western, and I solicit your help with all my heart.” At the first radio broadcast of the fall semester, listeners heard Garrett talk about his “most challenging and responsible task” of devoting himself to the memory of Cherry and “the glorious traditions of the College,” most notably the “Spirit of the Hill,” which he claimed was Cherry’s greatest contribution to the

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201 Harrison, 108-110.
202 Harrison, 111.
identity of the campus. Rather than attempt to pave a new direction or expansion of the school under his own personality, Garrett deliberately relied upon the spirit of Western’s founder to keep the institution afloat. Nonetheless, it is uncertain whether these public statements were his own doing, or if other Cherry devotees influenced him in this direction.

Unsurprisingly, Garrett as a total newcomer had minimal involvement in the planning of Cherry’s memorial service for the November 16 “Founder’s Day” ceremonies. J.R. Alexander, the oldest of the original remaining faculty and a key player in the Statue Fund and Founder’s Day Committee, had asked for U.S. Secretary of State Cordell Hull to come as the keynote speaker. Hull had attended the Southern Normal School in the 1880s and would have made an impressive testimony to its transformation into Western Teachers College. However, Hull politely declined the request, saying that there were other unsettling international issues happening that demanded his personal attention. Between dealing with Japanese imperial conquests in Asia and the growing militarism of Fascist powers in Europe, Hull simply did not have time to venture to Bowling Green, Kentucky, to celebrate a man he had never met.

Instead, Dean Finley Grise, who had been a favorite of some to succeed

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203 Broadcast No. 63 “Western Kentucky State Teachers College” WHAS Radio, Louisville, KY, aired October 26, 1937, Earl Moore Personal Papers, Box 1, Folder 16.
204 J.R. Alexander, letter to Cordell Hull, September 13, 1937 UA3/1/1, Cherry Papers, Box 84, Folder marked “Dedication,” General Correspondence; Hall of Distinguished Alumni, “Mr. Cordell Hull,” http://alumni.wku.edu/s/808/media.aspx?sid=808&pgid=1724, accessed April 19, 2016; Cordell Hull, letter to J.R. Alexander, October 2, 1937, UA3/1/1, Cherry Papers, Box 84, Folder marked “Dedication,” General Correspondence.
Cherry, was selected to preside the ceremonies. The continuing campaign for the bronze statue more than reached the total costs by mid-October, and by the time the last donations were received, there was over $2,300 raised in excess. The Statue Committee used the excess money to compensate the Cherry family for burial costs, construct bronze posts and chains around the statue pedestal, and commission an oil portrait of H.H. Cherry by a Nashville artist. By Homecoming week, the bronze sculpture had been completed in Chicago and arrived in Bowling Green. Shortly before the granite pedestal was installed, the Committee sealed in the base the commemorative time capsule after a special chapel service. Because the box placed in the base would not be accessible until the destruction of the statue, the Committee also decided to create a duplicate time capsule to be placed in the Kentucky Building for future generations to have access to their hallowed image of Cherry. A couple nights after burying the time capsule, the statue was erected, veiled with a tarp, and guarded by the campus R.O.T.C. unit until Founder’s Day (Figure 24).205

205 Teachers College Heights, Vol. XVI, No. 6, December 1937, 6, 15; Steering Committee meeting minutes, December 7, 1937, and January 14, 1938, UA1B3/5, Cherry Statue Committee Papers, Box 1, Folder 1; Pamphlet on the History of the Cherry Statue, 1951, found in UA3/1/1, Cherry Papers, Box 84, Folder marked “Dedication,” General Correspondence; J.R. Whitmer, letter to Leonard Grosse, November 11, 1937, UA1B3/5, Cherry Statue Committee Papers, Box 1, Folder 7.
At last, the day of Cherry’s immortalization came during wet, cold, and dreary weather. Beginning the services in Van Meter auditorium, the campus gathered to hear eulogies spoken by Herman Donovan, the first student at Western, J.L. Harman, the President of the Bowling Green Business University who had taught in the Southern Normal School under Cherry, J.R. Alexander, the oldest surviving faculty, and Arndt Stickles, Head of the History Department and one of Dr. Cherry’s closest
friends. Many lines in their speeches used deifying language. Comparing Cherry to Abraham Lincoln and other great Kentuckians, Donovan called Cherry the builder of an immortal, invisible temple. “He belongs to all Kentucky – to all future Kentuckians.” Mr. Alexander said, “Something of his spirit must have gone into every brick and stone and hod of mortar in these buildings…” and ended by stating, “I think he [Cherry] would have you approach his shrine with head erect, with a firm step and a stout heart, and listen to his voice in admonition…” Finally, Professor Stickles’ closing remarks were perhaps the most mystic and beatifying of all:

