

Ohio
Wesleyan
University

PRESIDENT ROCK JONES' MERRICK HALL RESTORATION REMARKS

Wednesday, June 26, 2013

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We gather today in the heart of the academic campus, under the canopy of trees that has been here nearly as long as the University, and surrounded by buildings that reflect the grand past of Ohio Wesleyan. Not by coincidence, we gather in the shadow of Merrick Hall. Merrick Hall was first envisioned in the 1850s and opened in 1873. Merrick Hall is a building unique to our campus in terms of architectural and material design. It is the only building on our campus constructed out of blue limestone, drawn from the quarry that existed just west of Monnett Hall.

From the beginning, Merrick Hall was a reflection of the commitment of the Ohio Wesleyan faculty to excellence on the cutting edge of undergraduate liberal education. In the mid-nineteenth century, the most rapidly changing feature of curricula on American college campuses was the widespread introduction of instruction in the sciences. Long before most campuses, Ohio Wesleyan's founders envisioned a building devoted solely to the teaching of science. That building became Merrick Hall. And today, nearly 14 decades after the building opened, Ohio Wesleyan enjoys a longstanding and well-deserved reputation for its outstanding curriculum in the sciences. This building reflects the pioneering spirit and the visionary thinking of our founders.

Today, our faculty continues to hone the curriculum to reflect the pedagogies most relevant to the time in which we now find ourselves. Recently, the faculty adopted the OWU Connection, which gives students the opportunity to make connections between the theoretical lessons of the classroom and practical experience in the real world, to bring interdisciplinary cohesion to their learning, and to make an OWU education global in every way possible. Once again, Ohio Wesleyan's faculty is leading the way, enriching the experience of OWU students with enhancements to the curriculum that reflect the introduction of robust opportunities for experiential learning in a global setting, reflecting the most rapidly changing feature of curricula on American college campuses in this era.

Back to Merrick Hall. For more than three decades, members of the Ohio Wesleyan family have dreamed of the day when this historic treasure would return to life. In the winter, a group of faculty and staff chaired by Dale Swartzentruber gathered ideas from the campus and brought forward a vision for the future of Merrick Hall as a center of academic excellence and opportunity. The vision included housing the OWU Connection on the first floor; a suite of state-of-the art classrooms and seminar rooms with the most advanced technology and available to every academic department on the second floor; a glorious restoration of the third floor with its soaring ceiling, gothic arches, and magnificent windows as a grand space for lectures, concerts, receptions, and dinners; and renewal of the grounds surrounding the building including the possible development of a patio on the south side of the building, which could become the future setting of Commencement. And that brings us to the purpose of our gathering today.

It is my great honor and happy privilege to announce that Ohio Wesleyan has received an anonymous commitment of \$8 million to fund the full restoration of Merrick Hall. Merrick Hall will return to life!

Our anonymous donors, who met at and both graduated from Ohio Wesleyan, have responded to the work of this faculty and the vision of this campus with the largest single outright gift in our history. This indeed is a historic day for Ohio Wesleyan.

We will begin immediately a process to design the restoration, with an ambitious timeline for completion of the project in 20 months. We will seek to preserve the historic beauty and architectural charm while also developing a building with all of the amenities, technologies, and sustainable, environmentally-friendly materials to which this campus is so fully committed.

This gift builds on the legacy of philanthropy that has been the foundation of Ohio Wesleyan from the time of its founding. This day is made possible by the extraordinary, selfless generosity of two people who believe in Ohio Wesleyan, who cherish what it meant to them and their generation of students, but who believe the best is yet to come. Their commitment is an acknowledgement of the dedicated work of our faculty and staff and an extraordinary vote of confidence in our future. Most importantly, their gift is an investment in the generations of students who will follow and who, with the benefit of an Ohio Wesleyan education, will emerge as leaders in every sector of the global society in which they will live and work. I can think of no better investment in our future than one that strengthens the ability of Ohio Wesleyan University to provide this education in the context of this historic campus.

While our donors insist on anonymity, they shared these comments: "Ohio Wesleyan has created quite a vision with its commitment to preparing students for global citizenship and leadership. We are pleased that we are able to give back to a university that has given us so much – including each other. We can't wait to see the renovation come to fruition and to see how students incorporate the new building and its technology into their OWU experiences."

In the early pages of the centennial history of Ohio Wesleyan, penned by Henry Clyde Hubbart and published in 1942, we read these words from Professor William G. Williams, one of Ohio Wesleyan's earliest professors, who recorded this reference to our founding in the first small book of faculty minutes: "It was the beginning, though humble, of a momentous movement, whose influences have been felt around the globe."

It surely must have been more vision than reality, 17 decades ago, to imagine the influences of Ohio Wesleyan to be felt around the world. And yet, 17 decades later, in this historic setting, we know the truth of that statement. And as we look to the decades to come, where we seek to prepare moral leaders for this global society, with the added benefit of the renaissance of this historic building, may we think of this day as yet another "beginning, though humble, of a momentous movement, whose influences are felt around the globe."