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Linfield at 150: Linfield's Faculty Predecessors

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150 Linfield at

Linfield's faculty predecessors

Northrup, Grover, Potter... those are names that live on at Linfield College as residence halls or academic buildings. But who were these people? And why were they designated by President Leonard Riley as his "greatest assets"? As we enter Linfield's sesquicentennial year, Professor Marvin Henberg shares his insight into the rich history of those faculty who helped define the college. Learn about some of the most influential teachers whose names adorn academic buildings and residence halls and who established early on Linfield's mission of Connecting Learning, Life, and Community.

Who was the first teacher at Linfield? There is no simple answer to this seemingly simple question. It really depends on how you define "the college."

Oregon City College, founded by Baptists in 1849, is the predecessor of today's institution and was led by Rev. George Chandler – who also happened to be the first president of The Baptist College at McMinnville, chartered by the Oregon Territory on Jan. 30, 1858.

The Reverends Ezra Fisher and Hezekiah Johnson and the Baptist Education Society organized Oregon City College and, later, the Baptist College at McMinnville. However, the McMinnville institution did not begin with the

Baptists; it began in 1856 with the Christian Church. The first teacher in this school was none other than McMinnville co-founder Sebastian Adams. Along with William Newby, he platted the land where McMinnville now sits and persuaded brethren in the Christian Church to erect a large, square, wooden structure to serve as the new town's school. Adams taught for at least half a year beginning in 1856.

Because the Christian Church had other preoccupations, Adams transferred the building and its few students to the Baptists, including the stipulation that the Baptists maintain at least one professor "who taught at the collegiate level." Newby donated the surrounding land, allowing the Baptists to hire a "first" teacher of their



own, prior to incorporation and prior to Chandler's accepting the presidency. In 1857 John Wesley Johnson taught elementary Latin to the few preparatory students gathered in McMinnville on the site of the new college.

In 1858, Johnson quit his post, shipped south to cross the Isthmus of Panama, then sailed north to earn a college degree from Yale University. He returned as the third president (1864-67) of the Baptist College at McMinnville and played another significant role in Oregon higher education: serving as the first president of the University of Oregon (1876-1893). There, Johnson was described as "a classicist of the disciplinary school. He had always been a hard worker, who so completely mastered the Latin classics that he seldom had occasion to refer to the textbook when engaged in instruction. He was a driver in the classroom, with a contempt for shoddiness and laziness."

It is a safe bet that he taught earlier in the same manner in McMinnville.

Presidents as teachers

While little teaching is required of today's presidents, that was not the case in the college's early years. In the post-pioneer days, later dubbed the "precarious period" by President Leonard Riley, the college took on the new name, McMinnville College (1898), and entered into a pattern where scant financial resources dictated that presidents were predominantly teachers.

Increasingly through the administrations of Mark Bailey (1873-1876), Harry Boardman (1896-1903) and A.M. Brumback (1903-1905), short staffing in the faculty ranks required the president to shoulder enormous teaching burdens.



Chemistry Professor Luther Taylor '15, above, working in a chemistry lab with three students in 1955. He taught at Linfield from 1928 to 1958. **Below**, Pioneer Hall, the observatory and the water tower in the 1890s. **Opposite page**, logo of McMinnville College.

Books tracing Linfield's history

Bricks Without Straw: The Story of Linfield College, by Jonas A. "Steine" Jonasson '26, professor of history and dean of administration 1931-1969, published 1938.

Linfield's Hundred Years, Edited by Kenneth L. Holmes, former dean of men and assistant professor of history 1954-1969, published 1956.

Inspired Pragmatism: An Illustrated History of Linfield College, by Marvin Henberg, interim president, professor of philosophy and dean of faculty/vice president of academic affairs, 1994-; afterword by Barbara Seidman, professor of English and dean of faculty/vice president of academic affairs, 1983-, published 2007.





Each year, Boardman reported on his teaching for the previous fall, winter and spring quarters. In 1898, he reported the following teaching load to the board:

Homer:	7 students for 13 weeks and 5 students for 13 weeks
Beginning Greek:	4 students for 13 weeks; 5 students for 13 weeks
Xenophon:	5 students for 13 weeks
Demosthenes:	2 students for 5 weeks
Caesar:	2 students for 39 weeks.
Beginning Latin:	19 students for 13 weeks.
Vergil:	10 students for 26 weeks
Biblical Literature:	8 students for 13 weeks
N.T. Greek:	5 students for 13 weeks

With such a strangling load, Boardman convened a special meeting of the board in 1900 to plead for relief from the burdens of fund raising.

