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## His Memorial is Western State

Silas Bent

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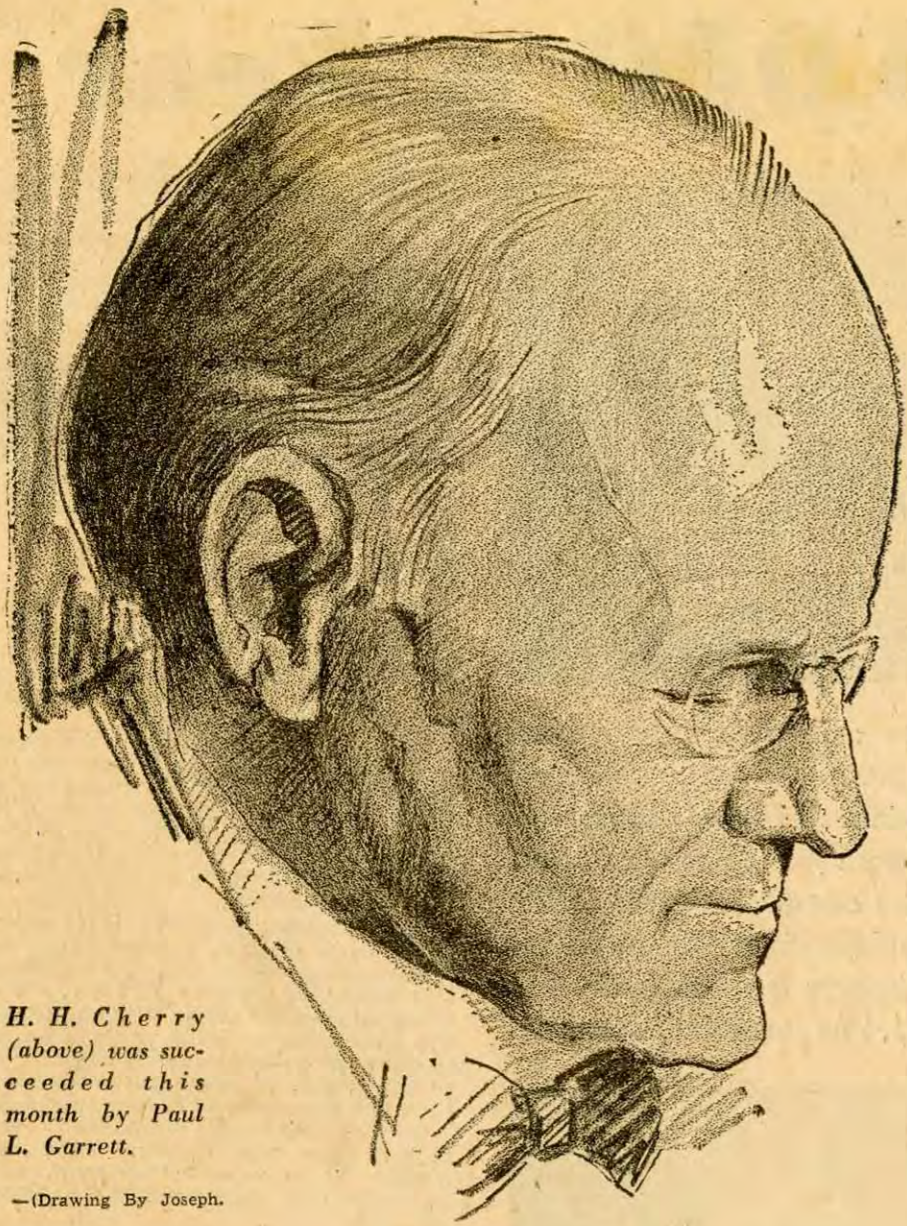
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# His Memorial Is Western State

The college at Bowling Green has 4,000 students and \$3,000,000 buildings in large part because H. H. Cherry insisted on giving it his property and his life



H. H. Cherry (above) was succeeded this month by Paul L. Garrett.

—(Drawing By Joseph.

By Silas Bent.

To sit up with the dying is a mournful fundamental of Kentucky folkways. So when the word went through the Barren River bottoms near Bowling Green that George Cherry's boy was on his deathbed with typhoid and couldn't live through the day, the doctor said so, farmers gathered from the countryside to whittle and chew tobacco and talk about crops. It was a brilliant mid-summer Sabbath.

