CHAPTER THREE

Preliminary Planning

1911-1914
THE ACT OF 1910, creating the two new normal schools, contained the following provisions:

As soon thereafter as the general assembly shall appropriate a sufficient amount of money for the purchase of said sites and the erection of suitable buildings thereon, the Governor shall appoint with the advice and consent of the senate five competent persons who shall constitute a board of trustees for the proposed normal school in the northeastern portion of Ohio and five other competent persons who shall constitute a board of trustees for the proposed normal school in the northwestern portion of Ohio.

Each board of trustees shall organize immediately after the appointment by the election from its members of a president, secretary and a treasurer...

Before adopting plans for the buildings of said normal schools each board shall elect a president of known ability for the school under its control, who shall have advisory power in determining said plans...

The board of trustees in connection with the presidents of the normal schools shall select and appoint an able and efficient corps of instructors for the said schools, provide a suitable course of study for the theoretical and practical training of students who desire to prepare themselves for the work of teaching...

The First Board of Trustees

Pursuing the above provisions, Gov. Harmon on May 17, 1911, appointed the following to the Board of Trustees for the Bowling Green school: D. C. Brown, Napoleon, dry goods merchant; John Begg, Columbus Grove, farmer;
D. T. Davis, Findlay, banker; J. E. Collins, Fremont, Superintendent of Schools; and Frank P. Donnewirth, Bucyrus. Mr. Donnewirth declined the appointment and, on July 3, J. D. McDonel, Fostoria, clothing merchant, was appointed in his place. The members of the Board were all from northwestern Ohio, and one was engaged in public school work. A second member, John Begg, had been a teacher, and later returned to the educational field. A similar pattern was followed for a number of years, and emphasized the early purpose and character of the school as an institution to train teachers for the schools of northwestern Ohio. The Board visited Bowling Green for the first time on June 30, 1911, and organized by electing J. E. Collins, President; John Begg, Vice President; D. C. Brown, Secretary; and D. T. Davis, Treasurer.

The members of the Board of Trustees, throughout the entire history of the Bowling Green institution, have shown a sincere and deep interest in the development of the institution, and have given generously of their time and energy. With few exceptions, they have been above all selfish interests and political influence.

The members of the Board are appointed by the Governor of Ohio, with the consent of the State Senate. From 1911 to 1961, the Board consisted of five members each appointed for a term of five years, except the members of the first Board, who were appointed for one- to five-year terms. The state director of education was an ex officio member, but seldom met with the Board.

Two members of the original Board deserve special mention. The first of these is J. E. Collins who was the first president of the Board and was devoted to the duties of this office. At the time of his appointment, Mr. Collins was superintendent of the Fremont Schools, and later in his term held the same position in Lima.

Probably the member of the first Board who contributed the most was D. C. Brown, merchant and postmaster of Napoleon, Ohio. Mr. Brown was not only a member of the first Board (1911-14), but served again from 1918 to 1936. He was active in the movement to secure a normal school for northwestern Ohio, and was influential in the starting of an athletic program at the new school. In addition, he was the man, above all others, to whom, in the early days, Dr. Homer B. Williams, the school's first President, turned to for help and advice.

The First President

After organizing, the trustees considered the selection of a president for the new institution, but no action was taken at the first meeting. The choice of a president aroused a great deal of interest in Bowling Green, and throughout northwestern Ohio. By many the position was regarded as a political plum, and for weeks the newspapers of the area speculated as to whom the lucky man would be. There were many active candidates for the job, including school
men, ministers, and prominent citizens in other professions. Many of these had strong backing from political and other groups.

Fortunately, the trustees refused to yield to these pressures. At their meeting on July 10, 1911, they announced that personal solicitation and wire-pulling would avail nothing, and that merit would decide this appointment. In spite of this announcement, the pressures continued and became even stronger. Several candidates claimed to have the support of Gov. Harmon; so, early in September, the trustees thought it advisable to have a conference with the Governor. They asked if he had a choice for the position and received an unqualified no in answer. He asked them to continue searching for the best-qualified man.

On February 16, 1912, the Board offered the presidency to Homer B. Williams, who had not been an active candidate, although his name had been prominently mentioned in the newspapers. Dr. Williams took the offer under consideration. He attended all Board meetings until May 23, 1912, when he formally accepted the presidency for an indefinite period.