This memorial in enduring bronze unveiled and dedicated today offers him who cares an opportunity to commune with the dynamic, unconquerable spirit of Henry Hardin Cherry, founder of what he may see by looking about. In communion with the Past lies strength born of knowledge and experience. In mute appeal the statue of the founder of this institution speaks to the innermost depths of the soul its message of a great life ended. In the living Present and for tomorrow comes from the same source an appeal to the sons and daughters of Western in clear, trumpet tones: ‘If ye loved me and believed in me, move onward and upward, be loyal to her best traditions and semper fideles.”

Following this, the crowd marched out into the cold rain with umbrellas to the plaza of Cherry Hall to brass patriotic tunes. Several from the community gathered around the veiled statue as overflow of people watched from the windows of the newly finished building. J.R. Whitmer stepped forward to tell the tale of the statue. “[W]e wanted future generations to see him in bronze as we saw him in flesh. He was spoken of most often as a human dynamo – the spirit of the Hill. That dynamo... has been stilled, but the spirit of Western lives on.” After Whitmer concluded, Cherry’s children, Josephine, Elizabeth, and Henry Hardin Jr., cut the cord

206 Teachers College Heights, Vol. XVI, No. 6, December 1937, 6-12.
to release the veil, and the public first beheld the larger-than-life image of their father. Standing fifteen feet above the ground, the statue’s stern gaze created an imposing impression overlooking the city of Bowling Green. Instead of an artificial gesture, the Taft sculpture showed the man’s likeness in a natural pose, with his left thumb in his pocket as was his habit. The rain hitting upon the statue accentuated rugged and resilient characteristics. Bess Cherry was credited to have said that day, “Mr. Cherry’s life was lived in a storm, and his statue was unveiled in a storm” (Figure 25).²⁰⁷

²⁰⁷ Teachers College Heights, Vol. XVI, No. 6, December 1937, 12-13; Broadcast No. 66 “Western Kentucky State Teachers College” WHAS Radio, Louisville, KY, aired November 16, 1937, Earl Moore Personal Papers, Box 1, Folder 17; Pamphlet on the History of the Cherry Statue, 1951, found in UA3/1/1, Cherry Papers, Box 84, Folder marked “Dedication,” General Correspondence.
After Cherry’s grandson came forward and placed a basket of flowers at the base, everyone’s ears heard the sound of the hymn, “My Faith Looks Up to Thee,” ringing from the chimes of the copper cupola, played through a carillon by long-time music professor Franz Strahm. The chimes were the very first of its kind on Western’s campus, and its subsequent melodies would now mark the hours and classes for years to come. The entire ceremony was recorded, wired to the radio station in Van Meter Hall, and later broadcasted on Louisville’s WHAS.208

After a choral singing of the alma mater “College Heights” and a benediction, the crowd dispersed from the assembly, undoubtedly to move somewhere warmer and drier. Resuming normal classes, many students and professors entered into the new classroom building dedicated as the symbolic temple of education that Cherry had created. Within the main entryway of this brand new and modern building was a bronze plaque on the wall that had received far less attention than the statue outside. In light of the extended celebrations of Henry Hardin Cherry’s life, many may not have even noticed the plaque’s acknowledgement to the Public Works Administration for making possible the creation of a suitable structure for instruction and research. The names of persons like George Meuth or George Sager were soon forgotten, but the name of Henry Hardin Cherry transcended for the ages.

