

10-18-1980

The Contributions of Harmon W. Caldwell to Higher Education in Georgia

Merle C. Prunty

Repository Citation

Prunty, Merle C., "The Contributions of Harmon W. Caldwell to Higher Education in Georgia" (1980). *Other Law School Publications*. Paper 196.

http://digitalcommons.law.uga.edu/lectures_pre_arch_archives_other/196

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Archives at Digital Commons @ Georgia Law. It has been accepted for inclusion in Other Law School Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Georgia Law. For more information, please contact tstriepe@uga.edu.

THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF HARMON W. CALDWELL
TO HIGHER EDUCATION IN GEORGIA

(OCTOBER 18, 1980, AT THE PRESENTATION OF THE
HARMON W. CALDWELL PORTRAIT, SCHOOL OF LAW,
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA)

(GREETINGS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.)

I HAVE NEVER KNOWN A MORE STIMULATING AND DEDICATED PERSON THAN HARMON CALDWELL. HE POSSESSED EXTRAORDINARY INTELLECTUAL BREADTH, VISION AS TO WHAT HIGHER EDUCATION IN GEORGIA SHOULD BECOME, AND AN UTTER DEDICATION TO HIS STATE AND ITS PEOPLE. HE WAS SELFLESS, AND SHUNNED PUBLICITY AND RECOGNITION OF HIS MANY ACCOMPLISHMENTS AS THOUGH SUCH THINGS WERE POISONOUS. HE WAS EXTRAORDINARILY COURTEOUS, HIGHLY SENSITIVE TO THE FEELINGS OF THOSE AROUND HIM AND SO CONSIDERATE IN HIS RELATIONS WITH OTHERS THAT HIS CONCERN FOR THEIR SENSIBILITIES OCCASIONALLY WAS MISREAD AS INDECISION. ACTUALLY, HE WAS INCISIVE AND DARING AS AN ACADEMIC LEADER. HIS ACADEMIC AND PERSONAL PRINCIPLES WERE OF THE HIGHEST ORDER. BENEATH HIS MODESTY THERE WAS ENORMOUS PRIDE -- PRIDE IN HIS FAMILY AND BACKGROUND AND UPBRINGING IN MERIWETHER COUNTY, PRIDE IN HIS STATE AND ITS PEOPLE, IN THE INSTITUTIONS WITHIN IT THAT HE SERVED, AND IN HIS OWN INTEGRITY. HIS FRIENDS WERE LEGION.

IT IS MY CONSIDERED OPINION, AND OF MANY OTHERS, THAT HARMON CALDWELL CONTRIBUTED MORE TO THE RISE OF AND PRESENT EXCELLENCE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN GEORGIA THAN ANY MAN IN THE 20TH CENTURY UP TO THIS TIME. THE HIGHLIGHTS FROM HIS REMARKABLE CAREER WILL UNDERSCORE THIS VIEW.

HARMON ENTERED FAMOUS OLD BOYS' HIGH IN ATLANTA AFTER ATTENDING A SMALL COUNTRY SCHOOL IN MERIWETHER COUNTY. THE VALEDICTORIAN OF HIS HIGH SCHOOL CLASS, HE ENTERED THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA IN 1917 AND TORE THROUGH THIS PLACE IN TWO, REPEAT TWO, YEARS AND GRADUATED WITH HONORS. IN 1919 HE SERVED AS PRINCIPAL AND TEACHER IN THE TAYLORSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL AND THE FOLLOWING YEAR AS SUPERINTENDENT OF SASSER HIGH SCHOOL. HE ENTERED THE HARVARD LAW SCHOOL IN 1921 WHERE HE WAS ONE OF THE HONOR STUDENTS, AND SERVED ON THE BOARD OF EDITORS OF THE HARVARD LAW REVIEW. UPON GRADUATION HE RETURNED TO ATLANTA AND PRACTICED LAW FOR A TIME IN THE FIRM OF KING, CALDWELL, AND PARTRIDGE. HE WAS APPOINTED TO A PROFESSORSHIP IN THE LAW SCHOOL AT THE UNIVERSITY IN 1929 AND BECAME DEAN OF THE SCHOOL IN 1933 AT THE AGE OF 34. DURING HIS TENURE AS DEAN, THE LAW SCHOOL WAS MADE A MEMBER OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF LAW SCHOOLS. HE BECAME PRESIDENT OF THE UNIVERSITY IN 1935 AND SERVED IN THAT CAPACITY UNTIL 1949. HE SERVED AS CHANCELLOR FROM 1949 UNTIL HIS RETIREMENT IN 1964.

