

*A Brief
History of
Ohio
Northern
University*

In March 1866 a slight, 28-year old man detrained at the Ada depot. A casual observer could easily have overlooked Henry Solomon Lehr, a recently discharged Union veteran. He had come to northwestern Ohio in search of a site for his projected university. That same observer might well have smiled if he knew of Lehr's ambition since neither he nor the rough village of Ada showed obvious promise.

Lehr's Select School

The members of the Ada school board were, however, sufficiently impressed to hire him as their schoolmaster. This was with the understanding that he would be able to use the facilities after classes to teach a "select school" for those wishing education beyond that offered during the day. As his reputation grew throughout the area, the number of select school students increased, and in 1870, Lehr felt sufficiently well established to approach the citizens of Ada for funds to purchase land for a campus and an academic building. In August of 1871, the Northwestern Ohio Normal School, later Ohio Northern University, was launched.

The period after the Civil War saw dramatic changes in American higher education as a re-united nation was transformed by industrialization and urbanization. A more educated populace was needed, and the sciences and modern languages rose in importance in college curricula to equal footing with

the humanities, religion, and classical languages. Lehr was receptive to the needs of the new era, and he crafted an institution with those needs in mind. He also bore in mind his own educational experiences, both as a student and teacher, and this, in turn, shaped his philosophy.

Educational Philosophy

Coming from a poor family, young Henry's schooling was formed by his need to support himself. He strove to keep tuition at Northern as low as possible, and as a country schoolmaster, realized that in order to be accessible to most Americans, his institution's calendar and curriculum would require considerable flexibility. The curriculum offered was clearly and unabashedly practical. As the school's first catalog noted:

It is the design of the Institution to provide... an education that will fit the rising generation to discharge life's duties with credit to themselves, honor to their parents, and benefit to humanity.

While a student at Mount Union College, Lehr absorbed the concept of education as a democratizing force. Side-stepping the debate over whether women should be admitted as students, Northern, from its inception, was co-educational in both its student body and faculty. It is also worth noting that, although Lehr was a

man of strong religious convictions, the school was not established with a specific religious affiliation, nor has it subsequently sought to limit admission according to church membership.

Need for Change

Lehr realized that to succeed, Northern would have to adapt its curriculum to society's needs. Although founded as a normal school, an institution for training teachers, Ohio Northern had, by the mid-1880's, added programs in pharmacy, engineering, law and business. The early curriculum also distinguished by a willingness to experiment, although some efforts, like the College of Agriculture, failed to take root. This experimental approach and a willingness to adapt the curriculum to contemporary needs has long been a hallmark of Ohio Northern.

Northern in the 1870's

Northern's earliest years were a trial for both the institution and its founder. Classes began at the new institution on Monday, August 14, 1871, though not without difficulties. Due to delays in finishing the Normal School Building, the 147 students enrolled found themselves temporarily relegated to downtown stores and local churches. Not until October 16 were the first classes taught in

the building, and even then the interior was incomplete. Lehr had recently rushed to finish his own degree at Mt. Union prior to the start of classes. He also had to pressure the contractor to fulfill his obligations, recruit a faculty, and see to the furnishing of the classrooms and to the printing of the school's catalog. Lehr was, in short, creating an educational institution literally from the ground up.

In these early years, Lehr taught beginning at 5AM, and several weeks into the first fall term, he collapsed while conducting classes, possibly under the strain of the ordeal. After a brief recovery, he resumed his duties.

The 1880's

By the 1880's, with the problems attending its founding largely behind it, Ohio Northern entered a period of growth and curricular diversification, which gave permanence to Lehr's original vision. This happy situation was reflected by the trustees' decision in the spring of 1885 to change the institution's name from the Northwestern Ohio Normal School to Ohio Normal University. The catalog for that year cited the growth of the curriculum as the first reason for the change, and it was also true that student recruitment was no longer limited to the northwestern corner of the state. Likewise, there was pressure from the students themselves to change the school's name. They wished their alma mater to join the ranks of more prestigious institutions and felt that the addition of the term university would elevate the status of Northern.

