Times have changed. So has Lake Erie College. As its Sesquicentennial celebration draws to a close, the College shares the opportunity to look back and reflect upon its history. This document is based upon a review of materials provided from the Lake Erie College archives, administrative offices and “Dancing on the Table,” written by Margaret Geissman Gross, ’42. Lake Erie College looks forward to another 150 years of success in higher education.

Copy by Sharon A. Coon, MBA ’95

Edited by Cristine Boyd, Kathleen Laury, Holly Menzie, MBA ’06 and Laken Piercy, ’07

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The Foundation

The United States of America was founded by the hard work and dedicated efforts of early pioneers. The same holds true for Lake Erie College, which traces its roots to the Willoughby Female Seminary founded in 1847. The seminary movement, which was at its height between 1830 and 1860, provided advanced education for women, focusing upon preparation to serve as wives, mothers, missionaries and educators.

The articles of association of the Willoughby Female Seminary stated, “The system of instruction...shall be substantially after the model of Mount Holyoke Female Seminary at South Hadley, Ma….the object of this institution shall be to promote a thorough and complete female education.”

The Seminary, the only single-sex institution of higher education for women in the Western Reserve, was housed in a Willoughby, Ohio building that was originally used as a medical college. The trustees appealed to Mount Holyoke’s leader, Mary Lyon, to send them a teacher to help establish a seminary for young women in that very location. She obliged, and Roxena Tenney became principal of the Willoughby Female Seminary, which grew to an enrollment of 211 students. Just nine years later, the building was destroyed by fire as students practiced piano on the third floor, among them a student named Sarah Wilcox.

A few months later, Sarah’s father and five other Painesville businessmen founded the Lake Erie Female Seminary in Painesville, located about 15 miles to the east. The trustees located a parcel of land on Mentor Avenue, just about one-half mile from the Painesville business district, to build the seminary. Adjoining properties...
totaling 13 acres, once part of the Isaac Gillett farm, were purchased from a number of owners for the sum of $4,175.

The Founders

Timothy Rockwell (1798-1881) had been a trustee of Willoughby Female Seminary. He produced pig iron at the Concord Furnace Company and was also a trustee of Western Reserve College in Hudson.

Silas Trumbull Ladd (1810-1879) ran a general store with Rockwell, which was lost in a Main Street fire in 1858. He moved to Hudson around 1842 to serve as treasurer of Western Reserve College.

Reuben Hitchcock (1806-1883) was a Lake County Common Pleas judge when the Seminary was established. He served as president of the Cleveland and Mahoning Railroad in addition to serving as president of the Willoughby Medical College and later a trustee of the Willoughby Female Seminary. His daughter, Melissa, attended Mount Holyoke, along with his niece. Hitchcock was fondly remembered throughout the years by the chanting of “Reuben, Reuben” at many founder’s events and alumni weekend activities.

William Lee Perkins (1799-1882) had also been a trustee of Willoughby Female Seminary. A long-time lawyer, he had served as a prosecuting attorney for Lake County, generally opposing Judge Hitchcock in prominent lawsuits.

Aaron Wilcox (1814-1881) served as mayor of Painesville several times and was president of a society that operated the Painesville Academy. A wealthy judge until the failure of his Lake County Bank in the 1870s, Wilcox served as secretary-treasurer of the trustees at the time of his death.

Charles Austin Avery (1816-1909) supervised the construction and was largely responsible for securing the grounds on which the College stands. Inspired by his work with the Seminary, he later added a tower to his own home, similar to the one on College Hall. He was a self-made man who came to Painesville from Connecticut in 1837, traveling by canal and lake boat to Conneaut. From there he took a covered wagon to Painesville, completing the last leg of his journey.

These founders became the first trustees of what would later become Lake Erie College. Each of them sent at least one daughter to the Seminary. Ladd and Wilcox each sent five. Founders Day was celebrated November 8, 1894 to commemorate the important work of these men. All founders are buried in Evergreen Cemetery in Painesville.
Construction of the Seminary

Charles Wallace Heard, of Heard & Porter, was commissioned to design and supervise construction of the Seminary building. He had previously served as an apprentice under Jonathan Goldsmith in Painesville and designed the building in an Italianate style, with a tower adorning the front and rising a story higher than the four-floor structure. The base of the tower contained the front entrance and an Italian staircase led from the drive to the entrance and to a piazza with balcony above. Eight chimneys in the facade heated the fireplaces in dorm rooms. A total of 108 hooded windows faced Mentor Avenue, adorning the building that measured the same length as the White House (180 feet) and the same width as the Mormon Temple in nearby Kirtland (60 feet).

