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Address of Welcome from the Chamber of Commerce by Dr. O. J. Hagen, M.D. (1937)

Moorhead State Teachers College

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Address of Welcome from the Chamber of Commerce

Delivered on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary, State Teachers College
Moorhead, Minnesota, June 5, 1937
O. J. Hagen, M. D.

Fiftieth Anniversaries like Expositions are time-keepers of progress and of events and give occasion for reflection on what the years have meant. I realized this fact poignantly when Moorhead celebrated its 50th Anniversary a few years ago, for at the time, it covered precisely to the year the history of my own personal existence in the Red River Valley. The years spanned the earliest beginnings of the frontier settlements here from the days we lived in small sod-buts in a wilderness to the proud days when a civilization had been carved out of the frontier and many of the heroes of the plains were lying in the quiet church-yards about - their mighty work done.

I was more deeply impressed by what anniversaries can mean last September when Harvard celebrated its ter-centenary. I realize that not on this earth shall I ever again be thrilled by such moving powers as that which gripped me on that occasion. It was an impressive, unforgettable scene when the world's greatest scholars, many of them representing scores of the oldest universities of the world--Cairo, founded in 879, down to Paris, Cambridge, Oxford, St. Andrews, Rome, Copenhagen, Madrid--the representatives bedecked in varient-colored academic robes, marching down from the Weldner Library steps along a wide aisle, and seating themselves like a flock of iridescent birds upon an elevated out-door platform--and to hear John Masefield, Poet Laureate of England, and a poet to behold--in slow enchanting voice read his poem composed for the occasion, beginning:

"When custom presses on the souls apart,
Who seek a God not worshipped by the herd,
Forth, to the wilderness, the chosen start
Content with ruin, having but the Word.

So these abandoning the English scene,
As spirit's solitary surety bade,
Ventured the wrath where Christ had never been,
Facing both sea and savage unafraid."

Boston and Cambridge and Harvard celebrated the great occasion--the cities and the college--each proud of one another.

Boston and Cambridge realized that both were known the world over because within their confines stood one of the world's greatest intellectual homes—and when the countless Harvard graduates scattered over the face of the earth reverted back in memory, they not only thought of their Alma Mater, but they remembered Boston and Cambridge as well.

So it is quite natural that the representatives of the Chamber of Commerce of Moorhead tonight should come out to extend their congratulations and well wishes to you, President MacLean, and to the Faculty of the Moorhead State Teachers College—the college that this week is celebrating its 5th Anniversary.

Subtraction is sometimes a lucid method of finding the value of a given quantity. Subtract the sun out of the sky and this Red River Valley—now visioned like a garden—would be an ice-waste, flowerless as the pole.

Subtract the gentle rains of heaven and this famed "bread basket of the world" would be a vast whirling desolate dust-bowl, striking terror and wreaking ruin upon the people here.

Subtract such men as the Comstocks, the Sharps, the Lambs, the Kiefers, the Mackalls, the Welters, the Davys, the Lords, and the Welds—and others I could name—subtract these from the human inventory of Moorhead's past and we should be poor indeed.

Take the State Teachers College out of Moorhead's history and we should have left not only a vacant space against the skyline of Moorhead's intellectual atmosphere but that of the entire Northwest.

President MacLean, your institution is as dear to Moorhead as Harvard is to Boston and Cambridge, and in its way this college is doing as great a work for America.

One of the members of the Chamber of Commerce of this city was Solomon G. Comstock. Mr. Comstock early in our history dreamed great dreams—and one of his dreams concerned itself with the vision of a better day for the frontier folk. True statesman—legislator that he was—he visioned for this western front not only a better economic order, which by industry, thrift, courage and individual initiative the grim pioneers were winning for themselves—winning by asking their God only for strong arms and a long day in which to work—but he wanted to provide an agency for the building of an intelligent democracy.

He knew that man--God's highest creation--lives not by bread alone, but that he must be nurtured by the manna that promotes human excellence to be truly prosperous and happy. He knew that the best way to enrich the lives of a pioneer citizenship was to train good teachers, and on that conviction he, as a member of the early Minnesota legislature, introduced a bill calling for an appropriation wherewith to establish in his home city of Moorhead a normal school. He donated a site to insure its location here--and on the southern fringe of this city there appeared one day his "dream come true" in the form of the large architecturally beautiful building, remembered as the Old Main. He thus became designated as the Father of the Moorhead Normal School. And throughout these 50 years there has poured out of this institution thousands of teachers who have gone out to hundreds of thousands of pupils--to enthroned the things of the mind and the spirit in the social order.

This benignant spirit who in his long day brought so many honors to Moorhead sleeps tonight in the cemetery at the south end of the city he loved. And if it be true that those who in their day have lived and served to great ends sometimes visit the scenes of their labors, I feel that his spirit hovers about us tonight.

Mr. MacLean, it is your privilege and honor to continue the high traditions of the great institution here in Moorhead. Personally I regard you and your faculty with high admiration. I know you as a great educator and a gracious man--a fit leader of youth.

I know, too, that the members of the Chamber of Commerce believe in you and your institution and regard your leadership and high service with no small feeling of pride. As they stand back of and encourage the groups of the city that carry the name of Moorhead with distinction to distant parts of America and Canada--such impressive groups as the Moorhead high school musical aggregations that won the hearts of Winnipeg the other day and the Amphion Chorus that has sung itself into the heart of America, the two inspiring leaders of which come from Moorhead--so they will continue to cheer you in your great task.

While the members of the Chamber of Commerce are interested in building material bridges—gestures of good will—across political boundary lines, they also are interested in your institution that is deliberately dedicating itself to the building of bridges between knowledge and power for a work-a-day world, building bridges of tolerance and understanding, building bridges of the mind and the spirit.

There are perilous times. Only understanding, high intelligence and a high patriotism hold the keys to the solution of the problems. No one can tell me that pressure groups and horse-playing politicians can solve the problems. Black legions and alien mongrels are insidiously undermining our freedom. Democracy the world over is caught between the withering cross fires of open attacks.

The members of the Moorhead Chamber of Commerce are intensely interested in education and in expressing their sentiments when in conclusion I say that the state or nation that will write the history of the future and fill its pages with the most thrilling chapters of achievement is the state or nation that gives the most of treasure and constructive thought to the education of its youth. I am certain too in this, knowing America as I do, and believing as I do that there are still millions of Americans with faith in our flag and in the institutions and ideals for which it stands, that this Republic will remain amidst the cracking wrecks and ruins of dead empires and dictatorships, the beacon light to the peoples of the world.

The Chamber of Commerce salutes you, and asks that you stand guard about the altars of our liberties—for your own sakes, and for that of our children and children's children.