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Lowell Harrison

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By: Dr. Lowell H. Harrison

FOUNDERS DAY Nov. 15, 1967

Each year near mid-November we pause briefly at Western to honor the founders of this institution. It is fitting that we do so, for we live so much in the present that we sometimes forget that our institution did not always exist, that it had to be

Dr. Lowell H. Harrison
Department of History
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky 42101

Dear Lowell:
I regretted that attendance at the annual conference of the Association of State Colleges and Universities prevented me from being present at the Founders Day program on Wednesday morning.

Continued reports on the excellence of your tribute have been highly gratifying.

As you know, Western places great value upon our rich heritage and upon the ideals which have sustained the University through the years. As we grow larger and the tempo accelerates, preservation of traditions becomes increasingly difficult. It also becomes more difficult to impart cherished ideals to students and faculty. For this reason Founders Day is an important event in the life of the University.

Please accept my personal thanks and the appreciation of Western for this contribution to a most worthwhile endeavor.

Sincerely yours,

Kelly Thompson
President

KT/mch
Hutchler, Alexander; Clagett, Craig, Stickles; McLean, Woods, Scott; Wilson, Grise, Ford---few of you will recognize the names of some of the prominent members of the Western staff during the early days on the Hill. If an occasional name seems familiar, you probably associate it with the name of a building, or a departmental club, or, perhaps,

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Each year near mid-November we pause briefly at Western to honor the founders of this institution. It is fitting that we do so, for we live so much in the present that we sometimes forget that our institution did not always exist, that it had to be founded.

Western's history can be traced directly to a private school, the Glasgow Normal Institute, which was founded in that town in 1875. It was moved in 1884 to Bowling Green where it was known as the Southern Normal School. In 1906 the state legislature provided for the establishment and support of two state normal schools, one at Richmond and the other at Bowling Green. Western Kentucky State Normal School was created by converting the privately owned school into the newly authorized state institution. Henry Hardin Cherry, the president of the private school, became the first president of Western, a position which he occupied with honor and distinction until his untimely death in 1937. In 1909 the Hill was purchased; and two years later the school moved up College Street to its new location, students and faculty assisting the exodus by carrying loads of books, scientific apparatus and furniture to their new academic home. Cherry, Mutchler, Alexander; Clagett, Craig, Stickles; McLean, Woods, Scott; Wilson, Grise, Ford----few of you will recognize the names of some of the prominent members of the Western staff during the early days on the Hill. If an occasional name seems familiar, you probably associate it with the name of a building, or a departmental club, or, perhaps,

with a statue which stands near the edge of the campus and gazes endlessly across Bowling Green to the hills which Henry Hardin Cherry loved. Few of these founders remain, and each year the ranks of those who knew them are somewhat thinner than they were the year before. Surely, these founders are entitled to an hour of remembrance once a year.

men and women,
 As we pause to honor them, try to think of them as ~~of~~ not as dim, shadowy figures from the almost legendary era of Western's history. For they were people--they lived, they worked, they loved, they died--and they established the foundations of a great educational institution. They contended with many of the problems that beset colleges today: heavy class loads, endless sets of examination papers, endless student problems, appropriations that never match needs, the construction and maintenance of an adequate physical plant. (The parking problem was somewhat less acute in their day.) Measured by current standards, they had all too little with which to work, but they built well.

For these founders possessed a vision which helped them transcend many of the difficulties under which they labored. Nothing less than a vision can account for the achievements of H.H. Cherry who started his advanced education at Southern Normal in Bowling Green in 1886 when he was already 21 years of age and possessed a total capital of \$72 which he had earned over a period of six months by making ax handles. He recalled his start in these words: "On the seventeenth day of January, 1886, when the snow was more than fourteen inches deep, I packed all of my earthly belongings into a twenty-five cents pasteboard valise

at the end of this process of renewing and refounding the school.

and walked to Bowling Green to enter school. I rented a room at fifty cents per week and did self-boarding which cost me on an average of \$4.72 per month. I remained until the last dollar was gone."

Six years after entering Southern Normal, Henry Hardin Cherry and his brother T. C. Cherry acquired the school. Then in 1906 when Western was founded as a state institution, H.H. Cherry became its first president. But not even a President Cherry could have founded Western by himself. He needed---and he received ---the support of a dedicated faculty and staff. He needed--- and he received---the support of a dedicated student body. When a fire swept through the old building on College Street in 1899 classes were resumed the following day in make-shift quarters, and only two students went home. Townspeople, citizens of the region, state officials---many of them shared in the vision that became Western. They were also founders of the school.

But when we pay homage to the founders of Western we must not stop with these people, important as their contributions were. Western would not be flourishing as it is today if it had not been founded and re-founded many times in its history. An institution finds it almost impossible to stand still; unless it progresses, it is almost certain to decline. Our Western is far different from the one that President Cherry moved to the Hill. It has prospered because it has been reshaped and refounded by second and third generation Westerners into an institution capable of meeting the challenges and problems of today. Nor are we at the end of this process of renewing and refounding the school.

Great changes have swept across this campus in recent years; the pace of change has accelerated far beyond what was known during the first half-century in the life of the institution. The changes in the next decade are almost certain to be greater, more challenging, than those which confront us today. If Western is to respond successfully to the challenges of the future, she must be refounded---again and again. This can be done through the united efforts of all of us---students, faculty, administrators, the friends of Western---all of us who love the school and want to see it become an even greater institution.

Therefore, as we pause today to honor the founders of Western, we honor those who labored yesterday, we honor ourselves for what we are doing now, and we honor the founders who will come after us, both tomorrow and in the distant days~~x~~ which we shall never see. Our predecessors built for us a firm foundation; we have erected upon it a great institution. It is now our responsibility to provide for an even greater Western tomorrow.

Founders Day is a day on which we pay homage to the past; it is also a day of dedication to the future. This combination constitutes a portion of what generations of Westerners have called "the spirit of the Hill."