

9.1.04
Lippert

Opening 2004

In 1973, after I'd spent two years at ONU, I got a Fulbright grant to teach in Algeria at the University of Oran. I was very new to ONU, untenured, and was surprised that the University would grant me a leave of absence, even for a Fulbright, but the University granted it.

When I arrived in Algeria, North Africa, I thought there would be no ONU connection in Oran or Algiers or anywhere else in that country. But one of the needs in the English Department to which I was assigned at the University of Oran was books in English. There was no real English library at the University and I was concerned about the limited number of books about the U.S. available to students. So I went to the closed-down American Library of the U.S. Embassy in Algiers and looked through the multiple copies of what they had of books about the U.S., our Civil Rights Struggle, U.S. history and politics. I was looking for anything that would provide sources for our students. To my surprise, I found a trove of books on American political parties by Wilfred E. Binkley...the political science professor, author and scholar, and who was, of course, an ONU graduate and an ONU professor from 1920 until his death in 1965.

I've spent time in some of the last openings talking about the struggles of the University and the colleges to survive despite world wars and "The Depression," to earn accreditations, to update and remake itself. It seems to me, however, that the real success of ONU is not just to have survived, although that was against the odds; the ONU success is that student learning inspired by many talented teachers, has been and continues to be the central effective focus and strength of the University.

As Binkley phrased it in his history of ONU begun in the last years of his life:

"Lehr had a pronounced flair for seeking out and discovering men and women of striking personalities for his teaching staff," individuals who made learning come alive.

While writing his history of ONU, Binkley focussed part of his research on "outstanding teachers." To Binkley, who the ONU faculty were and what they did as academics in and out of the classroom to foster learning was central to the mission of ONU. And so he listed some of the early greats: John G. Park, one of Lehr's first partners and known for his Grammar, "which was adopted in public schools throughout the Midwest and beyond" and for his ability to spellbind classes of hundreds as he discussed the points of grammar with them. Frank V. Irish taught English grammar along with Park and published books like Grammar and Analysis Made Easy and American and British Authors. Among these "greats" Binkley also named Frederick Maglott, another Lehr partner, who taught mathematics, German and geography and who published a Manual of Geography, and Eva Sisson (later Maglott) who taught mathematics and who, with her ONU students, in 1893 received the bronze medal and blue ribbon award at the World's Columbian Exposition of Chicago for the best display of mathematical figures in competition with other institutions of higher learning. Mrs. Maglott herself received a special diploma as the originator and designer of the unique display which won the special award in geometrical devices.

We are told by Binkley that Lehr, "initiated and developed a class in each subject taught in the elementary schools with the purpose of grounding teachers and prospective teachers thoroughly in the subject matter of the courses or classes they would teach in elementary classes of the public schools." Binkley adds "that Lehr had deliberately resolved to make his normal school, incidentally, at any rate, an answer to the prayer of the examination harassed prospective and in-

service teacher of the last generation of the nineteenth century."

Wilfred Ellsworth Binkley was himself a student at ONU, graduating with a B.S. in the science curriculum in 1908. In an address to alumni recorded in 1959, Binkley spoke with great enthusiasm about Lehr's genius in gathering about him a group of teachers of "striking personality" who made "every subject blaze with excitement." In the tape he cites as examples some of his own teachers or those he'd heard about: I.P. Tussings who gave "thrilling" lectures/discussions in the sciences; Frank Bartlett Willis (later a U.S. Senator from Ohio) who taught civics, law, economics and mathematics; Simeon D. Fess (later another U.S. Senator) who taught history and mathematics; Warren Darst who taught mathematics and botany and went on to teach at Miami University. These ONU faculty members and others like them made major contributions to public instruction in the region and state as they lectured in the many public school institutes held in the fall before the start of classes.

Within this pantheon of very fine teachers at ONU, Wilfred E. Binkley is most probably one of the most well-known academic figures at Ohio Northern. Throughout his life he personally knew as student, public school teacher or ONU faculty member, all of the first seven presidents of the University: Henry Solomon Lehr, Leroy Belt, Albert Smith, Robert Williams, Robert McClure, F. Bringle McIntosh, Samuel Meyer. Binkley started teaching economics as a part-time ONU faculty member in December 1920 while he was a faculty member at Lima Central High School. He was recruited to teach by John Davisson, a vice president at ONU. Binkley's son, Ludwig, tells us that Wilfred would leave Lima Central after teaching all day, bicycle to the railway station in Lima, catch the train to Ada, walk to the University, teach his course, and catch the train back to Lima late in the evening.

