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The History of Eastern Illinois University: Inaugural Symposium Lecture

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“The History Of Eastern Illinois University”
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To establish credibility for this paper, it is necessary to point out that I have had some association (student, alumnus, faculty member) with Eastern for more than half of its existence. I have worked with five of its six Presidents. Contrary to a lot of ugly rumors, I did not come to Eastern with Mr. Lord. But as I was putting together the material for this, I discovered that I had courses from five of the six pallbearers at his funeral. Clearly, that establishes some kind of authority.

Most of this paper will be devoted to Mr. Lord's administration. Historically this is valid because enough time has elapsed that we can begin to view him with the objectivity of time. And, Mr. Lord still has much to say to us. Upon reflection it seems that many of the teachers that influenced me were men and women who were hired by Mr. Lord. Brief impressions of the later presidents will be posed. Some of the last were here so briefly that we hardly got to know them.

No claim is made for originality of the material presented about Mr. Lord. Most of it can be read in Charles H. Coleman's *Eastern Illinois State College: Fifty Years of Public Service*; Isabel McKinney's *Mr. Lord*; and Henry Johnson's delightful little book, *The Other Side of Main Street*. The rest of it comes from the impressions and observations of forty-five years.

Livingston Chester Lord was born in 1851 in Killingworth, Connecticut. His father died of disease in the Civil War. Lord grew up on a farm with all the delights and hardships attendant to such a life. In 1869 he went off to the New Britain Normal School and stayed two years. This was the extent of his formal education. Thus he was virtually self-educated, but he was a reader and read everything so that he became a well-educated man. His first position was as principal of Terryville High School in Connecticut. In 1874 he was married to Mary Cook, an elementary school teacher in the village school. At age twenty-three Lord and his new wife moved to Minnesota. After some time he acquired a job as principal in Winnebago City. This was followed by positions at Mankato, St. Peter, and in 1888 the principalship of a new normal school at Moorhead.

To those students and faculty who were successful with Mr. Lord, he became the object of an undying love, loyalty, and respect that none of his successors has been able to command. Those who did not measure up did not remain at Eastern and we have no record of their feelings. To understand Mr. Lord it is necessary to understand his times. Mr. Lord was a Victorian. He was roughly a contemporary of Theodore Roosevelt. This generation had a standard of conduct against which any gentleman or lady must be measured. Either you met the standard or you didn’t. A friend once said that Theodore Roosevelt must believe that he had invented the Ten Commandments because he invoked them so often. A gentleman supported his family, dressed neatly, was honest and sober. Theodore Roosevelt even applied these principles to nations. Mr. Lord expected these of his faculty and hoped to impart them to his students.

Being a teacher in the late nineteenth century was not for weaklings. Often the students were older than the teacher and discipline was not easy. When Mr. Lord went to his first job in Connecticut, he had trouble with a class and ended up beating three of the boys so badly that two girls in the class fainted. Subsequently, he was arrested for assault and battery and paid a fine. He was not fired from his job and needless to say, there was no further question of his authority. A similar event occurred in Minnesota. These incidents are not recounted to debunk Mr. Lord, but only to illustrate the times. Indeed, Mr. Lord later expressed regret that he didn’t know better ways to handle the problem. Clearly, however, such a man would believe that any sign of weakness would lessen his authority.

There was never any doubt of his authority at Eastern. Dr. Charles H. Coleman wrote that he was “commanding officer, drill sergeant, and corporal of the guard.” An examination of the Lord papers reveals that he set the intellectual standard, kept close tabs on the classrooms, the details of housekeeping, and served as business manager. There was little delegation of authority. Especially in the early years of his administration this was possible. The college was small and not beleaguered by the bureaucratic interference and demands for useless reports by useless functionaries with little knowledge of or real interest in education.

When Livingston Lord went off at age eighteen to the New Britain Normal School, he was called Mr. Lord. Having known
no one in his rural village who was called mister. Lord believed his new title to be the utmost of distinction. He wrote: “The most important degree ever conferred on a young man and the only title he should wear, is mister.”

