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Opening 2005

The character and spirit of an institution comes from its original purposes and from the character of the people who initiate it and continue it. And so, at the opening of each year, I've gone to ONU's history, talked about some of its crises, its heroes and heroines in order to delineate its purposes and spirit. Institutions that continue, grow and change, but the essence of the institution remains faithful to its original driving spirit.

Together we've looked at McIntosh's struggles to achieve accreditation for the entire institution and his strategy for it through accreditation of the separate colleges. We've seen William's almost impossible battle to maintain the institution during the depression and the start of World War II and McClure's challenge to keep the university going during the World War II years until the return of military veterans to the campus. We've admired Meyer's ability to restore pharmacy accreditation and raise funds for buildings, and his drive to build the educational quality of ONU through obtaining quality teachers and improved programs. Last year we looked at the contributions of a faculty member, Wilfred Binkley, who among many faculty, staff and administrators, emerges as one of the great teacher/scholars of ONU and who embodies the character of ONU. But of all of these, the driving genius behind the school was the small-in-stature, large-visioned founder, Henry Solomon Lehr.

There are several sources for Lehr's vision for the Ohio Normal School which became Ohio Northern University. His own version of ONU's history was published in sections between 1904 and 1907 in the *University Herald*. His daughter, Sarah Lehr Kennedy's biography, **H. S. Lehr and His School**, was published by **The Ada Herald** in 1938 and republished by ONU in 1983. In April 1947 the then **Northwest Ohio Quarterly** (volume XIX, April 1947) published an article entitled, "The Evolution of O.N.U." by Mrs. Wilfred Binkley. Finally, for a number of years prior to his death in 1965, Wilfred Binkley worked on his own history of ONU. Binkley's insights are particularly significant because he was an "area boy", born near Lafayette, Ohio; knew Lehr personally; taught in area high schools; attended and graduated from ONU and later taught at the school for 45 years. Thus Binkley, a highly recognized political scientist, historian and author was particularly qualified to write a history of the school. His scholarly practice, deep personal knowledge of the school and of many of those who taught in it, administered it, and attended it, make his "take" on ONU's history ring particularly true.

Writing about Lehr's efforts to educate himself and about the quality of the teachers and

schools of Lehr's time, Wilfred Binkley tells us that "(i)t was as a consequence of Henry Solomon Lehr's unique experience as a pupil and student that there germinated in his mind the concept of the select school he started at Ada in 1866 which turned out to be the embryonic stage of his normal school to be initiated in 1871."

What was Lehr's experience? It was sporadic attendance at schools and, in the village school, mostly rote learning taught by individuals with little more schooling than the pupils. As Binkley reminds us: "Lehr was born in Ohltown, Mahoning County, Ohio, March 8, 1838, the eleventh child of Henry Solomon and Salome Lessing Lehr." The family was Pennsylvania Dutch and had recently migrated to Ohio. When Henry was two years old, they moved to New Baltimore and later to Cedar Valley, where the family began a weaving business. The business was not very profitable and the family was very poor. At age eight Henry became a spool boy for his father's loom. German was the language spoken in the family and Henry only learned to speak English when he "began a random attendance at a country school."

In spring 1854 Lehr attended the Cedar Valley village school for about a month. While he was a student there a visiting book agent gave him a flyer on Alfred Holbrook's school in Marlboro, Ohio. Lehr's teacher told him that he ought to go to Marlboro because she thought he'd be able to teach school himself after completing a term of ten weeks. For those of us brought up on NCATE accreditation and state legislation on preparation of teachers, this is incomprehensible, but that was the status of education in the schools at the time.

