MOREHEAD STATE UNIVERSITY'S
FOUNDING YEARS
1887 - 1922
(MOREHEAD NORMAL SCHOOL)

DELIVERED ON FOUNDERS DAY
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BY
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The founding of Morehead Normal School in 1887 grew out of the Rowan County feud. The State applied militia force to settle the problem, the Baptists held evangelistic meetings, and the Disciples of Christ established a school and a church.

In the summer of 1887 the Spirit moved the Disciples of Christ in Kentucky, in particular B. F. Clay, state evangelist and financial agent of the Kentucky Christian Missionary Society where he wrote the following as a reason for establishing a school in Morehead. "This school is needed to give permanency to our church work and to ensure a better citizenship in the future."

A decision was made by the Disciples of Christ to establish a school in conjunction with their missionary work in Morehead. J. W. McGarvey, editor of The Apostolic Guide and Professor of Sacred Literature at Kentucky University, in a report summarizing the conventions said:

The convention seemed roused on the subject of missions in the mountains... In connection with our work of preaching the gospel, it was strongly urged to establish and maintain good schools in connection with the general mission points to give the needed permanency to our work. The sentiment for the convention was strong for this movement.

The decision to establish a school in connection with a church at Morehead was reached as a result of a proposal made by William Temple Withers of Lexington. Withers, a former general in the Confederate Army, was an influential and philanthropic member of the Christian Church. He met with the State Board of the Christian Church and offered to give $500 a year toward the support of a man who would teach as well as preach. This proposal would be valid only if the board would assume ownership and direction of the project. The board accepted his proposition.
It is significant to note that the primary purpose of the school was to advance the church. The church and the school, therefore, were to be almost inseparably bound together. The school was to exist for the benefit of the church.

Sometime between August 10 and September 8, 1887, not one, but two people responded to the call to come to Morehead. Subsequently, F. C. Button and his mother, Phoebe, were selected for the task.

Frank Christopher Button, a young twenty-three-year-old college graduate, was to become the single most important individual to be directly associated with the school during its formative period. Button would serve the school for a total of twenty-eight years, twenty-two as principal of the Morehead Normal School and six years as President of Morehead State Normal School and Teachers College. As a teenager, he attended the Kentucky Female Orphan School in Midway. In so doing, he set a precedent. Button was the first and last male student of that institution. He was admitted to the freshman class of Kentucky University at the age of nineteen.

Phoebe Button, Frank Button's mother, was a frail widow. Her physical condition was indicated in a letter sent to a friend. "I cannot stand the exposure that I could before I was hurt. I cannot walk any distance yet and still have to use my crutch in getting out of a buggy or to help me over rough places."

Mrs. Button had experienced several tragedies in her life, causing her to turn to teaching. Her husband and her little daughter died. She started teaching in the public schools in Illinois soon after their deaths. From there, she and her son moved to Midway in 1880 where she taught in the Kentucky Female Orphan School until 1887.

Before leaving for Morehead, Frank Button received a letter from Withers expressing his and the Kentucky Missionary Board's desire to confer with him. This letter reveals that the school would open without physical facilities or learning materials. Mrs. Button wrote to her friends saying: "We start school without school buildings or anything else, except our few books and what few household things we have."
The nature and scope of the school were outlined by General Withers as being a school that would be suited for beginners and also for teachers to review their studies. It is clear from Withers' letter that one of the school's functions from the outset would be to aid teachers. It was also to be an elementary school.

When Frank Button came to Morehead, his reception was not the best in the world, as evidenced by Ida W. Harrison as written in her father's memoirs that F. C. Button received quite a harrowing reception on his first day in the village:

"On arriving there, Frank Button went to see a man whose name had been given to him, and while they were talking, firing began on the street, and they had to take refuge behind an old stone chimney, until the fusillade was over."