Henry Johnson wrote: “In conversation with each other, we always used Mr. or Miss or Mrs. If a first name was mentioned, it was always in association with the surname. We might speak of John Paul Goode, but never of John or Paul; otherwise he was always Mr. Goode. The President was Mr. Lord to everybody in the school and everybody in town, and everybody outside of his own family was Mr. or Miss or Mrs. to him. I was intimately associated with him for eleven years and after that in correspondence with him so long as he lived, but to the very end he was Mr. Lord to me and I was Mr. Johnson to him.”

The only other personal designation that Mr. Lord approved of was “teacher.” On his tombstone in Mound Cemetery is the inscription, “He was a teacher.” Mr. Lord could ask for no more.

His view was expressed in 1917: “We use no such terms here as professor, assistant professor, associate professor, instructor or assistant. The only term used is teacher. You may think it a mere whim, but I dislike exceedingly the use of these terms about a Normal School. The only titles used among us here are ‘Mr.’ and ‘Miss’. ” Mr. Lord rejected the title President for himself.

By 1917 there was pressure for uniform terminology in faculty lists. Mr. Lord urged the Normal School Board to use only the term “teacher.” Nonetheless in 1918 the Board adopted a system of designation: president, dean, professor, assistant professor, instructor, and training teacher. Accordingly, Mr. Lord fitted his faculty into the categories, reporting one dean, eight professors, ten assistant professors, thirteen instructors, and ten training teachers. He did not, however, inform the faculty of this and for many years none of them knew what rank they held.

Mr. Lord is said to have believed that this was to prevent jealousy and to emphasize that all teachers were entitled to the same respect. Indeed there seems to have been a remarkable feeling of community and collegiality among the faculty with a minimum of cliques and faculty disputes. Faculty did not have tenure but few were fired after two or three years. If Mr. Lord felt a teacher unworthy, he usually fired him or her after the first year.

Mr. Lord acquired a national reputation based on quality of faculty. This was based on the substantial numbers of faculty who went on to more prestigious positions as well as those who stayed on at Eastern. Perhaps this arose from the fact that he never said that teachers work under a president, “with expresses the right relation.” Miss McKinney asserts that never did he refer to “my teachers.” When Mr. Lord was asked the secret of his success, he replied: “I’ve gotten on by hanging onto men’s coat-tails and women’s skirts.” He spoke scornfully of administrators who regarded teachers as “hired help.” Parenthetically it should be noticed that almost all of the buildings that have been named for faculty were named for persons who were hired by Mr. Lord. Moreover, many of these buildings were named for women. It would appear that Mr. Lord, unlike some of his successors, was not afraid of women or more particularly of successful women.

Personnel matters were entirely the prerogative of Mr. Lord. He interviewed every candidate. Frequently if he heard of someone that had a reputation as a good teacher, he would travel to visit his/her classes. Often he took the word of a trusted friend. Dr. Coleman was invited to join the faculty after recommendation by Henry Johnson. Leah Stevens Castle was teaching in Centralia at the time Mr. Lord needed a training school teacher. He boarded the train to Centralia, watched her teach and then invited her to join the faculty. That scene was re-enacted many times. Often he would meet the prospective teachers at his favorite hotel, the Auditorium in Chicago. Sometimes he would ask the candidate to order breakfast for both of them. During the process he would size up the manners, dress and general civilization of the candidate. He had a list of stock questions that he asked, depending on the field.

Evasiveness was the worst direction for the candidate to take. Mr. Lord could not tolerate sham and pretense and he had the quaint and old-fashioned idea that a teacher should know something. Technique was all very well, but a solid grounding in his subject a would-be teacher could only fail. Degrees were not important to him, yet a degree should
represent a field being taught. During his time master's degrees in education came into common use, but he believed they were useful only to people teaching education or administration.

