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President John Roemer Remembers

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How I Came to Lindenwood College
by Former President John L. Roemer (1914-1940)

Transcribed by Lisa Kemmer

A brief review of events leading to call and acceptance of the Presidency.—John L. Roemer.

In October 1913 Dr. George Frederick Ayres died after 10 years of faithful and efficient service as President of Lindenwood College. Dr. Samuel J. Niccolls, pastor of the 2nd Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, Col. James Gay Butler and myself attended the funeral at the college and returned to the city in Col. Butler's car. At that time, I was pastor of the Tyler Place Presbyterian Church, St. Louis and a member of the Board of Directors of the College. Dr. Niccolls was President of the Board and Col. Butler Vice President.

Several days after the funeral Col. Butler by his appointment met me in the Directors Room of the Mercantile Trust Co. St. Louis. Why he wished to see me was not made known until the meeting. He then disclosed the fact that he desired me to become Dr. Ayres' successor. While I appreciated the confidence he had in me for the place, his suggestion was not received with favor. He was told that the place should be filled by an educator not a preacher. To this he dissented. I did not care to leave a growing church very dear to my heart. The "meeting" adjourned with the conviction in my heart that no college Presidency could allure me from my present pastorate.

In January 1914 Col. Butler phoned me to come to his home, 4484 Pine Blvd, to see him. At this meeting he said he was convinced that I was the man for the place; the man of his choice; that it was practically in his hands to bring the matter to a final conclusion. I could not see the matter in a favorable light and advised the Colonel to look elsewhere for a President of Lindenwood College. I did not feel fitted for the position.

The later part of January 1914 the Colonel asked for another conference at his house. At this meeting he insisted that my attitude was not the correct one for a Minister of the gospel to take—the college was a Church School and the call to work there was as worthy to consider as a call to a Church and no minister should refuse to go to a larger work of the Church. He told me what he would do for me personally if I would—make me financially independent. I told him I did not want to be bought. A consecrated work could not be bargained for in dollars and cents. He presented my suggestion of attempt on his part to buy me. After a heated debate on the propriety of making one's financial advantage a basis of consideration we parted understanding each other better. Continued refusal on ground I was not the man for the place.

In February, about the middle of the month, Dr. Samuel J. Niccolls conferred with me as an emissary of Col. Butler. He agreed with me that it was hard to give up my pleasant pastorate at Tyler Place Church and take up an unpromising and untried field of labor. "It is just this way," he said, "the young church is assured success. Without Col. Butler the College has a dark future before it. He has fixed his heart on you to take up the work. If you go Lindenwood will live. If you don't, death stares it in the face."

Dr. Niccolls arranged for a Conference with Col. Butler in March which he joined. Matters were plainly thrashed out. The Col. promised to get back of the College with his means and make the College not its President the object of his beneficence.

There was another obstacle in the way. None of us thought that the Tyler Place Church which I had served for more than nine years would refuse to become party to the change proposed. A vigorous protest was inaugurated. Dr. Niccolls arranged for me to conduct his prayer-meeting at the Second Presbyterian Church in exchange. He and Col. Butler arranged with the Session to have a congregational meeting following the regular services at Tyler Place to talk matters over. There was a large number present. Dr. Niccolls said afterward it seemed that the entire congregation turned out. After a lengthy meeting, lasting late into the night, in which some plain talk took place, the congregation agreed to yield and join in asking Presbyterian to dissolve the pastoral relations. Col. Butler told the people that if they would let their pastor go to Lindenwood he would stand back of him "to the last button on his vest."

The usual Presbyterian procedure was passed and May 12-1914 I entered upon my new duties as President-elect of Lindenwood College.

At the Commencement June 9-1914 the President-elect was formally inaugurated as President, Dr. Niccolls acting as Chairman and Col. Butler outlining what he would do in making the administration a success.

Following the inauguration ground was broken for a new dormitory to be called—Butler Hall—Col. Butler using the spade first, followed by Dr. Niccolls, myself, and John Olson Mayor of St. Charles.