The school opened October 3, 1887, in two very small rooms, poorly ventilated, on the first floor of a two-story rented house. The upper floor served as the living quarters for Frank Button and his mother. The school opened with one student from Morehead by the name of Annie Page. However, there seems to be some confusion around this point because an old class roll has been found written by hand entitled "List of Pupils in Morehead School October 3, 1887." It lists the pupils who enrolled in school from opening day to November 28, 1887, and the date on which they entered. Annie Page's name does appear first on the list from Morehead. The second student whose name is distinguishable was Ethel Bertie Ham also from Morehead; however, she quit school on February 13, 1888. If the class list is authentic, there were two pupils who enrolled the day on which the school was opened.

The school had a lot of struggles during the formative days of its operation. Sometime during the first month of the school's operation, some of the local citizens voiced their opposition to it. Frank Button mentioned this conflict in a letter to Withers. Withers responded by stating that the hostility would be beneficial because it would result in bringing the school before the public, and that is what was wanted.
Subsequent to the school's early growth, it became apparent that additional funds were needed in order to construct a more suitable facility. On several occasions, B. F. Clay solicited funds in *The Apostolic Guide* for the purpose of adding facilities. As early as January 13, 1888, he wrote of the growth of the Morehead educational endeavor by pleading with anyone who wanted to assist in building the facilities. In June of 1888, Clay noted that some progress had been made in raising funds, but not nearly enough. He stated that a school building was sorely needed in Morehead. It would cost about $500 to build. Brother Withers had subscribed $100 to this fund. So, as you can see, the budget problems that the University is now experiencing is nothing new to the history of Morehead State University.

In October 26, 1888, still no buildings had been erected at the school. Thomas F. Hargis, a Louisville judge and former resident of Morehead, and his wife, Lucy Norvell, deeded four acres of land and gave $500 to the Kentucky Christian Missionary Society. The deed stated that the land and the money were being given by the first party to the second party (J. W. McGarvey, President of Kentucky Christian Missionary Society) specifically for the purpose of building a permanent academy and school of learning in Morehead, Kentucky, for the exclusive use and control of the Christian Church of Kentucky.

Between October 26, 1888, and the summer meeting of the Kentucky Missionary Convention of 1889, a two-room, multi-purpose plant was constructed. Each room was twenty-four by twenty feet with a movable partition separating them. When the partition was removed, the one large room could be used for church, Sunday School, or for any other purpose.

Frank Button resigned as principal of the school in 1892 because of his mother's illness. She died the same year. During his four-year absence, the school was operated by Reverend Ralph Julian and his wife. Julian also served as minister of the local Christian Church.
The Morehead school experienced phenomenal growth during Julian's tenure. One-hundred-ninety-one pupils attended the school during the 1892-93 academic year. Julian and his wife were the only faculty members. As you can see, the pupil-teacher ratio was quite high, even much higher than we find now when it is 18 to 1.

As enrollment increased in 1893, it became apparent that a dormitory was needed. An uncle of Frank Button, Robert Hodson, donated $1,500 to help fulfill this need. His contribution provided the basis of a fund which was used to construct a boarding hall in 1894. Hodson Hall housed both boys and girls. So co-ed housing started at Morehead in 1894 instead of 1984.

In 1898, additional property was purchased for the school. Warren and Rachel Alderson sold fifty acres of land to the Kentucky Christian Missionary Board for $225 on February 21, 1898. Also in the spring of 1898, articles of incorporation were filed with the Secretary of State requesting power to confer high school diplomas. This request was denied and Morehead Normal School was finally chartered on May 6, 1899. The articles of incorporation signify the first official connection between the institution and the state of Kentucky.

Approximately a year later, in March of 1900, plans began to be implemented for the International Christian Woman's Board of Missions to take over control of the school. They controlled the school for thirteen years. Morehead Normal School had trained over 300 teachers during these early formative years.

Early in 1900, the Kentucky Christian Missionary Society expressed a willingness to deed the Morehead Normal School property to the National Board of the Christian Woman's Board of Missions. After a period of investigation, the advisory committee recommended to the executive committee on June 2, 1900, that the offer of the Kentucky Christian Missionary Society be accepted. Twelve days later, on the morning of June 14, the executive committee formally approved the offer. The property deeds were transferred from the Society to the Mission on July 31 and August 4, 1900.
Between 1900 and 1922, the Christian Woman's Board of Missions had ultimate control of the school at Morehead. An advisory board was organized in 1900 to assist the school. Various school superintendents of the Rowan County public schools such as Hiram Bradley and Cora Wilson Stewart served as members.