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208 Broadcast No. 66, “Western Kentucky State Teachers College.”
EPILOGUE

At the time of its construction, Henry Hardin Cherry Hall was the largest building in Bowling Green, and its deliberate positioning at the Hill’s apex on College Street made it all the more impressive. Two small murals on either side of the building’s limestone front, one of the arts and one of the sciences, denoted the balanced ideal of a liberal arts education. Cherry Hall’s three main floors housed the Education, English, History, Mathematics, Geography, Chemistry, Physics, Psychology, Foreign Languages, and Art Departments, and its basement contained the campus bookstore (by then operated by the College Heights Foundation), the Post Office, the Registrar, and included fireproof vaults for storage. It boasted of being able to hold 2,500 students at any given time. For the first time, many professors had adequate office spaces. As one of the first campus buildings built since the installation of modern city plumbing and ventilation systems, the building was far more commodious and safe compared to the original Recitation Hall. The grant and loan money through the PWA provided not only the building’s walls, but also modern classroom and laboratory equipment to bring teaching up to date. Even so, the delays in bids for subcontracts prevented the building from being fully
furnished until 1938.\textsuperscript{209}

The New Deal programs on campus certainly did not end with Cherry Hall’s completion. As previously mentioned, the Music Hall building funded through the Works Progress Administration was already under construction by the time of Cherry’s death, and it was completed in 1939 (Figure 26). Compared to PWA projects like Cherry Hall, WPA projects were easier to implement due to less stringent regulations and utilization of unskilled labor. The potential downside to quicker construction projects, however, was a decrease in sustainability. Once the music building opened, the basement flooded frequently during heavy rains. Over time, the building deteriorated to the point where it was not salvageable and was razed in 1975.\textsuperscript{210} By contrast, Cherry Hall has lasted to the present day as one of the most venerated and photographed buildings on campus.

\begin{center}
\textbf{Figure 26:} WPA Music Hall (bottom of frame) in relation to campus, circa 1940. Cherry Hall at top right. Source: “Aerial view of campus,” UA1C1.81, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky.
\end{center}


\textsuperscript{210} Harrison, 113, 216.
Without a doubt, Cherry Hall exhibited the most significant and lasting of infrastructural changes brought to Western by the New Deal. Even still, the story of its construction revealed an underlying tension between the influences of government agencies and the indomitable spirit of the local community, of which Cherry was the leader. Rehabilitating the campus during the Depression would have been impossible without the aid of federal programs. Showcasing this dependency, however, contradicted the popular narrative of community resilience and Cherry’s personal resolve to see his visions come to fruition. The all-too-timely death of Western’s founder allowed the government-funded building to be adopted as his personal monument and serve as the beacon of the “Spirit of Western,” further enhanced by the statue in the plaza. Though Cherry’s popularity already elevated him to an untouchable status before his death, the building would simply have been named “Recitation Hall” to comply with PWA standards had Cherry lived to its completion.211

Neither did Cherry live to see one of his other most favorite projects, the Kentucky Building, come to completion, as the Depression severely delayed its construction. The opening of Cherry Hall in the fall of 1937 allowed for work to resume on the Kentucky Building. The College Heights Foundation still received small amounts of public donations, but this was not enough to complete the building in a timely fashion. In the summer of 1938, Garrett reintroduced the idea for submitting a PWA application to complete the interior as quickly as possible.

211 Board of Regents Minutes, August 18, 1937, UA2/1, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky.
Previously, the Foundation had been resistant to government aid, but this time, it did not object. Unlike the two-year ordeal of securing funds for the creation of Cherry Hall, the college quickly received approval for a $37,800 PWA grant for the Kentucky Building by that September. Though the grant only could cover 45% of construction cost, Garrett’s friendship with Governor Chandler gave him leverage to personally petition for further state appropriations. Through the employment of both WPA workers and NYA student workers, the Kentucky Building reached completion and held its grand opening a year later on Founder’s Day, 1939 – a deliberate homage to Cherry’s memory. The commissioned oil painting of Cherry used with some of the leftover money from the Statue Fund depicted Cherry in a romanticized light at his desk, with the Kentucky Building outside a window behind him, reinforcing the image of Cherry as a dreamer and great builder for the state. Housed in the building were the College Heights Foundation offices, a first-of-its-kind Kentucky Museum and Library, and classroom spaces for courses on Kentucky history, culture, geography, and nature (Figure 27).  

