

Distinguished Achievement Citation

Amos Emerson Dolbear

Class of 1866

Today, with this presentation of Ohio Wesleyan's Distinguished Achievement Citation, we are honored and privileged to recognize Amos Dolbear for his outstanding and prolific body of scientific achievements.

Dr. Dolbear arrived on the Ohio Wesleyan campus in 1863, already a mature man, odd in appearance and clearly the stuff of which geniuses are made. He paid his way through school by playing the organ in chapel, serving as Professor Hoyt's assistant, tuning musical instruments, and teaching vocal music. It was during his time at Ohio Wesleyan that he made some of the most important scientific advancements that would eventually lead to the development of the radio and telephone.

Dr. Dolbear delivered one of the most famous student commencement orations, his subject being "The New Motor." After graduating from Ohio Wesleyan with a B.A. in 1866, Dr. Dolbear went on to obtain an A.M and M.E. from Michigan University in 1867 and secured a position as an assistant professor of Natural History at Kentucky University. In 1868, he traveled to Bethany College where he was a full Professor of Natural Science until 1874. In the fall of that year, he joined the teaching faculty of Tufts College in Massachusetts as a Professor of Physics and entered into his 50-year career as an inventor. It was during his tenure at Tufts that he earned his Ph.D. from the University of Michigan in 1883.

In 1885, United States Patent #350,299 had been issued to Dr. Dolbear for a wireless telegraphy system, one virtually identical to the system used by Marconi, the credited inventor of the radio. This very patent would be later purchased by the Marconi Company thus allowing them to use their wireless system in the United States.

The other major invention with some credit to Dr. Dolbear is the telephone. "A lively tradition" recounts Dr. Dolbear from his autobiography. He and a companion rigged up receivers and a wire from the basement to the upper floor of Thomson Chapel and the over this was transmitted the human voice, the first words "Can you hear me?" The dispute over the rightful owner of the telephone patent took Dr. Dolbear all the way to the U.S. Supreme court against American Bell Telephone. While the great case before the court was decided against him in 1888, a strong dissenting opinion and a large body of evidence are in his favor. *The Scientific American* of June 13, 1881, pays him this tribute: "Had he been observant of patent office formalities, it is possible that the speaking telephone, now so widely credited to Mr. Bell, would be garnered among his own laurels."

Dr. Dolbear is also an accomplished author of such books as *The Art of Projecting*, *The Speaking Telephone*, *Matter, Ether and Motion*, *Chemical Tables* and *Sound and Its Phenomena*.

It is a privilege to honor Dr. Amos E. Dolbear, an exemplary son of Ohio Wesleyan, and to applaud him for his remarkable contributions to the scientific community. He set an example for future students of science here at Ohio Wesleyan to follow. We celebrate his accomplishments posthumously with the presentation of this Distinguished Achievement Award.

May 17, 2003