It was noted that the Morehead school was never a self-supporting enterprise, therefore, Morehead had to rely heavily upon the Christian Woman's Board of Missions for financial aid with which to meet current expenses and to implement projected programs.

There was phenomenal growth in the school's early history. The largest enrollment at Morehead during the years it was under the direction of the Christian Woman's Board of Missions was 191. However, in 1908 there was a sharp decline from 584 students down to 377. In 1910 and 1911, a permanent downward trend began. It is interesting to note that there was no school at Morehead during the 1922-23 academic year.

When one starts looking at who the students were, from where did they come, why they selected Morehead, what was life like for them, and what were their problems and ambitions, one finds that most of them came from Rowan and surrounding counties. After all, Morehead's raison d'être was to provide an educational oasis in this cultural desert of Kentucky. However, in 1903, Morehead Normal School became a very cosmopolitan institution when one student enrolled from Nova Scotia. This was the first and only foreign student who came to Morehead between 1900 and 1922. The students were primarily the sons and daughters of farmers, rural school teachers, country preachers, small-town lawyers, and merchants. The students who enrolled at Morehead Normal School were by no means wealthy individuals. They were strangers to large sums of money, as we find a large majority of our students today. Perhaps one of the most outstanding graduates of Morehead Normal School was Harlan Hatcher, who served as President of the University of Michigan for a number of years.
The majority of the pupils who enrolled at Morehead Academy and Normal School never graduated. Students used their vacation time for many purposes, and by and large, it was utilized profitably. Some returned home and spent the summer helping their parents. Others engaged themselves in some type of social project such as preaching or teaching. At the beginning of the summer holidays in 1907, two young boys "preached their way home to the mountains of Tennessee." I am sure that many of our students at the University today would enjoy the level of tuition and living expenses that existed in 1900. It was Frank Button's attitude that the expenses should be kept as low as possible in order that more young people could attend the school. Therefore, the cost of attending the school did not increase between 1900 and 1922. The amount of tuition a student paid depended upon the course of study in which he enrolled. Except for the commercial programs, tuition was exceptionally low. The cost of the primary course was $1 per month. Other costs ranged from $1.50 to $7.50 per month. Living expenses were correspondingly low. Two dollars a week covered the cost of "room and board, fuel and light, and washing of bed and table linen." Sometimes students paid their expenses with something other than money. Charles P. Caudill, who was president of a local bank in Morehead for many years, stated that F. C. Button accepted a wagon load of potatoes as payment for a year's expenses for him and his four brothers.

Scholarships were made available to students in the early days. Students who desired to attend Morehead Normal School initiated the first work/study program by requesting employment by which they could earn their board and tuition. With this problem in mind, Ida W. Harrison, Chairman of the Committee on Mountain Missions, recommended to the executive committee in 1900:

1. That the pupils may, as the way opens, be enabled to learn such branches of trade, and agricultural and other employment, as will fit them in becoming, in a measure, self-supporting in the school and prepare them for the immediate and efficient service, when through with their course.
2. That the committee endorse the plan...of giving the girls five cents an
hour for housework and the boys the same for keeping the school buildings in order.

The first work/study program was initiated at that time. Both of these proposals
were approved. In 1903-04, the first proposal for trade programs was implemented.
In that year, a broom factory, a 120-acre farm on which to raise broom corn and a
printing plant were put into operation. Their purpose was to provide employment
for needy students and to supplement the income of the school.

Before scholarships were awarded to students, they had to sign a written pledge
that they would teach for a certain length of time in one of the Christian Woman's
Board of Mission' schools or "labor in any other way that may be required of them."
Therefore, the forgiveness feature of the NDSL and other loan programs was initiated
in 1903 at Morehead Normal School.

