

Two Transitions

Henry Solomon Lehr knew that change was integral to the growth of his institution and its survival. He began a normal school because he knew that qualified teachers were needed in the schools and envisioned a preparatory program built on his experiences of learning and teaching. He expanded the normal school to business, law, engineering and pharmacy because those fields, like education, provided pathways to employment for the less privileged students whom he recruited for his school and who attended his courses to build careers. His students went on to major roles in business and industry, e.g., Getty and Crile, and to national public service, e.g., Willis and Fess. An entrepreneur himself, he developed entrepreneurs and attracted entrepreneurs. A thinker and a doer, his intellectual curiosity and passion fed his school's curricula.

Lehr spent the latter part of his presidency, however, preparing his university for future growth through transition. Realizing that additional resources were needed for buildings and curricula, Lehr first sought state related status for the university. In 1895-96 newly elected Ohio Governor Asa Bushnell worked with Lehr and his collaborators at ONU to name fifteen external trustees; Lehr and his associates were to give the property of the school to the public and to the State of Ohio. Lehr's purpose in all this was to ensure the permanency of the institution. Because of newspaper publication of this attempt and the subsequent negative outcry by other state schools, Governor Bushnell did not send out the prepared commissions to the trustees and ONU's rebirth as/transition to a state institution was aborted. The effort to ensure continuity of the school continued, however. Lehr was then fifty-six years old and he'd already spent thirty years teaching first at his select school and then at the normal school. Colleagues, alumni and friends wanted to ensure that ONU would endure following Lehr's eventual departure. In 1896 Lehr and the other trustees/partners, Professors Park, Darst, Maglott and Fess agreed to sell the university to the Central Ohio Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The sale finally became official in 1899 with Lehr and most of his faculty remaining with the school. The agreement

was that Lehr was to administer the academic program and H.C. Jameson was to take over the presidency, with duties which included teaching and fundraising for ONU. Day to day management of the school belonged, however, to Lehr.

Lehr's plan, he tells us, was to remain in teaching for fifty years. (That included his earlier teaching experience.) He wanted to continue with his major life's work, ONU, until 1906 when he would be 66 years old and planned to turn its management over to a new team. Lehr's carefully laid plan did not happen. Jameson resigned the presidency barely before assuming it. Dr. Leroy E. Belt became president and soon became involved in a struggle over management. Before everything was finally settled two major professors, Fess and Park, resigned. In the end, the educational management conflicts between President Belt and Vice President Lehr led to Lehr's resignation July 31, 1902 at age 62.

Lehr's vision for ONU, he tells us in his history, was to make the University "one of the great universities of the United States." Lehr's goal presages the vision statement in the ONU's strategic plan (first iteration in 2000): "Ohio Northern University will be a leading, private, student centered institution of increasing regional and national prominence."

This transition from Lehr to Belt was rocky and lasted relatively briefly, 2-3 years. By 1905 Dr. Albert Edwin Smith had become president and reestablished ties with Lehr. Other transitions of leadership at ONU were also somewhat rocky due to external factors: a devastating fire, two world wars and the "great depression." Throughout all of these crises the University endured because the University and Ada communities were committed to their school.

A more recent rocky transition followed the presidencies of two very strong-minded and outspoken presidents, F. Bringle McIntosh and Samuel Meyer. Their presidencies had seen the growth of buildings and faculty, strengthening of the academic programs and advancement of athletics, achieving accreditations for academic programs and establishment of McIntosh Center, Heterick Library and English Chapel as the central axis of the campus. Relationships of these two presidents with ONU faculty and staff were not always without controversy and issues of university governance arose increasingly. By 1965 the U.S. was changing. During Meyer's presidency in the 60s and 70s the Ohio National Guard fired on and killed student protesters at Kent State. This event was preceded by the ongoing struggles

of the civil rights movement in the U.S., the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, the tempestuous 1968 Democratic convention and the ever escalating Viet Nam war protests. On ONU's campus, however, the faculty and staff maintained a coherent, focused attention on students and their programs as the state and nation seemed to splinter around them.