At the time of his election, Dr. Williams was superintendent of schools at Sandusky, Ohio. His selection proved to be a most happy one. He was well qualified for the task of starting and developing a new school for the training of teachers. He held baccalaureate degrees from Ohio Northern and Baldwin Wallace colleges, and the master's degree from the latter institution. In addition, he was soon to receive another master's degree from Columbia University, and honorary doctorates from Ohio Northern and Miami universities. He had broad experience in the field of public education, as teacher in rural and village schools and as superintendent in several towns and cities of Ohio. He was well known and highly respected by the educators of the state and, at the time of his election, was president of the Ohio State Teachers Association. His selection was approved by all, except the disappointed candidates.

A Building Program

Even before selecting a President, the trustees had appointed the firm of Howard and Merriam of Columbus as architects to draw plans for buildings for the new school. The General Assembly in 1911 appropriated $150,000 for the 1911-13 biennium to be used for construction purposes. It was also understood that future appropriations for construction would be limited to an additional $100,000. It was thought at this time that a total of $250,000 would be ample to take care of the needs of the new institution for many years.

The original plans called for only two buildings, a college building and a dormitory. These were to be located where University Hall and Williams Hall now stand. However, the building program was delayed almost a year because of defects in the titles of some parcels of land included in the site. Titles had to be quieted in the courts before the state would permit construction to begin. The contract for the Administration Building (now University
Hall) was approved by the Attorney General on January 20, 1913, but weather conditions prevented start of work until late in the spring. The first preliminary surveys were made on April 22, 1913, and construction was soon under way.

These delays, although they postponed the opening of classes by a year, were really beneficial to the new school. James M. Cox, who became governor in 1913, was very much interested in the cause of education, and appointed a joint legislative committee to make a statewide school survey. This committee employed a staff of experts whose findings aroused greater interest in education, and exposed the lack of adequate preparation and training of the majority of public school teachers in Ohio. Gov. Cox espoused the cause of the two new normal schools and the new appropriations were greatly increased beyond the $100,000 originally planned. In fact, the appropriations for Bowling Green for the 1913-15 biennium totaled just a little less than one half million dollars.

The original plans for the Administration Building included 25 classrooms, science laboratories, library, small auditorium, heating plant, and offices for the President. Before construction was actually started, however, the new and increased appropriations were assured, and the plans for this building were changed to enlarge the auditorium, add a gymnasium under this auditorium, and increase the number of classrooms by eliminating the science laboratories and heating plant. These changes were made possible by an appropriation of $41,000 for the auditorium and gymnasium, and $218,000 for a science and agriculture building, a dormitory for women, and a heating plant.

To help in formulating plans for the new normal school, the President made a survey of the teaching population of northwestern Ohio, and tried to foresee the future needs of this territory. On this basis, the President and trustees decided that the new plant should be designed to accommodate about 1,500 students. Although it was to be some years before the student body reached this size, there was one feature of the original plans that ultimately presented a serious problem in the expansion of the physical plant.

These plans called for all of the buildings (present and future) to be located around a small circle. The first three buildings (Administration Building, Science Building, and dormitory) left two open spots for a future elementary training school and a second dormitory. The heating plant was located outside the circle behind the Administration Building, and a large frame residence facing Wooster Street (south of the Library) was remodeled for the President’s home. These seven buildings, when completed, were to constitute the entire plant for the new school.

The next building to be completed was the training school, but its construction was delayed for a number of years, and the elementary school was housed in temporary quarters. Facilities for observation and practice teaching were, of course, important for a teacher-training school. Many such institutions at that time maintained both elementary and high schools on the campus. President Williams and the trustees thought the school population of Bowling Green was not large enough for two high schools, and that any facilities on
campus would soon be too small. They came to this conclusion after visiting several institutions, where the campus schools were already becoming inadequate to take care of the increasing numbers in teacher training.

After conferences with the public school authorities in Bowling Green, a cooperative plan was agreed upon. This involved two points. First, the College would maintain a small elementary training school on campus to be used, in the beginning, for both observation and practice. Later it was planned to use it only for observation. The pupils in this school were not to be selected from all over the city (the plan in many schools), but were to come from a regular school district. Building, teachers' salaries, and all other expenses were to be paid for by the College.