DURING HIS PRESIDENCY THE FOUNDATIONS FOR THE MODERN UNIVERSITY WERE ESTABLISHED AND IT WAS CHANNELED TOWARD THE QUEST FOR SCHOLARLY EXCELLENCE THAT IS ITS HALLMARK TODAY. LISTEN TO THE HIGHLIGHTS OF HIS ACCOMPLISHMENTS.

THE PHYSICAL PLANT WAS INCREASED ENORMOUSLY. FIVE DORMITORIES WERE BUILT PLUS A DINING HALL. LeCONTE HALL, BALDWIN, THE FINE ARTS BUILDING, THE DAIRY BUILDING, PARK HALL -- THESE ALL WERE CONSTRUCTED DURING HARMON'S PRESIDENCY. THE COMMERCE-JOURNALISM BUILDING, MOORE COLLEGE, NEW COLLEGE AND THE INFIRMARY RECEIVED ADDITIONS AND RENOVATIONS. HE GENERATED THE PLANS FOR THE ILAH DUNLAP LITTLE LIBRARY BUILDING WHICH WAS COMPLETED AFTER HE BECAME CHANCELLOR. IN THE LATE 1940s HE WAS CONVINCED OF THE NEED FOR A NEW STUDENT UNION BUILDING, HAD THE ARCHITECTUAL WORK DONE FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF SUCH A FACILITY AFTER HE BECAME CHANCELLOR, AND HAD GREAT HOPES FOR ITS CONSTRUCTION. BUT THIS DID NOT COME ABOUT DURING HIS LIFETIME AND WAS ONE OF HIS FEW DISAPPOINTMENTS.

HE ESTABLISHED THE GEORGIA REVIEW, OUR LITERARY JOURNAL WHICH TODAY COMMANDS INTERNATIONAL ATTENTION. HE WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN ESTABLISHING THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA PRESS IN 1939. IN 1937 HE LED THE MOVE TO INCORPORATE THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA FOUNDATION, THUS ESTABLISHING THIS ORGANIZATION OF ALUMNI AND FRIENDS WHICH MEANS SO MUCH TO THE CONTEMPORARY UNIVERSITY. IN 1937 HE CREATED THE INSTITUTE FOR STUDY OF GEORGIA PROBLEMS, THE FORERUNNER OF OUR CONTEMPORARY INSTITUTE OF LAW AND GOVERNMENT. HE DEVELOPED THE FIRST SUSTAINED FUNDING FOR FACULTY RESEARCH IN THE UNIVERSITY'S HISTORY AND THEN REORGANIZED THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, THUS ESTABLISHING THE FOUNDATIONS FOR WHAT IS TODAY A MAJOR CENTER OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND SCHOLARLY RESEARCH. HE WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN ESTABLISHING A SYSTEM OF HONORS COURSES IN 1948, AND HE ALSO WROTE THE FIRST

COMPREHENSIVE STATUTES FOR UNIVERSITY FACULTY GOVERNANCE. IN 1946 HE WAS THE KEY FIGURE IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF OUR COVETED REGENTS' PROFESSORSHIPS, WHICH RECOGNIZE AND HONOR TOP-RANKING TEACHERS AND RESEARCHERS.

AGAIN AND AGAIN, WHEN HE SAW TALENT THAT COULD CONTRIBUTE TO THE UNIVERSITY'S FUTURE HE MADE DARING MOVES TO INCORPORATE THAT TALENT INTO HIS FACULTY. CONSIDER THIS ONE CASE: HIS VISUAL ARTS AREA LACKED BOTH LEADERSHIP AND CREATIVITY WHEN HE BECAME PRESIDENT, AND HE DECIDED THAT THIS CONDITION HAD TO BE RECTIFIED. TO BUILD THE DEPARTMENT OF ART THAT HE ENVISIONED HE SELECTED A YOUNG MAN, ONE OF GREAT TALENT AND PROMISE, BUT WHO WAS THEN VIRTUALLY UNKNOWN. THROUGHOUT HIS PRESIDENCY HE PROVIDED CONSISTENT ENCOURAGEMENT AND SUPPORT TO LAMAR DODD IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF OUR OUTSTANDING CONTEMPORARY DEPARTMENT OF VISUAL ARTS. WHILE IT WAS A DARING MOVE, HARMON HAD CONFIDENCE IN HIS OWN PERCEPTION OF TALENT -- AND LOOK AT THE PAYOFF! HE DID THIS SORT OF THING REPEATEDLY.

