

OPENING REMARKS

1999

In an opening talk to the faculty in 1965 President Samuel Meyer talked about "roots and wings." His vision of roots was the intellectual effort in an institution of learning; wings was faith and religious belief. When I first heard the title (though some people in this room heard this talk I wasn't yet at ONU), it seemed to me to describe the journey we're on as a university: having our identity solidly in our foundation in the past, and moving forward in the present to make the future. Roots and wings.

In a sense there is no choice in our destiny. Dwight D. Eisenhower once said:

"Neither a wise man nor a brave man lies down on the tracks to wait for the train of the future to run over him."

None of us here is that stubborn or that silly. We know that we need to continue to change, adapt, re-work the original mission of the school while keeping the essentials of that mission or the essentials of the school will not remain the same. To refuse to change or alter means that we stagnate; stagnation is personal and institutional death. A hallmark of the colleges and the academic departments of ONU has been an ability to renew, revise, improve majors and programs. There are many examples. These are only a few:

- Electrical Engineering which has added computer engineering, cooperated across college lines with Computer Science. This fall there is strong enrollment in this program by the first year class.
- HPESS which eliminated some majors and replaced them with Athletic Training (accredited by CAHEP) Sports Management, and Wellness.
- Technology which completely revised its curriculum and methods of instruction over a period of several years and has moved forward in robotics and into a virtual simulation lab.
- Art which has inaugurated and strengthened a graphic design program while ensuring opportunities for student artists in professional fora.
- Comm. Arts which initiated, strengthened and deepened the international components of its theatre program while developing the public relations, communications and media programs of the department.
- Education and the Center for Teacher Education which has completely revised its program to meet the new licensure requirements of Ohio and has twice met NCATE accreditation standards.
- Music which has increased career options for its majors while developing its performance strengths
- Mathematics and Computer Science which have completely revised their programs
- Biological Sciences, Chemistry, Physics which have made extensive changes in the delivery of instruction, majors
- Pharmacy which has led the University in distance learning courses with the NTPD and development of modular courses in BSPH and PharmD curricula
- Business which has revised and consolidated its curricula
- English which revamped its writing programs into professional writing, creative writing, journalism
- History, Political Science, Criminal Justice which revised majors and has sought new career opportunities for majors, changed staffing patterns

Who has done this? Who made the changes? Who makes them work? It's the people in this room. Those in front of me and others not here are the individuals who have had the ideas of what to do, worked out the logistics, implemented the new programs, replaced retiring staff with new staff to meet new needs, and been focussed on those key ONU goals of meeting student needs in instruction.

The way ONU has always worked best is ideas from the bottom up. Not that ideas haven't also come from the

administrative level as well. But these ideas have worked out only with the commitment and ownership of those teaching in the programs. That was also the way ONU started.

When Henry Solomon Lehr came to Johnstown (Ada), Ohio, he came with an idea. To start a school where students could enter at any time and select his/her own line of work. (The 1999 version of this is that students should be able to get the courses they need when (at the time in program) they need them.)

Where did this idea stem from? Probably from Lehr's own personal history: his thirst to learn, his love of books, his desire to teach students who would share his learning, his commitment and generosity in that task.

Those of you who have read H.S. Lehr and His School or read his own account on the web pages of Heterick Library know that he was poor and generous and came from a poor and generous family. While living in Pennsylvania, his father gave security for others' loans and the family farm in Pennsylvania was sold to pay the debts of other men for whom he had co-signed. This is how the Lehr family happened to come to Ohio. Lehr tells us his father advised his sons not to sign for others, but that he himself did not always heed that advice. There were 12 children in the family; two sisters were invalids; his mother was in ill health; his father earned his living as a weaver. Lehr became a "spool boy" in his father's shop when he was eight years old. His father wove until late at night (10 or 12) in the fall and winter; they worked every day, year round.

Lehr didn't get to go to school until he was 12 years old. His family was Pennsylvania Dutch and the school he went to was the Dutch College (not a college in our sense). Only one student was of another ethnic (Irish) origin. From 1850 to 1854 he went to school for a total of about a year. He had to learn to speak English, read, write, do mathematics. Lehr tells us he gathered chestnuts in the fall of 1853 and sold them so he could buy Mitchell's School Geography and Atlas. He did this at night, after his day's work.

A teacher told Lehr's father in 1854 that Henry should go to college, but there was no money. The boy found a school in Stark County with a ten week term. He hired out for a month of harvesting (26 days) at \$12 for the month, got a loan from a brother of \$25 (who himself had to borrow the money to give to Henry). He was 16 when he went to Professor Holbrook's school at Marlborough, Ohio. He carried his belongings in a carpet bag (real carpet). He had 7 books with him: a spelling book, Ray's Third Part Arithmetic, Pinneo's Grammar, McGuffey's Fifth Reader, Mitchell's School Geometry & Atlas, Ray's Algebra (first part) and a small dictionary and an old English reader he'd borrowed from a brother. This was the start of his library...and ONU's library.

Lehr arrived at school in home-made clothes ... the cloth spun by his father and the clothing sewn by his mother and sisters. He was different. His clothing didn't look like that of the other boys. He saw his first piano---didn't know what it was. He had never seen a blackboard. He was small; the other boys laughed at him; he rented a room and boarded himself on bread, butter and water because he didn't have enough money for a boarding house; he got his ten weeks of classes. To H.S. Lehr, learning and books were his life goal. He wanted to teach and he did at 16.