Col. Butler and Dr. Niccolls

Col. Butler and Dr. Niccolls were very close friends. Their friendship was of 48 years standing. Dr. Niccolls counsel was highly appreciated and generally followed by Col. Butler. They both had Lindenwood at heart. Their dream was expressed in the slogan adopted upon my entrance upon the work—"Lindenwood-the Wellesley of the West." These two old friends had a serious difference that nearly wrecked the project. When Col. Butler proposed building Butler Hall as an earnest of his intention to stand back of the College with his means, Dr. Niccolls thought his ideas were too extravagant. Two buildings—one for class-rooms the other for athletics—costing \$15,000 each was in Dr. Niccolls mind. I recall distinctly the day Col. Butler called me to his home and revealed Dr. Niccolls plan of building up the College. "Are you in favor of this?" "No, Col. I am not. We might as well stop before we begin if this is the vision of the future of Lindenwood," was my reply. "Well," said the Col., "Dr. Niccolls and I have had a previous difference on this point. I will not have my name associated with a cheap plan like that." The Colonel's will prevailed.

About the middle of June, about the 16th according to my recollection, Dr. Niccolls came to see me at the College. He was fearful lest we do something we would afterward regret and 1914 would be a year of sad recollections. He proposed that the Col. be asked for \$100,000

endorsement to back up the School. I told the good Doctor I was not in accord with this proposition as I had been talking in the language of millions to the Colonel. “You don’t need it,” replied Dr. Niccolls, and continuing he said, “You will never get it.”

The triangular difficulty was smoothed over when Butler Hall was completed and filled to capacity Sept. 1915. Dr. Niccolls and Col. Butler were the happiest mortals at the dedication of the hall which the Dr. dedicated with prayer.

When Dr. Nicolls passed away in August 1915, I suggested memorializing his name. I never saw the Col. Enter so whole-heartedly into a building project as the building of – “Niccolls Hall.” Col. Butler passed away August of the year 1916. His greatest regret was that he would not see the completion of the building which he himself had largely planned for the man he so admired—his friend Samuel Jack Niccolls.

Mrs. Butler

In the development of Lindenwood College, Mrs. Margaret Leggat Butler, wife of James Gay Butler, plays a very important role. Her name must be written in large letters. She made the “larger Lindenwood” possible.

Two incidents are vividly impressed on my memory. The first was a conference she called at her home 4484 West Pine Blvd, St. Louis, April 29, 1914. She wanted to see me before moving to St. Charles to express her good will and best wishes. She wanted Mrs. Roemer to be happy in new surroundings and planned many things for her comfort. The Col. was beaming with delight when the meeting ended and exclaimed: “Now for the Wellesley of the West.”

The second was a few days before his death in August 1916. Unburdening himself he told me had failed to provide by will all he intended and promised me to do for Lindenwood. On the morrow he promised to send for the Mercantile Trust Co. officers and have a mission of his securities taken out of his box and given to the College. Feeling that his physical strength might fail he said to his wife who was with him in the last moments “Maggie I may be unable to do what I have planned but I want you to do what Dr. Roemer advises when I am gone.” She readily promised, “I will Jimmie (this is how she always addressed him in the home) for we are both interested in Lindenwood.” A brief prayer preceded my leaving for St. Charles after a whole day spent with him and at his home. Mrs. Nellie Eastlick, his niece, phoned for me at 8 a.m. that day and at 9 a.m. I was with the Colonel upon his request.

That night Col. Butler lapsed into unconsciousness from which he never rallied for any length of time. The promise made on that memorable day, Aug. 18, 1916, was faithfully kept by Mrs. Butler. Mrs. Butler invited me to dine and spend the day, August 27, the Sunday following the burial of the Colonel. The morning of that day I preached at the 2nd Presbyterian Church, St. Louis.

During our conversation after dinner Mrs. Butler asked me what my request for Lindenwood was. “Mrs. Butler, I would not care to lay a request before you but present a claim.” She smiled

and said-“I think you are right. You represent Jimmie and me in building up the School. We placed you there and we had invested our money under your direction.” At her request my “claim” was presented. “After you have cared for all your relatives, when you come to your benevolent gifts I think we ought to get one-half of what is left.” She said that seemed fair and she would provide for it. Although many contrary propositions were made her from time to time she stood by her promise and was true to Lindenwood. The promise made her husband was faithfully carried out. I believe Mrs. Butler’s gift was one of the largest gifts every given by a woman to a Woman’s College up to the time of her death. In addition to her gifts after death she gave \$250,000 to assure the College a sufficient endowment during her life to make possible the accrediting of the College by accrediting agencies.

Dr. John H. Miller

The Apostle Paul is in the mind of the world as the greatest and ablest follower of Christ. Christianity never had a greater organizer and exponent of the faith than Paul. Yet Paul might have been lost to the “cause” had he not been introduced to the Church of Barnabas.