Frequently a delegation of two or three visited the sickroom of the log house, tramping noisily, and returned to their fellows with a news bulletin. To the boy, tossing with fever, this well-meant neighborliness became unendurable. He lifted himself with painful effort to one elbow. "Get out of here," he commanded. "I'm not going to die."

That indomitable spirit to be up and doing persisted through the life of Henry Hardin Cherry, who died recently at Bowling Green. It was unbroken in the face of bitter poverty, of cruel derision of disastrous fire and of misguided litigation. It had brought him to the presidency of Western Kentucky State Teachers College, time and again. The school of its kind in this country has more than 4,000 students, much more than 100 splendid acres, and buildings which have cost some three millions. Mr. Cherry was a college president for forty-five years.

## Peddled Behind Oxen

The seventh of nine sons, H. H. Cherry and a brother drove oxen as boys to sell potatoes and ax handles in the town. Once Henry ventured inadvertently into a classroom where a teacher was initiating the girls of a fashionable school into the mysteries of Browning.

"Want to buy some taters?" he asked. Laughed out of that room by a group of girls, the farm lad continued undaunted his search for customers. He was able to attend school in those days an average of but two months annually, but when he had split and sold enough ax handles to amass \$72 he went to the Normal School. The weekly tuition was \$1 and the board was \$1.50; the school fee was fixed but the ambitious young man saw no need to squander money on board. He rented a room for 40 cents a week and cooked his own food, mostly rice. Thus his capital saw him through ten months.

Students and faculty alike were called "Soups" when I was in my teens in Bowling Green. Most of those struggling for an education in the Cherry School were hard put to it for funds, and lived in the cheapest boarding houses, whence the term. If a "Soup" had the audacity to make a date with a town girl, we way-laid him as he was going home and "rocked" him. In the presence of these indignities, some gave up and went home.

Now, during the first five months of that school there were but twenty-eight students, and for several years growth was not rapid. The ranks were serious, but even if that had not been so, the president was not the sort of man to fail his followers. He hid behind trees to get the names of the rock-throwers, and prosecuted them successfully. More, he had Lark Wilkins arraigned before the City Judge on a charge of calling his pupils "Soups."

## Led Teacher Training Move

All of us watched that case with interest, for we had heard that "Toose" Wilkins, Lark's father, actually had encouraged Mr. Cherry to go ahead. City Judge Hines disappointed all of us when he ruled gravely that the epithet was an offense against the dignity of the community and a breach of the peace. Lark was duly fined, and his father paid. Thereafter, although we made fun of the student body privately by the old name, we did not affront them publicly. There was still left to us the recourse of ostracizing them socially, which we did with the thoughtless enjoyment of a snobbish small town; and we may have pummeled some of them, when we caught them swimming at Beech Bend or crossing the covered bridge at the foot of College St. But we could not keep the school from growing, and we but deepened the enthusiasm and loyalty of its personnel.

It was in 1892 that H. H. and T. C. Cherry, the brothers who had sold taters and ax handles, organized the Bowling Green Business College and Literary Institute. By its very pretentiousness that name bespoke their high hopes; but it was changed three years later to the Southern Normal School and Bowling Green Business College. A little later H. H. Cherry took entire control of it. Fire in 1899 completely destroyed the modest buildings and all equipment, but not one day of instruction was lost. The second and third floors of business buildings on "The Square" and nearby were leased, the work went ahead, and a building company was incorporated to provide a new home.

This was still a private institution. When it was on a going basis, Mr. Cherry became a leader of the movement to have

the State take charge of the training of teachers for its common schools. At his instigation the students and many alumni sent a petition for this step to the General Assembly. "We most earnestly pledge to do everything we can," they promised, "to make it one of the great institutions of this country."

## Offered School to State

Lobbying at Frankfort for the bill, Mr. Cherry volunteered to give to Kentucky property representing years of labor and a triumph over adversity, the school buildings and equipment and a student enrollment gathered from eight States. The bill passed, but an action was brought to test its constitutionality. This was defeated, but later, when the Assembly appropriated further funds to acquire additional grounds and buildings, another similar suit was entered, with the same result.

