



## THE PROMISE FULFILLED

By

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A promise can be a declaration of intent; or, promise can be the indication of future excellence and success.

The declarations of our students in the promotional campaign—"I am the promise of Ohio University" resonate in my mind. My first reaction was "How true!" Concert violinist, electrical engineer, investment manager, photo journalist, apprentice physician, political scientists, teacher, and the list goes on. They are the promise of Ohio University in both meanings of the word "promise." They carry out our promised intent as a university; they are our promise of excellence and success.

Founder's Day calls us to look back to the past to better understand and serve the present and the future. Let me take you back in time to the first declaration of the intent of this university, the first indication of the future promise of Ohio University.

The promise was first a proposed amendment to the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. The Ordinance passed by the Continental Congress lacks the graceful prose of the preface of the Declaration of Independence, but its content was just as revolutionary. This newly independent nation, the Ordinance declared, would expand not as an empire but as democracy. New states to be carved from the territories were to be admitted to the union of states on an equal basis with the original 13 colonies. Each state was to have two senators and, proportionate to the population, an equal number of representatives. Unlike the compromises necessary to get the Constitution ratified, the Ordinance stipulated that the new states to be carved out of the territories were to be without slavery.

Some suggest the language of the amendment was drafted by our own Manasseh Cutler and offered to Jefferson, but whatever the source, the Continental Congress accepted the amendment. That language from the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 now stands, etched on the Class Gateway entrance to the campus, engraved as a charge in perpetuity to Ohio University —

"Religion, morality and knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged"

This is the first public commitment to a responsibility for education by a national body in our history as a nation.

Ohio University was made possible by that Ordinance. Under the terms of the Ordinance, the Ohio Company was to receive a huge track of the wilderness north and west of the Ohio River. The sale required the Ohio Company to reserve two townships, 46,080 acres of land, to support education on the frontier. Ohio University, chartered first by a newly formed Ohio Company in Boston in 1786, was reaffirmed by the Northwest Territorial Legislature in 1802. Once the Constitution had been ratified, and the territory known as Ohio admitted to the Union as a state in 1803, the newly organized Legislature chartered The Ohio University in 1804, the first university of the Northwest territory.

Land was set aside to fund a University. Ohio University carries the distinction, not just of being the first university of the Northwest Territory, but of also being the first land grant supported state university in the history of the United States (Frederick Rudolph, *The American College and University*, p. 275). Congress used this prototype to create institutions across the land with grants of millions of acres of land as the union grew and new states were admitted. Over four million acres of federal land were transferred to the states before the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1863 created a base for the great agricultural and engineering land grant universities of the country. These grants created educational opportunity for those who would settle the land; on a higher level they became “forces of political, economic and social mobility in American society” (Rudolph, p. 265).

As the first land grant college, Ohio University was a model for the nation. The issue that these early colleges faced in the federal period was how to educate people to the tasks of a new, revolutionary, and untested concept of a government by and for the people. Education was deemed necessary for this government to function. If the leaders of the government were to be chosen by the people, or at least by some of the people, because the right to vote was restricted; if the leaders were to be chosen by the people, the electors needed to be educated to vote.

Ohio University was the first fruit of this promise to educate for a political democracy. A copy of a handwritten charter drafted by Manasseh Cutler and dated June 30, 1800, a gift from the Massachusetts alumni chapter, hangs on the wall of my office. The preamble reads:

...institutions for the liberal education of youth are essential

to the progress of Arts and Sciences, important to morality, virtue and religion, friendly to the peace, order, and prosperity of society, and honorable to the Government that encourages and patronizes them. (Thomas Hoover, *The History of Ohio University*, p. 17)

Cutler’s model charter became the basis for a new law by the Ohio Legislature in 1804.

The first task of education in the new republic was to help create a political democracy by preparing people to decide in elections and to serve if elected or appointed. This promise of Ohio University began to be fulfilled with the first graduating class. One of the two students in that class, Thomas Ewing, was twice elected a United States senator and served under President Harrison as Secretary of Treasury and under President Taylor as Secretary of the Interior (Hoover, p. 31). That promise is fulfilled today in the dedicated public service of many of our graduates and by our own distinguished Senator George Voinovich.

