



Education for Individual and Social Responsibility

Founders' Day Ceremony: President's Address

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2011

Steven M. Corey, Ph.D., President

First, let me welcome you all here today. We're here to recognize and celebrate the founding of our college.

I also want to recognize the importance of coming together, for simply showing up on occasions like this is important in building a community. It helps to build affinity for one another and our common cause. It also helps us to build our story through shared experiences.

Today, it helps us to recognize and honor our past while we work to determine our future.

Many of us have heard the founding story, but I think one of the best tellings is that of Peggy Lynne Miller in her 1967 paper, and printed in Gorton Riethmiller's book, "Upon This Hill." (For those who don't know, Riethmiller was president from 1957-70 and is one of the namesakes on the art building next door). In it, she wrote:

The Rev. John J. Shipherd, a Presbyterian clergyman, and Philo P. Stewart, missionary among the Cherokee Indians in the state of Mississippi, founded Oberlin College in the dense forests of northern Ohio in 1833... Shipherd was anxious to extend the number of Christian colleges in the Midwestern "wilderness" area, and began searching for a suitable location for another institution...

In November of 1843 Shipherd again journeyed on horseback from Oberlin, Ohio into Michigan toward the Eaton County spot on the Grand River which he earlier had selected as the site of his new college. While riding north from Marshall, in Calhoun County, toward the Delta Mills location, he lost his way in Walton Township in a dense growth of young oak trees. But standing on a hill, "he saw, off to the southeast, the log house of Mr. Hiram Burroughs," and he went there to inquire his way and spent the night. In the morning they directed him to go round the foot of the hill, and he would see where the track turned to the right and went to the center of the county; but so few teams had been over the track that he did not notice it, and he soon found himself back where he started. This he did once or twice before he discovered the road; having finally found it he went on his way, and also found the land and examined it. But in his wandering around the hill in Walton township, Shipherd was impressed with the beauty of the location, and felt that he had not stumbled onto the spot by

Office of the President
Olivet, Michigan 49076 • (269) 749-7642 • www.olivetcollege.edu

chance, but that God had led him to it and the indications were that the Lord would have him build the college here on this hill. So Shipherd named the hill "Olivet"...

Now, I'm unclear whether it was divine intervention, confusion, or simply getting lost that caused Father Shipherd to wander and select this place, but it's important to recognize that this is part of our common story and helps bind us together as a unique college community.

Today, we're embarking on the development of a vision for the Olivet College of 2020 and beyond. And, while we'll all work together to co-create it, I'm confident that it must contain a number of key components if we're to create the strong and enduring college of our future. These must include:

1. strengthening our values-based mission of *Education for Individual and Social Responsibility* and its integration in our curriculum and campus life;
2. enhancing our ability to be a college of opportunity, whereby students of a wide array of backgrounds, experiences, and abilities come here as engaged and committed learners, and where "opportunity" is inherently defined by successful student outcomes of graduation, graduate school or vocational placement, and the societal contributions of our alumni;
3. ensuring an educational experience that's strong in professional preparation within a contemporary liberal arts foundation that develops critical thinkers who possess a strong ethical compass;
4. strengthening the integration of international and global perspective and understanding so that our graduates are prepared for the global economy and community they find themselves in; and finally,
5. strengthening the vibrancy of campus and community life; where students are empowered and engaged learners; build community; have fun; and importantly, a place where students want to be, live and learn.

It's important that we build our future with grounding in our past and with a respect for the distinctive culture we've developed here over the past 167 years.

One of the key contributors to who we are today is our featured speaker. He's been an Olivet College faculty member for 43 years and has helped to dramatically shape our art program, our college and most importantly the lives of many students over this time.

In my short time of getting to know him, it's the students who have made the difference for him. In his own words, "One thing that keeps professors energized at a place like Olivet is that you have more awareness of your students for all four years," he said. "I have a much greater appreciation of students and what they go through; that's the thing that's kept me here and working. And it's kind of nice to see how they turn out." (And in my observation, they turn out pretty great, by the way.) This is, of course, and I present to you, Professor Don Rowe.