Second, all of the facilities of the Bowling Green school system, both secondary and elementary, were to be available for observation and practice teaching, and the salaries of a certain number of teachers, those to serve as critic teachers, were to be paid by the College.

This plan, with some modifications, continued for many years and proved quite satisfactory. One immediate result was that it gave the new school at Bowling Green much better facilities for observation and practice than existed in most similar institutions at that time.

The small, circular arrangement of the buildings was to prove a serious handicap to the future growth of the College, and to development of a convenient and an attractive campus. The location of the dormitory was particularly unfortunate, since it occupied a site that was later needed for an academic building. Furthermore, since the original buildings faced the circle, little or no attention was paid to the appearance of the backs of the buildings. As a result, when it was necessary to locate other buildings to the east of the original group, they were on a back street. Unfortunately, similar mistakes have been made many times in the history of the institution. These have usually been due to failure to foresee the future growth of the University. The present campus bears witness to the resulting difficulties and to the manner in which they have been met.

A Name for the University

The trustees and President found it necessary at the very beginning to make decisions on two questions of the utmost importance to the future of the new institution. These had to do with the scope and character of the work to be offered, and the related problem of selecting a name for the new school. The trustees attacked the second of these two questions first. The Act of 1910 referred to the two new institutions as normal schools, but did not specifically give a title to either. At the meeting held on February 16, 1912, the trustees chose the name Bowling Green State Normal College. Dr. Williams was probably consulted in the choice of this name, although this was the meeting at which he was elected President. In any case, the name met with his partial approval.
The author remembers hearing him comment on this on several occasions. He believed that normal school was not only a misnomer, as applied to the institution he envisioned, but that this title was out of step with the then current trends, and was fast disappearing from the American educational scene. He stated that his personal preference would have been Bowling Green State Teachers College, but that he was not unhappy with the title chosen. There was never any legal authorization for the name Bowling Green State Normal College. In fact, the institution so designated was not to have a legal name for a number of years and, when it did receive one, it was soon changed.

The Curriculum

The Act of 1910 contained the following provision:

The board of trustees in connection with the presidents of the normal schools shall . . . provide a suitable course of study for the theoretical and practical training of students who desire to prepare themselves for the work of teaching.

There is no evidence that the General Assembly, in passing the Lowry Act of 1910, had any intention of creating anything beyond a two-year normal school for the training of teachers for the elementary schools. However, the name selected by the trustees indicates that, as early as February, 1912, they had already given some consideration to the scope of the new institution, and thought of it as something more than a two-year normal school. In February, 1912, the President-elect and the trustees visited the Teachers College at Albany, New York, and the State Normal School at Montclair, New Jersey. The first of these was selected, since it offered degree courses, and the second because it was supposed to be one of the best of the two year normal schools. In addition, President Williams visited a number of teacher-training institutions and arts colleges in the Middle West. After these visits, the President and trustees had to make decisions not only concerning the curriculum to be offered the first year, but also with respect to the future function of the institution.

As we have seen, the Lowry law referred to the two new institutions as normal schools, and the traditional normal school of the past had been a two-year institution for the training of teachers for the elementary schools. However, a new trend was developing throughout the country, and was resulting in the establishment of four-year, degree-granting institutions for the training of both elementary and secondary teachers. Should the new institution follow tradition and the legal designation of normal school, and plan only a two-year course of study for the training of elementary teachers, or should it also offer four-year curricula for secondary teachers and school administrators? If it offered a four-year course, should it confer a degree, and what degree?
President Williams felt strongly that the day of the old-time, two-year normal school was past, and that the need for professional training in the fields of administration and secondary teaching would soon become as urgent as in the elementary field. He argued that, although the Act of 1910 contained no specific authorization, it contained no prohibition. Therefore, the new school should start as a four-year, degree-granting college for the training of administrators and teachers in both the elementary and secondary schools. The trustees and our sister institution at Kent concurred with this point of view, and both colleges started on this basis.* These decisions were not to go unchallenged, but Bowling Green State Normal College, from the beginning, offered four-year curricula and conferred degrees. There was to be no specific legal authorization for either for many years. In fact, the Normal School Bulletin issued by the state Department of Education, in 1914, refers to Ohio State University with its College of Education, and then states: “The four other state schools for the training of teachers offer two-year courses.” This, it will be recalled, had been the thinking in Ohio for many years: a centrally located institution for the training of high school teachers and administrators and outlying two-year schools for the preparation of elementary teachers. Again it should be noted that neither the law nor the above statement specifically limited the four other state schools to two-year courses.