Even though a committee was established to award scholarships, Ida H. Button
described the manner in which her father, the principal, granted them as follows:

I can see students arriving on horseback or in wagons, with no advance registration,
and no money for tuition, but they had faith that here they could find an education
for which they yearned. I remember hearing my father talk about them and my mother
asking, "What did you do?" and his reply, "They have come so far, I can't send them
home." No one ever knew where all of the scholarship money came from. That same
attitude has pervaded this institution since its inception because many a young person
has come to this institution or desired to come without means to do so. Former presidents
have seen that they had an opportunity for an education. Many of the boys built
fires, some pumped water, others swept rooms and halls, and others worked in the
broom factory to pay for their expenses. The printing plant was closed in the 1910-11
academic year, and the broom factory and farm were sold. There can be little doubt
that the cancellation of these provisions directly affected Morehead's decline.
J. Wesley Hatcher, principal of the school, wrote in the Kentucky Quarterly:

We are anticipating the work of the coming year with pleasure. The depressing phase of the situation is our ability to give places to work and scholarships to so few of the many needy. As a result of the recordbreaking enrollment in 1900 and 1901, Burgess Hall was built in 1902, and it was named in honor of the president of the Christian Woman's Board of Missions. The first floor of Burgess Hall was used for classrooms, and an auditorium with a seating capacity of 500 was on the second floor. The printing plant and library (consisting of 2,000 volumes) in 1917 were housed in the basement of Burgess Hall.

In 1906 a new boys' dormitory (Withers Hall) was constructed. Selective admissions at Morehead first started in 1910-11 because of the lack of space forced a restriction on the number of students who could enroll.

Recruitment of students is no new thing to Morehead's school. In fact, in an effort to attract more young people to the Morehead School, the Christian Woman's Board of Missions provided funds for the salary of a student recruiter between 1901 and 1905. R. B. Neal was hired in 1901 for this purpose. It was stated as follows:

"Credit is due to R. B. Neal for his work in Carter County and for the large delegation--20 to 25--which he brought with him." In fact, Neal was so successful that he worked himself out of a job. At the end of the 1905-06 academic year, his services were no longer needed. So you see, recruitment of students is not new to Morehead, and maybe if our recruiters are as successful as R. B. Neal, they can work themselves out of a job.

A section in every catalog which the school issued listed the advantages of attending Morehead. For example, in the 1908-09 catalog, the following reasons why a student should select Morehead are given:

1. Expenses are remarkably low.
2. The location of the school is famed for its healthfulness and beauty.
3. Students have access to a large and well selected library.

4. The atmosphere of the school is pronouncedly religious and Christian.

5. A special Teachers' course is provided for the training of public school teachers.

6. Courses in Bible instruction are offered for all students.

7. A large chorus meets twice a week. Instruction in this class is free to all students.

8. Bookkeeping, shorthand, and typewriting are taught at moderate charges.

At the turn of the century, the common schools in Rowan County were poorly constructed and poorly staffed. Therefore, the Christian Woman's Board of Missions school at Morehead helped to fulfill all the educational needs by providing:

1. An elementary school;

2. An academy;

3. Teacher training;


Its function was less a normal school and more an elementary and secondary school. The normal school was merely a department above the elementary school level.

The concept of teacher aids started in Morehead Normal School during the formative years. It is found in the records the following, "Largely as a matter of economy, one full-time teacher was placed in charge of each department, and advanced students in the academy were used to assist in each grade." Therefore, this practice is not a new one with modern day school systems, but started in the early 1900's.

The Kentucky Legislature has passed legislation mandating that schools teach about narcotics, alcoholic beverages, and tobacco. This is not new either, because the exact content of the course in physiology indicates that this course was in vogue in the public schools during the early 1900's, and in it was stressed the evils of narcotics, alcoholic beverages, and tobacco. The course was included in public school curricula as a result of pressure exerted by the Anti-Saloon League and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union.
Another innovation in teaching was carried out in those early days. Observation in the form of frequent excursions was the basic method by which many courses were taught, especially appreciation of the environment courses.

Vocational training was recommended to be started at Morehead Normal School in 1900 by Ida W. Harrison, Chairman of the Committee on Mountain Missions. In 1907, the department of serving and cooking was established. It was called the department of domestic science. Also, the concept of a home management house in home economics was started in those early days as found in the records. Pupils were taken into a well ordered home where instruction in all the essentials of good housekeeping was given.

