11-9-1966

UA3/3/1 Founders Day Address: "Shoe Laces & Bell Ropes"

Willson Wood

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/dlsc ua_records

Recommended Citation
http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/dlsc ua_records/184

This Presentation is brought to you for free and open access by TopSCHOLAR®. It has been accepted for inclusion in WKU Archives Records by an authorized administrator of TopSCHOLAR®. For more information, please contact topscholar@wku.edu.
FOUNDERS DAY PROGRAM
WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY
VAN METER AUDITORIUM
10:20 A.M.
Wednesday, November 9, 1966

- PROGRAM -

Presiding - President Kelly Thompson

Invocation - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - Ward C. Sumpter
Emeritus Professor of the Department of Chemistry

Providebarn Dominum - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - Orlande De Lassus
Fanfare and Chorale - - written for Founders Day - - - - - Bennie Beach
Brass Choir

Gerald Chandler
Michael Sims
Larry Brooks
David Dickerson
Brian Gonneley
Pamela Buchanan
Mary Palkowski
Martin Miller

Mary Drennan
Roy Mc Dale
Charles Rinne
Charles Cron
Robert Boling
Harold Baker
Douglas Webb
Gary Pruitt

Bennie Beach, Conductor

A Brief Tribute - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - Willson E. Wood, Head
Department of English

College Heights - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - 
Claude Rose at the Organ

Audience

Led by Ohm Pauli

The ideals on which Western Kentucky University is founded were first declared by Dr. H. H. Cherry, the founder and first president of the University. November 16, the birth date of President Cherry, was designated as Founders Day in 1931. Since that time, there has been an annual celebration of Founders Day as a time when special tribute is paid to the great founder and to others who have made outstanding contributions to the growth and development of Western.

(over)
COLLEGE HEIGHTS

College Heights, on hill-top fair,
With beauty all thine own,
Lovely jewel far more rare
Than graces any throne!

Chorus

College Heights, we hail thee;
We shall never fail thee
Falter never -- live forever,
Hail! Hail! Hail!
Ladies and Gentlemen, there are two logical reasons for indulging in reminiscing. One is that it is a gentle and harmless pastime for those who for one reason or another have little to do today and no promise for tomorrow. This sort of reminiscing is generally done by the very old or infirm. The other is that occasionally one needs to reexamine the past in order to better understand the present or to project the future. This sort of reminiscing is generally done by mature people who are concerned with the long sweep of time—past, present and future. Youth do not normally indulge in reminiscing because they are busy making the most of today or building dreams for tomorrow. Let me persuade you, my youthful audience, to assume for a few minutes sufficient maturity to give you at least a mild interest in the yesterdays and the people of those yesterdays who have made this day and your tomorrows a little better fitted to your needs.

I have entitled my speech "Shoe Laces and Bell Ropes" for reasons which I shall now explain to you. Thirty-five years ago I was sitting every morning at the ten o'clock period out there where you are, and up here sat and stood several of the men who actually laid out the foundation and symbolically set the corner stone of this institution. One of these, with the voice and general attitude of a Hebrew prophet, even before the days of P.A. systems, rattled the windows of the farthest balcony as he denounced lethargy, indolence, and ignorance, but proclaimed the dawning of a new day for education and democracy. One of his favorite battle cries was that we must develop education and democracy until we shall have rung "the
moral, intellectual, and industrial rising bell in the life of every child in the land."\(^1\) I recall that he talked frequently about ringing bells, not just rising bells, but bells symbolizing progress, or bells calling children from play to their studies. So I like to think of him as a bell ringer, and if he had used a give-away gimmick, I think he would have handed out symbolic bell ropes indicating his campaign to develop a generation of bell ringers.

As I thumb through the pages of my memories I find the portraits of several other men whose efforts and dedication through two, three, and even four decades so impress me that I want to rearrange the words of the great evangelist and say there are some who have gone before me, the laces of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose.

For the few minutes which I have I shall recount some of the achievements, I shall give examples of dedication, I shall reveal the philosophies of some of these men who have marked out the trails which you and I follow today. Without referring to individuals by name, I shall give you specific things which I know that certain men did, but I shall not have time to develop complete biographies.

The first man I shall discuss was the most dynamic and most dedicated man I have ever known. Two other qualities he had were his great persuasiveness and his insatiable ambition—not a selfish ambition—but a drive to achieve, to build, to promote a great cause—like universal education. Let me give you an example. When he was twenty-eight years old he was a teacher of rural schools and moonlight writing schools in Warren County. His formal education amounted to about what you had after your first year of high school. His older brother had a little more education and a little more experience. This older brother had just been made president of a little business college in Mississippi. The younger brother talked his older brother into resigning from that job and coming back to Bowling Green to start a new college.

