CHAPTER TWO

The Establishment of State Normal Schools in Northern Ohio, 1910
AFTER THE PASSAGE of the Seese bill in 1902, it was evident that some provision would have to be made for more and better teacher-training facilities in the northern half of the state. The only questions were when, where, and in what form.

Early Attempts

Existing colleges were still strongly opposed to the establishment of new institutions and hoped to secure state support for the training of teachers. Several bills were introduced in the General Assembly with this end in view. Among these was Senate Bill 87, introduced in 1906, which recommended state financial assistance to normal schools in connection with established colleges. Although this bill was supported by the friends of the private institutions, it failed to pass the House of Representatives. Other similar proposals also failed.

Although the private colleges never ceased their opposition to the establishment of new institutions, the sentiment in favor of such a move was gradually gaining strength. Two influences were largely responsible for this growth. First, the rapidly growing movement throughout the country for the professional preparation of teachers, and the opposition to this movement by colleges of liberal arts, led many educational leaders and public school administrators to the conclusion that the private colleges could not do a satisfactory job in this field. This point of view was expressed, in 1909, by John W. Zeller, State Commissioner of Common Schools. In his annual report he stated that private colleges could not give satisfactory training because:
(1) Their aim is academic and collegiate; their courses of study are academic and collegiate; their spirit is academic and collegiate. (2) They are not equipped for thorough and adequate work in this field, and have no funds to become so equipped. (3) Our colleges have a college atmosphere and college equipments and cannot, in the very nature of the case, do this work.

It is interesting to note that, in 1915, Mr. Zeller became instructor in history at the new institution in Bowling Green.

A second force was at work in favor of the establishment of new schools. This was the strong desire on the part of each of a number of towns in northern Ohio to secure a normal school for their community. This desire was based on the belief that such a school would bring many cultural as well as financial benefits to the community. Bowling Green was one of these towns and, in 1907, a group of influential citizens started a vigorous campaign to secure such a school for their city. Prominent in this group were B. F. James, an attorney, and R. A. Beattie, state senator from Wood County. In 1908, Sen. Beattie introduced a bill in the Senate providing for the establishment of a normal school at Bowling Green. In support of this bill, the citizens' group published a booklet setting forth the advantages of Wood County and Bowling Green as the location for a normal school. This booklet contained a map of northwestern Ohio and 28 full-page illustrations of Bowling Green buildings and street scenes and of the tract of rolling ground covered with native oak, hickory and other trees, known as the City Park. This tract was offered to the state as a site for the new school.

The Lowry Bill of 1910

Sen. Beattie's bill received little support, but the citizens of Bowling Green continued their efforts. Other towns of northwestern Ohio were also interested in securing the normal school, which all thought must soon be established. Among these, mention should be made of Napoleon, Ohio, because of the part two of its citizens were to play in the history of the new school. These were D. C. Brown, prominent merchant, and J. Hamilton Lowry, representative from Henry County. Mr. Lowry introduced the bill passed in 1910, and Mr. Brown was a member of the first Board of Trustees of Bowling Green State Normal School. Both men wanted the school for Napoleon, but both became loyal friends and supporters of the new school at Bowling Green.

The long fight for adequate teacher-training facilities for the state of Ohio finally reached a successful conclusion on May 19, 1910, when Gov. Harmon signed the bill sponsored by Rep. Lowry. This bill had been passed by both houses of the Legislature on May 10. It had been opposed (as usual) by the friends of existing colleges, but received strong support from school men, the representatives from the northern half of the state, and from Commissioner Zeller. The bitterness of the fight between the two factions was
shown by the fact that the friends of the private schools accused Commissioner Zeller of employing too much pressure in favor of the bill.

The Lowry bill provided:

1. That the normal school system of the state of Ohio . . . be extended by the creation and establishment of two additional state normal schools, one in northeastern Ohio and one in northwestern Ohio, to be so located as to afford the best opportunity possible for all the people to obtain the benefits and advantages to be derived from teachers trained both theoretically and practically. Neither of such schools shall be located in any city or village which now has a college located therein.

2. Within thirty days after the passage of this act the governor shall appoint a commission composed of five persons . . . with full power and authority to select suitable locations, lands, or lands and buildings and secure options on the same as said commission shall find necessary for the establishment of said normal schools and upon such terms and conditions as said commission may deem to be for the best interests of the state and submit a report of their proceedings to the governor for his approval.