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212 Ella Sophonisba Hergerheimer, *Henry Hardin Cherry*, 1939, oil painting, Kentucky Museum, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky; Board of Regents Minutes, July 11, 1938, UA2/1, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky; H.T. Cole, letter to Paul Garrett, June 28, 1938, UA3/2, Garrett Papers, Box 15, Folder 4; H.T. Cole, letter to Paul Garrett, September 7, 1938, UA3/2, Garrett Papers, Box 14, Folder 1; Paul Garrett, letter to A.B. Chandler, September 29, 1938, UA3/2, Garrett Papers, Box 14, Folder 3; Gayle Carver, report to Paul Garrett, 1939-1940, UA3/2, Garrett Papers, Box 6.
Other New Deal opportunities continued to expand under the Garrett administration. The Civilian Conservation Corps, with over 30 camps in Kentucky by the late 1930s, held its 1938 conference for camp educational advisors at Cherry Hall, and eleven of the CCC advisors were Western graduates. The NYA work-study programs were ever competitive, and the school could only offer scholarships at the beginning of each semester. For fall 1938, the college received over 600 NYA applications due to the surge of financial needs exacerbated by flooding in the area that had destroyed many crop fields. The expansion of the NYA led to slight increases in funding, especially as a new war breaking out in Europe led to increased emphasis on defense preparations. Still, Western was not able to provide aid for at least half of total applicants. For students fortunate enough to receive NYA

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213 James Allison, letter to Paul Garrett, June 10, 1938, UA3/2, Garrett Papers, Box 1, Folder 1; Paul Garrett, letter to James Allison, June 15, 1938, UA3/2, Garrett Papers, Box 1, Folder 1.
aid, work projects included various campus repairs and improvements. The NYA also provided limited numbers of resident projects for high school aged youth from rural areas to live on campus and earn up to $28.20 a month for 100 hours of work while taking courses related to their work projects. As the nation came closer to its entry into World War II, these resident projects increasingly concentrated around national defense needs such as radio making, power sewing, metal welding, and woodwork. The usefulness of the NYA programs in retaining current students and bringing rural youth to the college campus deteriorated when NYA funding drastically decreased after America’s entrance into the war. In the face of such cuts, Garrett, like many other college presidents, considered NYA aid “doubly important” in wartime. “I believe that the availability of college training is a very important defense activity,” he said in a letter addressed to Kentucky congressmen and President Roosevelt.215

Western Kentucky State Teachers College arguably faced grimmer circumstances in the Second World War than it did in years prior. The Depression in Kentucky did not end with the U.S. declaring war on the Axis powers. On top of the existing struggles to find adequate funding, the college now faced a mass exodus of students and faculty as they were drafted into the war effort. Enrollment dipped to

215 Robert Salyers, letter to Paul Garrett, October 14, 1939, UA3/2, Garrett Papers, Box 2, Folder 10; Paul Garrett, letter to Robert Salyers, January 21, 1941, UA3/2, Garrett Papers, Box 2, Folder 10; NYA Work Project Application, December 5, 1939, UA3/2, Garrett Papers, Box 2, Folder 11; “NYA Advisory Committee Information,” 1941, Louisville, in UA3/2, Garrett Papers, Box 2, Folder 10; Paul Garrett, letter to Franklin Roosevelt, May 14, 1942, UA3/2, Garrett Papers, Box 2, Folder 10; Aubrey Williams, letter to Paul Garrett, July 20, 1942, UA3/2, Garrett Papers, Box 2, Folder 10.
less than 1,000 students for the fall semester of 1942. Garrett belatedly petitioned the federal government to bring a military training program to the campus. A personal trip to Washington, D.C. along with the recent construction of an airport in Bowling Green helped secure a cadre of 400 men in an Army air training corps to reside on campus. Their physical presence, and the receipts of more than $10,000 a month, in many ways supplemented the college's otherwise abysmal period during the war. The existence of a modern classroom and laboratory structure such as Cherry Hall provided the means for adequate academic training of the military officers, particularly in the subjects of physics, chemistry, history, and geography (Figure 28).216

