

Opening Remarks --- August 00

A couple of years ago, I took a lunch hour to find a site on the net I'd heard about somewhere; it might have been listed in the Chronicle of Higher Education or in Ms Magazine, or in something I saw in a newspaper. I don't remember. The site was "The Noon Quilt" and those managing it were in Nottingham, England. The site was colorful (virtual colored scraps of quilt pieces), user friendly (you could open them up and read what others had written and make a contribution yourself), and it was relatively anonymous....as anonymous as you wanted given your ISP track was there. The idea was that from all over the world (mostly Europe and North America), people would write unrhymed verse or simple prose about what they could see from their windows at noon. Each contribution was a piecing, put together by the editors. I don't know if there was more than one quilt, but I was intrigued by the human face on the machine medium. And I did contribute a piece, never admitted until now, and, finally got a hard copy of the selected quilt pieces (mine among them) in print media last year. One's writing had to be terse (space); it was creative work in a group (the whole quilt); it was tied to realities (virtual and what you can see in the street below you).

I thought about this experience late last July when I read Steve Gilbert's comments to the American Association of Higher Education technology group as he left for an "entirely electronically unconnected" "vacation" at a Quaker camp where he and his wife were to be camp cooks and a daughter was to be a camper for a week. Gilbert, for those not aware, is president of the Teaching, Learning and Technology group that operates out of the American Association of Higher Education. The focus of his group's work is "teaching, learning, technology, and collaborative change." As he notes in the TLT page introduction, "Higher education has begun an irreversible transformation - with information technology as the catalyst. New technology options arrive at an accelerating and confusing pace." TLT group programs, and the listserv, help institutions "identify and continue to support (their) fundamental values and educational goals while embracing new technology options." His piece was entitled: "Aliens Among Us? Don't Swallow without Chewing." To paraphrase his two page annual salvo, "many things are changing in important ways, and... as we strive to integrate new applications of information technology into teaching and learning we must recognize

how rapidly things are changing...and how slowly things are changing. We must see the ways in which young people are truly different, and the ways in which they are truly the same. Our deepest values, our most human characteristics change very slowly, if at all. And that is both the source of our strength and its challenge." Using the new technology to help students learn is time-consuming, requires faculty and staff commitment and availability, and may be the necessary boost to students...but the changes in technology have focussed on the student learner. Over the years we've prided ourselves at ONU on teaching that is student focussed, enabling, demanding of student effort, because we know that without this participation in the process...there is no learning. We've been after problem solving, student diagnosis of issues, student creation/design of art objects, performance, projects, literary works and expository writing; analysis of data and issues; computer programs; interpretation of data and hypotheses; interpretation of data and recommendations of care options; working out and understanding issues. What we're doing in the year 2000 as we incorporate useful technology into course learning, change course learning to a new medium, is simply to continue ONU's initial mission to educate students and to help students educate themselves.

Thanks to Paul Logsdon making the material available in Heterick, during the summer I also spent some time reading a 400 page report of the survey of educational institutions affiliated with the Methodist Episcopal Church. The survey, called for by the presidents of those colleges in 1928 (and including colleges from ONU to Cornell), evaluated programs, procedures and resources of those colleges. What is remarkable about this study is the fact that the issues raised by the evaluators are contemporary to our own time. To the evaluators ONU needs were:

1. A clear mission statement of the University
2. Accreditation of the professional and other programs and of the total University
3. Improved business reporting
4. Improved health services for students
5. Reduction of over-expansion of courses in some departments; elimination of some programs, consolidation of others
6. Equalization of faculty work-loads
7. Improvement of qualifications of faculty; improvement of salaries & fringes

8. Improvement of instruction
9. Increased endowment and annual funds and other development efforts
10. Increased scholarship endowment
11. Improved retention of students
12. Improved library holdings and facilities

Although the evaluators did not fully appreciate the aims of the University, the statement that then ONU President Williams enunciated is modern in its clarity of purpose:

1. To furnish a liberal arts education to those desiring a broad, liberal and cultural education
2. To train teachers for public and private schools
3. To train students for the professions of pharmacy, law and engineering (Ed: add business)
4. Generally to furnish men and women a background of culture to fit them for the active duties of better citizenship under Christian (ED: Judaeo/Christian) conditions.