The cornerstone was laid on July 4, 1857. Men and women of Painesville helped while the building was under construction. “On Saturdays, all men who could, went with hoes, spades and teams and graded the grounds. The dinner that followed was served by the Painesville ladies. Every Wednesday afternoon, ladies’ sewing circles met at a private residence. Most of the bedding and linen was furnished in this way.”

During construction, four girls left Painesville to attend Mount Holyoke “that they might bring something of the mother college to the new enterprise.” They were Sarah Jane Wilcox, Lucy Perkins, Julia Mathews and Melissa Hitchcock.

Opening

Although the building was not yet completed, the Seminary opened in 1859, in what we know today as College Hall. The school replicated the Mount Holyoke plan, including courses, method of instruction, discipline and rules. Principal Lydia Sessions presided over the institution, a position she held until 1866. The original teachers were six women from Mount Holyoke, who brought with them the upstanding principles and discipline for which that institution had become known.

The program of study included liberal arts, but focused upon domestic affairs and preparation for women’s role as a wife and mother. In fact, in the early years
of the institution, very few women who attended actually completed their studies through graduation. Instead, many young women looked at their Lake Erie experience as a brief educational opportunity that increased their marriage prospects. Students worked one hour each day on domestic duties. Domestic work continued until 1917. The charge for tuition and board was $90 per year. Enrollment was 127 students.

The first class graduated in 1860 and consisted of young women Mary Elizabeth Burton and Mary Strong, followed by nine graduates the next year, including Sarah Wilcox. Graduation exercises were held in the Seminary building and then a procession of scholars, faculty and parents formed on Mentor Avenue. Led by the Painesville band, they marched to a grove in the rear of the building (the Ash Grove), where Judge Wilcox handed out seminary diplomas, which he and Lydia Sessions had signed.

Prospective students, according to the Catalog of 1882, "must be not less than fifteen years of age. Seminary life is intended for those who can be trusted upon the streets and elsewhere, and for those who can study in their own rooms and not under the watchful eyes of a teacher."

As the curriculum changed, so too did the Seminary charter. In 1898, the breadth of coursework had been modified to qualify graduates for a college degree instead of a seminary diploma, and the name was changed to Lake Erie Seminary and College. In 1908, the state of Ohio granted a charter establishing Lake Erie College.

When the Seminary opened, College Hall was the only building on campus. Recognized by the National Register of Historic Places, College Hall provided students with a place to study, live, eat and enjoy recreational activities. The South Wing of College Hall was added in 1876, followed by the completion of first floor in 1877, the second in 1878, the third in 1881 and the fourth in 1910. College Hall was first illuminated with electricity in 1916.

The cornerstone for Memorial Hall, which was connected to College Hall by a corridor, was laid
May 29, 1890, and the building was dedicated the following year. The building contained an auditorium, chapel, dormitory, lecture rooms and music practice rooms. In 1893, the famous iron fence was installed on the front of the campus. A fire broke out in Memorial Hall in the early morning hours of April 13, 1957, destroying the structure. Although College Hall sustained smoke damage, the building stood tall. Today, the stone sign for Memorial Hall remains on the ground outside College Hall, in the exact spot where it once hung over the main entrance to the building.

Bentley Hall of Science, named for Dean Luette Bentley, was dedicated in 1897 and stood until 1972. Later, Murray Library, named for Concord resident Jared Murray, would be dedicated in 1908, housing open stacks of books for students to review. Today, the building is known as Kilcawley Hall (in honor of long-time board member Anne Kilcawley Christman) and houses the offices of the president and institutional advancement.

Ritchie Gymnasium was designed by Abram Garfield, grandson of former U.S. President James A. Garfield, who visited the College for a birthday celebration just months before his death. The gymnasium was dedicated in 1920 and is now a part of Phillips Osborne School. Abram Garfield also designed Murray Library and Morley Hall.

The Helen Rockwell Morley Memorial Music Building was
dedicated in 1927, estab-
lished as a tribute by her son, Charles Rockwell Morley. She had been a
member of the class of 1854 at the Willoughby Female Seminary. This building is still in use today, providing a lovely setting for events such as the annual Christmas Vespers.