Figure 28: Completed Cherry Hall lecture room used to instruct Army Air Corps trainees, 1943. Source: George Updegraff, “Station History of the 321st College Training Detachment (Aircrew),” 1943, UA3/2, Garrett Papers, Box 10, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky.

216 Harrison, 123-126; Paul Garrett, letter to A.B. Chandler, September 24, 1942, UA3/2, Garrett Papers, Box 3, Folder 6;
Cherry Hall, now the main classroom building and center of the campus throughout the most difficult period in Western’s history, began to live up to its symbolism of spirited perseverance. In a time when some may have doubted how the college could go on, the stone structure with its crowning cupola now permeated the horizon as a defiant testament to the “Spirit of Western,” due to its association with the mystical presence of its namesake, Henry Hardin Cherry.217

The immediate postwar years saw a steady resurgence in attendance, aided in large part by returning veterans receiving funds for education through the GI Bill. Uncertain as the times were, the influx of students forced the state government to reanalyze the role of the state teachers colleges. A more diverse student population interested in careers outside the teaching profession prompted the General Assembly to shorten the institution’s name to Western Kentucky State College in 1948. With the name change, Kelly Thompson, who had risen through the ranks as the Director of Public Relations and Assistant to the President, seized upon an opportunity to change the seal of the college. Thompson replaced the original student-designed seal featuring Van Meter Hall with his own rendering of Cherry Hall’s façade and tower, with rays of light surrounding it and overlaid by inscriptions of Cherry’s aphorisms “Life, More Life” and “The Spirit Makes the Master” as school mottos. Since Thompson had been a loyal protégé of Cherry, his redesign of the college seal was probably an intentional move to further encapsulate the mythos of his mentor with the institution’s identity. The seal being approved, it

217 It is also worth noting that the Graduate School returned in 1941. According to Harrison, this would have been Cherry’s next project had he lived longer. Harrison, 93, 135.
first appeared on publications with the name change (Figure 29).²¹⁸

Figure 29: College Seal featuring Cherry Hall designed by Kelly Thompson, 1948.
Source: UA1C8.0.8, WKU Archives, Bowling Green, Kentucky.

Within a decade, Thompson rose to become the third president of the institution after Garrett, like Cherry before him, died in office in 1955. With the enormous expansions during his administration, Thompson saw the college transform into its present designation – Western Kentucky University. For him, Cherry was his idol. “Of all the people whom I have ever known or might ever know, he was the greatest man of all,” reflected Thompson years after his retirement from the presidency. “I became a great subscriber quickly of his beliefs and to his ideas, and they have stayed with me all of my life.”²¹⁹

The remembrance and deification of Henry Hardin Cherry through his

²¹⁸ Wilson, A Factbook of Western Kentucky University, 141-142.
²¹⁹ Harrison, 142; Kelly Thompson, interviewed by Carlton Jackson, October 26, 1976, WKU Oral History Committee, 21-22.
faithful disciples like Kelly Thompson helped sustain the tradition of the “Spirit of the Hill” for future generations. To this day, Cherry Hall, its cupola imbedded in the university logo and reproduced on other capital constructions, serves as a visual reminder to the spiritual culture espoused by the founder. Though other traditions like chapel and the celebration of Founder’s Day eroded over time, the historical legacy of a strong figurehead may subconsciously persist in the present WKU community. At the very least, the glorified image of a battle-hardened crusader fighting against the forces of ignorance and economic depression provides a more exciting and compelling narrative for posterity than the complicated political machinations of the Depression and the negotiations of the New Deal.
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