“I am not well adapted to the work,” he wrote. “Some other can be found, I am sure, who can do this work with far greater efficiency than I.”

The board agreed, and in 1902 Boardman taught 15 different courses in 15 different subjects for an average of 24 classroom hours a week.

Unfortunately, the trustees did not secure a person of “greater efficiency” to raise funds, and the college began issuing “warrants” in lieu of cash payments to faculty and staff. Boardman resigned in favor of Brumback, who had taught natural sciences at the college since 1896. Brumback had a passion for sport, playing center on and coaching the college’s first football team. While enormously popular with students, he was no more suited to stopping the fiscal wolf at the college’s door than was Boardman. In 1905 he left McMinnville to take a position at his alma mater, Denison College, in Ohio.

Leonard Riley’s ‘greatest assets’

Hired in a cliff-hanging search only weeks prior to a trustee meeting scheduled to close McMinnville College permanently, Rev. Leonard Riley began working immediately on the mandate “to pull the college out of the hole if you can.” Riley’s focus was on galvanizing the regional and national Baptist constituencies, on publicizing the college’s achievements, and on taking personal responsibility for eradicating a debt far larger than the college’s net assets. Although teaching was finally eliminated from the president’s responsibilities, after retiring 25 productive years later, he mentioned his three “greatest assets” in revitalizing the college were faculty members. A fourth must be added – the woman who provided the college with its new name.

The first faculty member Riley considered one of his great assets was the Rev. Emanuel Northup. A pro-



The 1910 May Day Coronation of Queen Myrtle Maxwell being crowned by King J. Alan Jeffery.



The library in Pioneer Hall, 1884-1910. **Left**, an 1890s social club.

fessor of Greek and mathematics and dean of faculty from 1888 until 1929, Northup had somewhat of a dubious beginning, confessing in later years that when he arrived in McMinnville, “I had never seen a more desolate looking place in my life.” It didn’t help that his salary of \$650 a year was two-thirds that of his predecessor, A.W. Crawford, who resigned rather than accept





Presidents of Linfield College

1857-60	George C. Chandler
1864-67	John W. Johnson
1873	J. D. Robb
1873-76	Mark Bailey
1876-77	John E. Magers
1877-78	Ep Roberts
1878-81	J. G. Burchett
1881-87	E.C. Anderson
1887-96	Truman G. Brownson
1896-1903	Harry L. Boardman
1903-05	A. M. Brumback
1905-06	Emanuel Northup (i)
1906-31	Leonard W. Riley
1931-32	William R. Frerichs (i)
1932-38	Elam J. Anderson
1938-43	William G. Everson
1943-68	Harry L. Dillin
1968, 1974	Winthrop W. Dolan (i)
1968-74	Gordon C. Bjork
1974-75	Cornelius Siemens (i)
1975-92	Charles U. Walker
1992-2005	Vivian A. Bull
2005-06	Marvin Henberg (i)
2006-present	Thomas L. Hellie

(i) = Interim

A group photo taken in 1890 that includes President Truman G. Brownson, standing on the far left in the second row, and Emanuel Northup, seated in the fifth row, at left.



James A. Macnab, left, professor of biology and geology, with Jane Claire Dirks-Edmunds '37 and other students during one of their research trips to Saddleback Mountain near McMinnville.

the same cut in pay. Northup supplemented his small income by working nights as an actuary for Oregon Mutual Insurance Company.

Students described him as “a disciplinarian...often crusty in class, a man with a Calvinistic sense of self-denial and justice, hard on the indolent but gracious and helpful to the discouraged.” He taught long hours and served not only as dean but also as librarian and, under Riley, treasurer from 1906 to 1917. He was acting president of McMinnville College as well as mayor of McMinnville.

Isabel Grover, an 1896 alumna who as a student wrote for *The Review* under her nickname, “Belle,” was the first faculty member to have a campus building named in her honor. She taught variously in art, Latin and history between 1896 and 1917 and proved tireless in advancing the college. Badly crippled in a childhood accident and frail in health, Grover nonetheless assumed the charge of bucking up spirits in lean times: “Students came to her day and night, year after year, to bring their pain, disappointments, worries, and heart-breaks. She lifted our spirits and steadied our feet.” She loaned money to students in need, even when college warrants were of dubious value and she had not been paid in months.