The first dormitory (exclusive of College Hall) was Avery Hall, for which ground was broken in 1954. This was followed by Ritter Hall in 1956, Fowler in 1958 and Andrews (Tiber) Hall in 1964. Avery, which was named in honor of founder Charles Avery, was replaced in 2004 by Dickinson Hall, named in honor of trustee Tracy Harrington Dickinson, ’78.

The Lincoln Commons, dedicated at the Centennial Convocation in 1959, stood at the heart of the campus until 1996, when the cost of major repairs necessitated the replacement of the building. The $6 million Arthur S. Holden Center opened in 1997 as the new student center and marked the first new construction on campus in nearly 20 years.

The Austin Hall of Science was dedicated in 1964, followed the next year by a groundbreaking for the Lincoln Library. The Fine Arts Center opened in 1970, followed by construction of the Jane White Lincoln Center for Physical Education and Recreation in 1977. This building was later razed to make room for the $9.5 million Athletic & Wellness Center, which opened in 2004.

Enrollment

Throughout Lake Erie’s history, enrollment has experienced peaks and valleys. From a population of 127 at its founding, enrollment grew and stayed between 148 and 316 students in the 1940s and 50s. As a result of the baby boom, the enrollment at Lake Erie College experienced a high of 1,075 in 1964. As the boomers graduated from college, enrollment fell to 738 in 1969 and continued to decline in the early 1970s, at which time new curriculum in business and equine studies drew additional students. The creation of the all-male Garfield Senior College in 1972 boosted the total head count to an all-time high of 1,114 in 1974.

Enrollment fluctuated between 900 - 1,000 for the next nine years. In 1987 (the year the stock market plummeted), enrollment dipped to 544. The creation of two master’s
degrees (business and education) and a weekend college for working adults helped the student population grow again in the early 1990s, leveling around 860 by the fall of 1991. By Fall 2004, total enrollment rose to 1,056.

**Co-Education**

Although Lake Erie College became co-educational in 1985, the College already had an alumni population of nearly 1,000 men. Day students were first admitted to the College in 1932. Ground was later broken for The Garfield Center on June 6, 1950 and the building was dedicated in 1952. The College maintained a separate identity for the program until 1985, when Garfield Senior College was eliminated and male students were admitted as full-time traditional and residential students. From that point on, with the merging of Lake Erie College for Women and Garfield Senior College, all students were graduates of Lake Erie College.

**Study Abroad**

International study has been important to the Lake Erie College experience for many years. Lake Erie first developed a partnership in 1925 with Kobe College in Nishinomiya City, Japan. Later, the College made history as the first college in the U.S. to require students to spend an academic term abroad. Alumni fondly remember the Winter Term Abroad, which began in 1953. As a result of the changing demographics of the student population, the mandatory term abroad was later eliminated. The program was featured in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* in the late 1990s, highlighting the “Passport to the Future” program, which gave free passports to incoming freshmen and provided a shortened (approximately two week) international experience to students as part of their tuition. This program restored the importance of international study, for which Lake Erie was known for so many years.

The College has continued to increase opportunities for student study abroad. This has been strengthened by the recent development of numerous other exchange programs with colleges and universities around the world, including Costa Rica, Honduras and China.

**Equestrian Studies**

Horses have been a part of campus life for more than eight decades. The very first riding class
was offered for physical education credit in 1928. In 1955, renowned horseman Laddie Andahazy came to Lake Erie College and changed the face of campus forever. President Paul Weaver gave Andahazy two years to prove the worth of an equestrian program. Beginning with 12 horses, tack and a small stable that stood where Fowler Hall stands today, Andahazy set out to make the program a success. That he did. Andahazy was recognized by The New York Times in 1967, which reported that 100 of the school’s 600 students were regular participants in equestrian classes.

The College acquired Morley farm in 1958, and with the help of local architects, Andahazy planned the first-class competition facility so many have come to know and love. The George M. Humphrey Equestrian Center officially opened in 1971. The equestrian major was added in 1973 and Andahazy retired from the College in 1977, continuing to serve as an important element of the equine program until his death.

The equestrian program has continued to expand, producing many successful alumni. The equestrian team earned its first trip to the National Intercollegiate Championship Horse Show competition in 1994 and won the Intercollegiate Dressage Association National Championship in 2005. The Equestrian Center also became approved as a British Horse Society Establishment in October 2005, one of only seven such establishments in the U.S.

**Philanthropy**

Beginning with the investment of funds ranging between $25 and $2,000 from six Painesville men, the financial stability of Lake Erie College has grown throughout the years. Although tested at times by the economy and circumstances, the tenacity of the College has persisted.