PLEASE REMEMBER THAT, DURING DR. CALDWELL'S PRESIDENCY, HE FACED THE MANIFOLD PROBLEMS OCCASIONED BY WORLD WAR II. ENROLLMENTS WENT DOWN, THE ARMED FORCES CONTRACTED WITH THE UNIVERSITY FOR SERVICES IN THE TRAINING OF VARIOUS CADRES OF OFFICERS AND CADETS, AND MANY FACULTY WERE PULLED AWAY INTO THE MILITARY AND GOVERNMENT SERVICE. AT THE CLOSE OF THE WAR THE INSTITUTION FACED ASTONISHING INCREASES IN ENROLLMENT WHEN THE VETERANS RETURNED TO THE CAMPUS, AND THERE WERE ALL SORTS OF STAFFING, SPACE AND FACILITY PROBLEMS.

IT WAS A PERIOD OF MANY STRESSES AND STRAINS, BUT THROUGHOUT HARMON CALDWELL NEVER LOST HIS VISION OF WHAT THE UNIVERSITY SHOULD BECOME.

YOU WILL RECALL THE FAMOUS CASE, IN 1941, WHEN GOVERNOR EUGENE TALMADGE ATTEMPTED TO FIRE DEAN COCKING BY REQUESTING A DISMISSAL VOTE FROM THE BOARD OF REGENTS WITHOUT A HEARING FOR DR. COCKING. PRESIDENT CALDWELL'S POSITION WAS THAT ACADEMIC FREEDOM FROM POLITICAL INTERFERENCE WAS AT STAKE AND HIS OPPOSITION TO THE PROPOSED ACTION WAS SO VIGOROUS THAT AT ONE STAGE HE TENDERED HIS RESIGNATION. ULTIMATELY, HE CARRIED THE DAY AND COCKING (AND OTHERS), WERE GIVEN HEARINGS. THE LONG-TERM UPSHOT OF THIS AFFAIR, AS YOU WILL RECALL, WAS AN AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION WHICH MADE THE REGENTS A CONSTITUTIONAL BODY FREED FROM POLITICAL DOMINATION.

I CAME TO KNOW HARMON BEST WHEN HE USED ME AS A REGENTS CONSULTANT IN ACADEMIC OPERATIONS AND PLANNING BETWEEN 1950 AND 1954. I SERVED FOR A TIME IN 1951 AS HIS ASSISTANT CHANCELLOR. IT CAME THROUGH, LOUD AND CLEAR, THAT THE CENTRAL THRUST OF HIS CHANCELLORSHIP WAS GOING TO BE A SYSTEM-WIDE UPGRADING OF ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND CURRICULA. HE BELIEVED THAT GEORGIA PEOPLE WANTED TO TAKE SECOND PLACE TO NO ONE IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND HE WAS OUT TO SECURE EXCELLENCE FOR HIS STATE. ONE SHORT STORY WILL REVEAL HIS VIEW. SHORTLY AFTER I STARTED WORKING FOR HIM, HE ASKED ME TO GO WITH HIM TO THE CAMPUS OF A SOUTH GEORGIA COLLEGE -- WHICH SHALL BE NAMELESS -- TO REVIEW FIRST-HAND AN ACADEMICALLY DISORGANIZED SITUATION. WHEN WE ARRIVED HE DROVE ME THROUGH THE CAMPUS AND, IN

A LACONIC FASHION, IDENTIFIED ITS COMPONENTS AND THE ACTIVITIES THEY HOUSED. THEN HE WHIPPED THE CAR OFF TO A LITTLE EMINENCE THAT OVERLOOKED THE CAMPUS AND CUT OFF THE MOTOR. "LOOK AT THAT," HE SAID. "DOCTOR, THAT'S SUPPOSED TO BE A COLLEGE, BUT YOU AND I KNOW IT REALLY ISN'T. OUR PEOPLE EXPECT SUPERIOR COLLEGES, SO -- TELL ME -- WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO WITH THAT SCHOOL?" I SAT THERE FOR PERHAPS TWENTY SECONDS, STUNNED BY THE RAMIFICATIONS OF THE WHOLE THING, AND THEN SAID, "MY GOD, WHAT A QUESTION!" "I DIDN'T MEAN TO BE QUITE SO BLUNT," HE REPLIED WITH A SMILE, "BUT THE TRUTH IS THAT'S THE CENTRAL QUESTION WE FACE. HOW DO WE BRING ALL THESE SCHOOLS UP TO SUPERIOR LEVELS?" THROUGHOUT HIS TENURE AS CHANCELLOR, DR. CALDWELL STAYED AFTER THAT "CENTRAL QUESTION". BROADLY STANDARDIZED CURRICULA EMERGED, MUCH UPGRADED IN CONTENT, AS DID ALSO STANDARDS FOR EVALUATION OF PROSPECTIVE FACULTY APPOINTEES FOR THE FIRST TIME. TRANSFER OF CREDITS AMONG INSTITUTIONS WAS ESTABLISHED. A COMPREHENSIVE BUILDING PROGRAM EMERGED AND THE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM BUILDING AUTHORITY WAS CREATED. THERE WERE MANY OTHER IMPROVEMENTS THAT TIME DOES NOT PERMIT US TO DETAIL.