The Normal School Commission of 1910

On June 24, 1910, Gov. Harmon appointed the commission provided for in the Lowry bill. To avoid the possibility of bias toward any particular location, the members were all chosen from the central and southern parts of the state. The members were W. H. Johnson, Granville, instructor at Denison University; A. J. Catrow, Miamisburg, retired banker; J. S. Hummell, Wilmington, newspaper man; L. D. York, Portsmouth, retired businessman; C. L. Martzolff, Athens, instructor at Ohio University.

Choosing the Location

The commission met in July, and agreed upon the questions to be considered in selecting the location for the new school. These were (1) population within a 25 mile radius, (2) railroad and other transportation facilities, (3) moral atmosphere of community, (4) health situation in community, and (5) suitability of sites offered. On August 23, the commission announced that 16 communities had requested that they be considered as the location for the new school in northwestern Ohio. These were Arcadia, Bowling Green, Carey, Columbus Grove, Delphos, Findlay, Fostoria, Fremont, Grand Rapids, Leipsic, Lima, Napoleon, Perrysburg, Upper Sandusky, Van Wert, and Wauseon. Kenton was later added to the list of candidates. Findlay was eliminated, since it was the location of Findlay College. Toledo (not eligible as it was the site of the University of Toledo) and Findlay then strongly supported the candidacy of Bowling Green.
The citizens of Bowling Green lost no time in planning their campaign. A preliminary meeting of prominent citizens was called on August 17, 1910, by E. D. Bloom. Mr. Bloom was an attorney, state senator from Wood County and later lieutenant governor of Ohio. After considering the criteria set up by the commission, the group decided to call a meeting of citizens on August 29. At this meeting, a committee was appointed with Mr. Bloom as chairman. B. F. James reported on the work already done, and remarks and suggestions were made by a number of citizens. The chairman also announced that the commission would visit Bowling Green in September.

After the commission had visited all of the towns under consideration, the competition was narrowed to three candidates—Bowling Green, Fremont and Van Wert. Napoleon offered a beautiful site on the Maumee river and for a time had been a strong contender due to the powerful support of Rep. Lowry, the sponsor of the normal school bill, D. C. Brown, and other influential citizens. Napoleon was eliminated, however, because at that time it had a large number of saloons. This, in those days, evidently spoiled the moral atmosphere of the community in the eyes of the commission. Bowling Green at that time was dry under local option. Napoleon now gave its support to Bowling Green.

For a time, Fremont seemed to be the favored candidate. It offered the use of Spiegel Grove (former home of President Hayes) as part of the school campus and free use of the Hayes Memorial Library and Museum. This property could not be purchased by the state, and the commission found that the cost of purchasing adjacent property was prohibitive. The Hayes Memorial Commission insisted, if the Fremont offer were accepted, that it become the governing board for the new school or, at least, be represented on that board. These two conditions resulted in the elimination of Fremont, and the competition narrowed to Bowling Green and Van Wert.

**Bowling Green Site**

The commission arrived in Bowling Green on September 22, 1910, and was entertained at the home of B. F. James, who had been a college classmate of Prof. C. L. Martzolff, a member of the commission. After touring the city, the commissioners inspected the four sites which the citizens committee had suggested as possible locations for the new school. One of these was the tract east of town including the city park; a second was north of town, east of the Dixie Highway (Main Street) and north of the Poe Road; a third site was a mile south of town, south of Gypsy Lane Road and west of the Dixie Highway; and a fourth was the present site of Wood County Hospital. The commissioners were favorably impressed by the beautiful grove of trees in the city park. The story is told that Prof. Martzoff stood on a spot west of the present location of the University Union and, with a sweep of his arm to the east, said, “This, gentlemen, is where the new normal school should be located.”
Although no official decision was made at that time, the commissioners advised that options be secured on all four sites. Such options were obtained on three of these tracts, 82½ acres including the city park, 185 acres south of town known as the Munn farm, and 100 acres north of the city.

At a meeting of the commission on November 10, Bowling Green was officially chosen as the location for the proposed school. Mr. Hummell was unable to attend the meeting and wired his proxy to Prof. Martzolff. With Prof. Martzolff casting two votes for Bowling Green, the vote was Bowling Green 3, Van Wert 2. The commission also selected the tract of land including the old city park as the site for the new institution.

Prof. Martzolff’s friendship with his classmate, B. F. James, may have influenced him in favor of Bowling Green, but several other factors were probably more powerful. Foremost among these were the interest and the untiring efforts of a number of its citizens, Sen. Beattie, E. D. Bloom, and B. F. James have already been mentioned. Others of whose efforts we have a record were R. J. Eberly, J. N. Easley, B. F. Harding, Dr. J. C. Lincoln, J. H. Lincoln, E. E. Rogers, N. R. Harrington, F. P. Riegle; and S. A. Canary. There is evidence that the commissioners were favorably impressed by the attitude shown by the citizens of Bowling Green and felt that the community would give loyal support to the new school.