As Binkley recounts, "as early as 1825 the Legislature of Ohio had enacted the first statute providing for the certification of teachers in the public schools of the state. It authorized the Probate Judge of each county to appoint three examiners of applicants to teach who were authorized to certificate those considered competent and no teacher could be legally paid from public school funds who was not so certified. Certificates" (valid for three years) "were to be granted only to persons of good moral character able to pass "successful informational examinations in orthography, reading, writing, arithmetic and English grammar. In 1868 there was added an examination in knowledge of the theory and practice of teaching." (History of Educational Legislation in Ohio)

The legislation may have been clear, but administration of it and testing was haphazard to almost non-existent. As Binkley tells us, "(m)ost teachers in the mid 1800s lacked any formal preparation at all either to subject matter taught or methods of teaching. Almost none was a college graduate or had even attended college. Not many of them had even attended high schools, which outside of the cities, were rare and even what they passed for high schools in the villages

were usually such only in name."

Lehr's education in the village school totalled about one full year between 1850 and 1854. As Lehr tells us, "(i)n that time I learned to speak English, learned to read, went through Ray's Practical Arithmetic five times, went through Mitchell's School Geography and Atlas, about halfway through Penneo's Grammar and I went through Ray's Third Part (Arithmetic) in six weeks. I was considered a good speller, but I think I never scribbled over a dozen sheets of paper in learning to write before I began teaching school." (Lehr, University Herald, May 20, 1904, p.1.)

With a loan of \$25 from a brother and his earnings as a farm hand (\$12 for one month's work), Lehr began a five week summer term at Holbrook's select (tuition) school in 1854. At the end of this term Lehr stopped at Wooster "to take the examination for a certificate to teach school. The examination was held in a country school and despite the law enacted the year before requiring that the examination be written, it was oral." Lehr recounts: "For a specimen of our penmanship we had to write our names in the roll-book...That day there were fifty-two applicants for certification. We were seated on benches around the room where we could have no desks in front of us and could have no books. I remember several questions that I was asked that day. The question, 'What is ratio?' started near the head of the class. It passed over 40 of the applicants before it reached me. I had looked up the definition a few days before and readily answered." That evening after lecturing the group about their progress (or lack of it) in their profession, one of the examiners noted "that boy there (Lehr) will carry home the best certificate today.

After passing his certificate to teach after five weeks at Holbrook's select school, the 16 year-old Lehr taught a 3-month term at Dutch Flat School and followed that with another 6-month term. He then returned to Holbrook's school now at Salem, Ohio, where he attended summer terms.

Alfred Holbrook is credited by Lehr as the "father of all the successful, independent normal schools in Ohio and Indiana and several states" (Ohio Educational Monthly, March 1903). Holbrook, like his father, Josiah Holbrook, "was a leader in the nineteenth century drive for the democratization of higher education" (Binkley: "Midwest Schools in the 1860s). Holbrook's (and later Lehr's) schools "were open to all without regard to previous schooling" (Binkley).

Lehr continued his pattern of teaching during the winter school term and continuing his studies in the spring term with Holbrook until the latter moved his school to the southwestern corner of Ohio and Lehr began attending Mt. Union Seminary (now Mt. Union College) in the spring. Summers he worked as a field hand. In spring 1861 on his way to Mt. Union, the Civil War began with the firing on Fort Sumter and Lehr tried to enlist. He was rejected. Since it was

too late for the start of the Mt. Union term he went to the Vermillion Institute in Maysville. That August he tried to enlist again, went to camp, and was rejected. Finally in spring 1862 he enlisted again and was finally "mustered into the service at Camp Chase sometime in June as a private in Company G of the 86 Ohio Voluntary Infantry," and after training marched through West Virginia and Virginia. Not a very big or a very strong individual, Lehr was discharged from the service for that reason. He re-enlisted in 1864 and served with Company F of the 176 Ohio Volunteer Infantry. In December and following several month's hospitalization for pneumonia, he was made chief nurse of Ward 2, Nashville Post Hospital, where he served until his discharge from the army May 20, 1865 (Sarah Lehr Kennedy).

In the army he became good friends with Calvin S. Brice (1862), who later became a U.S. senator and helped Lehr as president of Ohio Normal University. That friendship and others he made in the service as well as his experience as a nurse in the army, all assisted Lehr in his struggles to build and develop his school.