The 1880's also saw the creation of several major programs. During this period the commercial course of the 1870s emerged as a separate college. The title page of the 1881-1882 catalog cited a "Business College" at the normal. The Civil Engineering Department, first of the institution's professional programs, appeared in the 1881-82 catalog. The existence of a law department was noted in the catalog of 1884-85, and the following year the Annual Catalog listed for the first time a "School of Pharmacy." Along with medical classes, courses in chemistry and botany were offered. The decision to expand these classes into an actual college was prompted by the passage of Ohio's first pharmacy licensure act in 1884.

Change in the 1890's

In the following decade it became increasingly apparent that major changes were demanded in the way in which the institution was administered. Outside funding continued to elude Lehr and the other trustees, due, in part, to their continued control of the institution. Then too, Lehr's policy of keeping tuition low, commendable as that may have been, left the institution chronically underfunded. At the same time, larger enrollments and an expanding curriculum made finding funds for additional buildings all the more pressing. Also worth noting, President Lehr, the guiding force behind the university, was 52 years old at the

beginning of the 1890s and was likely concerned about his personal longevity. Although a dedicated teaching staff assisted him, he was beginning to have concerns for the future of the institution. What would become of the university if illness removed him?

In trying to secure greater permanence for Northern. Dr. Lehr tried two approaches. In 1897, he first sought state support for the institution. When this tack failed, he agreed to sell the university to the Methodist Church. The sale was plausible given the heavy representation of Methodists among the student body. Dr. Lehr also apparently believed that he would be allowed to continue in some managerial capacity though this proved unfeasible. The actual transfer of assets was completed in 1899. He was succeeded by Dr. Leroy Belt, 1900 – 1905 and Dr. A.E. Smith, 1905 – 1930.

Transformation, 1900 - 1930

The period between 1900 and 1930 saw the institution transformed administratively, physically, and pedagogically. As rapidly as their contracts expired, faculty members were organized in a more standard departmental fashion. Under Lehr, a number of programs such as law, art, pharmacy, stenography, music, and oratory, were conducted on a semi-autonomous basis. Tuition collected in these courses was divided among the faculty with only a

percent being remitted to the university. Under Pres. Belt, all funds were sent directly to the ONU treasurer, who then paid individual professors a stipulated salary. The practice of faculty members renting books and equipment to students was also curtailed. Finally, individual professors were placed under the supervision of department chairmen.

Meanwhile, at the July 28, 1903, trustee meeting, the university's name was changed from Ohio Normal University, a name which it had borne since 1885, to Ohio Northern University. Tradition recounts that President Belt was petitioned to make the change by a group of engineering students headed by Thomas J. Smull. As participants in a professional program, they felt that the value of their degrees was lessened by their being granted from a mere "normal school." This move also reflected major academic changes underway.

The curriculum was extensively revamped during this period, again with an eye toward contemporary needs and trends. In 1904 an attempt was made establish joint medical program with the Fort Wayne College of Medicine in Indiana.

Although this concept had potential, it proved to be very short-lived. Another innovation was the creation of a College of Agriculture in early 1911. By the fall term, nearly 300 students had enrolled in the college, and the college's farm eventually consisted of 90 acres. Although the Agriculture College failed to thrive

and was disbanded in 1923, the university wisely retained ownership of the former farm. Later it formed the core of Northern's west campus.

Curriculum Changes

The curriculum adapted to contemporary developments by removing as well as adding programs. In 1925, the university's preparatory department was abolished. Since President Lehr's day, the department had served as a bridge between high school and the university. This practice had merit as long as there were few high schools, but by the 1920s, they were common in Ohio. Moreover, the practice of admitting high-school-age students to the university now detracted from the institution's academic reputation. Today, however, remedial courses and the post-secondary option mirror this earlier approach. Four years earlier, the Military Department, established under Dr. Lehr, was discontinued thus freeing resources for the rising star of varsity athletics.