Col. Butler might have been lost to Lindenwood had it not been for Dr. John H. Miller of Kansas City, stated clerk of the Synod of Missouri. It was he who suggested and urged Dr. Niccolls to name Col. Butler for a vacancy on the Board of Directors. Dr. Niccolls was afraid that the Col. would not accept and his fears were well founded. Dr. Niccolls named Col. Butler; the Synod confirmed the nomination and the Stated Clerk notified him of his appointment. Col. Butler answered the letter refusing to accept. Dr. Miller and Col. Butler were friends dating back to the Civil War. Dr. Miller loved Lindenwood, was a faithful friend of the institution at all times and refused to accept the Colonel’s reply as final. He wrote to him and urged him to withdraw his resignation. “We were faithful to our Country in time of need, let us be as faithful to our Church and it’s institutions in the time of need” he wrote. The Colonel replied to his comrade in arms he would be faithful and withdrew his resignation.

Dr. Miller related this bit of interesting information after my connection with the College.

Dr. Um.J.McKittrick

Dr. McKittrick was pastor of the First Presbyterian Church and a member of the Board of Directors at time of my election to the presidency of Lindenwood College.

Beneath a brusque exterior his heart was as large as his physique. Always sympathetic, always willing to help a fellow-man in difficulty, I prize his memory for the wise counsel he gave me both as a pastor of a church and as a College President. “You have a mighty hard job ahead of you,” he used to say. “It does not look very promising and it will test your whole being to reach the goal of Success. But don’t get discouraged with the present appearance of an almost defunct institution. The Lord, Col. Butler and the rest of us will give you all the help we can if you make an honest effort to build up Lindenwood.”

Dr. McKittrick was not with us a great while, but to the time of his death he was loyal to the School he had represented as a Director for many years.

When Dr. McKittrick mentioned the Lord as being willing to help I told him a remark by Dr. Niccolls to the effect that it was not management but the Lord that had kept Lindenwood College from being ruined years ago.

The memory of the great-hearted McKittrick is a very precious one to me as the years go by.

Warning

The day I had given Col. Butler my pledge to go to Lindenwood I happened in the office of Dr. B.P. Fullerton in the Odd Fellows Bldg. on Olive opposite the Post Office at 8th and 9th St. on Olive. As Secy. of the Home Mission Board he was closing the day's work. After discussing some Home Mission work of the Presbytery of which I was chairman he said: "Roemer what are you going to do about accepting your call to Lindenwood College?"

"Well Dr. I have just told the Col. I will go." "I am sorry, oh! So Sorry. There is no hope for it and the Colonel's enthusiasm will wear off and financially you will be helpless."

I replied that the Col. and I had a "gentlemen's agreement about our parts in the work and upon faith alone I was going to undertake the task.

"I tell you again," he said, "You should have bound the Colonel up in a written agreement. It was your only hope. As we start for home Roemer I promise you as a friend when you are looking for a Country Church I am going to help you get it. Goodbye."

Up to the present time, 3 years later, I have not asked for a hearing in that Country Church that was so prominent in Dr. Fullerton's mind at that time.

No one on the Board has been so interested in my welfare and so hearty in his support than the big-framed, able minded, spiritually prosperous, Dr. Braxton P. Fullerton.

A Root of All Evil, But a Source of Great Good

Money is a root of every kind of evil. There is no doubt of it. My experience in defending the Butler Estate or rather Lindenwood's interest in it gives ample illustration of the truth of the assertion. Like a lot of buzzards the claimants hovered about the dollars of the dead! Relatives, lawyers, charitable institutions and a Presbyterian College were in league to get by fair or foul means what the departed never intended to give them. "Brethren of the faith" who on Sunday worshipped devoutly worked on Monday their diabolical plots. Commissioned on Commission to get what they could by extortion what was never intended for them to have, the represented Charitable institutions and a Presbyterian College and succeeding in measure with their schemes, were not satisfied with the "Commissions" awarded them by their employers but extracted an

additional fee from the College with the Christian injunction—“This must not be known to my clients.” Westminster College, Fulton, Mo., is welcome to the \$80,000 it secured by joining the league of pirates, but the methods employed are not such as belongs to a Christian code of ethics. The \$5,000 additional lawyers fees charged to us was only natural to the practices of the underworld.

Some preachers on our Board were made aware by experience that there is often the opposite result from the sermons than intended.

Well: Money is a root of every kind of evil, but let us look on the good it can do and forget the sordidness of human nature. It's real mission is to bless not to blight.

