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Centennial Perspectives: BGSU at 100!



Students and faculty lined up to spell out the university's new initials.

2010 is a landmark year in the history of Bowling Green State University and Kent State University. It marks one hundred years since the passage of the Lowry Bill, creating two new teachers' colleges in northern Ohio. Since those early days, BGSU has transformed from a teacher-training school to a university with over 200 undergraduate majors and programs with strengths in technology, liberal arts and sciences. It's a story well worth celebrating and an opportunity to mark some of the steps along that journey.

Earlier anniversary celebrations are documented in the University Archives' collections, and they make an interesting contrast with this year's activities. The tenth anniversary (1924-1925) was duly noted, but mostly through the choice of theme for what was only the third Homecoming. Students urged each other to create activities which could become traditions in the future.

The 25th Anniversary of the passage of the Lowry Bill occurred in 1935, yet there was no official event held on the BGSU campus. By that time, Bowling Green had grown from a normal college, focused exclusively on teacher training, to a state college (1929) that offered courses in business, to a state university (1935) with three colleges and a graduate program. All this was accomplished during the depths of the Great Depression, when as recently as 1933, the State of Ohio had considered converting one of its colleges to a mental hospital. Perhaps spending money on an anniversary celebration seemed out of keeping with the austere times.

By 1939-1940, however, the economic recovery was well underway, and the Silver Anniversary of the first graduating class (1915) was marked with solemn ceremonies. Speakers representing students, faculty, and visiting dignitaries drew a crowd that filled the auditorium. Held in conjunction with the inauguration of President Frank Prout, speakers included Governor John W. Bricker, student Kermit Long (Class of '39), and a representative of that first class, **Martha Harvey Parquette** who had just completed a four-year teaching degree. President Emeritus Homer Williams spoke on "Normal School to University." In addition to Williams, four faculty members were recognized for 25 years of service: James R. Overman (math), Rea McCain (English), G. W. Beattie (agriculture), E. L. Moseley (science). An alumni luncheon in June 1939 served to kick off the first endowment campaign to generate funds for the university separate from those provided by tuition and the state's support, and to establish the Alumni Association.

The Golden Anniversary (1960) was marked with considerable pomp and dignity. President Ralph McDonald, at the helm since 1951, had worked tirelessly to strengthen the university's academic reputation and take advantage of the opportunities presented by the post-World War II boom in college attendance. Each concert or public event throughout the year was tied to the anniversary in some way. Five symposia were held, one for each of the university's colleges, featuring speakers of national reputation. A university-wide convocation was held, with Governor Michael DiSalle giving the keynote address. Dr. James Overman was commissioned to write a history of the University's first fifty years, which appeared in 1967.

President Paul Olscamp led the 75th Anniversary celebration in 1985. This time, public events emphasized the festive nature of the occasion and included competitions for logos and musical fanfares. Based on a popular board game, *BGSU Trivia* was successful in preserving University history as it helped raise funds to support academic programs. A **series of quizzes** drawn from that game appears on our website. Dr. Stuart Givens wrote *The Falcon Soars*, a history covering the years since the Overman book was published.

The Centennial celebration during this academic year will be university-wide, with events and activities encouraging participation by every college, student, faculty and staff member, and alumni from around the nation and the world. A commemorative history of the university is planned, featuring photographs and historical commentary, authored by Dr. Gary Hess. Thanks to the internet, even those alumni and friends who are unable to make a return visit to the campus will be able to share their photographs and memories with the university community. The **Centennial Website** provides more details about this and the year's coming events.

—Lee N. McLaird