Of the original faculty, Mr. Lord once remarked that he had three of the best teachers anywhere and three of the worst. The three worst are unnamed but it can be assumed that the three best were the three that came with him from Minnesota. These were Henry Johnson, history; John Paul Goode, geography; and Ellen Ford, Latin. Of these only Miss Ford remained at Eastern for long, retiring only after the death of Mr. Lord. Henry Johnson after a few years went off to Columbia where eventually, with some study in Germany, he got a doctorate in history and remained at Columbia with a joint appointment in the faculty of history and political science at the Teachers College. He became for generations a highly-respected authority on the teaching of history, and his most famous published work was entitled *The Teaching of History*. It was still used in methods courses down to the 1950's. John Paul Goode went to the University of Chicago where he published *Goode's School Atlas* which was still widely used in classrooms only a few years back. Miss Ford, whether she knew it or not, was the Dean at Eastern until 1934.

Much of Mr. Lord's fame rested on the fact that many of his faculty did go on to more prestigious jobs. He encouraged this, and Eastern became justly famed as a training ground for academia. Francis G. Blair, principal of the training school, left to become Superintendent of Public Instruction of Illinois. His successor, Lotus D. Coffman, was plucked from obscurity by Mr. Lord to become principal, and from this Mr. Coffman went to the presidency of the University of Minnesota. Edgar M. Transeau left to become head of the Botany Department at Ohio State University. Otis W. Caldwell became the first head of Lincoln School. Thomas H. Briggs became head of secondary education at Teachers College, Columbia. Earl Daniels went to the English department at Colgate. Harry Giles went to the English department at Ohio State. Mary Hardin went to Teachers College, Columbia.

To Eastern, however, those who stayed on contributed most. It would be impossible to name them all. Dr. E. L. Stover had the reputation that any botany student that he recommended could go to any graduate school in the country. Edson H. Taylor came to Eastern on the first faculty and stayed for forty-five years as professor of mathematics. He got the Ph.D. from Harvard, but also studied at Columbia and in Germany. In his classroom even a mathematical dunce could understand. Frederick Koch was the music teacher. Educated in Germany, he emigrated to the United States in 1888. He gave concerts throughout the United States before coming to Eastern in 1899. He taught at Eastern until 1935 and died in 1943. Because of his German background he suffered some harassment during World War I, but was supported by Mr. Lord.

Howard deForest Widger was a longtime fixture as head of the English Department. There was Simeon Thomas, the soul of dignity. It would not be possible to speak highly enough of Glenn Seymour and Charles Coleman, historians and teachers of unequaled skill. They were different, but they complemented each other and their respect for each other precluded any hint of jealousy or competition as they worked together for so many years. The prince of them all was Kevin Guinagh, scholar, wit, and fine teacher, a man of charm and grace. Any student who passed through Eastern between 1931 and 1964 without a course from Kevin Guinagh clearly wasted some of his or her time.

Mr. Lord insisted on precision and clarity of language. Faculty and students never forgot this. He was appalled by the non-sequitur. He was fond of saying, "If I ask you how far it is to Mattoon, don't tell me it is seventy-five degrees Fahrenheit." He urged cautious use of adjectives—called the adjective a decoration. He warned against the over use of a fine word. He urged punctuality. He urged attention to personal appearance. He advised students, "Failure to shine your shoes may keep you from being President of Harvard some day," and the injunction, "Tell the truth and don't be afraid," was on the masthead of the Eastern News in the days before the News gave up truth. He urged all to "have more goods on your shelf than you display." To prospective teachers he said, "Sarcasm is like kerosene in butter—in the classroom never." And, "No method can take the place of a thorough knowledge of subject matter."
Mr. Lord, still President of Eastern, died in 1933 at the age of 82. His influence on students is illustrated as well as anywhere in a letter written by Newton Tarble, already a successful industrialist and businessman, recalling fondly his days at Eastern. Tarble was unaware of Mr. Lord's death when he wrote the letter. Among other things Tarble wrote: "You taught me to hate sham and hypocrisy, loud and pompous people, bluffers. I keep my fingernails reasonably clean. I seek the companionship and company of interesting people. I like good books, biographies being my favorite."