Thomas H. Cobbs

After the battle of dollars in the Butler Estate I would be remiss in my privilege not to mention the name of a man to whom Lindenwood owes it's greatest debt of gratitude for his honest, fearless and straight forward service in a time of it's greatest need. Some lawyers may be crooks but not Thomas H. Cobbs is practicing his Christian profession.

I think I was in position to know the trying circumstances leading up to his acceptance of the College case. I know also the “square shooter” that he was in all his dealings with his client and also with the adversary. To my mind he was more than a lawyer on all occasions. He was a Christian gentleman, than which a greater praise cannot be panned. He had his troubles within (for he was not heartily supported in the honest efforts by all members of the Board) and endless troubles without. (A greater gang of disputable foes parading as Christian leaders could hardly be imagined.)

My hat is off to Tom Cobbs, lawyer and Christian gentleman. He has proven the two are possible in one-lawyer and an honest man.

Kurt Our Big Policeman Born Feb. 1, 1921 Died April 15, 1934

When Dr. B. K. Stumberg brought him to the college a two months old pup we began a new experience in the raising of a dog. Kurt was the first police dog on campus. He was all legs and thin and large. He developed into one of the finest looking dogs that one would wish to see. He was powerful of body and possessed a face that was commanding. Strong yet gentle of spirit. A one man dog that loved his master above all others and was obedient to his every command. To the day of his death he bestowed his every affection upon him. His love and devotion was reciprocated by his master who was faithful to him the 13 years of his stay. When the end came on Sunday evening at 7:15 he passed to the great beyond with his head being voluntarily placed in his master's arms. He died in the President's office as the choir came from the Vesper service singing-“He leadeth me, oh blessed thought.

While holding his master first in affections he made up with all the men on the place and all loved him and when he passed on they encased him in a well made coffin and over his grave

shed many a tear. Kurt was very fond of Mrs. Roemer and when she was alone in the house at night he felt it his bounden duty to guard the gables. To the women in the office, he was friendly with and appreciated their caresses. To Miss Pook, the Bursar and Miss Waye her assistant he was particularly courteous and would heed their admonitions. He was always ready to be attentive to Miss Foster, the dietitian. There was diplomacy in that for Kurt always loved a good meal. He paid little attention to students but female members of the faculty he would escort to the door of their homes when they were on the campus at night. Some rewarded him with a piece of cake at the end of the journey.

Kurt was a born policeman. He came from aristocratic German lineage. Kurt von Linderholz was his full title. From 11 p.m. to 6 a.m. he made the rounds with the night men. When they “rang in” on the clocks of the dorm he surrounded the building to see that everything was O.K. He refused to work with an un-uniformed watchman. When the cap and brass buttons were on he found someone of his own standing. There are immeasurable good qualities of the dog that could be mentioned. He had not a mean trait in him. He was one of God’s noblemen in the Kingdom of Dogdom. When his spirit winged it’s way to the great beyond we are sure the great Master said to him—“Kurt you have been faithful unto death enter into the joy of your Master.”

He has left us no more to return to our campus. All hail to you Kurt! You were worthy of all our love while you lived and all the tears we shed when you left us. Though dead he yet speaketh.

Snooks

The little fox terrier, beloved by all who knew him, is no more. On this day, Sunday December 15, 1929, his spirit winged its way to the great beyond from whence no doggie returns in the flesh to his master.

He came to Lindenwood College Campus the summer of 1926. From whence he came and to whom he belonged no one even knew. He just came, a pup of twelve or fifteen months of age. He met our Bobby, a police pup of three months and at once a life friendship was formed. They were loyal to each other to the time when Snook’s little body was taken to the veterinary, Dr. Wayne O’Neal in St. Charles, for treatment. This was Wednesday, December 11, 1929. Four days after he became so helpless that his end was humanely hastened a few hours before he would have died. He was saved the final agony when it was certain he had no chance to live.

The going of Snook’s cause many a tear to be shed and many a heart to feel sad. Joe Weirs, whom Snooks loved and looked up to in reverence, gave way to tears. His “little helper” would no longer travel together over the campus and to the college farm. No longer could he visit the traps set for rats will Snooks at his side to assist him put an end to those who still lived. Snooks was so familiar with the raps that he visited them along when Joe failed to appear for a day.

Mrs. Roemer and her husband had a cry over the going of our little dog. We were not ashamed to visibly mourn for our speechless friend whom we loved and were loved by him.

The vacant chair in which he slept in our bed-room recalls hallowed memories of his companionship and guardianship.