We have seen that there is a great deal of evidence to show that the trustees, from the beginning, were determined to develop ultimately a four-year degree-granting institution for the training of both elementary and secondary teachers. Four-year courses, however, were included in future rather than present plans. On August 25, 1914, the trustees adopted the following outline of courses to be offered during the first year:

1. Diploma Courses
   (a) Two-year courses in academic and professional subjects for elementary and rural teachers.
   (b) Two-year course for special teachers of manual training, domestic science, drawing, music and agriculture.
   (c) Three-year courses in academic and professional subjects for elementary and rural teachers.
   (d) Three-year courses for special teachers of manual training, domestic science, drawing, music and agriculture.

2. Short Courses in Professional Subjects
   (a) One-year course in professional subjects for elementary teachers with a bachelor’s degree.
   (b) One-year course in professional subjects for district superintendents.

*However, the institution at Kent used the title Kent State Normal School.
(c) One-year course in professional subjects for directors of county normal schools.

3. Short Course for Rural Teachers
   One-year academic and professional course for rural teachers.

4. Advanced Courses
   The diploma courses will be extended into four-year professional courses whenever sufficient demand arises.

A few words of comment and explanation need to be given in connection with the above. First, in order to meet the new requirements for professional training, it was necessary for many teachers already in service, and for other individuals preparing to teach, to take at least one year of professional training. The one-year courses were intended to meet the needs of these students.

Possibly the courses for rural teachers also need a word of explanation. In 1914, there were still many one-room rural schools in Ohio, and the curricula were intended to meet the requirements of teachers in these schools. It was felt that their needs and problems required special preparation. The one-year course was dropped at the end of the first year, but the diploma course was offered until 1922.

The courses in agriculture also deserve some comment. The Act of 1910 contained the following:

In planning said buildings, ample provisions shall be made for the establishment of a well equipped department for the preparation of teachers in the subject of agriculture.

Agriculture was the only subject of instruction specifically included in this Act. This special mention was undoubtedly due to the fact that northwestern Ohio was at that time predominantly agricultural in its occupations, interests, and outlook. In addition, the legislators responsible for writing and introducing the bill creating the new schools were mostly farmers, or men close to and interested in farming. This was true of Mr. Lowry who sponsored and gave his name to the bill. In spite of all this, however, there was little real need for teaching of agriculture at Bowling Green. In addition, the College of Agriculture at Ohio State University was opposed to agricultural instruction in the two new schools. It maintained, and rightly as later shown, that Ohio State could meet all needs in this field, and that proper instruction in agriculture was too expensive to warrant developing departments in the new schools. As a result, the General Assembly soon ceased making any appropriations for the University farm. The trustees, however, decided to hire a man to farm the fields, since they thought the farm could support itself. This continued for several years and items such as brood mares, horseshoeing, hay, and cattle appeared frequently among the bills allowed by the trustees. After several years, the University farm was changed to a dairy, which supplied milk to the dormitory and to many citizens of the town.
Bowling Green State Normal College was never able to develop a strong Department of Agriculture, and instruction in this field was finally discontinued in 1938. It is interesting to remember that the lettering over the front door of the original science building read Science and Agriculture. This called forth many questions from visitors, until it was finally changed to Moseley Hall, in honor of E. L. Moseley, science teacher on the first faculty.

Although no four-year courses were included in this first outline of curricula, they were planned for the future. The three-year courses were intended as a first step in this direction. These were expanded to four years after the first year.

President Williams and the members of the first Board of Trustees foresaw the trend in teacher training and the future needs of the schools of northwestern Ohio. Their courage in planning curricula, establishing entrance requirements, and adopting a title in conformity with these needs and trends have meant much to the institution they started and to the people of northwestern Ohio.

College Standards

At the time of the establishment of the new institution at Bowling Green, the normal schools of the country were not standardized, and many of them were little more than secondary schools. Many had low entrance requirements and admitted students who had finished only the eighth grade. Even this requirement was often waived. President Williams from the first was convinced that, if Bowling Green were to be a degree-granting college, it must establish its entrance requirements for all curricula on the same level as the strong colleges of liberal arts. This would mean graduation from an approved, four-year high school. Many residents of northwestern Ohio did not understand these requirements, and some were opposed to them. President Williams once showed the author a number of letters in his files from parents seeking the admission of a son or daughter with only eighth-grade preparation, or even less. A Bowling Green mother wrote that she had a boy in the fifth grade who wanted to enter the new school when it was opened, and inquired what studies he would have to take. Some parents became quite irate when told their child could not be admitted.