Not until five years after the State took charge was the school moved from its quarters on College St. to its present site on Teachers College Heights. Bowling Green is surrounded by handsome hills, of which this is the handsomest. During the War Between the States, when the town was a point of considerable strategic importance, it was crowned by Fort Albert Sidney Johnson, from which the Union forces drove the Confederates on February 15, 1862. Remnants of the fort are preserved, and reveal that even then there was trench warfare.

Earlier still, what is now College Heights had been called Vinegar Hill. A crane who lived in a thicket there had brewed an illicit corn liquor which she dubbed vinegar and sold to the young blades of the village. After the war the trees were cleared to make way for a dignified brick building which housed Potter College, in the early Nineties of the last century one of the leading institutions of its kind for young women of the South. After it had flourished for more than two decades, the property was acquired for Western; and when the new students marched up the hill they carried with them their books, maps, globes and other equipment, plus all the furniture of the old school. Moreover, they set about vigorously with picks, hoes, shovels and wheelbarrows to clean up the campus and make themselves at home.

## Forty High Schools Then

A few years earlier the town had failed in an effort to persuade the State to locate there a penitentiary for which \$250,000 had been appropriated. A delegation of citizens was sent to lobby for it and was outraged that their own State Senator, Dr. Robert Parker of nearby Scottsville, would not support them.

"Bowling Green will never be a prison town," the physician maintained stoutly; "it was meant to be a city of schools and colleges."

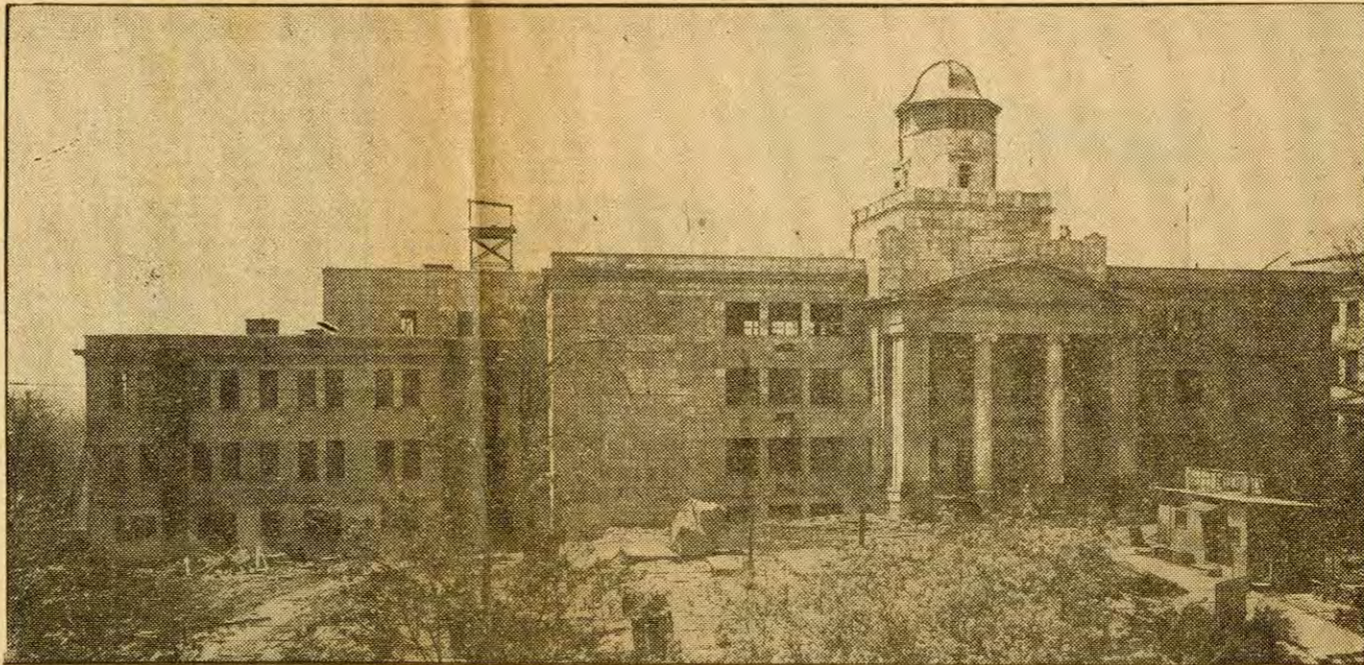
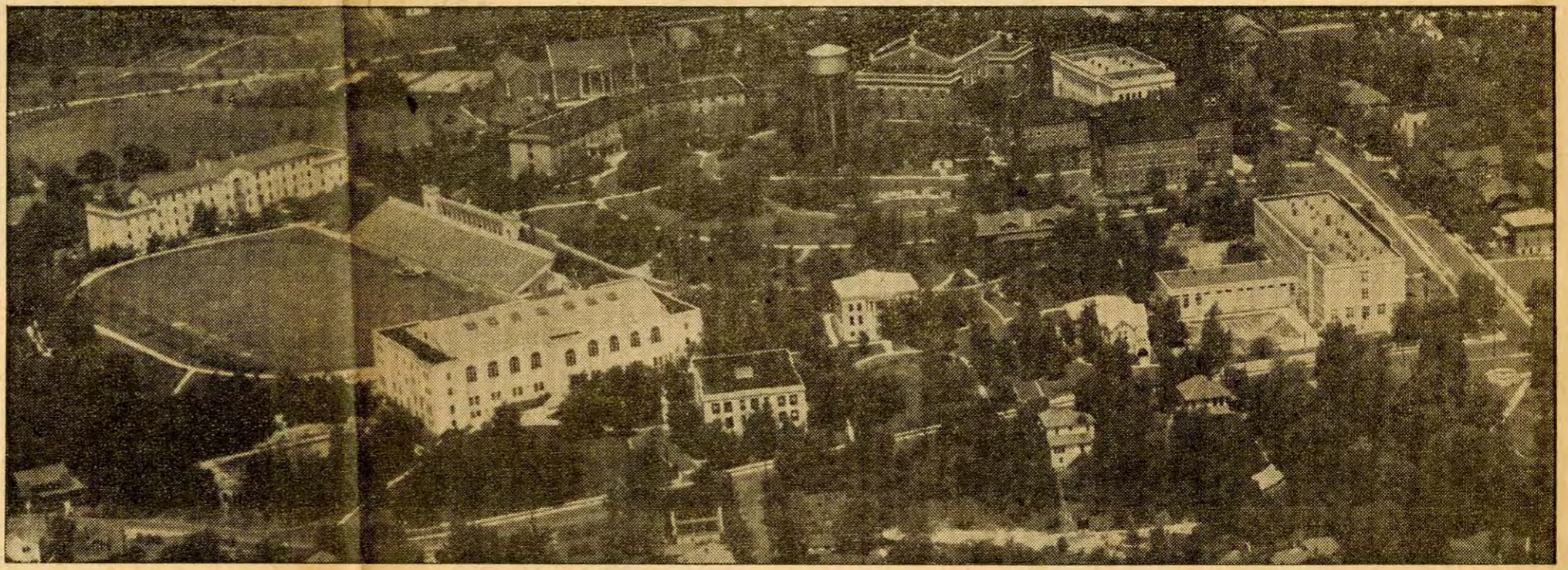
The Cherrys were making that prophesy come true. Eddyville got the penitentiary, and Bowling Green did not begrudge it.

After absorbing Potter College, Western reached out for 50-year-old Ogden College, on the eastern slope of its hill. Some thought this was sheer voracity; but John B. Rodes, a graduate of Ogden, addressing an alumni banquet, said that he was "overjoyed" at the merger, and declared that at last the hill typified "the spirit of a wide tolerant outlook on humanity; a spirit that will impel us to follow knowledge like a sinking star beyond the utmost bounds of human thought." The more supercilious part of the population divided rapidly thereafter, and no longer lifted its eyebrows so persistently.

The supercilious were those who had the better advantages in getting an education. Many of them could attend private schools. Kentucky was a bit backward in the scholastic field. Thirty years ago, when Western became a State institution, there were fewer than forty public high schools, where now there are 668; many children could not buy the textbooks they needed and so could not go to school, but last year the State spent half a million dollars for books to give to the underprivileged; county superintendents could qualify by taking an examination which any good eighth-grade pupil could pass, but now they must have at least a bachelor's degree and three-fourths of them are M. A.'s. The State per capita tax for schools has almost quadrupled in that period. It cannot be said that H. H. Cherry and Western's faculty have been solely responsible for these advances, but the fact is that they have been in the vanguard all along, and that Mr. Cherry's unflagging enthusiasm, especially in the matter of putting all children on an equal footing and in improving scholastic standards, have been dominant factors.