---

in the place of one which had just gone out of business. These two men hired a
secretary to do the office work and to teach shorthand; they obtained the services of
one other man, rounded up about twenty-five students, borrowed or leased four rooms
of the defunct college, and with an initial capital of less than $3000 started a business
college. Only a missionary, a martyr or a fool would have done that, and this man
was no fool.

That was in 1892, and those of you who know your history know that the next
year brought the depression of 1893 which should have killed this school off almost
before it got started. But these two young men were not the quitting kind; they put
their secretary to producing brochures, advertising in glowing terms the great and
successful school, while they got into their buggies and drove throughout surrounding
counties persuading a few country school teachers and others to come to Bowling Green
for a few months of college training. They also accumulated lists of names of pro-
spective students whom they showered with advertising which promised the great
blessings to be derived from a term or two in their great college.

The same drive and persuasiveness which brought these young men and women
to this school persuaded employers that they could not prosper without employing
their students. I know whereof I speak, for my own father, who was only seven years
younger than one of these brothers and was a country school teacher in his own county,
somehow fell under their spell fifty miles away, a long distance in those days, and
came to their school. However, he did not get to finish one term because he got a
job paying four times as much as he had been making. I imagine that he became a
valuable statistic in the advertising sent out for the next few years. At this point I
would like to read a part of the educational philosophy of this school which was published
in their advertising in 1892 under the title: Declaration of Principles of Policies.
To be a live school and to impart to its students a burning zeal to do and be something. To fight against ignorance, and for higher education and the liberation of the human soul. To "ring the rising bell in the human soul" by inspiring all students who come in touch with the work of the institution. To teach that self-control is an imperative duty and the first great obligation that every person must fulfill, if he would succeed. To instill in the minds of the students the great truth that every person is created to do something, to be a producer. To lead the student to see that success depends mainly upon his own efforts, and that he must discover the man in himself before he can become a being of power and influence. This sort of philosophy and energy and ambition, accompanied by a missionary zeal, made it possible for these two brothers to build a successful school. Then when the younger brother became interested in a move to establish a system of public higher education, he became a member of the committee which was organized to sell the idea to the state. With the same dynamic personality, the same missionary zeal which had built his private school he flung himself—body, mind and spirit into the campaign. So well did he and the other members of the committee do their job that the bill to establish two normal schools passed without a dissenting vote and became law on March 21, 1906.

This last sentence makes it sound easy, but let us look at the facts. That bill carried an appropriation of $5000 to equip a physical plant and $20,000 a year for running expenses for each of the new schools. It appears utterly ridiculous that anybody would take the job of running a college on a budget like that. But remember here was a man in Bowling Green who had started a college some twelve to fifteen years earlier in four borrowed rooms and with $3,000 running expenses. So, like a new prophet with a new law book this man sent his voice crying through the wilderness of

---

2James P. Cornette, *A History of the Western Kentucky State Teachers College*, pp. 74, 75.
ignorance and indifference and slowly increased the public support, while at the same time he used his powers of persuasion to surround himself with the sort of faculty members who would command respect. This was a thirty year campaign—a battle that never ceased until the end of his life—no, not even then, because other men and women had joined him and displayed the same sort of courage and dedication. Not even a miracle worker can build a great institution without capable and dedicated colleagues, the kind I am going to discuss for the next few minutes. Here, again, I am not going to present biographies but shall give you some facts which I know to be true of certain people who must be counted among the founders.

Fifty-nine years ago, next January 19, a young man came to Western, just two days after it became one year old. Except for a few periods while he was away in graduate school almost all of his adult life has been spent here. I am sure that there have been many times when he was tempted by "bigger" jobs (I have enclosed the word bigger in quotation marks) and higher pay, but somehow in those early days he arrived at what I call complete commitment; that is, his life, his work, his hopes became so inextricably entwined with the life of this school and its community that nothing could take him away. Only such commitment could make a man stay on through lean year after lean year—one long stretch, I happen to know, he went seventeen years without a raise in salary, yet there was never a complaint, never a threat to leave, not even a diminution of his regular habit of putting in overtime almost every day. He regularly came to school in the morning before anyone else was stirring, prepared his lessons or graded his papers so that he could be available other periods during the day to advise with students and faculty, or anyone else who came to the campus for help.
He was here three years later when Western's students and faculty picked up books and equipment and physically carried them to the Hilltop. Talk about founders!