Appointment of a Faculty

In the selection and hiring of a faculty, President Williams was confronted with a problem similar to that faced by the trustees in their selection of a president. Since the new college was established by the General Assembly to serve the schools and people of northwestern Ohio, and was supported by state funds, many thought that the positions on the faculty should go to politicians, friends of politicians, teachers and administrators in the public schools,
The City Park was the site of Bowling Green State Normal College.
Bowling Green Armory – where classes met in 1914-1915.
The first Commencement was held July 29, 1915 in the Chidester Theatre.

The college was very young when these students posed for the 1918 Bee Gee.
The former Administration Building as it looked soon after its completion in 1915.

Early in the spring of 1916, the Science Building, above, was completed enough to permit partial use.
The Training School Building, above, was completed in November, 1921.

Williams Hall, dormitory for girls, opened in June, 1915.
The University Library contained some 15,000 volumes when this picture was taken for the 1918 Bee Gee.

"Eunice in her room in Williams Hall"—from the 1918 Bee Gee.
The Normal College orchestra in 1917-18.

Book and Motor members pose on the steps of the former Administration Building in 1918.
The entire student body of 1935 formed the B G U in honor of the achievement of university status in that year.
and other worthy citizens of northwestern Ohio. There were many active candidates, each with strong backing. These included ministers and other citizens, and many teachers and school officials. A few had some qualifications for the positions they desired; most had little or none.

President Williams, in spite of strong pressures, decided that the faculty should be selected on the basis of qualifications alone without regard to geography, political influence, need of a job, or other considerations.

On September 15, 1913, he asked the trustees for leave of absence to attend Columbia University. His purpose in this was three-fold: (1) to secure a master's degree, (2) to take courses planned for college administrators, and (3) to recruit a faculty. The author first met President Williams during his period at Columbia and agreed to come to Bowling Green as a member of the faculty of the new college. President Williams found several other faculty members while at Columbia.

By the time classes started in September, 1914, President Williams had assembled a faculty of 10 members (in addition to himself), plus four critic teachers for the elementary training school. The members of the first faculty were:

George Wilson Beattie, agriculture; Mary Turner Chapin, home economics; Ernest G. Hesser, music; Dallas D. Johnson education; Josephine Forsythe Leach, supervisor of practice teaching and director of Toledo Branch; Rea McCain, English; Edwin L. Moseley, biology; James Robert Overman, mathematics; Ernest G. Walker, extension; Leon Loyal Winslow, industrial arts; Lucy Helen Meacham, first grade critic; Grace M. Poorbaugh, second grade critic; Effie Alexander, third grade critic; Margaret Burney, fourth grade critic.

Without exception, the appointees were all well qualified by both training and experience for the positions they were to hold. All either had the master's degree or equivalent advanced training in their special fields. Several were to render long and successful service at Bowling Green. Others were to carve out careers in other fields of education or in other institutions of higher learning.

In addition to their professional qualifications, the original faculty had two other characteristics—the members were all comparatively young, and only two of the group had previously taught in northwestern Ohio. They also were selected solely on the basis of their ability and training, without political or other pressures. These characteristics of the first faculty were of the utmost importance to the future of the new institution. Their age enabled several of the group to serve many years and gave continuity to the early development of the school. The decision of President Williams to select the faculty on the basis of qualifications only was even more important. It was a decision that meant much for the future, and it was one that he was to adhere to (with few exceptions) throughout his long term of office.

The pressures to use faculty appointments as rewards for political and other services did not cease with the appointment of the first faculty. They
were to recur at intervals throughout President Williams' administration. Often they were very strong, and two or three times they became too strong to be resisted. On these occasions appointments were made because of outside dictation, but even in these cases the appointees were reasonably well qualified for the positions to which they were appointed. Because of President Williams' determination to select faculty members on the basis of qualifications and to resist attempts at outside dictation, Bowling Green throughout the first fifty years of its history was remarkably free of the political domination that has hampered many state institutions of higher learning.