Those events, however, and their effect on the generations of faculty, staff and students led in part, it seems to me, to the very tumultuous two year transition after Meyer's retirement when Ray B. Loeschner assumed the presidency. Initially it appeared that the eighth president of ONU was the popular choice. Born in McCordsville, Indiana, Ray B. Loeschner grew up in Grand Rapids, Michigan where he earned his A.A. degree at Grand Rapids Junior College. His B.A. degree was earned at Albion College and his M.A. and Ph.D. in psychology-guidance and administration at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. He had broad experience. He had been a coach and instructor at Lake Forest College and later while earning his degrees at Northwestern had served as a residence hall counselor, assistant coach and as an instructor in education and psychology. Following his Ph.D., Loeschner was an assistant professor in education at Augustana College for five years. In 1964 he was named dean of student affairs and professor of psychology and education at Washburn University in Topeka. A member of the president's cabinet in Topeka, Loeschner was responsible for both the law and graduate schools. Two years later Loeschner returned to Michigan as assistant to the president at Eastern Michigan and in 1967 assumed the post of vice president for administrative affairs there. In that role he oversaw academic affairs, student affairs, public affairs and off-campus education. In 1970 he was named to the presidency of Olivet College. It was from Olivet that he was recruited to ONU as the first choice of the selection committee made up of Board of Trustee members, faculty and administrative staff.

Loeschner arrived in Ada with an aggressive agenda. State data showed that the number of high school graduates in Ohio would decline in the 1980's. That had been talked about on campus, but yearly growth belied future realities. Loeschner was impatient to make changes in curricula, calendar, student activities, faculty status, numbers of faculty members in the Liberal Arts College. One of his first acts was to establish a marching band and a

swim team. There was a close faculty vote on the marching band which had ceased existence in the 1960's. Some music faculty members were opposed, but Loeschner's initiative succeeded. Both moves were made to enhance programs to attract students to ONU.

He next moved to reduce the faculty in the College of Liberal Arts by two faculty members. Caps were placed on the number of tenure-track positions in departments across campus. His plan was to issue two year contracts to faculty (once the cap was reached) until a tenure-track position became available again in that department. A faculty committee was asked to review and propose alterations to tenure at ONU.

In spring 1978 three tenured faculty members were informed they were to be terminated at the end of the contract year. Administrators had been advised erroneously that all employees in a private institution were at-will employees subject to simple dismissal. The three engaged a lawyer and a very public campus hearing ended in the three continuing at ONU until retirement or death.

Earlier, in February 1978 at the Board of Trustees meeting, President Loeschner launched the idea of establishing a Business College. By the time the day and a half meeting was over, the College of Business Administration (removing business curricula and economics from the Liberal Arts College) was approved by a surprised Board. The announcement was made to an astonished faculty at the monthly meeting following the Board meeting.

The faculty had periodically discussed a changeover to semesters from the 1950's. No change had been made, but discussion was again on-going on campus and it appeared quite possible that the move would be made because of growing faculty support. In summer 1978, however, the president's cabinet determined that the change to semesters would be made beginning with the 1980-81 academic year. At the October faculty meeting, faculty voted to delay a final decision on the change. That vote was unanimous. At a following meeting, faculty voted 65 to 44 to remain on the quarter system. President Loeschner told the faculty that he could make the change and that his decision to move to semesters stood.

The president's relationship with the faculty continued to deteriorate until in January 1979, a group of faculty from all five colleges signed a white paper presented to the chair of

the Board of Trustees citing serious morale issues among students, faculty and staff; declining image of the university with the public, alumni and local communities; increasing loss of good faculty because of escalating unrest on campus. It stated that it seemed unlikely that these problems could be resolved while the president remained because of perceived lack of leadership, managerial skills, poor communication and loss of confidence by the campus community. Faculty members who wrote the white paper were Dick Kain (they met at his home), Frank Farrington, Dan Butler, Bruce Chesser and Ron Ladwig. The trustees received the white paper and did meet with faculty members and students, but following their meeting the Board issued a statement of support for President Loeschner.

Suffice to say that with several administrative resignations and multiple firings, concerns expressed in its report by the United Methodist Board of Higher Education which visited the campus following a North Central visit and the general uproar/instability on campus, little moved forward in administrative offices in 1979. Classes, however, did continue. A group of faculty members discussed formation of a faculty union as faculty, staff and student concerns continued to grow and as the faculty moved ever closer to a vote of no confidence. No vote was necessary. President Loeschner resigned his post effective July 31, 1979. In the end, the Board, itself torn apart through this controversy, determined his effectiveness had ended.