It was not until 1911 that a manual training-department was founded. Only one course was offered--wood working. Students paid a $1 fee to cover the cost of material, so a laboratory fee was established in those early days. The immediate purpose of the course as stated by F. C. Button was to afford boys an opportunity to find out whether they are "hand-minded"; and if not especially so, would like to train the hand to do some things. This was based on John Dewey's philosophy of learning by doing.

The high school at Morehead did not become an accredited secondary school by the Kentucky Department of Education until 1914. Prior to this time, graduates of the academy were admitted to the University of Kentucky and College of the Bible without examination.

In 1917, a half year course in general science was required of all high school freshman at Morehead. The offerings of the language department, which were Latin grammar, literature (Cicero, Caesar, and Virgil), and composition show the influence of humanism.

Educational opportunities at Morehead were offered in a religious context. This, no doubt, influenced many parents to send their children to Morehead. We
find this to be a reason why many parents still send their children, because of the high moral standards established by the school. Further, it may be interesting to note that Morehead State University probably sends more students on to seminaries or into the religious field of endeavor than any state institution in Kentucky.

In the first annual report of the United Christian Missionary Society, the principal, Warren Lappin, stated: "Twenty-four of our boys and girls were baptized during the year." Warren O. Lappin was principal from 1919 until 1922 when the school closed.

As a result of this strict attitude of the institution, the students' social and private lives were closely supervised. All mail to or from students was censored. A girl was allowed to have not more than four correspondents outside her immediate family—if certified in writing by parents or guardians. Furthermore, no correspondence with persons in the town of Morehead was permitted. Girls were not permitted to leave the campus unless accompanied by a chaperone. Females were urged to wear clothing which was neat and plain because "it saves time, energy, money, and thought." The wearing of jewelry was also discouraged as "it was out of harmony with school life." A very interesting regulation that existed at the time was "borrowing and lending is prohibited, being a bad practice and in bad taste." Another interesting regulation: "On Saturday after school or on Monday mornings, the young ladies were permitted to go shopping downtown if accompanied by a chaperone.

In 1908, the state superintendent of public instruction, John G. Crabbe, opened a campaign for better education in Kentucky. He selected a group of individuals to go throughout the state of Kentucky speaking against illiteracy and ignorance for a period of nine days. At that time, Cora Wilson Stewart, a former teacher in Morehead Normal School, started a campaign against illiteracy in Rowan County. Many of the faculty and students at Morehead Normal School were teachers in what she called
the "Moonlight Schools," which opened on the fifth of September, 1911, with twelve hundred pupils ranging in ages from eighteen to eighty-six, coming by lantern light to the various schools to receive instruction. So successful was the campaign that it was started in other counties throughout the state. In 1914, the Legislature created an Illiteracy Commission to extend the Moonlight Schools. Later, President Hoover recognized the need for a National Illiteracy Commission, and Cora Wilson Stewart became its first director.

Morehead was provincial in its appeal, and young people from surrounding areas were motivated to attend the school because of limited or non-existent public education agencies. Morehead Normal School cooperated with Rowan County school systems in eliminating illiteracy, and this certainly received widespread recognition. This is the forerunner of the Community Education program that we have today.

With the close of Morehead Normal School in 1922, it was said that its goal had been reached by preventing another feud and creating a better life for the residents of the county.

So closes the chapter on the history of Morehead Normal School, transcending into the next phase in its development, the Morehead State Normal School and Teachers College, 1923-1929.
The early history of the development of the University is well documented in a doctoral dissertation written by Harry Eugene Rose in 1965. Much of this presentation was taken from his dissertation without much change.

The early history is recorded in The Raconteurs of 1927 and 1928 loaned to me by Emma Sample. Interviews were held with Hildreth Maggard, the only living graduate of the 1922 graduating class, the last class of the Normal School, and Emma Sample, one of the faculty members of the 1923 staff.

The pictures used were from the collection in the Adron Doran University Center and prepared by Ray Bradley, University Photographer, and printed by Martin Huffman, Manager of Printing Services.