Carrie Casler Potter proved to be “a woman of spirit, charm, and [an] instructor of merit.” Hired by acting president Northup in 1905, she was a graduate of the New England Conservatory of Music and had a distinguished background in choral music and choral performance. She became dean of McMinnville College’s own conservatory and was as beloved in the community as in the college, conducting the McMinnville First Baptist Church choir long after her retirement in 1929.

While Francis Eleanor Ross Linfield is known for her defining contribution that secured the college’s future, she was also a teacher. Not only did she serve the college as dean of women from 1921 to 1928, but also served as “professor of practical ethics” and for five years taught a required freshman course titled “Practical Ethics.” The course disappeared from the catalog on her retirement.

Excellence in the sciences

Linfield’s long record of excellent science teaching and research can be traced to three early faculty members hired by Riley.



The 1904 McMinnville College football team.

Herschel Hewitt, professor of physics from 1921 to 1946, worked in the Silver Valley of Northern Idaho as a mining assayer before coming to Linfield. This experience infused his teaching with a practical, hands-on orientation that served well in a poor college where much laboratory equipment had to be built from scratch rather than purchased directly off the shelves.

James A. Macnab, professor of biology and geology, took nearly 20 years to complete his Ph.D. at the University of Nebraska. But in his story of persistence in doctoral research lies a key to educational excellence that has long defined science education at Linfield.

Macnab conducted longitudinal research on a stand of Douglas fir forest on Saddleback Mountain near McMinnville. He involved students in his research, commanding their respect, focus and undying allegiance even as he worked them to capacity and beyond. He was arguably the most prominent teacher of his time or any other in Linfield history. According to a study published in 1952 on the origins of American scientists, Linfield ranked, per capita, in the top 10 percent of liberal arts colleges nationwide in the production of Ph.D. scientists.

“The biology department of Linfield is one of the most interesting science departments reviewed in this study,” the study said. “Its brilliant achievement from 1928 to 1939 appears to be attributable almost solely to the unusual talent of its one faculty member and chairman, J.A. Macnab.”

Macnab’s spirit of inquiry figured prominently in two of his students who earned Ph.D.s and returned to follow in his footsteps. John Boling ’35 assumed the department chairmanship on Macnab’s departure in 1946, and Jane Claire Dirks-Edmunds ’37 took over Macnab’s research on Saddleback Mountain, publishing an extended study of the area, *Not Just Trees*, following her retirement in 1974.

In chemistry, excellence at Linfield was defined and established by Luther Taylor ’15 (1928–1958). As he began his teaching career, he found he had only one good piece of equipment on hand – and no budget to purchase supplies except in small quantities. When he was finally able to place his first order for chemicals in bulk, he celebrated by throwing a party, the inaugural “Wednesday teas,” with the beverage served from a chemical flask, a ritual that continued until Taylor’s retirement.

Those were the days before the Occupational Health and Safety Administration began poking into laboratory practices.

Further directions

Excellence in the sciences set the stage for Walter Dyke’s ’38 founding of the Linfield Research Institute in the post-war era. Other innovators in business, athletics and professional studies expanded the curriculum in new directions. In the next issue of *Linfield Magazine*, we will explore how learning at Linfield extended into the community, a process that included acquisition of the nursing program at Good Samaritan Hospital in Portland.

– Marvin Henberg

In search of Linfield’s history

It took Marvin Henberg 16 months of reading thousands of pages of student newspapers, board minutes, press clippings, catalogs and bulletins, and sorting through hundreds of historic photos to write *Inspired Pragmatism: An Illustrated History of Linfield College*.

Much of Henberg’s research stemmed from earlier work he tackled during the 11 years he served as dean of faculty and vice president for academic affairs. He also served as interim president at Linfield during 2005–06.

The result is a richly illustrated volume that, through photos and stories, traces the history of Linfield College from its origins to the eve of its sesquicentennial celebration on Jan. 30, 2008. The book will be released in November, and Henberg will discuss the writing of the book during homecoming Friday, Oct. 19, and at a special reading Thursday, Dec. 6, in Nicholson Library. The book is available through the Linfield Bookstore. To order go to: http://www.linfield.edu/inspired_pragmatism.

The articles in this and the next two issues of *Linfield Magazine* contain material not included in the book, yet still significant in the life of the college.

“My appreciation for the founders and for thousands of individuals who dedicated their lives to the college over the years has been deepened,” Henberg said.