Once again a civilian, Lehr wavered between teaching and medicine. Berated by a doctor in Alliance (with whom he was reading medicine) for not charging for setting a poor young man's leg (a skill he'd learned in the army), Lehr decided to found his own school like his mentor, Holbrook. As Lehr tells us, "in 1865 teachers were itinerants. The prospect of moving from one place to another was not alluring to me....it was my purpose to found a school and conduct it according to my idea as to how a school for the people, especially the common people, should be conducted" (Lehr's Reminiscences). So this is what he did, scouting out possible positions where he, like his model Holbrook, would begin a select school and transform that into a University. The site he chose was Johnstown, later named Ada, and his plan was to start a different sort of school. And that is precisely what he did. He used his experiences at Holbrook's school and others like it, his own learning and teaching experiences in village schools, his commitment to populist higher education, his understanding of his own impoverished roots and struggle to get an education to formulate a new kind of school. Initially it was more like Holbrook's normal, but Lehr's interest in many fields of knowledge and his wish to meet student and community needs while furthering the reputation of his school and attracting new students to it fashioned the uniqueness of ONU. Within fifteen years of his founding his normal, business, engineering, pharmacy, law, the arts and sciences joined education and the general cultural education that he provided initially. And when the state secondary schools supplanted the private normals because state funds paid for students' education in the local high schools, Lehr had already "transitioned" his private tuition-based normal "into an institution of cultural and vocational education," as Binkley

describes ONU so clearly. It was this planning and foresight which kept ONU from obsolescence and extinction. Today we've upgraded the term vocational to professional, but those characteristics of an education based on preparation for careers combined with a broad cultural education within a values-based framework is what ONU has been and is. Lehr's vision was a comprehensive school that welcomed whoever sought that education.

A major strength of Lehr was that he recognized and appreciated the talents of those he brought in to teach with him and to join him in his school venture. His early collaborators, some of whom joined him as partners in the school, were men and women who helped transform education in northwest Ohio and beyond. John Park, Frank Irish, Frederick Maglott, Eva Sisson Maglott were known not only for their teaching, but also for their works on grammar, geography, literature as well as for their contributions in providing continuing education for teachers in schools throughout the Midwest. Lehr believed that the reputation of his institution and its growth depended upon the quality of its faculty and those significant outside speakers he could attract to Ada. He may not have used the terms "marketing" or "public relations," but he practiced both that and government lobbying as well, for his school. Examples are the military department he established with the help of Calvin Brice and his success in arranging for the McKinley/Campbell debate in Ada. Lehr was an entrepreneuring founder of a unique school; his personal mission was to see it continued and flourish.

The substance of all this is that Lehr did not found a Dennison, an Oberlin or even a Mount Union. What he founded, to use Binkley's terms, was an "institution of cultural and vocational education." That was his deliberate choice, not a serendipitous outcome. Understanding that, it is important that we continue to use some of Lehr's principles and strategies as together we map ONU's future.

The quality of ONU teachers and the respect they are held in their fields outside of ONU continue to be foundations for our future. ONU's faculty and staff are ONU's foundation in the present as well as its past. Wilfred Binkley may have been one of the 20th century's shining lights at ONU, but although he was one of its bigger stars, he was not the sole light. Long-term faculty member and chair of "Industrial Arts" Dick Kain, has described how he happened to attend ONU. Just before he left for Ohio State, thinking he ought to at least look at ONU before he went, he stopped at the ONU campus. Not knowing the location of the registrar's office he asked an old gentleman with a cane for directions, got them and went to the office. Leaving the registrar's office unimpressed by its single light bulb and counter, he again met the older gentleman who asked if he had a few minutes to talk. He did and went with the old gentleman and another faculty member to

their office. They spent about an hour asking Kain about his military service and his family. It was a simple, friendly conversation, but the interest taken in him by Childe Harold Freeman and Frank Berger and his fascination with their conversation decided Kain to attend ONU and to take courses from these two men. He tells us he took as many literature courses as he had time for from Freeman and a physics course from Berger. Kain never totally left ONU. You can still see him riding his bike around campus or in Taft.