What a thrill it must give this man to be able to say "I, with these very hands, carried this infant school from down under the hill and placed it in its new home."

I could go on at great length recounting evidence of this man's dedication to those 1892 principles as exemplified in this school. However, I want to tell you briefly about another giant who has preceded me across this stage. Though his contact with Western was brief during his early days, he, too, arrived at a sort of complete committment to his profession, so much so that he made a record which I do not believe can be duplicated. He taught school fifty-two years, nearly half of which he spent at Western. You mathematicians know that if one starts at eighteen, the minimum legal age for a teacher, and goes to the compulsory retirement at seventy, he barely can get in fifty-two. You are probably wondering how he did his own school work. I would wonder, too, if I didn't know, but it is a fact that he did four years of high school, four years of college, then a Master of Arts and a Doctor of Philosophy—all without missing a year of teaching. Yes, he did all that by going spring terms, summer terms, Saturdays, night classes, and for one considerable stretch held a job close enough to a graduate school that he could make it to late afternoon classes after he got out of school. You might think that he would have slighted his job, but I was closely associated with this man for several years and know that it was not possible for him to slight any job. Although he had two hobbies and some other interests, this man's life was the most completely intertwined with his profession of any man I have ever known.
Yes, it required hard work, and it seems as if he had said, "I shall give my all," for when his fifty-two years were finished he went home, rested for a few weeks, then departed this life.

One other aspect of the founding of this university must be mentioned. That is its contact with its surrounding community. No institution, no matter how well founded or managed, can outgrow or become isolated from its community and long survive.

Western has been fortunate in this matter. From that bell ringing philosophy announced in 1892 down to the community college program of today Western has had men who have willingly carried the message of educational opportunity out into the surrounding community. Let me give you a few facts. I know one man who has delivered 318 commencement speeches in 199 different places. That is not counting numerous other appearances at workshops, literary clubs, Boy Scout meetings, Sunday School classes, etc. Then, on top of that, numerous judging jobs, such as spelling bees, speaking contests, essay contests, etc. are always available for those who will do what Dr. Cherry would have called filling the basket above the rim. Sometimes these men have been re-imBURsed for expenses, a few times they have been paid well, and a few times they have barely received thanks. In earlier times whatever pay they received was nothing compared to the time and effort involved. For instance, one man went to Beaver Dam, which is about an hour's drive now—just 43 miles north of Bowling Green on Highway 231. At the time I am thinking of there was no public transportation direct to Beaver Dam. To get there this man left Bowling Green at 6:10 A.M., went by train to Guthrie, after a long wait caught another train to Nortonville, still later got another train from there to Beaver Dam, and arrived at the destination
in late afternoon during a down-pour of rain. He made the speech, spent the night in a hotel, then spent most of the next day getting home. How much would you pay a man for a job like that? I am afraid most of us would not settle for railroad fare, the hotel bill, and a $5.00 tip. Well, we might, if we had his subject on that particular night--and really meant it. It was "My Debt to the Ages and How I Can Pay It."

It is almost unbelievable how these men gave their services to Western and its surrounding community. I know of another occasion when a Western man drove his car a roundtrip of one hundred miles and made a commencement address in a gymnasium which had a tin roof. Twice during the program the rain on the tin roof drowned him out, so that he had to stop and wait for it to slacken, and once the motor which ran the generator for the lights quit and plunged us into total darkness. For this trip and speech the man was paid $5.00 and he bore his own expenses. That was during the great depression, and he was probably surprised to get more than a "Thank you." I am particularly conscious of this sort of dedication because it was through this kind of activity on the part of two men of Western that I was first led in this direction, then later brought here and made a part of this school. One of these contacts was made in an extension course taught in my home county--there I got my first taste of an education which challenged my thinking. I caught from that teacher almost as one contracts a contagious disease--a restless desire for something my home community could not provide. That was forty years ago, and I can still repeat some of the things which were said in that class. Then two years later I was graduating from high school and another man came from Western and delivered the commencement address. I
was so enchanted and so impressed by something about this man that now thirty-eight years later I can almost repeat his speech.

You can readily understand, then, why I bring to any discussion of founders a deep sense of obligation. You can appreciate the feeling of humility with which I tread the paths and the hallways of this campus as I recall some of the men who have been here before me.

So I say, and I hope you can say with me, "Founders, we salute you men of yesterday; we honor you for having laid so good a foundation; we share with you your dreams for the future; we recognize the challenge which you present to us today, and with full cognition of the awful responsibility, we accept your challenge."