And the mission statement published in the catalog of 1930 underscores the idea of diversity that has become the motto of the University: "strength out of diversity." It reads in part: "Ohio Northern University opens her doors to all worthy young people, especially the self-dependent, who are ambitious to secure either a liberal or a professional education." It adds: "A distinct characteristic of Ohio Northern is the spirit of democracy and good fellowship among the students, many of whom are making their own way through college."

What impressed the survey staff was the ability of the ONU faculty, staff, and administrators to move with "astounding rapidity in introducing changes which were urgently needed." They added: "The brightest feature of the whole situation at Ohio Northern University is the energy and the intelligence which have been displayed in making urgently needed readjustments, and the cooperation with which all concerned have entered into the task of reorganizing the institution."

In discussing the organizations at the University which supported moral and religious influences, the survey staff noted the YMCA, the YWCA, and the Oxford Club, a campus organization of pre-ministerial students. They also praised the International Club, "which has for its object the promotion of international good will and brotherhood

by uniting students of all nationalities attending the institution....It aids foreign students on their arrival and in various ways tries to be of service to them while they are in America. It maintains an emergency loan fund for the benefit of any of its members who may be temporarily embarrassed financially." It would be nice to have that loan fund in 2000!

The visitors noted: "The possibility of increasing revenue from endowment at Ohio Northern University involves either increasing the size of the endowment fund or increasing the rate of return from the present endowment, or both." Later they stated: "the one outstanding need at Ohio Northern University is for a larger income with which to support the educational program." ----- The year 2000 speaks in 1930. Issues of tuition costs, discounted tuition, staggered raises in tuition were discussed by the visitors. Finally, they summarized the six most important improvements to be undertaken according to the study:

1. Improved faculty
2. Better library facilities
3. Improved plant facilities for engineering and pharmacy
4. Accreditation of the College of Law by the ABA/AALS or its discontinuance
5. Increase in endowment
6. Increase in the annual income from sources other than student tuition.

Many of us in this room have seen growth in that team's #1, #2, #3, #4, #5, and limited growth in #6. We still have a ways to go. Most of these issues are continuing, on-going efforts for all of us in this room.

Now just who was the president of ONU at this juncture? Most of us know something about the founder, Henry Solomon Lehr, but, except for the presidents that some of us have known personally (McIntosh, Meyer, Loeschner, Freed, Baker), the president, Robert Williams, whose service spanned the depression through the middle of World War II, is an almost unknown and unsung hero. It was probably prophetic that at his first baccalaureate sermon at ONU, Dr. Robert Williams preached on Jonah. He told the 232 members of the graduating class that Jonah was not truly educated because he lacked the ability to adapt himself to new situations; he lacked the preparation essential to the educated man and an idealism with roots founded in a true conversion of the soul. He told the graduates that he (Williams) had come to the conclusion that after all, people really had to educate themselves. Jonah, he said, had

to endure many ordeals of a soul-terrifying experience before he was finally converted and educated in the highest and best sense." If any of the presidents had soul-terrifying experiences, Williams did. He was president during the crash of 1929 and throughout the economic depression in the U.S. and world that hit Ada and the University. He saw the University recover and grow, and then, again, suffer diminishment as World War II decimated the student body.

The student editor of the 1933 yearbook had requested an autobiographical sketch from the president. This is what Williams wrote:

"The light of this troubled world first broke upon my eyes in the beautiful vale of the Aire in Yorkshire, England, not far from the Priory of Bolton, which Wordsworth has immortalized in his poem, the Doe of Rylstone, and not much farther from the famous home of equally famous Bronte sisters. My memory is still green of a boyhood spent in the neighborhood of a sixteenth century church and an ancient castle. It seems as if I had been cradled amid a thousand years of history.

My parents, not being Dukes, emigrated to the United States when I was yet young, and apparently having a full sense of their responsibilities, brought me with them. And so I have grown up, a citizen of the United States. Now there come memories of New England, my jobs there and later my education. And so to Rhode Island, Connecticut and Massachusetts I am indebted for such formal training as I have, preparation for college at the East Greenwich Academy; college career at old Wesleyan University, and graduate work of various sorts at Harvard, Yale and Boston. Since coming to the Middle West, two other colleges have enrolled me as an adopted son, namely Albion and Ohio Wesleyan.