Since he was so small one of his brothers suggested they ride horses to an interview for Dutch Flat School and go after dark. They did (he never got down from the horse) and he got the job at the school for the three months term. He was paid \$14 a month. (He was small throughout his life. At the time he enlisted in the Union Army in 1861 when he was 23 years old, he weighed 110 pounds.)

One of Lehr's discoveries during his teaching experience was the purpose of diacritical marks in the dictionary. He had his mother buy a dictionary (she bought the wrong one as mothers are prone to do--been there, done that) and studied the matter carefully. He learned he'd been mispronouncing words....and corrected himself and his students. Intellectually honest, he admitted his errors, something he was to do publicly more than once in his life. Learning from reading or lectures or life's experiences molded and changed Lehr and it was that process that drove him to teach, to start a school, and to devote himself to it throughout his professional life and later. He went from being a pro-slavery Democrat to an anti-slavery Republican one night while listening to an impassioned orator. He voted publicly for voting rights for the negro when that caused him and his school some difficulty. He did what was necessary to give his school a future, even to letting it be sold to the Methodists (1899) and having a clergyman (Dr. Belt) president succeed him, whom he felt knew little about educational programs.

A lot of history to say that ONU was founded out of a generous idea: to teach students and to make learning available to a broad group of students. Lehr wanted an affordable education and he wanted students to learn. You all probably know about the classes taught at 5:00 A.M. and late in the evening. You know that he gave his personal library to the library

societies, the start of the ONU libraries. The model was service; the term was availability, the mode was close interaction with students.

Lehr lived during times of major change in the U.S. The Civil War was a distinguishing event; it marks us still. It marked Lehr in his experience and in his beliefs. He remained convinced, however, of the importance of education and learning ... and he has left us that heritage.

"Plus ca change; plus c'est la meme chose." The more it changes, the more it remains the same. Paraphrased, if it doesn't change, it can't remain the same. The campus of ONU has grown from 2 1/2 acres at its birth to 260 acres in our day. Lehr's innovative idea was to found a school to teach teachers. A lot of people thought he was crazy, too narrow an idea. His was the mind behind the school and the curriculum; later he expanded that idea to include other fields. We still teach teachers; we still teach the programs that were added in his day: engineering, law, pharmacy, business, the arts and sciences. He contributed his own funds, went into debt to found the school; he did it in conjunction with the people of Johnstown and others. We still borrow to build; we still collaborate in projects with the village of Ada. Lehr was the past master of the entrepreneurial initiative. ONU continues to grow through faculty with this same bent. Lehr wanted school to be year round and a summer term of 10 weeks; he could only get his faculty to agree to 9. What must he be thinking now when he sees the 12 week summer session put in by the current faculty? He was a workaholic, I suspect, but he was devoted to his family. Lehr was able to go beyond his own interests to build his dream. We are continuing that construction. Lehr began his school with 131 students and ended his active role with over 3300 students. Like today's 3100 students, they weren't all on campus, all of the time.

Following the sale of the University, Lehr gave his first annual report to the Board of Trustees. He didn't do charts, but there were statistics on enrollment and he notes the increases. He talks about faculty load: "All our teachers have rendered excellent service, but have been overworked. None have taught less than six hours a day and many seven and some eight hours a day. (That was hours in the classroom, did not include preparation, correcting work, student conferences.) Classes in mathematics, electricity, Latin, Greek, French and German are small, occasionally consisting of but five or six members. The other classes are large, but we divide and subdivide so much as is possible with our present facilities. We do not have the number of rooms needed. We teach in cloak rooms, garret and cellar." He names the graduates for the year. He tells the Board that "the campus is too small for drill and other athletic exercises. Drilling has almost entirely killed the grass. (Interest in grass started early at ONU.)...The ball ground and target range are both on the private land of the President of the University (Lehr). All the rooms used for Laboratories, Library purposes and Museum are much too small for the purposes for which they are designed. The buildings are entirely inadequate to accommodate our students. All the music teachers, the teacher of Elocution, the teacher of Telegraphy, and the teacher of Fine Arts furnish their own rooms. If more room is not furnished the school will suffer and retrograde from overgrowth." (The more it changes, the more it remains the same.) He gave a finance report: net proceeds were \$12,343.30. The church got 10%; the members of the Board of Management got \$11,108.97. (Balanced budgets...the more it changes, the more it remains the same.)

Lehr ends his report by saying: "I have spent many years studying the history of various institutions of learning and have observed their rise, growth, and in too many cases, their decay and even death. Schools have two sources of strength and growth: wealth and clientage. (In our language today: students and outside funds: endowment, annual funds, gifts.) Just as Lehr had fought the efforts of Ohio State to kill ONU through support of legislation that would do this, so he fought to keep ONU a four year institution and not a two-year feeder school to Ohio Wesleyan as was being proposed. And he advised the Board "In my judgment you should select a strong president, a good financier, a man possessed of many good qualities who will have the interests of the school at heart and who is careful and discreet in all things; and then let him, by and with the advice of the Trustees, employ and pay the teachers." He notes: "At the close of the next school year I will retire from my labors as President of the University. If God spares my life till then, I will have been connected with the Ada schools over thirty-five years. I will give you my best efforts the coming year and I expect your prayers, sympathy and support in my labors."

Today we are starting a new phase in the history of the University. We begin the 10th presidency of the University. We have had much luck/grace over the years in our presidents: Lehr, Smith, McIntosh, Meyer, Freed, and now Baker. Those presidents have been committed to the improvement of the programs of the University, to student-centered education, to values and service, to the improvement of the campus, equipment, facilities. The more it changes, the more it remains the same. Let's move forward with 1999-00, the 129th year of ONU.