If one looks rationally at many of the ideas promulgated by President Loeschner, several can not be faulted. Many of his mandated changes: establishing the swim team and reestablishing the marching band, moving to a semester calendar, calling for greater accountability, evolving to meet the needs of the times--- are ideas that have now been embraced by the faculty and staff. A downturn of students did occur in the early and mid-eighties. Objections to his presidency seemed to have stemmed in part at least from an authoritarian style and his penchant for ignoring university processes. Collaborative governance by faculty and staff that had dominated much of the history of the university anticipated treatment as colleagues not as workforce. To a large group of ONU faculty and staff, ONU was their university; they'd stayed with it and the students in good and bad times. To many professors, ONU was simply a way of life. They took very seriously the concept of teaching as a profession. ONU was, for many of them, not a job, but a calling,

an integral part of their identity. Their university was threatened they felt and they would save it.

Of greatest concern to the University community in this time of transition, however, were the splits it caused among ONU faculty and staff themselves. In March 1979 a group called ONUFA (Ohio Northern University Faculty Association) had filed a petition with the National Labor Relations Board to be the collective bargaining unit for the faculty. This filing was followed by the ONU chapter of the AAUP requesting recognition as well. The NLRB set the election for May 3 with three choices: No Union, ONUFA or AAUP. Tabulation results showed No Union, 57 votes; ONUFA, 53; AAUP, 29; abstain, 7 votes. A run-off election was held by the NLRB on May 18. That time the choices were No Union or ONUFA. ONUFA was selected 66 to 62, but there were 18 abstentions. Not only was the campus in tumult, but the faculty itself was deeply divided about the union. Not taking part in the voting were the Law faculty who believed their graduate status and ABA accreditation excluded them from the vote. In June 1979, ONUFA was certified as the undergraduate faculty's bargaining unit. An initial request by the University for decertification was denied by the NLRB that August and negotiations for a contract began.

One of the demands of the ONUFA bargaining team (Andy Ludanyi, Terry Keiser, Don Traxler, Anne Lippert, Norm Rex and Wally Smith of OEA) was that bargaining could not occur during those times that team members were assigned to teaching. The work of teaching at the University was to continue and students were not to be disadvantaged. That meant that much of the bargaining was done nights and weekends. Representing the University were Dale Wilhelm, George Hassel, Jim Moore and Ross Bridgman of Vorys, Sater, Seymour & Pease, LLP, the law firm that the trustees had engaged to advise the University in the process. Much of the negotiation involved establishment of policies on tenure and promotion, faculty expectations, evaluation of faculty and administrators, salary, leaves of absence and sabbatical leaves, teaching loads, fringe benefits, university governance. In short, much of the current Faculty Handbook was put in place. Of concern to the faculty representatives were academic freedom, due process, fairness and consistency in administering regulations, providing equitable opportunities and resources to faculty, and faculty compensation. University data on salaries and compensation of all faculty, all

faculty workloads, complete financial status of the university, were among items requested by the union team. This began the systematic collection of data about the university and its operations for decision making that we have today.

Once bargaining began, a group of faculty members (Bruce Burton, Don Stansloski and Alan Drake) calling themselves the Committee for Decertification filed a new petition with the NLRB. Thus the faculty was divided into several groups: ONUFA supporters, AAUP supporters who did not like the OEA supported union, law faculty who claimed not be part of the union because of ABA requirements for greater autonomy for their college, the Committee for Decertification, and a disengaged group that did not want to be bothered with any of this. This was not a united faculty force to move the University forward. Certainly it was a difficult situation for union leaders who found old friends pitted against them.