During the last years of his administration, Mr. Lord was under pressure to increase the number of faculty who had advanced degrees. Mr. Lord had no earned degree and although he advised students to get degrees, bachelor's, master's, or doctorates, he was not convinced that advanced degrees necessarily meant a better teacher.

In 1930 Mr. Lord wrote to the U.S. Commissioner of Education: "Of course, we all know that the doctor's degree does not lessen the thickness of a man's skull one millionth part of a millimeter. There is no trouble whatever filling vacancies in teachers colleges with people with master's degrees and doctor's degrees, but it is the hardest work in the world to fill positions with personality, scholarship, and teaching skill."

When Mr. Lord died, fourteen teachers at Eastern held no degree at all and twenty-three had only the bachelor's degree. Mr. Taylor served briefly as Acting President until the arrival of Dr. Robert Guy Buzzard in 1933. Dr. Buzzard was in a difficult position. Inevitably he would be compared with Mr. Lord. Many of the older faculty thought Mr. Taylor should have had the appointment on a permanent basis. They gave Dr. Buzzard a bad time.

The verbal battles between Dr. Buzzard and Gertrude Hendrix or Dr. Stover enlivened faculty meetings and insured full attendance of the rest of the faculty. Some of the older faculty seemed to have insisted on addressing the new president as Mr. Buzzard for no other purpose than to irritate him. Worse, however, was the fact that Dr. Buzzard had the task of acquiring more advanced degrees. He must tell many of the faculty to either get a degree or leave. The North Central Association had placed that "condition" on Eastern's accreditation.

Dr. Buzzard had academic qualifications. Born in Sumner, Illinois, he had a bachelor's and master's degree from the University of Chicago, and a Ph.D. degree in geography from Clark University, then highly regarded for its geography department. He had taught widely and successfully, most recently at Illinois State in Normal where he went in 1922. By 1948 he had achieved the goal of upgrading the faculty's paper qualifications. Of a total of 142 on the faculty, sixty-one had doctorates, sixty-one had master's, and only ten remained with only a bachelor's degree.

Dr. Buzzard hired many fine teachers, but sometimes mistakes were made. To him a doctorate was a doctorate. Unlike the scrupulous care of Mr. Lord in such matters, it didn't make much difference if the doctorate fitted a teacher's field or not. To Dr. Buzzard a faculty member with a doctorate was like a scalp hanging from his belt, a matter of great pride. From this period doubtless comes the ludicrous custom at Eastern of addressing everyone as Dr. This or Dr. That. It is not uncommon still to see the tacky use of Dr. in signing a letter—for example, a letter signed "Dr. Joe Blow, Coordinator of Occupational Sexuality" or some such title. Students were often misled into believing that some of the degrees were much more prestigious than they actually were.

Dr. Buzzard also had the handicap that affects many college presidents—that of wanting too much to be loved. He so desperately wanted to be one of the boys. Dr. Buzzard dearly loved a party. He was a gregarious man and when the governing board came to Eastern, a feast would ensue that would have put a Roman emperor to shame. At first these were held in Pemberton Hall and later in the temporary Union which had been made from discarded army mess halls. The faculty Christmas parties were among his greatest delights. The food, prepared in later years by Ruth Gaertner, was magnificent, served in grand fashion to the faculty, the men in tuxedos and the women in formal gowns. This came to an end as we began to get men in polyester leisure suits and after a time women, too, gave up their elegance in favor of street clothes.

During this period the campus grew. The physical science
building and McAfee Gym were constructed by the PWA in the late thirties. At this time the football field was roughly where Booth Library stands, with Dr. Buzzard’s iris gardens to the northeast of that. Then Schahrer Field was replaced by Booth Library which was dedicated in 1950. Lincoln, Douglas and Stevenson Halls were built, as was the Buzzard School. The iris garden was moved to the space west of the Library. Plans were made to build Ford, McKinney and Weller dormitories, marking the final destruction of Dr. Buzzard’s beloved iris garden—this, as a result of a quarrel with a local board member. The systematic downgrading of the iris garden can be regarded as the symbolic deterioration of the relationship of Dr. Buzzard with the Board. The dormitories were completed after Dr. Buzzard retired.