Victor Streib, a current faculty member in the Pettit College of Law at ONU, started his scholarship on and advocacy against the death penalty for juveniles in 1980. His research led him to not only write about it, but to actively campaign against the death penalty for juveniles, going to state legislatures in the hope of getting them to ban the practice. He wrote and successfully spearheaded the petition through the A.B.A. in 1983 to have that body oppose the juvenile death penalty. He was attorney of record, wrote much of the brief and was the second chair at the U.S. Supreme Court for the Thompson vs. Oklahoma case. (Thompson was a fifteen year old at the time of his crime.) That case decided by the Court in 1988 banned the death penalty for juveniles under the age of sixteen. Streib continued his research and writing, separating his legal writings from his advocacy. Throughout his career he has published over 250 books, chapters, articles and papers. A nationally and internationally known expert on the juvenile death penalty, you've seen him on *Larry King Live* and *60 Minutes* among a host of other TV appearances. You've heard him on *All Things Considered* and a number of other radio shows. Open **Time**, **Newsweek**, **The Wall Street Journal**, **The New York Times**, and there's Vic Streib. Go to the internet and type in Victor L. Streib, and the references extend over 40 pages. His 1987 book, **The Death Penalty for Juveniles**, published by IU Press in Bloomington, Indiana, was placed in the Supreme Court Library in that year. He'd updated his *The Juvenile Death Penalty Today*, from January 1, 1973 until the demise of the death penalty for juveniles in 2005, over 66 times. Go to the on-line text. What facts do you want to know? They're there. Streib is probably the most prolific scholar in the history of ONU, and, to my knowledge, he's the only person in the history of ONU to effectively participate in a major change of judicial policy at the U.S. Supreme Court. He was the legal expert cited eleven times (in the court opinions on both sides) in the final March 1, 2005 decision striking down the death penalty for those who commit crimes under the age of 18. Streib will assure you that he did not effect this change in a vacuum. There were others involved in the same cause, but he was involved for twenty-five years. What Streib did was awaken interest in the cause in the early 80s and then stayed with the issue until its resolution using two avenues: (1) even-handed scholarship and reason in developing the argument that would convince minds and (2) advocacy

and participation in numerous court cases.

A final example of my point about the importance of faculty is Ed Williams. Ed was all about music and people. He knew music, loved music, believed music was for everyone and he did everything he could to make it accessible. A local farmer wanted to learn to play the trumpet? Ed taught him. Those lessons resulted in an endowment for the Department of Music and Biology's ONU Wetlands Nature Center. You didn't understand the history or background of a piece? Ed could tell you all that and more, down to the color of the shirt of one of the arrangers or soloists in a performance. For over thirty years he taught young children and students at ONU to play the trumpet. He conducted the Lima Area Youth Orchestra for 30 years. The year before he joined ONU, he'd been awarded a Fulbright to study with Professor Helmut Wobisch at the Institute for Music and Dramatic Art in Vienna, Austria. Ed Williams appreciated what that experience had done for him and worked out ways to bring international performers to ONU's campus. Every teacher Ed hired was "the greatest". Almost every student was "highly talented". He dreamed of a symphony at ONU and it appeared. Former students gave money for scholarships for other music students; one gave a gift for the Music Department that is to be the new music listening room in Heterick, another gave a gift to provide software and hardware for ear training. His students and colleagues came back in droves this July for the unexpected Memorial service. I called it a wake without the drinking because it was full of funny stories, music, prayers. A talented musician, Ed was a very hardworking chair, collaborating with the NASM (the National Association of Schools of Music) for the music program's continued accreditation. Fairness was his byword and he lived by it for students, colleagues and musicians. He liked and respected everyone...and their differences.

So. Here we are at the start of a new academic year. There's always new hope at the start of an academic year: new students, new challenges, new colleagues, new life. We've got the gift of the ONU tradition and the way that tradition has evolved and developed through the people who teach and work here. It's 2005-06. Let's make our mark.