

## FOREWORD

The history of a university, like its mission, is never complete. The university's central purpose, the pursuit of knowledge, ideas and truth, is not a purpose easily measured and evaluated, nor captured in place and time. In essence, the inner life history of an institution, committed to teaching and learning, is an unending series of intellectual encounters among the members of the university community. The membership changes year-by-year, even day-by-day, but it is always united in a search for enlightenment. The fruits of this search are tested and assimilated through a process which takes unmeasured time. The results are often surmised rather than calculated. The influence of a great teacher, however, never ends and an illustrious university must be a great teacher.

Although our history is not easily captured, it is valuable to us as a measure of our successes and failures, a chronicle and evaluation of what has gone before. This history is of special interest and inspiration as it traces the story of one of the most significant chapters in the development of higher education in the United States. It is a sober, documented account of historical facts.

I find much of it quite moving. For example, there is the account of the work of Isaac Crary and John D. Pierce, in the early days of Michigan's statehood, when Michigan was for the most part a wilderness of forests and swamps that nearly concealed the small settlements. These young men saw that, if a tolerable life was to be made here and if a viable society was to arise, an effective educational system would be needed. They saw further that for the creation of a worthy educational system, a corps of educated teachers would be required. They concluded that the State must establish a school for that purpose. Against legislative skepticism, indifference, hostility and pleas of poverty, they waged an energetic and unremitting campaign for years until they won. So it was that Michigan State Normal School came into being.

The little school went about its business quietly but with a sureness of purpose. It became a four-year Normal College, and soon was recognized as one of the premier institutions of its kind in the country. It survived a civil war, two world wars and the intervening depression, and now an Asian war.

This is the inspiring story that Dr. Isbell unfolds, with a skill and sensitivity that reveals both his high professional talent and an extraordinary devotion to this task. This was, for him, a labor of love. As professor of history at Eastern for 36 years and as Dean of Administration for 15 of those years, it might be said that the subject chose him as much as he chose the subject. In any event, they were clearly meant for each other.

Dr. Isbell, a native of Michigan, and having earned the AB, MA, LLB and PhD degrees from the University of Michigan, taught at Eastern from 1937 until his retirement. This manuscript was virtually completed at the time of his death in 1968.

He was a quiet and scholarly man, proud to be a part of this University because he believed (and rightly so, in my opinion) that it had made memorable contributions to the development of public education in the State and in the nation. Drawing upon his education, his wide experience, and his zealous devotion to the University, he would almost appear to have been destined to tell the story of the origin, struggles, and development of this university; to set forth its contributions to American education, and to define its relation to the history of America itself.

Professor Isbell unfolds an inspiring story. Thousands of graduates of Eastern Michigan University have carried into schools and colleges over the entire country the idea of their University. They have influenced the minds of legions of young people and their professional colleagues. Thus, much that has happened in the last 120 years is now playing a part in shaping the course of American education.

This book should interest and gratify all who have ties with Eastern and will be of value to all who have a professional interest in the development of education in America.

The portfolio of sketches of the presidents, executed by Professor Jane M. Dart of our Art Department, enhances the attractiveness of the book. For Professor Dart as well as for Professor Isbell, this was largely a labor of love. Her work is as excellent as his narrative.

Final editing and publication were completed in the absence of

the author; some minor errors will doubtless appear. They are the responsibility of the University, not the author.

While Dr. Isbell is not here to express his gratitude to all those who helped him, I am sure that I speak for him when I say that the debt is large and the appreciation great. We cannot name all who assisted, but they will know, and they will find special pleasure in these pages.

Harold E. Sponberg, President  
Eastern Michigan University  
Ypsilanti, Michigan 1971