Most of my life has been spent in work, with only a little leisure for play. As a parson, teacher, dean and president my hands have been rather full of cares. Providence has apparently ordained me to be a son of toil, and I have no quarrel with this arrangement. However, among my hobbies are included a little golf and less tennis. If when and as I have opportunity for books---poetry, philosophy and religion absorb much of my thought. My serious interests are my wife and my children, for I realize with Francis Bacon, that he who marries and has children gives hostages to fortune.

Besides being a citizen of this Republic, I am a Methodist, a Republican with Democratic ideas, a more or less casual Mason, and am listed along with other college

presidents in Who's Who, where the curious can be satisfied as to further details of my life."

Some of those further details included his working in the mills at Skipton where his father was a hand. He worked his way through school. He was an ordained Methodist minister; he earned his A.B. from Wesleyan University in Connecticut and his master's in philosophy from Boston University. He was a professor of Greek and English at Williamsport-Dickinson Seminary in Pennsylvania, was vice-president of Greenwich Academy and later served as dean at Albion. He loved learning, truly liked people, and never took himself too seriously.

Williams became acting president in 1929, the fourth president of the University. President Smith, however, continued to be listed as president in the catalogs of 1929 and 1930. Williams typifies the breed of ONU president who is committed to students. The 1930 yearbook was dedicated to "Robert Williams. To whose understanding heart and fairness to all is this Northern of 1930 respectfully dedicated." The 1942 yearbook note on the president reads: "To Doctor Robert Williams, president of Ohio Northern University since 1929, belongs much of the credit for making our institution what it is. "Prexy's" genial personality and breadth of interest account for his popularity among students and faculty alike, as well as for his popularity as a speaker both on and off campus."

In 1935 he was asked for a President's message for the yearbook. He wrote: "After sixty-four years of distinguished service to many thousands of students, the University is preparing itself for further expansion and progress. These critical times will give place to new periods of stability, and the demand for fine educational training will be more than ever necessary in the future. Ohio Northern, therefore, should play an increasingly important part in the facilities it offers for students in liberal arts and professional courses. With the constant improvement in teaching, the acquisition of better equipment in the laboratories, and the steady development of the libraries of the University, our campus should be increasingly attractive to the many students who are seeking a thorough education.

Furthermore, the University with its emphasis upon the possibilities of richer social fellowship, its care for the life, not only of the intellect, but of the spirit, is able to minister with more adequacy than ever to its student body. Both in

intramural and intercollegiate activity the students are giving a constantly better account of themselves, and it is growingly manifest that in these respects the future is bright. May we not then venture the suggestion that the student body of the University is its greatest asset....We are all interested in a bigger and better Ohio Northern. We may have such a University if we mutually desire it, and if we work cooperatively to that great end. With all good wishes for your own success and that of Alma Mater, I am cordially yours, Robert Williams."

Students called him "intensely human." His idea was that "a wholesome atmosphere among students can best be obtained by combining proper social relations with good instruction." "He relaxed the ban on social dancing (1931), allowed sororities to be established (1930), and...opened a social hall on the second floor of Lehr Memorial for student and faculty parties. In 1934, the football team was undefeated, and in 1942, they won the championship."

Williams lived with his family at 502 South Johnson, that's across the street from the Mike Milks family's victorian and is the house that has housed the vice president for development, faculty members, and students in recent years.

In his "state of the union" address to the faculty at the opening session of the school year as he took over as interim president in 1929, Williams noted:

"It (Ohio Northern) enters now increasingly on the phase of its educational development. It is this third and present stage that commands our attention. For after all it is not enough to recite history; we must make it. It is this that made our predecessors great; it will do no less for us."

He went on to say:

"The college man and woman should be educated for leadership, for positions of importance in the professional and industrial life. This does not involve a wholly non-cultural view of education and it certainly excludes a view that is wholly cultural."

He followed up with:

"Ohio Northern University is a unique institution. This is not flattery, but fact....If a university be defined in our American sense as a group of colleges, devoted to arts, the professions and commerce, then Ohio Northern is a true university."

Later he noted:

"The fact is that we can no longer take the whole of learning for our province.