Today, the endowment of the College stands at $35 million and alumni and friends continue to provide financial donations. Scholarships, particularly the Twins Scholarship, established to provide a “buy-one, get-one free” tuition gift for twins, have brought the College notoriety in magazines such as Fortune Magazine, Mademoiselle, Seventeen and Newsweek.

**History and Traditions**

Various celebrations have been held throughout the years, some which became well-loved traditions. Two of the most notable were Founders Day and Mountain Day, both of which were borrowed from Mount Holyoke traditions. Founders Day was first held in 1894 and became the leading fall
celebration, including a speaker of notoriety and declaration of important College announcements. For many years, it was celebrated with the class dinners of Alumni Weekend, honoring the late Peter Hitchcock, direct descendent of Reuben Hitchcock.

Mountain Day was a special day of rest from all classes. Originally, it was an un-announced surprise that involved an excursion to Little Mountain and a hotel owned by founder Charles Avery, who always made the property available to the Lake Erie women for their holiday. It has been recalled fondly as a day of exercise, food, fresh air and fun. In later years, excursions were planned at area parks and farms and also became a focus for campus clean-up and beautification.

At the founding of Lake Erie Female Seminary, administrators stressed to young women the importance of physical activity and encouraged daily walking, requiring students to keep a record of these activities.

Paths were later provided for bicycle trails and a field for outdoor events, equipped for track and basketball activities. The Athletic Association was formed in 1895, with tennis and croquet sets getting regular use. In 1908, organized sports in field hockey, fencing, basketball and tennis were added to the curriculum and by 1911, the College held five national records in athletics.

Athletics, like all other areas of the College, evolved. Beginning with field hockey, tennis and softball, sports were added and removed from the list of extracurricular activities. Swimming, including synchronized swimming performances by the Dwan club, enjoyed popularity and the first swim meet was held in the new pool in Ritchie Gym on June 4, 1921.

Aviation classes were held in the 1940s and fencing, aikido and conditioning classes were introduced in the 1980s. When the College became co-educational, men’s sports were added. The men’s basketball team earned a spot in the league playoffs during the 1994-95 season, which also marked the College’s entry into NCAA competition. Men’s soccer made its debut during the 1994-95 season, following the addition of the sport to the women’s line-up the previous year. The Athletic Hall of Fame was instituted in 1987 and to date has recognized 42 alumni athletes.

Today, varsity sports for women include basketball, cross country,
soccer, softball and volleyball. Baseball, basketball, cross country, golf and soccer are currently offered for men and football is scheduled to kick off as an intercollegiate sport in the fall of 2007.

Lake Erie College Today

College Hall still stands proudly in the center of the campus. If walls could talk, we could learn much more about the rich learning and living experiences that generations have shared in that building. People have come and gone as have buildings and programs. One thing is certain, Lake Erie College is alive today because of them and is a much stronger place for sharing their company.

From the very first graduating class of two students, the alumni population now numbers near 9,200. The class of 2006, which celebrated the College’s 147th Commencement in May, included 190 graduates. The total enrollment numbers over 1,000 students, while the student body hails from 42 states. More than twenty-six majors are offered and graduate programs in education and business are integral components of the curriculum. The campus now encompasses 48 acres in Painesville and 85 at the George M. Humphrey Equestrian Center in Concord Twp. The faculty has grown from six Mount Holyoke women to 37 full-time men and women.

The year-long Sesquicentennial celebration included the appointment of Lake Erie College’s 11th president, Michael T. Victor. His energy and leadership will guide the College into the next chapter, into the next 150 years.
Presidents of Lake Erie College

Lydia Sessions
1859 – 1866

Mary Evans
1868 – 1909

Dr. Helen Dalton Bragdon
1941 – 1950

Dr. Paul S. Weaver
1951 – 1976

Anna M. Edwards
1866 – 1868

Vivian Blanche Small
1909 – 1941

Dr. Alfred T. Hill
(Acting President)
1950 – 1951
Michael T. Victor
2006 – Present

Paul Newland
(Interim President)
1976 – 1977

Dr. Charles E.P. Simmons
1977 – 1984

Edward Q. Moulton
1985 – 1986

Marilyn S. Jones
(Interim President)
1984 – 1985

Hal Laydon
1992 – 2005

Clodus R. Smith
1986 – 1992

M. Sue Dreitzler
(Interim President)
2005 – 2006

Edward Q. Moulton
1985 – 1986