Binkley's ties to ONU are described by him in a newspaper interview in 1956. Asked by a reporter "why a man of his stature in the political science field would choose to remain a lifetime at a relatively obscure university in relation to today's large universities," Binkley said:

"I had ONU drilled into me from my earliest memory. From the age of five I was aware of the institution, my father having a tremendous respect for learning. From that I developed pride in the institution."

Wilfred Binkley was born July 29, 1883, on a farm about 4 1/2 miles northwest of Ada (a Lafayette address). Like other teachers at the time, just graduated from high school, he started to teach at age 17. As he tells us in a short biography:

"By vocation I am a teacher and have been since September 1900, when I began teaching the middle grades in the Lafayette, Ohio, public schools. I had just graduated from the high school at Lafayette near which is my birthplace."

In a story noting his selection as Ada's Man of the Year in 1962, the reporter noted Binkley had walked to Ada from Lafayette, a distance of eight miles each way, to attend ONU and that he supplemented his income while going to ONU by lighting the gas lights in Lima. He earned his B.S. from ONU in 1908 and an A.B. degree from Antioch College in 1910. The following year he was given a fellowship to Harvard where he was a university scholar studying under a group of brilliant Shakespearean and English scholars. He earned the master's degree and Ph.D. from Ohio State University in 1926 and 1936 respectively.

From 1921 on Binkley taught full-time at ONU. Although courted by other institutions, he remained at ONU, teaching summers at Ohio State (1927), Bowling Green (1941-43) and Teachers' College, Columbia University (1947-52). A newspaper report states: "In June 1945, a few weeks after war in Europe ended, the War Department asked his help with 250 other

American scholars to found Biarritz American University in France. He taught political science courses to GI's during the 1945-46 academic year, and, later, with a panel of professors was sent to conduct classes before Army units in Germany. Biarritz was known for having the greatest star-studded faculty either here or abroad."

For most of the people here in this room, what Biarritz American College was, is a mystery. So for a bit of American history. In late 1943 President Franklin D. Roosevelt agreed to a post-war education program for American GIs in Europe. The proposal had come out of the army's information and education division. "In September 1944 the War Department issued Readjustment Regulation 14, a move designed to provide every U.S. soldier serving in Europe with academic, vocational, and orientation courses when the war ended. General Eisenhower, commander of the European Theater of Operations, was given the responsibility to carry out the operation. Each school would have more than 250 courses; there would be 250-300 faculty; there would be eight major fields of study. The first schools were at Shrivenham Barracks northwest of London; the second was at Biarritz where they took over the hotels, casinos, villas and other buildings to make a school. At the close of the war in Europe there were 2.5 million U.S. servicemen who would need to be repatriated, but it needed to be done in a phase-in fashion.

Shortly after VE Day, May 8, 1945, the first two schools of the four eventually in place, were up and running. Initially the plan for staffing was to get faculty members who had been called up to the armed services, librarians and teachers. Soon, however, the need for additional faculty, and fine faculty with national reputations, became a priority. At Biarritz for which Binkley was recruited, there were other famous name faculty, among them Guthrie McClintoc and Richard Whorf, theatre directors; Academy Award winning set designer, Mordecai Gorelick; NBC scriptwriter, Albert Crews. Courses of study included agriculture, journalism, commerce, education, engineering, the fine arts, liberal arts and science. Binkley taught with Oliver Douglas Weeks (authority on American, Southern and Texas politics) and James G. Umstadd (education chair and professor) from the University of Texas and Mack Evans, director of Music at the University of Chicago.

Professor Binkley published his first book, The Powers of the President, in 1937. Thomas K. Finletter later called it "an outstanding analytic history of the relationship of Congress and the President, the classic on this important and timely subject. (Finletter was consultant to the U.S. delegation to the U.N. Conference on International Organization in May 1945, chair of President Truman's Air Policy Commission (1947-48), Minister in charge of the economic cooperation administration mission to the United Kingdom, Secretary of the Air Force and U.S. ambassador to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.)

In 1941 Binkley received an Alfred A. Knopf fellowship to complete American Political Parties, published in 1943 and lauded by Bernard de Voto, critic and historian, as "the most comprehensive, useful and sagacious outline of American politics so far written." Other books were A Grammar of American Politics, written in collaboration with Malcolm C. Moos in 1949 and The Man in the White House, in 1959. He continued to update these books which were reprinted up to and following his death in 1965.

Binkley's work, American Political Parties: Their Natural History, was his most widely known work. It was translated into Spanish, German, Portuguese, Italian and Russian. Its translation into Russian caused quite a furor. "When a Soviet war prisoner freed from Germany by U.S. troops returned to Russia and resumed his post as head of the Russian Publishing House for Foreign Literature, put out Binkley's book in translation, he was removed from his post on the charge that he was an American agent who had been indoctrinated with "bourgeois ideas" while

in American hands. The publishing house was taken to task by the Russian magazine, "The Literary Gazette," for publishing the book and called the author "one of the ingrained reactionaries of the Republican Party of the United States." Binkley's endorsement of the two-party system was a revolutionary threat to one-party states. The New York Tribune had reviewed the book and stated that the "author approaches American politics without emotion or prejudice" and described the text as the "most comprehensive and useful outline of American politics so far written."

Alfred A. Knopf wrote in Volume 15, Number 1, of "The Borzoi Quarterly" (First Quarter, 1966), how he had first taken on the book: "In 1941, largely at the urging of my old friend Charles Beard, we gave Binkley a \$1,200 fellowship to complete his "American Political Parties" which we published two years later. It has since passed through two revisions and continues to enjoy a steady sale. This was probably Binkley's best book though his "President and Congress" ran it a close second but never found the readers it deserved."

Professor Binkley became a long-time friend of Charles A. Beard, noted historian whose books many of us have studied and read. Binkley sent Beard The Man in the White House for his comments. ONU archives house some of the letters they exchanged. Binkley in turn read Beard's work. Binkley's last update of The Man in the White House included Lyndon Johnson's ascendancy to the presidency.

Malcolm Moos was another collaborator with Binkley. Their work together began in 1946 when the publishing house interested in the Grammar of American Politics sought another Republican to work with Professor Binkley. Moos joked once that they had come to him in desperation because they needed a Republican and there weren't many political scientists who were Republicans. The pair published the initial volume and several revisions of the work. In the preface to the 1958 edition the authors noted that "the book is not an encyclopedic compendium about American government and politics. It aims to provide insights into the nature and functioning of "the great society," the body politic consisting of the citizens of the United States. We hope it will serve as a handbook that will help citizens to function as intelligent members of the society. The information provided herein is, of course, not the end, but the means to reach that understanding of our government which is the sine qua non of a competent citizenry."

Moos had earned his Ph.D. from the University of California at Berkeley. A long-time professor at Johns Hopkins, active in the Republican Party, he wrote extensively about American politics. He was asked by Sherman Adams to help Arthur Larson draft speeches for President Eisenhower. In 1958 he became Eisenhower's administrative assistant and chief speechwriter. (He's credited with inserting the term "military-industrial complex" in Eisenhower's famous farewell address on January 17, 1961. The Moos and Binkley families shared a father-son, mother-daughter relationship and the 1958 edition of Grammar was dedicated to Dora and Tracey, their wives. During the following Democratic Administration, Moos was retained by President Kennedy as a member of the Presidential Commission on Campaign Costs. He later became the planning director of the Ford Foundation and convinced it to support the legal defense fund of the NAACP. In 1967 he became president of the University of Minnesota.

Binkley also published in a variety of major periodicals: Fortune, New Republic, Journal of Politics, American Historical Review, Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, American Political Review, National Municipal Review, and in Grolier and Britannica encyclopedias and Harper's Encyclopedia of American History. He never stopped writing until the day he died. In the last years of his life he was working on his history of ONU and a study of Republican leaders from Lincoln to Eisenhower. Binkley once said that although he was a lifelong Republican, he seemed to create Democrats through his teaching. He was a staunch

admirer of Harry S. Truman.

In 1954 President Eisenhower appointed Professor Binkley to a four year term on the National Historical Publications Commission (now the National Historical Publications and Records Commission). He was reappointed to that Commission for a second four year term in 1957. On the Commission he worked with a number of scholars and statesmen "to ensure understanding of our nation's past by promoting, nationwide, the identification, preservation, and dissemination of essential historical documentation. Among his collaborators on the Commission was Justice Felix Frankfurter of the U.S. Supreme Court. Our current emphasis on "civic engagement" was a given to Binkley. It was important to him that citizens know the Constitution, have at hand the documents of our history and heritage. He underlined on the frontispiece of one of his books the sign beside the church on Lexington Green: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." (He wrote in his books, corrected his own books, revised his books in the margins of his texts.)

In his classes he urged students to forget their eighth grade misconceptions of history and government. One newspaper article reported he once asked a student in class, "Did you come to college to confirm your prejudices?" His diaries recount his classes: lectures and discussions, exams. He notes "this is the best group I've had in.... (fill in the course). He worked with students who had trouble with his exams, meeting with them and helping them to understand. He gave long hours to advising students for registration. He marvelled at students' interest and their ability to learn.

The 1962 Northern, the ONU yearbook, was dedicated by the students to two staff members, one of whom was Dr. Binkley. As the editor said: "The student body has come to love and respect these men for not only their intense personal interest but also their willingness to understand a problem from the students' viewpoint." Binkley was a member of Sigma Pi Epsilon. Keith Richards, current member of the Arts and Sciences Advisory Board, was a student in the 1960s and has said of Professor Binkley, who was then in his eighties, that "he connected with college students. He was able to bring things alive. He could connect things...the French Renaissance and a current political campaign." Richards recalled his talks in assemblies (chapel) in Lehr Auditorium. Chaplain James Udy (memorialized this summer and who brought Martin Luther King to ONU) asked him to give assembly talks. These he gave to standing ovations. He was known for his dry humor. Letters from former students included in a remembrance given to Binkley in 1960 include the following: "your friendship and guidance when we were students, your courageous leadership in the faculty when the schools' future looked dark indeed, your own outstanding achievements, all have made you a symbol and a bulwark to which we cling."

To commemorate his forty years of teaching and to mark his possible transition to part-time teaching and full-time writing at the University, the University planned a special luncheon and convocation honoring Professor Binkley on the Sunday of Homecoming 1960. About 800 people attended the convocation, the only one like it in the history of ONU to my knowledge. It was called the Wilfred E. Binkley Political Science Convocation and just as we do for Commencement or Honors Day, the faculty robed in academic garb and processed to Lehr Auditorium. Malcolm Moos, the invited speaker, had brought Binkley a letter of appreciation from President Eisenhower in which Eisenhower said that he and all the other students of politics were greatly indebted to Dr. Binkley for his research and writing in that field. Moos addressed the crowd on "The American Presidency: Corridor to Greatness." On the stage and receiving honorary degrees with Moos and Binkley were Dr. Howard White, president of the Midwest Political Science Association (Miami University); Dr. James Pollock, past president of the International Political Science Association (Michigan); Dr. Charles S. Hyneman, president of the American Political Science Association (Indiana).

Wilfred Binkley and his wife, Dora, loved the academic life and students; they also loved travel. Binkley's was the first Fulbright awarded to an ONU professor and he went to Oxford University, England in academic year 1949-50 where he lectured on politics. He was selected by the International Political Science Association to be the U.S. representative on a seven-member panel leading discussions at their 1955 meeting in Stockholm. In 1962 with Dr. Clara Penniman, chair of the Department of Political Science at the University of Wisconsin, he led a 65 member 40 day world tour (14 nations) for the American Political Science Association which started in Japan and ended in Lisbon, Portugal. The visits, coordinated by the two American leaders, officials of the governments and local political science associations from those countries visited and American Embassy officials brought the group into conversation with Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru of India and King Hussein of Jordan. Focus of the scholars' trip was internal political development. Places visited included Tokyo, Taipei, Hong Kong, Bangkok, New Delhi, Cairo, Jerusalem, Istanbul, Athens, Belgrade, Madrid and Lisbon.