More and more we must seek so to construct our curriculum so that men and women can learn to handle the tools that shape the civilization of our time. Medievalism in the twentieth century is as much out of place in education as it is in religion. In other words, it is important to supplement the analyses of science with the syntheses of philosophy, and to add to the appreciations of art the evaluations of religion, but it is equally important to be Socratic in our concepts, and to define only that which is good for something as the good; and for us, this means that education shall prepare men(women) for life and living."

He told the faculty:

"Our own scholarship should be constantly enriched. From time to time there should be visible evidence of our achievements. Our reading should keep us abreast of the literature of our field....A faculty that is studious and holds learning in reverence spreads a contagion among the student body that is wholesome. Student bodies are easily satisfied. Their minds are full of a thousand interests. Our conceptions of standards become theirs. Hence the necessity of continued study, of production whenever possible, of love for high scholarship and achievement for ourselves."

Williams wanted "a women's dormitory, a new library, laboratories for biology, chemistry and physics." He wanted "a social union on the campus for the interest of independent students." He wanted to "develop adequate quarters for art"...and "adequate equipment for the colleges of pharmacy and engineering."

He envisioned improving salaries for faculty, establishing sabbatical leaves, providing teacher pensions. He wanted to get the colleges and the University accredited. His was a practical sense. As he noted: "Finances, distasteful as they may be to discuss, are after all the bed rock facts with which we have to deal....It is a homely and trite thing to say that a dollar cannot be twice spent." He noted the need for student "amusement" and wanted curricula to increase the students' power of adjustment in the world of books, machines, men, manners and morals. He was encouraging change at the University; he was leading that change with persuasion and tact.

The interim president closed his 1929 "brief statement of program and immediate policy" thusly:

"May I urge upon you all the spirit of real service. It is true that we must work for money, but after all, ours is the rare privilege of intellectual, aesthetic and moral quests that should tune us with the finest idealisms. I know of no greater

privilege than that of giving instruction to a growing mind, or shaping habits of thought in developing adolescence. This is a service that there is little compensation for.

You are in a great lineage and succession. What can be done to make our achievement greater should be done. What we can do to give you a greater sense of security and permanence of dignity and respect will be done. Standing as we do at the beginning of a great adventure together, I feel with Tennyson's Ulysses:

"It may be that the gulfs will wash us down.
it may be we shall reach the happy isles
And see the great Achilles whom we knew.
that which we are, we are;
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield."

In 1943, after having established flight training for the Army Air Corps and officer training for the Navy, on- and off-campus programs to counter the decline in traditional students during World War II, with some successes in achieving accreditation in two colleges (law and pharmacy) and working toward additional accreditations, and after having devoted fourteen years to the work of rebuilding the university after the depression and then having to cope with its decline in enrollment in the war years of the 40s, Dr. Williams resigned as president. In the *Northern Review* of March 27, 1943, he outlined the struggles still facing the University and practical considerations for its survival. He summed up his analysis:

"I trust it will not be inferred from this statement that the school cannot survive. I do not believe in the theory of the indispensable man. This institution was founded in 1871. It has gone through wars, depressions and panics ever since, and there is no reason why, with new leadership and full apprehension of the needs of the school, with a definite carry out of policies to meet those needs, the institution cannot survive. After fourteen years of service here, I am fully convinced that new leadership is necessary and see no reason to change my point of view. I am simply stating here in some detail the very definite reasons which have led me to so grave and so important a decision."

Williams was ill and he died within that year. He was replaced by Robert O. McClure who provided the leadership that Williams sought.

So here we are at the start of a new year. Accreditations are in hand; faculties are committing themselves to student research; we face the challenges of adapting our teaching as we use new technologies to assist student learning; the spirit of our students and the student body continues to be our greatest asset; we continue the mix of practice and theory in our curricula; we still need to find sources of income outside of tuition dollars. You and I may not be called to the heroism of a Williams, but we are called to the same service. Ours is a service profession and we should be humbled by it. Our challenges at ONU today are analogous to the challenges of the past: funding of the university beyond tuition dollars, incorporating the technology of our century into our curricula and changing modes of instruction, continuous improvement of instruction; assessment of learning outcomes and reshaping curricula to achieve better results; incorporation of integrated service learning into our programs, providing service and collegial civility to one another.

No one much quotes Tennyson anymore, but the phrases Williams quoted do still ring:

"It may be that the gulfs will wash us down.
it may be we shall reach the happy isles
And see the great Achilles whom we knew.
that which we are, we are;
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield."