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UA3/2/1 Founders Day Address

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Foreword

The address herein printed was delivered November 16, 1942, by Dr. Alfred Leland Crabb as the principal address of the Founders Day celebration of Western Kentucky State Teachers College.

Born in Warren County, Kentucky, in 1884, Alfred Leland Crabb received his early education in the common schools of that county. In 1903 he attended Bethel College at Russellville, Kentucky. The following year he enrolled for the first time as a student in the Southern Normal School, which was shortly afterwards to become the Western Kentucky State Normal School, and eventually to achieve the status of a teachers college. Ever since that time, almost four decades past now, A. L. Crabb has been closely associated with the development of Western. A student, faculty member, and alumnus, he has through the years demonstrated his loyalty and devotion to his alma mater and proved that he is himself among the greatest of her founders.

Dr. Crabb's long and intimate personal relationship with Western, his love for her ideals and traditions, his scholarly devotion to historical accuracy, and his gift for creative writing have in this Founders Day address coalesced to make of it a document having both historical importance and literary excellence. In its composition were fused the best of the critical faculty which has made Dr. Crabb a respected authority in the field of scholarly research, and the best of the creative ability which has made him the author of a best-selling novel. Not only have the Founders of Western been here portrayed with great verisimilitude; their portraits are preserved in the colorful and pungent phrasing so characteristic of the creative writing of A. L. Crabb. To him all of those who love and cherish the ideals and traditions of Western will be deeply grateful for this beautiful memorial to the noble souls who formulated those ideals and established those traditions.

JAMES P. CORNETTE
"It Sounds So Lovely What Our Fathers Did"

By A. L. Crabb, Peabody College

The century was in the kindergarten when I entered the institution which since has been informally and somewhat vaguely christened "Western." I say vaguely, there being now a flock of colleges so labeled scattered throughout the country. It was then the Southern Normal School, the Bowling Green Business University, the Columbian School of Oratory and Elocution, and the National School of Railroading, Telegraphy and Express. To speak it properly was an excellent practice in breathing and breath control, and should be used as a standard exercise in all courses in voice training.

It was a snowy January morning. My memory here is vivid and should not be questioned. It was snowing. I went into chapel that morning and sat by a tall blond man from the Kentucky mountains, named T. Austin Fields. Later, I came to know Fields and to like him. The first class I attended in the Normal was taught by Professor J. S. Dickey, whose classroom methods drove diffidence from an assorted group of bucolic youths even as the sun restores reality to a fog-haunted countryside. I remember Mr. Dickey perfectly. He was a little, plump, bald man with the most contagious laugh I have ever heard. He would cock his head to one side as pertly as a robin, regarding with bright eyes the reluctant student of whom a recitation was expected. Sometimes a volley of questions would leave the strain unbearable and then his peals of laughter would spread throughout the room like a balm. He was clairvoyant in his understanding of those baffled states which so often chasten student life.

"Bud," he would say, "you look like a fellow who has something on what he playfully refers to as his mind. Come into my office and tell me why you are wearing that visage of
woe." Within five minutes the student would be telling him fully and sometimes tearfully just what the matter was. Sometimes he was just plain homesick, sometimes he was in a jam about his work; oftentimes it was a case of economic crisis. The chances were that the student would leave the conference with morale definitely improved. At the end of the conference the professor would say, "Avaunt, now avaunt." Since it was the student's first experience in avainting, he would regard the professor with a confused look, whereupon the professor would interpret.

"What that means is get to your room and go to work." Then the interview would close on that peak of ringing laughter.

Professor Dickey left us very suddenly one Sabbath afternoon, but his influence lives through the generations. He was a founder.

The second class I had was in Latin, taught by a young Adonis named Robert Powell Green. He was dark of complexion, black of hair, square of jaw but without austerity. He had been a student under Professor Dickey and was unconsciously aware of the patterns set by his preceptor in dramatizing school room situations.

"Ah, but who is it I see with an eager gleam in his eye as if poised to spring into recitation. It is none other than that eminent classical scholar, Mr. Alphabet Snyder!" The eminent classical scholar derived the sobriquet "Alphabet" from the fact that those who christened him had used up all the letters of the alphabet except twenty-two.

Or "Mr. Dixie Hollins, the vine-clad hillman from Old Butler, will now translate."

The limelight shed its revealing rays upon one thus called forth to indicate his erudition. We remembered that when preparing assignments.

Mr. Green was a good teacher and equally good in the extra curriculars. He directed the Senior Class for years. And I mean directed. He never required the class to play Hamlet or
Beethoven’s Fifth, but that was because he never thought of it. Oratory was for him the *sumnum bonum*. He was a superior speaker himself. His interest and example were contagious. And any Friday evening would find those seniors at their meeting place, turning cadenced phrases and sounding throaty thunder in all of the indexes of eloquence. He was, and worthily so, one of the school’s most popular teachers. He was one of our founders.

I first saw Professor J. M. Guilliams at the old L. & N. depot. He was moving with tanklike singleness of purpose down the platform. The impact of his collision with anything would have meant demolition. He had on his face the scowl of a halfback who purposes to leave his opponent in an unravelled condition. I was at the station in line of duty. I was then working nights and Saturdays for the Adams Express Company, or in the low idiom of such matters, working my way through college. I offer the item as a matter of record and in no sense as evidence that I am one of those vulgarians known as a self-made man. Vehemently not! I owe too much to my parents and brothers; to the founders herein set forward; to a great array of unmentioned but not forgotten friends, guides, and philosophers; to a young lady known then as Bertha Gardner whose pungent and precious counsel and unremitting helpfulness has continued unrelaxed throughout the years; to a son who at times has given me clear and revealing glimpses of what I’d like to be but never may; to churches, and books; and those vast and beneficent accumulations of community and country; to the golden glory that walks at sunrise on high eastern hills, and sits serenely upon the valleys at twilight. The consciousness that one is the product of all of these fine forces leaves one both humble and grateful. The personalities and institutions of men are but media where all of these forces may properly converge.

But I was talking about Professor Guilliams as he walked with powerful strides along the platform, looking neither to the right nor the left and wearing a scowl that seemed to say that he didn’t like the world and intended to do something about it,
perhaps immediately. I didn’t know it till later, but he had just been interviewed and employed by President Cherry. He came to the Normal then and taught there for four years, and left an enduring legend. He was the Jonathan Edwards of the Normal, the expounder of the true faith, which if rejected left you condemned to the everlasting perdition of illiteracy. I heard him say once that grammar was both the science of language and the sign of character; and there remains the more than probability that he had something. There was for him no neutral ground. Right was what he believed, and wrong was any variation therefrom, and never the twain could meet. He was one of the most unforgettable men I ever knew. There was in his dogmatism the vivid virtue of entire sincerity. He could fit the news or gossip of the day into parables that cling tenaciously to memory. There was a teacher in Florida who refused to pronounce his final g’s. He’d say runnin’, or walkin’, or sleepin’. He was warned but he never changed his way. The last time I saw him he was butch on a train, or, and this was in a course in ethics—text by Dewey and Tufts—There is a lady—no, a woman—in this city who had a dress sent from one of the stores on approval. She wore it to a party, and then sent it back. Then, he’d point a stern finger at one of us and in a deep growl inquire what sort of ethics that was. If I ever see a lady—I mean woman— butch on a train I shall know then and there that she was the one who wore the dress to a bridge party and then wouldn’t buy it.

But despite the scowl and the growl he was a kindly man to all of serious and sober purpose. His home was hospitable. He was a good Samaritan to the sick and troubled. He was stern in the class room but he was never stingy in the service he could offer one worthy of it. He was, I think, one of the founders.

Another founder was Thomas Crittenden Cherry. I remember well the first time I ever saw him. It was at a teachers institute, of which he was the conductor. He was just back from communing with Harvard’s best minds, and the spiritual steam which had been generated within him surged irresistibly against the cylinder heads of his action. I remember that he was
showing, by the aid of a microscope, some cross sections from the brain of Laura Bridgman, whoever she was before her brains went on the institute circuit. The microscope was passed about and each teacher took a confused look at the mysteries. I don’t know what the purpose was, unless it was to prove the objectivity of the human brain. Later, I had two courses in English with Mr. Cherry, and they were grand courses. They did not deal particularly with the emotional phases of literature, but with its thoughtful and philosophical phases. He shed upon the literature he taught the white light of intellectual appraisal and not the mellow light of love, of bereavement, of longing for the never never land. He could enter the deep caves of thought but he could not so well hear the voice that sings there. The man was an intellectual then, but year by year his deeper emotions have kindled until today he glows with the inward radiance of the poetry from which he then derived wisdom but not warmth. The man was dynamic. His face beamed with the zeal of a crusader. His voice rang with the clarion effect of a leader summoning men to go and wrest the precious things of life from the infidel. And what is psychology and literature and the like? What but fuel to light the fires of personality? Thomas Crittenden Cherry was one of our founders.

There was a man not tall, of slight build, hair touched with red, and very gentle eyes. His voice of itself was shrill but its wiry edges had been smoothed into lyric music by years of constant fitting it to the noblest outpourings of man’s soul. J. H. Clagett was one of our founders. He founded us in a love for the sublime beauty of, The morn in russet mantle clad, or Night’s candles are burnt out, or This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England, or O sleep, O gentle sleep! Nature’s soft nurse, how have I frightened thee that thou wilt no more weigh my eyelids down and steep my senses in forgetfulness? or Lay her in the earth and from her fair and unpolluted flesh may violets spring.

Perhaps Mr. Clagett taught other courses than Shakespeare. I think he did. But why should be? Why should an artist who can well portray the sunrise spend his sweetness upon a
tobacco patch or a bus station? There are not many men with the sensitive soul of the artist among those assigned to instruct the youth. Such a one therefore is as fine gold among the drosser but desirable metals which compose our college staffs. A term in Shakespeare, Hamlet and The Tempest and Richard the Second, under Mr. Clagett was worth more to any college boy or girl with, at the first, the slightest groping for beauty than a cycle of culture in any approximation of College Cathays. The rest is not silence—not silence, but the acclaim for a founder!

There was another founder of the school I knew. His name was Macon Anderson Leiper. Don't permit anyone gratuitously to discount Arkansas, nor any great unit of American citizenship. That is to discount the essential virtue of democracy. The state of Arkansas has produced enormously even of the surprising commodity of scholarship. For indeed some of the most shining figures in American science and letters were christened in Arkansas. But publicity has dwelt upon the state's other parts. When the word went out that the new professor was from that maligne state, we straightway began to expect of him a great deal. We got a great deal but not at all what we expected. His looks were ascetic, not bucolic. His flavor was of Nassau, not the Ozarks. The deltas could not limit the vision of those reflective eyes. They swept back and back until they rested upon the sacred rites of lighting the lamps of the beginnings of our culture. Mr. Leiper was an excellent teacher. He found his patterns partly in a mediaeval monastery where patiently the copying of the manuscripts of Horace and Cicero went forward, and where hermit monks shivered from the outward chill but glowed within from the truth they glimpsed; and partly from the techniques of instruction and research practiced in a modern university. For indeed Mr. Leiper was both monastic and progressive. An assignment was an assignment, and one prepared it or mused the day. But he introduced a new earthiness into the study of the classics. The students built a bridge for Caesar to cross the Rhine in Book IV, and so made it the more plausible that one of flesh and blood named Caesar crossed a river of mud and water named the
Rhine. As far as I know, Mr. Leiper introduced that Trojan Horse of the educationists, the bibliography, to the Normal. Before that, scholarship stood upon the two legs of the teacher and asked for no other props. But came Professor Leiper saying in effect. *Let my learning enter your life for it is supported by the pronouncements of such sainted ones as Erasmus of Rotterdam, or Melancthon of Augsburg, or by the current Colossuses of the Classics, Gildersleeve of Hopkins, Goodwin of Harvard, West of Princeton, Little of Peabody. If their words ordain my learning accept it. Here they are. Read them for yourselves. Well, that broke down our resistance, if any, and we joyfully gathered the classics into our arms. Every lesson brought its chore in bibliography. Look up this in blank. Be able to report on Dash’s commentaries on that. It was not enough for Caesar to trisect Gaul, but all of the authorities on that subdivision must pour their separate tales into our listening ears. Later, when Latin seemed to be languishing he shifted his major affection to her granddaughter, English. And the bibliographies waxed more potent than ever. He is one of our foundation stones.*

I remember well when a tall young Hoosier came to the Normal with the imprimatur of Massachusetts freshly blazoned upon him. He it was who gave Normal students an academic introduction to the out-of-doors. They had revelled in the glories of the Boat Excursion and the Chestnut Hunt before he came, but it was he who rearranged nature so as to yield college credit. It was he who raised microscopic life to the level of the gerundive and the Punic Wars. It was he who transferred the love of green trees and growing crops from the extra-curricular to the curricular. He blazed the trail later trod by the Taylors, the Lautermilks, the Lancasters, the Edens, and by Conner Ford, a builder whose work has reshaped a state. He could with his enthusiasm fire the most callous country boy with a love for the countryside. He could take a puckered brow, a quizzical look, stir them well together, add a modicum of mock solemnity and hold gripped the attention of any class. Dr. Mutchler had a fine sense for fitness of taste. He taught me a lesson once for which I offer sincere thanks. I had, after the manner of an un earthqu
college student, paraphrased one of the Bible’s finest passages and printed it in The Elevator. He met me in the hall and told me in a friendly but blunt manner just what he thought of it. And though it was humiliating I knew he was right. And now when I see the almost inevitable and altogether regrettable malformation of the Twenty Third Psalm I always wish that same Dr. Mutchler would speak to the writer thereof. He was, of course, helpful in many ways, but his major contribution to the Normal was to establish therein the activity of experimental and applied science.

Do you remember Miss Laura Frazee? She, I think, founded the school rather firmly in one of its more significant educational phases. She it was who gave sense and substance to the teaching of small children. She directed the “Model” school and taught Arnold Tompkins’ Philosophy of Education and Sandison’s Educational Method. She was dynamic. Her movements were very quick, her words precise, and her eyes bright. She was alert and indefatigable. She was ably assisted by Miss Proctor, Miss Stallard, Miss Beasley, Miss Caffee, Miss West, Miss Holman, Miss Birdsong, but she knew best of all in those early founding days the ways and means of the mind of childhood.

Another woman belongs fully and firmly in this—or any—listing of the founders. I speak of Miss Florence Ragland, the librarian. She was the very major premise of the true librarian, a lover of books. She loved her books with missionary zeal. She wished them read. She then wished them returned. A modern librarian is a complex and highly trained person. She has an amazing intimacy not only with books but with their mechanical and technical impediments. If you ask her for The Invisible Empire by Horn, she tells you that it is \( \frac{532}{163} \), and turns to the next customer on the assumption that if you can’t find it after that you likely wouldn’t know what it was about, even if she placed it in your hands. Or, if you desire to know precisely what Plato had to say about the fabled Atlantis, she refers you to an index which refers you to another index which refers to an 1893 copy of Harper’s which has an article claiming
that Plato was probably wrong in his theory about Atlantis. But I must not jest. The modern librarian is remarkably effective. But her adequacy is likely to be plagued by a remoteness as impersonal as the Information clerk in a government building in Washington. If you want a book, she arranges for you to get it in the minimum of time, but Miss Ragland told you about the book . . . I remember twice she advised me against books which I proposed taking out. I likewise remember that she once advised me to read Emerson's Essay on Compensation, and once Kipling's Jungle Book. Miss Ragland, assisted by Miss Mary Jarboe, made that library a genuine center of the contagion of culture. Miss Ragland knew all the students and dealt with each according to his needs. She had, and has, the most direct look I ever saw a human use. She never cast an oblique look in her life, nor performed an oblique act. The word character fitted her as well as any human I ever saw. Place her among the founders.

1906 is the year of the appearance of the Normal's first professional psychologist. Laymen before him had taught courses in that subtle subject, yet weather courses springing up from the short-lived fountain heads of the textbook. But here was a man whose fountains were filled with the accumulated storings of years of patient probing of the human mind, and of allegedly related minds. Here was a scholar! His face had the cast of a scholar and bore the pallor of a monastery. His shoulders were stooped from sitting intently crouched, watching for revealing glimpses of the truth. But his scholarship never dulled his appreciation of humor, nor caused his common humanity to pale into an abstraction. He was a good teacher, patient, resourceful in illustration, and entirely convinced that the lessons of his courses were well worth teaching. He was a cheerful man and the merry blinkings of his eyes were harbingers of zest for living and good will towards man. A dean's function is to complement the president in the service of the school. The president lives in the periphery; the dean in that congested area which lies nearest the school's be-all and end-all. Dr. Kinnaman played that role well. He was dean, and not a
mere understudy to the president. Where the president left off with the means he took up with the end. Unfortunately, another assignment was added to his professional obligation, that of Registrar. He should never have been that. The school, however, was just entering upon the modern phase when bookkeeping becomes the watchdog of the educational treasury. A thousand people had fragments of unsystematized credits which had to be equated into their values by the techniques then current. The dean volunteered to do this and from that time on sat countless hours at a desk pushing figures with a pencil across a sheet into columns of college credit. It wasn't that the work wasn't vital. It was extremely so, but it wasn't his work. He was a scholar, needed in the classroom where his scholarship could find its proper burgeoning in the futures of students, not their past. But that is not of major importance. What is is that by thoughtful precept and kindly example, by the power of his scholarship and the wisdom of his counsel he built himself into the very founding of our college.

The College has had many founders, and some of them most beneficently are still founding. Mr. Stickles is, Mrs. T. C. Cherry is, Mr. Craig is. Miss McLean, one of the noblest founders of them all, still sits at one of the college's most creative desks. Mrs. H. H. Cherry assisted nobly in the founding. A few hundred yards from here Mr. Harman is still founding in a college that went out to live its own useful life. Some of the founders came after I went away. Mr. Strahm did, for it was he who founded the school in the great art of music. Mr. Burton did, for it was he who gave form and direction to the Normal's efforts in behalf of our country schools. Miss Mattye Reid if not a founder was a builder of distinction. There was an impressive group of my schoolmates who were not founders but who later built sturdily on the school's broad foundations, Finley Grise, Gordon Wilson, Henry Yarbrough, Ernest Canon, Bert Smith. Other builders who came soon after my student days were Miss Ella Jeffries, Miss Elizabeth Woods, Miss Gabe Robertson, Mrs. Nell Travelstead, Miss Mattie Hatcher, Miss Sally Rodes, Miss Iva Scott.

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But I have not yet exhausted the list of those who in my judgment founded the school. Mr. Alexander is from Cumberland County. That is, one understands, a virtue of itself. But there is more strength in him than he ever drew from Cumberland County, strength running back to what unguessable sources. My first memory of him is as he sat on the platform at chapel. He had long hair that curled with a Spencerian flourish at the ends. His eyes were the dwelling place of dreams, and his moustache was long, with flavor of Western deviltry. I remember that he was among the students considered a sort of radical or modernist. So, there was considerable eagerness to hear him speak at chapel. But I know now that he wasn’t radical. He was merely emphatic . . . He never had an idea in his life that in any manner menaced human society as constituted. What an amazing matter is human personality! Two men may believe the same thing. One states it and those who listen are bored by its commonplace. Another affirms the same idea and those who hear are startled by its revolutionary nature. And it is revolutionary in that it springs from a great conviction, from a soul’s major affirmation. A statement that issues merely from a desire for audibility on the one hand, and from profound belief on the other. I then thought that Mr. Alexander was a decidedly opinionated man. I now know he is, but I also know that behind those opinions exists a great humility, the humility of one who recognizes the infiniteness of truth and the finiteness of mind. It was never Mr. Alexander’s policy to use a flanking movement in his attack upon truth, always the frontal assault, the head-on collision with truth’s outposts. Sham and camouflage offered no interruption to his clear vision. With the exception of the intrusion of certain personal prejudices he was the clearest evaluator of men and motives I have ever seen. Furthermore, as little as any man I ever knew, he has maneuvered matters for his own personal profit and prestige. He has the Scotch Irishman’s true sensitivity to matters of culture, and now and then one finds in him a genuine flavor of Gaelic mysticism. He is essentially a philosopher. But in that does he not manifest the true end of higher mathematics? He has the objectivity, the basic regard, for the proper relationship of
cause and effect of the scientist. I know of no man whose daily reading is more substantial. It has always been his tendency to play the role of a citizen of the world, not of a ward. I confess that I learned no higher mathematics in his classes but for all that he has taught me lessons that lie at the end of and transcend mere mathematics—not me alone, but hundreds and hundreds of others. His teaching has always risen high above the low-lying level of the assignment. In any inventory of the founding influences of the Normal, place J. R. Alexander high, very high.

It was my good fortune perhaps to know President Cherry best when he was at his best. He bore the mark of the ordained, the set apart, the first time I ever saw him. I was young and impressionable. It was at commencement likely in 1900. There was a total eclipse of the sun that morning and it rained all that night. Henry Stiles came into town with me for those exciting exercises. Commencement was held in the old opera house. What sights I have seen therein! Once Floradora, twice Al Field’s Greater Minstrels, once Robert Mantell in Macbeth. Even now I hear breathlessly across the span of years the terrible melancholy of,

Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death.

But most memorable of all there was that rainy summer evening when the clarion voice of a young man rang from across those footlights. He was thin and there were great unfilled places on his body and in his face. His hair was heavy and long, and if a jutting jaw bears witness of an indomitable spirit his was indomitable. His eyes burned with a sort of holy fire. I don’t remember a word he said—But I do, for I surely heard them spoken a hundred times later. We have always loved the contagion of affirmation. We have always resented the pale performance of neutrality. I was warmed by the burning zeal
of the man that night. It still warms me, though they have called him dead five years.

I said that I knew him best when he was at his fullest flower, roughly from 1922 to 1927. I was permitted to know something of the dreams that burned within his mind, of the visions that for him were lifted in etched clarity against the horizons of the future, of the unflagging vitality of the man, of his capacity for patience and perseverance. At times I saw in him the arrogance of the strong man, and again the humility of the understanding man. If at times he rejoiced in his strength, it was to match it against other strong men, not against the weak. If the word democracy fell upon his ear like sweet music that steals o'er a bed of violets, it sounded no maudlin note. He never had any concern for the weak who would remain weak. His democracy existed in the spiritual compulsion of the weak to become strong. To me it has always been doubtful whether Mr. Cherry ever had any sympathy for the permanently weak. Civilization, culture, human society, and the institutions thereof were what man by sheer strength had carved from the flinty granite of his own savagery. The world was the product of strength, of strength turned into creativity. The most beautiful physical experience of Mr. Cherry's life was to watch buildings arising to the organized glory of God and service of man, to watch a campus fit its contour into the very specifications and details of beauty, to watch great groups of men come into convocation to consider the goals he envisaged. His finest spiritual experience was to watch with glowing eyes the unfolding of personality, to watch the weak growing stronger.

Well, this is my catalogue of those who laid the foundation stones. It includes only the ones whom I knew, with whom I have had experience. It is therefore not complete. Then, too, it has included only those who have dealt directly with instruction or with its administration. And that but adds to the incompleteness of the list. For those who have husbanded and systemized the college's funds, those whose minds have conceived and whose hands have shaped the beauty which is the glory of the campus, are founders, too. There have been lay-
men, men of zeal and understanding, whose time and devotion have been freely given. Mr. Potter and Mr. McElroy come to mind. They, too, helped to found.

The snow of that winter morning when I went into the chapel and sat down by Austin Fields has long ago melted, and made a hundred round trips to the sea. More than a generation has added its documentation to the deeds of mankind. In that time the founders, my founders, have toiled and wrought, and about them streamed none of the glory of founding. For they were founding and knew only that was the work they must perform.

The text of those grand things which I have so feebly tried to say may be found in Goethe's poem, Iphigenia:

Endless, my friend, the projects which the soul
Burns to accomplish. We would every deed
At once perform as grandly as it shows
After long ages, when from land to land
The poet's swelling song hath roll'd it on.
It sounds so lovely what our fathers did,
When in the silent evening shade reclin'd,
We drink it in with music's melting tones:
And what we do is, as their deeds to them,
Toilsome and incomplete!