A second factor that should not be forgotten was the strong backing given Bowling Green by representatives and leading citizens of Findlay, Napoleon, and Toledo. Bowling Green was the choice of each, since they could not secure the school for their own community. Bowling Green’s central location in northwestern Ohio, and its excellent transportation facilities were also in its favor. With two north-south railroads, and north-south and east-west electric interurbans and highways, it was easily reached from all directions. The fact that the city was dry was very strongly in its favor.

Origin of Bowling Green

The first home in Bowling Green was built in 1833, west of the present location of the Conneaut School, and the first post office was established the next year. The name of Bowling Green was suggested by Joseph Gordon, who carried mail through the new settlement on his route from Bellefontaine to Perrysburg. According to tradition, he suggested the name in honor of his old home, Bowling Green, Kentucky.

Bowling Green is the county seat of Wood County which, in 1910 and today, is one of the richest farming regions in the state. Until 1853, when a major system of irrigation ditches was constructed, much of the county was a marsh, known as the Black Swamp. Following the discovery of oil and natural gas in 1886, Bowling Green and the other towns of the region grew rapidly for a time. Glass factories were attracted by the gas, and added to the boom. There were once five glass factories in the county but, by 1914, when the new
school opened, the oil and gas were almost exhausted and all of the glass factories were gone from Bowling Green. The town had returned to what it had been before, a small, residential city without any large industries, and dependent on farming for its prosperity. In 1914, the population was approximately 6,000, and many of these were retired farmers.

Probably most people would agree today that the choice of Bowling Green as the location of the new school was a satisfactory one. Problems and controversies have arisen between the town and the University from time to time but, in the end, satisfactory solutions have been found. In general, relations have been both pleasant and cooperative. However, the selection of the site was not so fortunate. The beautiful grove which attracted the commissioners is now mostly gone and the presence of rock near the surface has made construction both difficult and expensive. The nearness of the cemetery also has become an obstacle to the expansion of the campus.

**Purchase of the Site**

Having been officially selected as the location for the new school, Bowling Green's next problem was to buy the site chosen by the commission. The city moved as rapidly as possible in the purchase of the several parcels of land adjacent to the city park to complete the 82 1/2 acres that had been offered to the state. In order to finance these purchases the city council at a meeting on December 5, 1910, decided that a bond issue not to exceed $50,000 would be needed. This proposal was voted on by the citizens in an election held on January 10, 1911, and was approved by a vote of 947 for to 11 against. On April 3, 1911, the council authorized a bond issue of $40,000 and on April 24 authorized the purchase of the real estate.

It was anticipated that title to all land included in the proposed site would be secured in a short time, but this did not prove to be the case. In some cases, the owners asked more for their property than the city was willing to pay, and in others clear titles could not be obtained. These and other difficulties caused so many delays that rumors were started (apparently by a Toledo newspaper) that the newly appointed Board of Trustees was seriously considering asking for authority to move the school to another town, and Fremont again became a candidate. A spokesman for the trustees told a reporter of the Sentinel-Tribune (the Bowling Green newspaper) that the Board had no serious intention of moving the new school elsewhere, providing all obstacles could be removed in a reasonable time. However, the trustees did secure permission from Gov. Harmon to move the school from Bowling Green, if it became necessary.

Finally, all difficulties but one were overcome. After completing the purchase of the various parcels of land needed to complete the 82 1/2 acres of the proposed site, the Bowling Green city council had planned to donate the entire tract, including the old city park, to the state. Some questions were
raised, however, concerning the legality of this procedure, so it was decided to sell the tract to a private citizen who would then sell it to the state for a nominal sum. Therefore, on October 26, 1911, the land was sold at public auction held on the site, to J. N. Easley, for the sum of 10 dollars. Mr. Easley immediately transferred the title to the state of Ohio for one dollar.

Although the vote on the proposed bond issue had been passed by an overwhelming majority, there was still some opposition. This was led by one member of the city council who succeeded in blocking the purchase by the city of the parcels needed to complete the site. He finally ceased his active opposition but continued to vote no on all normal school issues. The group opposed to the new school was small but vocal. Rumors were rife that an attempt would be made to defeat the plan for the transfer of the land to the state by outbidding the representative of the city at the public auction. When the time arrived, a crowd gathered at the spot where they expected the sale to be held. This was near the present location of Shatzel Hall. While the crowd was waiting, the auctioneer and J. N. Easley went to the opposite corner of the park (where Hayes Hall now stands) and the tract was quickly sold to the lone bidder.