

**Dedicatory Remarks
John Phillip Lomax**

Henry Solomon Lehr Memorial Statue

**Ohio Northern University
Ada, Ohio
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Henry Solomon Lehr, the founder and first president of Ohio Northern University, was unusually smart, resourceful, and clear-sighted. He had an intellect that was at the same time focused, flexible, and free ranging. Lehr's vision of an institution of higher education that schools its students in the liberal arts, the professions, and responsible citizenship still guides the university today.

The first catalogue of the North-Western Ohio Normal School stated that "It is the aim of the authorities to make this course as thorough as any in the country, to give sufficient attention to the classical languages, and at the same time to devote more time than customary to the branches that are more modern and practical."

Now look at the 2007-08 catalogue: "Ohio Northern University . . . will be a diverse, dynamic and unique learning community offering rigorous professional programs in partnership with the arts and sciences to prepare individuals for lifelong challenges in the 21st century."

I seriously doubt that the committee that drafted the current ONU Mission Statement consulted the 1871 catalogue. The continuity between Lehr's school and our own is organic. We are in a very real sense the same body to which Lehr gave life and purpose 136 years ago. Not only do we share his vision of an education that enriches and prepares students for a productive and satisfying life, we also pursue his strategy of enlarging and enhancing the curriculum in ways that match our students' ambitions with the opportunities that exist for them in the world beyond Ohio Northern University.

Lehr expanded his normal school into a liberal arts

university with three professional colleges. In like fashion, the university has tripled the number of majors, minors, and other degree programs that it offers since I arrived at ONU in 1988. We at Ohio Northern take as given our obligation to offer the courses and degrees that will help our students to find a place in their world, a world that demands both a solid core of knowledge and values and the flexibility of mind that permits them to master a rapidly changing reality.

No one would have had to tell Henry Solomon Lehr about the need for a rock-solid education in an ever-changing world. He was a schoolmaster in eastern Ohio when our nation descended into the apocalyptic yet foundational strife of the Civil War. Today's color guard reminds us of the extravagant price in blood and pain that Lehr and his comrades-in-arms paid to preserve the nation and free a people. And the music we have enjoyed today reminds us that Lehr's age was peopled, not by mental constructs, but by human

beings like you and like me whose hearts reach for the sublime even in the worst of times.

Lehr knew everything there was to know about human nature at its best and its worst. Yet when he took those lessons to school in Ada, Ohio, he did so with an energy and exuberance that never flagged throughout his tenure as president of the university. He knew that anger, bitterness, and irony do nothing to better the life of a person or a nation. He had a realistic optimism that rejected second-guessing and recrimination in favor of purposeful effort.

Rather than dwell fruitlessly upon the nihilistic violence of battle — which he well knew — Lehr determined to accomplish something transformational for the people and the country that he loved.

He founded a school for teachers and built it into a university that recognizes the absolute necessity of a person to cultivate the mind, make a good living, and build up the community of which all of us are a part and on which all of us depend.

It is entirely fitting that we gather here today to celebrate the life and accomplishments of Henry Solomon Lehr with this brilliant work of art. It stands as a memorial to the “Little Professor” who witnessed with his life and his work to his unswerving faith in the potential that God has placed in each and every person. It will remind us who are his heirs to strive every day to preserve and build upon his legacy of loving service to those whom God gives over to our care.