The tiny college in Athens struggled in its early years, grew very slowly, had to be closed, and then reopened. An advanced education did not seem important to many settling the frontier. The land rent from the 46,080 acres was not enough to support the University and hard to collect from the early citizens of Athens. President McGuffey urged the Legislature to raise the land rents and caused a near riot. The College did whatever was necessary to survive, closed for a time to let the land rents accumulate, and then reopened to serve the promise of education.

A proud moment in that early history was President Wilson, who acting on his deeply held pro-abolitionists convictions, brought John Newton Templeton to campus, housed him in his home, and shepherded him to a degree in 1828. Templeton was one of the first three or four African Americans to take a degree. As some tell the story, Templeton left the campus and crossed the Ohio River to pursue his dream of becoming a teacher. He was promptly arrested for the then criminal act of teaching a black man to read. When released, he settled in Pittsburgh where he started and edited a newspaper which served the African American community of the city for many years.

Three decades later another giant step forward was taken in the promise of democratic education for all. The University class roles included a student listed simply as "M. Boyd." The "M" initial was used because some of the faculty and students were embarrassed to admit that women had the ability and the right to education. Margaret Boyd got her degree in 1873. Over the years, Ohio's record of educating both excluded groups was uneven, but still part of the proud history of this singular place.

America was a developing country and the promise was not to be denied. The country was expanding as the frontier moved west. There was a growing sense that now education was necessary not just to create a political democracy; education was the key to a new democracy, an economic rule by the many. The developing country needed those who could survey the land, grow the crops, operate the businesses, teach the children, serve the churches. The promise made now was to help educate these people. The young nation through years of doubt, uncertainty, and conflict had become a functioning political democracy. But, questions remained, could it become an economic democracy, a society where all would be given the chance for success through education? The children of uneducated immigrants, illiterate farmers, rowdy Irish working in the slums, the children of German or Italian or Polish immigrants, immigrants who could barely speak the language of the land, could this diverse population be given the opportunity for education? Could their children become the legislators, the judges, the doctors and lawyers, the teachers and business leaders this developing nation needed? Could a political democracy transform itself into an economic democracy with a broad base of a middle class?

Two of the barriers blocking the way to becoming a political and economic democracy, race and gender, crumbled. By the year women gained the right to vote in 1920 they were already a majority of the students enrolled in advanced education. The public universities, including land grant universities like Ohio, made that transformation possible. Sadly, the opening on race created in 1828 on the Ohio University campus did not expand in Athens, or elsewhere, until the 1960's. African Americans then demanded and won the right to participate fully in our democracy and in education. Today we celebrate the fact that African Americans are in leadership roles in many areas of American life, at universities like Ohio and as of January 20<sup>th</sup> of this year as the President of the United States.

The post war years, 1940 to the present, transformed American higher education and radically changed Ohio University. Enrollment grew and the campus expanded—doubling during the years of President John C. Baker and redoubling in the years of President Vern Alden. More than just growth in numbers, the population of students on campus changed and diversified. The specialization of academic disciplines for study and research, the growth of graduate programs leading to doctorates, professional schools preparing practitioners became part of the life of Ohio University.

Advanced education is now deemed necessary not just for a political or economic democracy, but also to fulfill the promise made by being a university. As educators of a free people, as economic engines of a world economy, the universities of the land have promised to deliver graduates to serve these purposes and the knowledge, invention, and technology so essential to the well being and future of the nation and the world.

“The university has become a prime instrument of national purpose” (Clark Kerr, *The Uses of the University*. 4<sup>th</sup> edition, p. 66). Ohio University, together with other universities, is called on to serve this end. Ohio University responds to all three tasks in the promises made by its history: first, to faithfully serve its founding purpose—good government, the preparation of literate and involved citizens for a democracy; second, the promises of educational justice for all; and finally to serve the ends of the creation, preservation and dissemination of knowledge and the application of that knowledge.

Ohio University has promised. The evidence of fulfillment of intent and the evidence of future success is our students and graduates. They are right in declaration—“I am the promise. I am the promise of Ohio University.”