Smith Administration, 1905 - 1930

President Smith was a fund-raiser of considerable ability and stamina. During his long administration, the local newspapers were peppered with articles announcing his departure on trips to visit potential benefactors. The student body, which found itself occasionally at odds with Smith over his regulations, may

well have breathed a collective sigh of relief each time his train pulled out of the Ada depot. There is, however, little doubt that his frequent journeys benefited the university. He was, for example, instrumental in creating the university's first endowment fund and raising roughly \$500,000 for it.

President Smith was less successful in dealing with his exuberant and irreverent students. Although fraternities were first introduced under Pres. Belt, Smith viewed these organizations with considerable suspicion, seeing them as a challenge to his authority, especially where the university ban on dancing was concerned. The use of alcohol and tobacco by students, both on and off campus, was also forbidden. Pres. Smith apparently visited the Ada train station to catch intoxicated students returning from the fleshpots of Lima. The students were, at least in some cases, able to bribe the conductor to stop outside town for a hasty departure.

Great Depression

Had the university's economic situation remained stable, the next change would have been to further strengthen its academic program. The desirability of doing so had been noted in 1920's, especially in terms of gaining recognition from regional accrediting bodies. It was unfortunately necessary to delay this step for

almost two decades as the Great Depression and the Second World War buffeted Ohio Northern.

Like many institutions, Northern was heavily dependent on tuition income, and the arrival of economic hard times slashed enrollments. The number of students attending dropped from a pre-depression high of 1,056 in 1928-29 to 529 in 1935. From that point, enrollments grew until, immediately prior to the Second World War, they were approaching pre-Depression levels.

President Williams, 1930 – 1943, and the trustees enacted several measures to improve the university's finances, perhaps the most significant of which was to reduce the number of staff employed. In 1928-29, for example, Ohio Northern had 60 faculty members, but by 1934-35 this number had been reduced to 32. By the latter date, many of the administrative staff was also listed with the faculty, suggesting that the administrators were pressed into the thinned faculty ranks.

The curriculum was revised with an eye towards greater efficiency. The overall effect was to consolidate various independent academic programs in the College of Liberal Arts. One of the first units to be abolished was the College of Music. It had been formed at the very end of President Smith's administration, and, given the modest size of the program, demoting it to a department in the College of Liberal Arts was a sensible step. In 1930, the College of Education was similarly

reduced to the division of teacher training. Both the School of Fine Arts and School of Oratory met a similar fate. Indeed, even the School of Commerce, a product of the Lehr era, became the department of economics and business administration within the College of Liberal Arts.

World War II

As American entry into the war became more likely, the university sought to minimize its impact by participating in several government programs. In early 1940 students began flight training under an Army Air Corps program. As the international situation grew more threatening, a ground school was added to teach non-pilots the rudiments of various aviation-related subjects. By April 1942, the Navy had approved Northern for officer training. As during the First World War, the federal government turned to schools such as Northern to provide engineering expertise. Anticipating wartime needs, the Federal Security Agency created a program to train non-students in war-related industries. Later in the war, this program was consolidated under the Engineering, Science, and Management War Training program (ESMWT). By mid-1943, the university was conducting ESMWT classes in 15 cities in the region. Between the program's beginning in January 1941 and its end on June 30, 1945, more than 5,400 individuals were enrolled in classes taught by Northern. Despite these efforts,

the size of the student body dropped below the worst levels of the Depression. It appears that during the fall of 1943 only 156 students were enrolled.

Various emergency measures were enacted to deal with the crisis. The school's yearbook, the *Northern*, ceased publication with the 1942 issue. Next year, the student newspaper, the *Northern Review*, closed. The last full-sized university catalog was printed for the 1942-43 academic year. Thereafter, 30-page pamphlets were issued. At least one building, Presser Hall, was closed for most of the war. A sure indication of the seriousness of the situation was the decision, in 1943, to cancel intercollegiate sports for the balance of the war. Several changes were made to the university's calendar to accommodate wartime requirements. Restrictions were lifted regarding when students could enter Northern to permit incoming students to begin during any quarter. Course offerings were increased for the summer session, thus making the university effectively a year-round institution.