ANOTHER HALLMARK OF HIS CHANCELLORSHIP WAS HARMON'S DEPENDENCE ON A SMALL STAFF IN THE REGENTS OFFICE. THE LAST THING HE WANTED TO DO WAS BUILD AND PRESIDE OVER A LARGE BUREAUCRACY IN ATLANTA! HIS STAFF WAS DEDICATED AND HARD-WORKING BUT NONE PUT IN MORE TIME, OR WAS MORE AVAILABLE TO PEOPLE, THAN THE BOSS HIMSELF. HE TENDED TO WORK THROUGH THE ADMINISTRATIONS AND FACULTIES OF THE SCHOOLS IN THE SYSTEM INsofar AS POSSIBLE, AND HE WANTED THE REGENTS'

MONEY OUT ON THE FIRING LINE -- WHERE THE STUDENTS WERE -- TO THE MAXIMUM DEGREE. TO MY CERTAIN KNOWLEDGE HE EVEN REJECTED INCREMENTS TO HIS OWN SALARY (WHICH THE REGENTS HAD VOTED HIM) ON THE GROUND THAT THE INCREMENTS WERE INAPPROPRIATE. HE WANTED THAT MONEY USED ELSEWHERE.

A THIRD HALLMARK OF THE CALDWELL CHANCELLORSHIP WAS THE RESPECT AND ADMIRATION FOR THE BOARD OF REGENTS, AS AN INSTITUTION, THAT ACCUMULATED WITHIN THE LEADERSHIP CADRE OF OUR STATE OVER THE YEARS. ABOVE ALL ELSE, HARMON WANTED HIGHER EDUCATION IN GEORGIA NOT JUST OUT OF, AND ABOVE, POLITICS BUT TREATED AS A PRECIOUS ENTITY. IN THIS HE WAS EMINENTLY SUCCESSFUL. NEAR THE CLOSE OF HIS TERM, GOVERNOR CARL SANDERS REMARKED PRIVATELY TO THE EFFECT THAT ALL POLITICAL LEADERS OF HIS TIME VIEWED THE BOARD OF REGENTS WITH ADMIRATION, AND CONSISTENTLY RESPECTED THEIR WISHES AND REQUESTS. WHILE THIS WAS QUITE A TRIBUTE TO THE REGENTS OF HIS TIME, IT ALSO WAS AN OBVIOUS TRIBUTE TO HARMON CALDWELL.

SOME TIME BEFORE HIS RETIREMENT I SAT IN HARMON'S OFFICE AND LED HIM INTO A REVIEW OF THE MANY, MANY THINGS HE HAD DONE AND THE DIFFICULTIES HE HAD OVERCOME. AFTER A WHILE I ASKED, "HARMON, WHAT HAVE YOU DONE THAT YOU ENJOYED THE MOST, THAT GAVE YOU THE GREATEST SATISFACTION?" "OH, THAT'S EASY TO ANSWER," HE REPLIED. "I WAS NEVER SO HAPPY AS I WAS WHEN I WAS DEANING AND TEACHING THOSE YOUNG MEN IN THE LAW SCHOOL."

AND SO IT'S ENTIRELY APPROPRIATE THAT THE FIRST TANGIBLE RECOGNITION ON THIS CAMPUS OF HARMON CALDWELL'S UNIQUE CONTRIBUTIONS

SHOULD COME IN THAT SPOT HE CHERISHED MOST -- THE LAW SCHOOL. AS HE VIEWS US TODAY FROM WHEREVER HE IS, HARMON WILL BE DEEPLY PLEASED. IT WILL WARM HIM TO KNOW THAT HIS OLD FRIEND AND STUDENT, MACK CRENSHAW, SPEARHEADED THE MOVE TO PLACE HIS PORTRAIT HERE. BUT IF HE COULD SPEAK TO YOU, MACK, AND TO THE REST OF US, HIS INNATE MODESTY WOULD COME FORTH AND HE PROBABLY WOULD CHIDE US FOR SPENDING ANY TIME AT ALL HONORING HIM.

HE WAS A GREAT MAN IN THE FULL SENSE OF THE TERM. I CHERISHED HIS FRIENDSHIP. MY ADMIRATION OF HARMON CALDWELL GROWS EACH YEAR AS I SEE THE FLOWERING OF THE THINGS HE ENVISIONED AND THEN GENERATED AND PUT IN PLACE THROUGHOUT HIS REMARKABLE CAREER. THANK YOU, MACK, FOR WHAT YOU AND YOUR COHORTS HAVE DONE IN PRODUCING HIS PORTRAIT.