Snooks we called him not knowing what he might have been called by his former owners. He accepted his new name gracefully and responded lovingly to it.

Snooks possessed an unusual personality. His coming was resisted by he overcame that by his persistence and love for "Bobby." He was out at 7 a.m. with Joe when he came to work. At 5 p.m. when Joe went home Snooks stopped at the "Gables" for the night. He knew when Sunday came and Joe was not expected.

Snooks had an uncanny intelligence. He had the "sixth sense" of discerning what was going to happen and the part he was going to take. He loved to bark at the heels of the students to make the girls jump, but he would never bite.

Although immunized for Rabies in August 1929 the immunity failed when he was bitten by a mad dog and he succumbed to the "Dumb Rabies."

Snooks has left us in body but not in memory. He still lives with us in pleasant recollections. He made life a little brighter for us by his presence. May the God of good doggies have a rich reward for a life well spent on earth.

Bobbie

Beloved police dog of Dr. and Mrs. Roemer. Born May 2 1926. Died October 20, 1937. Age 11 years, 5 months, 18 days.

Bobbie was a female dog. She came by her name in this manner. When Dr. B.K. Stumberg gave her to Mrs. Roemer she was 2 months old and was unnamed. The delicate little pup was called baby. When she developed into larger proportions we called her Bobbie. From time of her entrance into our home until her death day Mrs. Roemer always addressed her as "My Baby." Bobbie was a most affectionate dog and received in return the caresses of her one and friends o the campus. She was conservative in forming close friendships. Miss, Anabelle Foster, dietitian, looked after her when we were away on or vacations. On Saturday afternoons when Mrs. Roemer and I usually went to St. Louis Bobbie and Miss Foster "kept house" at the gables until our return in the evening. "The ladies of the office"-Miss Ethel B. Cook – Miss Cora Waye, Mrs. Agnes Zeisler were other favorites.

Bobbie was our "talking dog." When we returned home after an absence he tried to tell us what had transpired. When he was away from us for a time, he always had much to say in his dog language. We didn't understand it but for 5 minutes at a time he would try to make known his experiences. As a member of our household she tried to make all visitors welcome by her cordial greetings, Mrs. Roemer was the idol of her life and when she was indisposed or sick she immediately went to her from consolation and help in her distress.

Five weeks before her death she suffered paralysis of the left hind leg. Notwithstanding her handicap she would drag herself for some distance. So determined was she to regain her ability to walk that she would try to stand up and walk. With assistance she succeeded for short distances across the campus. The efforts were hard on the heart, but she would persist in her efforts.

On Wednesday afternoon, Oct. 20, 1937 she was placed on the campus to enjoy the fine “sunshine” day. In about 30 minutes after she signaled by tagging at her rope she wanted to come back to her home—the gables. Joe Vhys who so tenderly cared for Bobbie during the last days of life carried her into the gables where her master awaited her coming. She looked into his face with her big brown eyes, received her usual caress, and as Joe laid her on the floor she keeled over and was dead. She evidently knew her time was at hand, wanted to be in her room in the gables and say farewell before leaving. Mrs. Roemer was away when Bobbie died and her loved one was denied the privilege of saying farewell.

The men on the Campus of Lindenwood College made a beautiful casket for Bobbie’s remains, buried it with soft cushion lining and carried her to her lasting resting—the pet cemetery back of Sibley and Niccolls halls.

Bobbie has left us to join Lin and Kurt and Snook, who were before to the great spirit world.

Blessed are the dead doggie pets who live in the affections of their loved ones. Their memory will be with us in time and eternity.

Early Experiences at Lindenwood College

When Mrs. Roemer and I started for St. Charles, May 12, 1914 our feelings were very much like the weather, very gloomy. There was not very much to enthuse over when taking a survey of the property. As we drove up what is now “Butler Way” the horses and cows in the enclosure now occupied by Irwin hall grounds were peeping over the fence as if to say- “let us take a look at the new boss and his wife.” There were two dormitories on the campus-Sibley and Jubilee Halls. There was one 16 candle power incandescent light between the halls. Niccolls Hall now occupies the site of the Gamma Sorority house, an orchard stood where Butler Hall now stands, the only sidewalk was the preset one extending from Kingshighway to Bruere’s home. An old brick sidewalk ran past Sibley Hall and a dilapidated stone walk met the Butler Way walk. Near where Irwin Hall stands facing on Clay St. was machine shop and residence which is now called The Lodge. Students were not overflowing the two buildings.