Following Dr. Loeschner's departure, Dr. Harold Bolz was named interim president and contributed greatly to lessening tension on campus by meeting with faculty and students. In December 1979, Dr. DeBow Freed was named president and bargaining continued throughout 1979 and into 1980. Contracts had not been issued for the 1980-81 academic year since the University was negotiating salary increases with ONUFA and the issuance of contracts by the University would be an unfair labor practice. The bargaining continued throughout that summer while faculty members worried about starting classes in the fall. During most of the bargaining period the union team leadership had tried to minimize the impact of negotiations on the university and potential university enrolment. The bargaining team was focussed on increasing faculty salaries which were low, reducing unmerited parity differentials, putting in place procedural guidelines to protect faculty and the university, fairly distributing opportunities for summer work, establishing clearer processes for personnel actions. In June 1980 as negotiations dragged on, concerned that the on-going talks were not leading to a contract, ONUFA filed an unfair labor practices charge asserting the university was not negotiating in good faith. This was followed by a union vote to authorize a strike if a contract were not negotiated by the start of fall quarter and a picket line march up and down Main Street from Hill to Dukes.

The mix of the possibility of a strike which might not fully close down the University, but could cripple it; the absence of faculty contracts for the fall term; and private

discussions of the president of ONUFA (Anne Lippert) with President Freed finally resulted in an agreement between ONUFA and the university which was ratified by the membership in early September. Every faculty member of the four undergraduate colleges received a copy of the 54 page agreement document. Still to come, however, were rulings by the NLRB on the Unfair Labor Practices filed by ONUFA, the petition for decertification by the Committee for Decertification (never acted upon) and the University petition to have the union abolished on the grounds that Northern's faculty were managers. In February 1981, the NLRB revoked ONUFA's certification, on the grounds that like the Supreme Court's decision in NLRB vs. Yeshiva that Yeshiva faculty were managers, ONU faculty had the same status. The union had lasted twenty-four months.

In the aftermath of the decertification, President Freed put together an ad hoc committee made up of union leaders and anti-union activists who were to take the contract and the old Faculty Handbook and put together a first edition of the current Faculty Handbook. Jim Moore, the registrar, chaired the group. The union contract had kept intact the actual operative faculty committee structure. Although later much of the role of this ad hoc committee would be assumed by the University Personnel Committee, that first group also continued to work through issues of salary parity and salary and compensation increases.

Although civility began to return to the campus, deep feelings of distrust of faculty members for faculty members on either side of the controversy continued. Some white paper signers did not support ONUFA and supported decertification. Some faculty members had feared signing the white paper or openly joining ONUFA because of anticipated retaliation by the University but secretly contacted the activists, some of whom faulted them as pusillanimous. Blame and recriminations had poisoned faculty cohesion. It was that break-up of community that needed to be addressed; gradually community was rebuilt. When I was one of two finalists for the position of VPAA in 1991, a Board member following my interview told me he was no longer worried. That statement referring to my earlier role was made some ten years after the end of the union.

So why am I talking about these two very different, but troubled transitions? Because ONU is now poised for another, greater transition, one that will advance the University to be "one of the great universities of the United States," as Lehr stated. In making this transition

we're changing much of the familiar: new calendar (semesters), new general education to be adopted by the University faculty, greater expectations for scholarship and performance of students and faculty, more broadly based and diverse student body, additional strong faculty and staff colleagues coming to ONU from quality institutions across the U.S. and abroad, and changes at the vice president level of administration. Last year it was John Green. As you all know, I'll be retiring from ONU in August 2009.

All this change at once is both exhilarating and unsettling. There's a lot to do in a relatively short period of time. 2011 is not far away. Although we've already started some of this work with faculty participation in formulating a new general education, the semester transition, increased faculty and staff expectations, the University Strategic Plan and Master Plan, curricular and student learning outcomes assessment, there is much more to do as we work to move the University forward on our plan to further reposition ONU as a center of excellence. Many times in the past it was the strength and cohesion of faculty and staff invested in and committed to the University's mission of a "student-centered, service oriented, values-based institution of higher learning committed to a rigorous pursuit of academic excellence through inquiry and achievement" that enabled ONU to move forward. That is our case today. The people that can advance this University to greatness are in this room right now. Your individual and our collective work will make this happen. "Ohio Northern University will be a leading, private, student-centered institution of increasing regional and national prominence. We will be a diverse, dynamic and unique learning community offering rigorous professional programs in partnership with the sciences and the arts to prepare individuals for lifelong challenges." We are the "WE" that will make this happen.

Anne Lippert