Post-war Recovery

The following year brought the first good news that been heard on the Ada campus for several years. The Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944, dubbed the "GI Bill of Rights" was enacted. Under Title II of the act, qualifying veterans enrolled at a college or university could receive tuition

assistance. This promise of future income would be invaluable if, and this was a very big if, Northern could survive into 1945 when the returning servicemen arrived.

The university was also fortunate to have a core of faculty and administrators who were dedicated to the university. For his part, President McClure, 1943 – 1949, served his first year in office without pay. His example was followed by others on the faculty, some of whom served either without pay or at considerably reduced salaries.

The opening of fall quarter 1945 found the university trying to cope with a sudden flood influx of students. With peace only one month old, an initial group of 30 veterans had enrolled. By the beginning of spring quarter, an estimated 325 servicemen were on campus, and overall the enrollment for the following fall was projected to be 750. By winter quarter 1946, over 900 students were enrolled, and the fall 1948 class numbered 1,209. This influx strained the local housing market, and Northern, which at that time had no dormitories, acquired, courtesy of the federal government, an assortment of trailers and prefabricated dwellings. By the beginning of fall quarter 1946, the university had in place 114 trailers and five barrack-style dormitories for single men.

McIntosh Administration

By start of McIntosh administration in 1949, enrollment had stabilized to the extent that the institution's efforts could shift from survival to long-discussed improvements in academic programs. For the past two decades, the university had labored under the handicap of not being accredited by any regional or national agencies, but by 1958 this problem had been corrected. The professional programs first won recognition with College of Law American Bar Association accreditation in 1948, followed by the College of Pharmacy's accreditation by the American Council on Pharmaceutical Education in 1951 and the College of Engineering's approval of its programs by the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology three years later. The process was completed when, in 1958, the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools accredited the undergraduate program. When the news reached campus, a joyous crowd gathered at McIntosh's home to celebrate. For his part, President McIntosh declared a free day for the campus and went out of his way to recognize the efforts of the faculty, administration, and students in securing accreditation.

It would be comforting to believe that, with its obvious crises past, Ohio Northern University entered a period of unruffled calm. In the ensuing years, however, the university has been a changing part of a vibrant and changing society. While the

core liberal arts and professional programs have remained strong, new disciplines such as biochemistry and computer engineering have grown alongside them. Recruiting an increasingly competent faculty for those programs and providing appropriate facilities has been a major challenge. Numerous academic buildings have been added including the science complex, chapel, library, field house and performing arts center. The new classrooms and laboratories also required increasingly sophisticated and expensive equipment, and the advent of computers and networking has emphasized this trend. Literally all of the earlier structures have been renovated. A total of eight residence halls were constructed to house a student body that grew from ca. 850 in 1951 to over 3,000 in 1998. Room for further expansion was acquired in 1989 when an additional 120 acres south of the main campus were purchased. Whatever else Ohio Northern University may run short of, challenges are not among them.

By the time Ohio Northern University's founder retired, many of the defining characteristics of the institution were already in place. The university was committed to providing a diverse curriculum, one that combined a strong foundation in the liberal arts with a professional orientation. At the same time, efforts were made to keep the institution ecumenical in nature and to offer a student-centered educational program. The goal of these developments was and remains to graduate educated, competent, and employable practitioners in its areas of specialization. Today's university has grown within this framework.

Meyer, 1966 – 1978, and Freed, 1979 – 1999, Administrations

The course of Ohio Northern University's development is perhaps best summarized by the administrations of two of her two most recently retired presidents. At his inauguration, President Samuel Meyer spoke of the institution's bequest to its students of "roots and wings." His vision for Ohio Northern was that of a university capable of providing its graduates with the educational "roots" necessary for them to make their way in the world. However, he also saw the need to offer the spiritual "wings" which Northern, as a church-related institution, was able to contribute and strove to provide both to Ohio Northern's students.

