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Ghosts of the Past

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Ghosts of the past
Every institution has its skeletons. We’re looking for ours.

Institutions across the nation are examining their histories and grappling with controversial elements—Confederate statues, founding leaders, building names and more. Archivist Rich Schmidt is digging into Linfield’s history.

When I was asked to look at the names we see at Linfield and learn more about the people behind them, I was excited but apprehensive. Every name promised an interesting story; but what if one of them brought more than that? Something more troubling?

Every institution has its skeletons. If an organization is fortunate enough to survive and grow, there will be missteps along the way. An inexplicable hire, a confounding decision, a broken promise. Part of the risk of associating yourself with an institution, then, is accepting this reality. Much like a marriage, you’re opening yourself up to the bad along with the good, with the faith that the latter will always outweigh the former.

I am not the preeminent expert on the history of Linfield College, having worked here since only 2011. There are people who have been associated with the school for much longer, who have been in positions to see the unofficial truths behind the official stories. Part of my job is to learn about the school’s history and about the many people—heralded and unknown—who have played a part in shaping the school as it exists today.

So I dug in, learning about Michelbuick and Murdock, about Cook and Miller, about Elkinton and Campbell. Mac Hall is named not for the missionaries and namesakes of the college in Walla Walla, but for a long-time English professor and registrar. Taylor is named for a 1915 alumnus who taught chemistry at the school for 30 years. And so on, account after account of people who left their mark on Linfield in some way.

Institutions are a product of a time and place, and by their nature slow to evolve. Change often comes gradually, a result of a society’s fluctuating needs, beliefs, values, ethos. Occasionally, though, a seismic shift can change a culture seemingly overnight, shaking institutional foundations and toppling long-held assumptions.

Our culture is in the midst of such a shift now. Powerful people are being held accountable for transgressions silently accepted in the past. Actions or beliefs that weren’t considered transgressions are being analyzed in a new light. As part of this evolution, we’re looking to history with disillusioned eyes, questioning people and symbols our institutions have long held as paragons.

Colleges and universities across the country—from Yale and Princeton in the Ivy League, to Clemson and Mississippi in the South, to the University of Oregon and Oregon State in the Northwest, to Princeton in the Ivy League, to Clemson and Mississippi in the South, to the University of Oregon and Oregon State in the Northwest—have faced pressure to re-name buildings honoring people whose beliefs and behaviors no longer fit the image these institutions wish to project.

People are complicated. We all—this article included—tend to sum up people’s lives in a sentence, or a paragraph, or a page, all the while knowing it doesn’t capture the whole story. It’s simply an outline, the curated highlights of a life full of innumerable events and moments.

Now we’re looking again with fresh eyes, hoping to more deeply examine the people after whom we’ve chosen to name our institutions and buildings. Are we likely to find stories at Linfield that mirror ours that have caused trouble for other institutions? It’s possible. Every institution has its skeletons, and we’re in the process of looking for ours.

— Rich Schmidt, Linfield College archivist

Stories from the archives
• Linfield is named after George Fisher Linfield, a Baptist minister born on the East Coast who spent the bulk of his life in the Midwest. George and his wife, Frances (Ross) Linfield, pledged to spend their life savings on the advancement of Christian education, and invested in real estate. After George’s death in 1890 at age 44, Frances moved to the Northwest and befriended college president Leonard Riley. She donated $250,000 worth of real estate in 1922 (a $3.5 million value today) and asked that the school be renamed in honor of her late husband.

• Kenneth Scott Latourette was one of the foremost historians on Christianity and China. After graduating from McMinnville College in 1904, he eventually was ordained as a Baptist minister and taught at Yale Divinity School, publishing more than 80 books. Other Latourettes also played a significant role in Linfield’s history, among them D.C. Latourette and Lyman E. Latourette, who were each on the board of trustees.

• Potter Hall, originally purchased by the college as the president’s house, is named for Carrie Cassidy Potter, known to her students as “Mother Potter.” She served as the dean of music from 1904 until her retirement in 1921. Potter was known for “adopting” students as well as for her patience, humor and wide-ranging musical ability. When a new home for the president was built in 1938, the old building was converted into a residence hall.

• Williams Frerichs served a number of roles during his time at Linfield. He taught German, served as head librarian, edited Linfield publications and served as interim president for a year after Leonard Riley’s retirement in 1931. Frerichs’ role as a jack-of-all-trades is repeated throughout Linfield’s history, as talented people have often been asked to change roles or fill multiple positions at the same time.

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One of North America’s most widely used family nursing textbooks also just became the first to include a chapter devoted entirely to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and queer (LGBTQ) healthcare issues. The sixth edition of *Family Health Care Nursing: Theory, Practice, and Research,* released in February, includes the chapter written by Linfield College professors Aaron Tabacco and Mary Bartlett, along with co-author Judith MacDonnell of Canada’s York University. Joanna Rowe, Linfield’s interim dean of nursing, is lead editor of the textbook and Melissa Robinson, associate professor of nursing, is a co-editor.

Tabacco was a co-editor of the previous edition of the textbook, one of the most popular nursing primers in the United States and Canada. When the new edition was being discussed, he didn’t feel he could take on an editorial role again—he was finishing his doctoral dissertation. He suggested the new chapter instead.

Bartlett was excited to come on board as a co-author.

“We need something in nursing education that says, ‘this is another kind of family,’” she says. “You have to offer open, affirming and nonjudgmental care.”

“As we got into this,” MacDonnell recalls, “it was apparent to me that we were covering specialty areas such as trans older people and their families, as well as situations related to clinical issues. There was just such a broad spectrum of what we could cover in the book.”

One thing Tabacco hoped to achieve, he said to his co-authors, was “a chapter that traced healthcare across the lifespan.”

“This chapter examines gender-diverse families across the lifespan, including couples and families who are aging, who haven’t had legal rights, and are now dealing with transitioning into elder care, for example.”

Amy Penkin of Oregon Health and Science University’s Transgender Health Program applauds the research that went into the chapter.

“It made a solid link to evidence-based practice,” she says. “To have an academic text that brings forth [those] practices will shed light on the health disparities for these groups as historically underserved and marginalized.”

The new chapter, for instance, highlights the work of the Family Acceptance Project of San Francisco State University. The project’s research focused on LGBTQ youth who are particularly vulnerable to family abandonment or expulsion from their homes and have higher risks for depression, suicide, homelessness, substance use and HIV infection. Using their findings, the project developed interventions aimed at helping to prevent these problems and keep families intact.

— Christian Feuerstein

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**Healthcare for diverse families**

The first nursing textbook chapter devoted to care for LGBTQ families was written by two Linfield professors.