Binkley shared Henry S. Lehr's interest in improving teaching in the schools. This resulted in his obtaining funds in the early 1960s from the Coe Foundation for the Institute of American Studies, a five week seminar held by ONU in the summer for local and international high school teachers of history. Lectures/discussions were on political science, history, economics and literature and conducted by ONU professors, including Binkley, who also brought in outside scholars to inspire the Coe Fellows. A notebook of Binkley's describes his approach to teaching: involving students in the subject; making the abstract, concrete; having students work on problems; discussing and questioning material. Binkley believed teachers should be thoroughly grounded in the subject matter they strove to bring alive. He also thought that fairness, kindness, disciplinary control, humor and good temper along with clearness of explanation were qualities of the good teacher.

Wilfred Binkley was in many ways an ordinary fellow. He mowed his own lawn, painted his barn, cleaned his own house (803 S. Union, not the current brick dwelling there), focussed on his family. Dora was his partner; he was proud of his four sons and their families. He enjoyed friends like Gene and Katie Lou Hanson with whom he and Dora travelled to Europe. He liked eating with friends in Hal and Jean's (former restaurant in Ada). After the death of his wife in 1959, his sister, May, was his companion on trips.

He was also a citizen of Ada. He served fourteen years on Ada Council and served as mayor for two years. He told his students he had received no greater honor than being elected mayor of Ada in 1952. He was selected as Ada's Man of the Year by the Town and Gown Association in 1962.

He was an active member of his professional associations throughout his life, serving as vice president of the American Political Science Association and president of the Midwest Political Science Association in 1956-57 and President of the Ohio Academy of History in 1961.

What was constant in Binkley's life was his love of ONU. Alfred Knopf called it "his beloved Ohio Northern University." Binkley was not blind in his attachment. His diaries speak to frustrations with deans who didn't get schedules done on time for scheduled student registration and he notes (sometimes with disbelief) the kinds of rumors colleagues alerted him to, those rumors that are rife on any college campus. Of the seven presidents he knew, he appreciated the genius of Lehr, was sympathetic to Belt, recognized the accomplishments of Smith, worked with Williams and McClure during the "dark days" of the university, applauded McIntosh's success with accreditation, welcomed Meyer....and in those sections of his history that we have, we can understand what he questioned in their administration of ONU.

Binkley was proud of the successes of ONU students. In that taped address to alumni in 1959 he said that "a vice president of a state institution had told him that graduates of ONU set the pace of our graduate school." He knew there were (and are, of course) ONU graduates who were (and are) medical, political, church, legal, educational, industrial and health care leaders. Binkley took pride in the fact that Northern "was doing its share in educating the ever increasing thousands" seeking higher education.

Keith E. Richards was one of the three students who in 1965 came to Binkley's assistance when he collapsed in Dukes on his way to proctor an exam for a colleague. Richards, now Superintendent of Newark City Schools, was on his way to take his history exam when he heard someone call out for help. Richards and the other students tried for fifteen minutes to revive Dr. Binkley. When the EMT arrived, it was too late. Wilfred Binkley died December 9, 1965. He was buried December 13 in Woodlawn Cemetery north of Ada. The day of the funeral his body lay in state in Lehr Auditorium from noon until 2:00 P.M.; Services in Lehr Auditorium were conducted by the pastor of Ada Lutheran Church of which he was a long-time member and Dr. F. Bringle McIntosh, president emeritus of ONU, gave the eulogy.

Today Binkley is memorialized in the Wilfred E. Binkley Chair of History and Political Science. Funds for the chair were contributed by the Scaife Foundation of Pittsburgh through the efforts of Dr. Laurence Woodworth, an Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Treasury and a former student of Binkley. (Many of you recognize the name Woodworth from the Law College's annual Laurence Neal Woodworth Endowed Lectureship in U. S. Tax Law and Policy that was inaugurated in Washington, D.C. in 1995.)

Wilfred Binkley believed completely in ONU's heritage and mission. He was committed to excellence in his teaching, writing and service. He thrived on his work with students; he thrived on his writing and work with other scholars; he thrived on his life as citizen of Ada, as father and husband and grandfather.

And if Wilfred E. Binkley would advise us today? I'll quote his 1959 ending comment to alums:

"The future is secure.

The omens are auspicious.

You and I....share in a great tradition."

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