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Louis Albert Weinland

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THE SPIRIT OF OTTERBEIN

LOUIS AUGUSTUS WEINLAND

by

Louis Albert Weinland

A shadowy figure pushes a small, two-wheeled cart across the darkened stage from lamp post to lamp post, singing softly. Most likely the song was the old lamplighter's favorite, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." It might very well have been Uncle Benny Thurston singing, but it was, in fact, "Prof Louie" Weinland, and the time was 1922, not 1872. The scene was the historical pageant, Spirit of Otterbein. The few who knew the two men agreed that the type-casting was perfect. Professor Louis Augustus Weinland and Uncle Benny Thurston had the same simple, straightforward philosophy of life. Both were jolly, friendly people, both deeply religious.

Professor Weinland had a great empathy for the character he portrayed, for he had grown up a typical small-town boy. He played ball, marbles, walked all around town on homemade stilts, and fought bumble bees.

He was born on a Monday, March 7, 1881, the third of four children of Daniel and Ellen Weinland. His father was a cabinet maker employed in a small carriage shop in the little town of West Elkton, Ohio.

The little village was a rural community and had been a stopping place on the underground railway so that a fairly large percentage of the 250 population were recently freed slaves. It was a quiet peaceful village boasting three churches, three doctors, three retail stores, a barber shop, and the carriage and buggy factory. Because there were no saloons, there were few town drunks. One of the doctors was his grandfather, and, although there are no records, he was probably present at Louis' birth. The Augustus in his name came from an uncle, a prosperous insurance agent in Westerville who was later to become his benefactor.

The Weinland family, although not exactly poor, could hardly be considered well-to-do. But all four children attended college.

His grandfather Randall owned a good farm which was at the edge of the little village, and he gave an acre of that farm to the Weinland family. This place was to become their home during the time they lived in West Elkton. The plot contained a large front yard plus a sizable garden which took care of many of the family's food problems.

Little else is known of his early days except that, at a young age, he worked very hard in the fields to earn a little money. In addition, he clerked for a time in a general store owned by his brother-in-law, Charlie Stubbs.

One of his most prized possessions was a complete set of the writings of Washington Irving which he had read while tending sheep. He was an extremely ambitious lad, and it was at this period of his life that he resolved to get a college education and accomplish something that he considered worthwhile. Incidentally, this determination continually to improve himself never deserted him, for he earned his doctorate in chemistry from Ohio State University at the age of forty-nine.

After graduating from the local high school in 1898, he worked two years as a painter in the town's main industry, the little buggy and carriage shop. This experience helped to firm his resolve to get an education so that he would not have to earn his living the rest of his life with his hands. The experience

in the buggy shop helped him later on, however, when he did all of the painting and decorating on his home in Westerville.

He entered Otterbein University in the fall of 1900 and, after a year's absence between his junior and senior years, graduated in 1905, the first bachelor of science in the history of the college.

His first year out of college was spent at Hammond, Indiana, teaching physics and botany in the high school of that city. The two following years were spent as a teacher of physics and chemistry in the high school at Lancaster, Ohio.

Nineteen eight must have been a very trying ^{year} one indeed. In January his son was born and only six weeks later his wife, the former Lydia Mabel Scott, '03, died.

Later in that eventful year of 1908, Professor Weinland returned to Otterbein, his Alma Mater, to initiate and organize a department of chemistry.

In his college days, he had been a favorite student of Professor Louis H. McFadden and when the Board of Trustees, at the Spring meeting in 1908, decided to ". . . consider the wisdom of organizing a department with chemistry as its major and placing a young, well-equipped man in charge beginning on associate salary . . .," he was selected.

Getting this position was most important to him. It had been something of a "cliff-hanger," for an older and more experienced man was favored by the president.

He had agreed to the condition that he would, if hired, pursue graduate studies and spent the summer of 1908 at the University of Chicago. Later he transferred his credits to Ohio State University where he completed a Master of Science Degree in 1910. It was a long hiatus of twenty years but in 1930 Ohio State made him Doctor Weinland.

Several of his old college friends were already on the faculty when he returned to Otterbein. He and Professor Glenn Grant Grabill, B. Mus., '00, a young bachelor, came back at the same time and the two arranged to live together. They did resemble each other somewhat and soon were known around the campus as the "Gold Dust Twins." The similarity remained for a long time. Years later, one local man persisted in stopping Weinland to discuss lodge business, of which he was not a member, thinking him to be Grabill.

The chemistry laboratory in 1908 was on the third floor of Baum Hall. Acids were stored in a little brick building that stood between the president's house, next door, and Baum Hall. Some students of that era may still recall that this evil smelling structure was called Pluto's Realm, a name given to it by "Prof Louie," evidence of his fondness for mythology.

Otterbein, for many years, had to depend upon the loyalty and devotion of many of her alumni to staff the faculty. As late as 1930, over seventy per cent of the faculty had completed their undergraduate work at Otterbein. The class of 1905 let no one forget that, for a number of years, five members of their class were on the faculty.

The two decades between 1910 and 1930 were busy ones. It was in 1910 that he married again, this time to Alice Ada Keister, '04, and brought his young son to Westerville. He bought and completely remod^eled a house on East College Avenue and a few years later built a new one. He did much of the carpentry and all of the painting on both of his houses. A large plot of ground went with both houses and each summer he raised enough produce for canning to last through the winter. A small flock of chickens also helped solve the food problem.

Completely dedicated to his teaching, it is significant of his character and loyalty to Otterbein, that he turned down several very attractive offers to go into industrial chemistry.

Active in many community and church affairs, he still found time to continue his studies at Ohio State.

Happily, he experienced no conflict between his religion and his science. He believed that the experimental method, common in science, could be applied to religion and often counseled: Try it and you will discover that Christianity works. He also advised that adversity should never turn one away from the main goals in life.

Long active in church work, he served over ten years as Sunday School Superintendent, taught a large class of college girls and a group of young boys. He endeared himself to the boys, for he frequently took them to his laboratory and performed chemistry experiments for them and let them bend glass and do other simple experiments. He also took them on many hikes and picnics.

He served as Secretary of the Faculty from 1909 to 1914 and as President of the Alumni Association from 1914 to 1919.

All of these activities left little time for his only hobby, photography, which he practiced enthusiastically around the turn of the century. Unlike his longtime friend, Professor Grabill, he never became interested in golf.

The 1937 Sibyl, in its dedication to him said, " . . . one who gave the most and best of his life to Otterbein. His memory will continue far beyond anything we might write as friend,

adviser, companion and instructor."

He died September 14, 1936, on the day college opened, after 28 years of devoted service to the college he loved.

He, along with many others, helped to create the Spirit of Otterbein.