At this point tribute must be paid to Hobart Heller. He served as Dean and Academic Vice President through the last half of Dr. Buzzard’s time and on into the administration of Dr. Doudna. If anyone can be credited with holding the faculty together, of maintaining academic standards, and the quality of the curriculum, it was Hobart Heller. Heller came to Eastern in the later years of Mr. Lord’s time to teach mathematics. Subsequently he became Dean of Men and then into the position of chief academic officer with various titles.

He had a sentimental and pragmatic approach to his duties at Eastern. Heller could be infuriating at times. He had a built-in automatic “no” to any proposal brought to his office. But not infrequently he would meet the faculty member on campus and say, “That proposal of yours may have merit. I think we should work on it.” He also could verbally chastise a faculty member but if he later found that he was wrong, he had the gentlemanly good grace to seek out that faculty member and apologize.

Heller was succeeded by Peter Moody, with different style a worthy successor, who kept us honest for a time.

In the early 1950’s there was increasing friction between Dr. Buzzard and the Teachers College Board. He was forced to retire in 1956. The Board selected Dr. Quincy Doudna, who took charge in the fall of 1956. Dr. Doudna received his degrees from Carroll College and the University of Wisconsin. He taught in the public schools of Wisconsin, had stints in various country normal schools and was most recently Dean of Administration at Wisconsin State College at Stevens Point. It was Dr. Doudna’s lot to be President at the time of the explosion of the size of the student body and consequently of the physical plant and the faculty. The student body in rough numbers quadrupled during his sixteen years at Eastern from approximately 2,000 to 8,000. Facilities were needed to house them. Ford, McKinney and Weller Halls were completed. The biological science building was built as was the Martin Luther King Union, Coleman Hall, Lantz Gym, Fine Arts Center, Applied Arts-Education Center and the dormitories on the south part of the campus.

The faculty grew apace. Every fall there were dozens of new faces but still there seemed to be a feeling of community. Many fine scholars and teachers came to Eastern. Many left for more prestigious positions. Eastern still seemed to be a training ground for academe. In the haste many bad calls were also made. Perhaps this is inevitable and perhaps it happened everywhere during that time as hasty decisions sometimes had to be made. It was a seller’s market for the faculty.

During the last years of Dr. Buzzard’s administration there came into vogue the concept of faculty participation in the decision-making process. Accordingly he created a personnel committee, the curriculum committee, and the Committee of Fifteen which was the predecessor of the Faculty Senate. These were continued and added to during President Doudna’s time. Indeed we seemed to be up to our shoulders in committees. This was supposed to solve all the problems of the faculty. In practice, the concept fell short of its promise.

It was not too difficult for a President to circumvent these if he chose. It would be unfair to the Presidents, however, to blame them entirely for the failure of the system. The faculty did not always behave in a responsible manner. Particularly in the case of Dr. Doudna, the faculty let him down. When he came to the campus, he seemed committed to the concept. All too often the committees would vote for some project and then just as the President was moving to implement the policy, the committee would reverse itself. Small wonder then that he began to take action and then notify the committees.
In one respect, the Doudna years were among the most interesting. This came about because it was the time of protest over civil rights and the stupidity of the Viet Nam war. Eastern had its protests, but it was almost unique in that there was virtually no violence or physical damage to university facilities. The reasonableness of the protests were largely due to a remarkable crop of student leaders—Ellen Schanzle, Ken Midkiff, Bob Sampson, Carl Greeson, Allen Grosboll, Keith White, Jack Shook, Gail West, Mike Goetz, and Mark Joy. These young but mature heads, with the help of some faculty and local clergy, made sure that the marches and protests were peaceful. Everyone got his say but nowhere was there any demagogic provocation to violence. These also were the best students a classroom teacher ever had. Most are now highly successful professional people.

