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Rudolph H. Wagoner

1861 - 1920

By Mr. Ray Wallace, District No. 44, Hills and Dunes

Otterbein students who attended college in the late 1800's and early 1900's still well remember a certain colorful professor who was a bright spot in campus life in what is now termed "the good ole days."

The name of Professor Rudolph H. Wagoner is oft-discussed when the grads return for reunions, homecoming or other campus festivities.

"Rudy," as he was known by his close associates, was more than just another professor. He had that certain something that made him a favorite among his students. Perhaps it was the poetic way he called on them, using first, middle and last name in class or when he greeted them on campus.

Often he would go even a step further and call off their hometown too. He possessed the memory of an elephant and was able to remember the first, middle and last name of every student on campus as well as their home address.

This uncanny trait coupled with a tremendous sense of humor, love for practical jokes and a genuine power for getting the subject across to his students were probably the key reasons for the respect and admiration he earned from his students and fellow faculty members.

Professor Rudy was a versatile man. He held the official title of Professor of Mathematics and Latin. However, as needed, he also taught German, civics and astronomy and at one time was principal of the preparatory department which

is best remembered now as the old Martin Boehm Academy.

An extremely active, enthusiastic and energetic person, he served as President of the College Alumni Association for three years; served three years as secretary of the faculty; held a license to preach in the United Brethren Church; taught a men's Sunday School class for 23 years, a class that is known today as the Wagoner Memorial Class.

His sense of humor and uncanny antics always brought a smile every time he came forth with something new and are still well remembered today by those who knew him.

For no apparent reason and much to the embarrassment of his wife, Rudy occasionally would stage a staggering act as he would walk from his home on South State Street to the campus. His friends remember him hugging on telephone poles and zig-zagging up the street even though he'd never touched a drop.

Another of his favorite antics was to string lights across his potato patch "so the potatoes could see to grow at night." He is particularly remembered as he would walk up State Street in zero weather wearing a straw hat, his coat over his arm and fanning himself.

Despite all of his love for humor, silliness and practical jokes, Prof. Wagoner loved nothing more than to tax his keen analytical mind with a "problem that couldn't be worked." He became friends through letters with some of the country's most recognized mathematicians and they would trade problems "for the fun of it."

It was a bit ironic that Professor Wagoner came to Otterbein. He was born on a farm near Sidney. Meager financial circumstances prevented him from attending

high school until he was twenty-one years old. In the interim he worked as a farm hand, impatiently awaiting that day when his small savings might be great enough to further his education.

He joined the United Brethren Church in Sidney in 1883 and while teaching Sunday School there he became influenced by his pastor, the Reverend E. M. Counsellor. In 1886 he enrolled in Otterbein thanks to encouragement and financial assistance by his close friends, Mr. and Mrs. William C. Smith, with whom he had made his home while attending high school.

Rudy worked as a farm hand outside of Westerville and served as a boarding club manager while attending Otterbein.

He married Miss Eva Moss, Westerville, in 1891 and graduated from Otterbein with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1892. He taught for one year in a country school and in the spring of 1893 was asked to return to Otterbein to fill a mid-year vacancy. That fall he became a permanent member of the faculty and continued faithfully in that capacity until his death in 1920.

He loved work and people, which was apparent in his everyday way of life. A faithful Christian man, he once wrote, "There are four things I love passionately in life: my family, my home, my church and my work."

He once stated that he had never undertaken any duty or task in a half-hearted way and that every day's work had been a veritable pleasure. Even in his last illness, when his pain-racked body refused to be driven further, his mind remained active and his soul was still heedless of self.

In a very punctual manner he had faced death with every detail of family responsibilities taken care of, each and every plan for his services and a

final letter to his family and Sunday School class written.

Prof. Rudy was dedicated to the service of Otterbein. He lived and died Otterbein. He sent his son and daughter, Wilbur and Alma Marie (now Mrs. Ray Gifford), to Otterbein and would be especially pleased to know all four of his grandsons are Otterbein graduates: Robert Wagoner; Ray W. Jr., Don, and Craig Gifford. The latter grandson is now serving Otterbein as Director of College Information and Printing for the fourth consecutive year.

The name of Rudy Wagoner brings back memories, smiles and happiness to those who knew him over twoscore years ago ... his name will live on forever as a dedicated Otterbein professor who considered the classroom only a small part of his responsibilities to his students.