Under President Meyer a long list of badly needed buildings were completed. These included the Heterick Memorial Library, Tilton College of Law, Taggart Law Library, Wesley Center, Young Building for Philosophy and Religion, Biggs Engineering Building, King-Horn Convocation Center, Park Hall, McIntosh extensions (White Bear and Wishing Well), the refurbished Taft Building, the Wilson Art Center, and the later-renamed Meyer Hall of Science. By the end of the Meyer administration in 1977, all of the private residences lying between the original campus on Main Street and the new west campus had been removed, and the intervening space completely landscaped.

As President Meyer noted in his comments at retirement, the extensive building program constituted a visible manifestation of the intangible improvements to the university's educational program. The size of the faculty was increased by over two-thirds, and the curriculum was modernized. In addition, chapters of five national honorary societies were established to recognize academic achievement and leadership, a number of student life living groups and social groups were formed and intercollegiate athletic teams were expanded.

This work of strengthening the academic program and the physical facilities of the campus was continued under President Freed who, along with his wife Catherine, quietly exemplified a spirit of Christian care and concern. His low-keyed and civil approach to campus leadership was much appreciated, as was his concern for Northern's students.

Changes in the curriculum and the continued growth of the student body required improved academic facilities. In 1982 an addition to the law library was dedicated. Three years later, the music building, Presser Hall, was renovated and enlarged; a second addition to house student practice rooms and faculty offices was added in 1998.

Due to the purchase of 120 acres south of the campus, space was available for the Freed Center for the Performing Arts. This facility included two theaters, their

support facilities, broadcasting studios, and a classroom wing. It was opened in 1991. Even before the Freed Center was completed, work commenced in a 62,000 square-foot field house with an additional fitness center and improved exercise equipment.

In the 1990's additions were made to Dukes Memorial, the pharmacy building and the Wilson Art Building and the university gained the use of the Metzger Nature Center in Tuscarawas County for student and faculty environmental and biological study. A senior citizen complex where seniors and students live as neighbors in small housing was acquired in the 1990's. In 1996, ground was broken for an annex between the Biggs Engineering Building and Meyer Hall of Science. The groundbreaking, in summer 1998, for the Heterick Memorial Library expansion and a new president's home on campus marked Dr. Freed's final building projects in this extensive list.

These improvements were underwritten by two ambitious fund-raising campaigns. In the mid-1980's, an \$18 million campaign was announced. At its conclusion, over \$23.5 million had been committed. Only five years later an even more ambitious enterprise, the \$30 million "Campaign for the 21st Century" was launched and successfully completed.

The major improvements to the university's physical plant were joined by another development in the 1980s. It was subtle and easily overlooked but arguably as significant as the erection of any building. The use of computers, once the province of a small circle of faculty and students, began to spread throughout the institution. This change was driven by the advent of personal computers in the early 1980s, which provided an alternative to Northern's centralized mainframe machines. This was followed, in 1990-91 by the installation of a fiber-optic network on campus. Over the next four years, most buildings, residence halls included, were connected. This local network was, in turn, linked to the Internet in 1992. The university joined OhioLINK, the Internet consortium of public and private college and university libraries in Ohio, in 1995.

As networked computers became more common, they gradually began to affect the academic program. In some activities, such as the preparation of written assignments, the basic task remained unchanged, but it was greatly simplified by using computers. In disciplines such as engineering, traditional drafting tools were supplanted by computer aided design software. Finally, the university's Internet connection made the institution's rural location irrelevant by providing immediate and inexpensive communication with persons and organizations worldwide. In 1998, the first distance learning courses were offered in pharmacy.

Baker Administration, 1999 -Present

Dr. Kendall L. Baker joined the university in August 1999 as its 10th president. He and his wife Toby quickly defined their own energetic and outgoing approach to the university community. As a communicator, Dr. Baker has organized focus groups dealing with health care plans, salary plans, the budget, and the general vision for the university. An update of the campus master plan is underway. In fall of 2000, the renovated and expanded Heterick Memorial Library will be opened to the public along with an apartment-style residence hall. An undergraduate honors program will be launched in 2000-01. Dr. Baker clearly continues Northern's tradition of adapting a student-centered educational program to a changing world.