In August 1970, Dr. Doudna announced that he would retire beginning Fall, 1971. The Board of Governors chose as his successor Dr. Gilbert Fite, Professor of History at the University of Oklahoma. Bringing with him an awesome list of scholarly production, he was Eastern's scholar-President. He hoped, as he told the faculty, to make Eastern “among the very best small universities in the United States.” His emphasis was once again the upgrading of the faculty. Once again the faculty let the President down. Dr. Fite had been led to believe that the faculty wanted a merit system of evaluation for tenure, promotion and pay raises. But when he proposed such a system, many of the same faculty who had assured him that such a system was desirable, now opposed the plan. Few were willing to lay their careers on the table for scrutiny by their peers.

Dr. Fite was a believer in raising private funds. He raised money for the Tarble Arts Center which was built after he left.

One of the concepts of the times was that it was wrong for a President to have too long a tenure. Dr. Fite had remarked at the time of his employment that perhaps five years was enough. Thus when after five years Dr. Fite was offered an endowed chair of history at the University of Georgia, he resigned to accept the post. The Board chose as his replacement Dr. Daniel Marvin, trained as a biologist, but who had considerable administrative experience in Virginia. Again after only a few years Dr. Marvin resigned to go into banking.

This brings us to the present and the future. What are our assets? What are our liabilities? Clearly our greatest asset is the faculty. Although we have our share of clods, now as always, we have many faculty members of brilliance, scholarship, erudition, and teaching ability. To name them all would be impossible and to name only a few would give offense to others. We have a fine legacy in physical plant. We have need for space in some areas, but in general the buildings are good, housekeeping has been good and the campus generally retains much of the beauty of the old. Of paramount importance, Eastern has its good reputation still. Some of this is based on the glory of the past but perhaps any educational institution can best be judged by the success of its alumni. In medicine, law, business, politics and education Eastern’s alumni have many leaders. We have distinguished alumni in all of these fields. Clearly Eastern can take some of the credit for these successes.

As to the liabilities, most seem difficult, almost impossible of solution. Many of these came from outside the University and thus are insolvable.

There is the age old anti-intellectualism of the legislature and most of the governors. The only part of the presidency that Mr. Lord seems to have really hated was what he called “the biennial begging.” Since we have gone to annual legislatures and annual budgets, the problem has doubled and is now the “annual begging.” It is hard to convince ignorant men that ignorance is not the norm.

Perhaps even a worse problem now is the baleful influence of the ever increasing bureaucracy. The President is ever more the slave of these. Where once there was accountability to one board and the legislature, there is now the Board of Governors, the Board of Higher Education, the Bureau of the Budget, legislative committees, auditors, and the Governor. Each of these has an ever-growing staff. As they add staff, each one must justify his or her existence. This justification takes the form of demands for useless statistical information, endless forms to be filled out. The resultant paper shuffling makes work for the bureaucrats and makes necessary, then, a whole new
bureaucracy on campus, a cadre of employees whose salaries could be put to better use in the real process of education.

Recent governors have not been educated in public institutions and none of the members of the Board of Governors have been so educated either.

Add the proliferation of accrediting agencies, and their bureaucracies, and one wonders why the whole system has not ground to a halt. Add to this the coming of the union and another bureaucracy is added.

The point of all this is that Presidents don't have much time to be concerned about the faculty or their teaching.

A worse problem, to some degree because of the above, is a deep malaise among many of the faculty. The most distressing thing that Dr. Fite found at Eastern was the poor self image among the faculty. There is a defeatist attitude. There is a widespread attitude that no one in Old Main cares much about what we do and the implication is then why should we do anything? As a young colleague said, a year or so ago, “Nobody up there has a dream for Eastern.” Doubtless the coming of the union has furthered this attitude. We have become “hired help.”

All of the feeling may not do justice to the recent administrations, but the feeling is there.

Another facet to this is that the faculty has lost its sense of community. We no longer talk much to people outside our own narrow fields. Part of this is due to growth because the old means of socialization are no longer possible—the picnics and the dinners.

So now we have a new President. Dr. Rives, we wish you well. We hope you have a dream for Eastern.