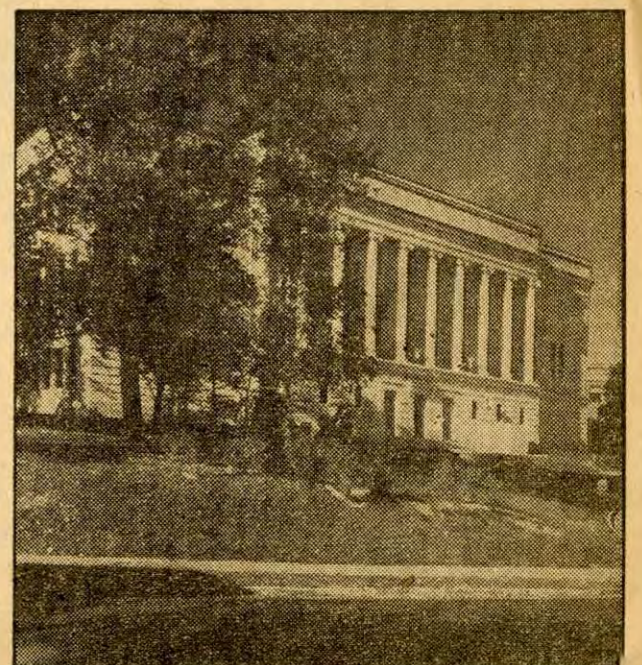
## 30,000 Have Enrolled

In those earlier days the man who taught art at Western taught penmanship also; Mr. Cherry himself had been master of the Spencerian flourish in his young manhood, and regarded it doubtless as a form of art; now penmanship is taught separately in the business college, there are three art teachers in Western, which is a separate organization, and in the library there are more than 300 books on



—(Photo By Eugene Franklin Studio, Bowling Green, Ky.)

The building at the extreme top of the air view, to the left of the water tank, is the Kentucky Building, which houses a museum of Kentuckiana, among other things. Of the buildings shown separately, the one at the left is H. H. Cherry Hall, occupied this fall for the first time. The other is the library.



art, instead of but three. A part-time instructor offered two courses in geography and geology, where four instructors now give sixteen courses. There were but three courses in history and none in government; now there are ten courses, all of college rank. As late as 1909 the library of less than 4,000 books was housed in a single room; now there are nearly 50,000 books and 3,000 documents with an annual circulation of some 300,000. Nine are on the staff and the school has a separate department of library science.

The growth in other departments, of which there are twenty now, has been no less notable. More than 30,000 have enrolled, from twosome States, Canada and Alaska, since Western became a State school; last year three-fifths of them were women. In the Kentucky Building and the grounds around it are the products

of the State and its flora, with invaluable heirlooms such as the cradle in which the first white child born there was rocked to sleep, and a bird sanctuary where the gay call of the cardinal mingles with the cries of other birds of the region. There is even a bed of wild flora, including bulrushes, which some of us may have supposed went out with Moses.

Mr. Cherry would have been the last to claim credit for the accomplishments of Western. He thought that his fine faculty, numbering more than one hundred, had turned the trick. Always he consulted the faculty, even about minor moves

and policies; he never dismissed a teacher summarily, for although an excellent executive he was not a believer in rigorous discipline. Once when a student was found to have defaced property on the campus, he stopped proceedings against the young man; the next year this pupil guided thirty-five children some 140 miles to the Hill, to make their tiny contributions in person to the Kentucky Building.

Having prosecuted boys of the "best" families for throwing rocks at students and calling them "Soups," Mr. Cherry continued his loyalty by organizing a fund to lend those in need. When prices and

rents skyrocketed during an oil boom in 1919, he built a village of cottages for them to occupy at nominal rentals. Not until two years ago, because of the attitude of Fundamentalists Baptists and Methodists, could he permit dancing on the Hill; then it became a fortnightly diversion.

Despite high academic standards, Mr. Cherry's predominant thought was for the welfare of the student body. He had given thought to the State also, and to its farmers in particular. He was credited, for example, with having introduced alfalfa, a money-getting crop. When he was past the Biblical three score and ten, his main purpose was to create a machinery of organization which would carry on smoothly when he was gone. Even then he did not rest upon his oars, although his vision was realized.