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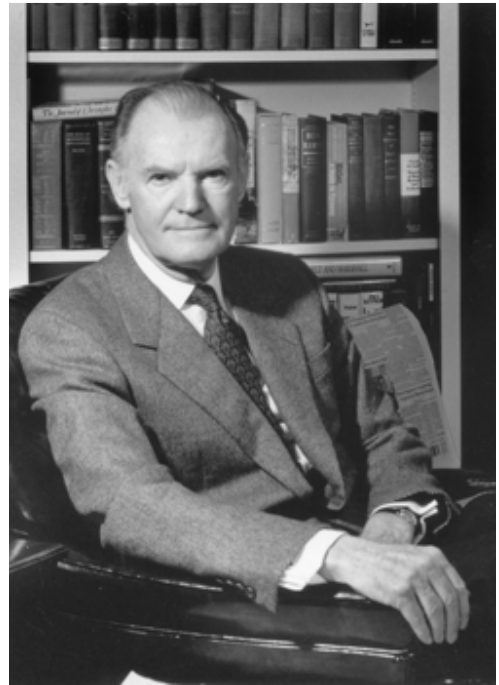
Illinois Wesleyan Remembers President Robert S. Eckley

April 16, 2012

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Illinois Wesleyan President Emeritus Robert S. Eckley died on Sunday, April 15 at 2:10 a.m. in his home after a four year battle with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (commonly known as ALS or Lou Gehrig's disease). He was 90 years old. Eckley served as president of Illinois Wesleyan from 1968 to 1986.

A memorial service will be held in Evelyn Chapel (1301 N. Park St., Bloomington) on Illinois Wesleyan's campus, Thursday, April 19 at 11 a.m. The service will be live streamed and will remain available to [view online](#).

Immediately following the memorial service, the family will be available to visit at the Celebration of Life luncheon in the Young Main Lounge of the Memorial Center (104 E. University St., Bloomington).



Robert S. Eckley

"It is with great sadness that I report the death of IWU's 15th president, Robert S. Eckley. Bob's contributions to Illinois Wesleyan are both broad and deep, but I know his proudest achievements revolved around strengthening the faculty and making profound improvements in the University's financial position," said IWU President Richard F. Wilson. "His 18-year tenure as president was matched only by his continuing loyalty and support to the University. We all shall miss him as a colleague; I shall miss him as a mentor and friend."

President and Mrs. Eckley were most recently honored during a Feb. 14 meeting of the University's Board of Trustees. It was announced at the meeting that the couple would [fund an endowment](#) for the Robert S. Eckley Lecture in Economics and a second endowment fund for the Robert S. and Nell B. Eckley Summer Scholars and Artists Program. Previously, the Eckleys funded the Robert S. Eckley Professorship in Economics and the Eckley Family Foundation Endowed Scholarship Fund.

"This generosity reflects the longstanding commitment by Bob and Nell to promote and preserve the University's academic mission," Wilson said. "They have remained active in the life of the University and one sees their influence and impact all around us."

As the longest-serving president of the University, Eckley presided over a "transformative era for Illinois Wesleyan's history," said Wilson.

"During his presidency, the University's budget and financial affairs were strengthened and stabilized," said Wilson, noting that the endowment also grew dramatically, from \$6.6 million in 1968 to \$47.4 million in 1986. Several outstanding faculty members were also recruited, "moving the University into the top-ranked liberal arts colleges in the Midwest."

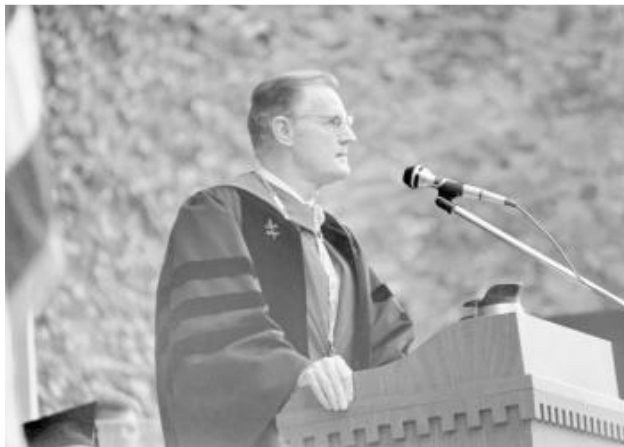
During the Eckley era, the footprint of campus increased by 71 percent, from 34 to 58 acres. Many facilities were renovated and several new buildings were constructed: Mark Evans Observatory, Dodds Residence Hall, the Alice Millar Center for the Fine Arts, Evelyn Chapel, Fort Natatorium and the President's House.

The Eckleys also oversaw the closing of University Street for the creation of the Quadrangle in 1974, as well as extensive tree plantings in the wake of the Dutch elm disease that cleared out most of the University's major trees in the '40s and '50s. These efforts were awarded the City of Bloomington beautification award in 1978. The Quadrangle was named in honor of the Eckleys in 1998.

More than 11,000 students received degrees during his years as president. To improve students' quality of life, Eckley encouraged formation of new student groups, such as the Black Student Association in 1969. The long-cherished dream to launch a campus radio station was also realized in 1972, when WESN-FM went on the air.

During the Eckley years, the University's national profile was raised by several famous visitors to campus, including astronaut Frank Borman, actress Helen Hays, Illinois poet laureate Gwendolyn Brooks and novelist Larry McMurtry.

Eckley was born on Sept. 4, 1921 in Kankakee, Ill., and grew up in Peoria, Ill. After serving in the Coast Guard Reserve as an engineering officer from 1943-46, he attended Bradley University, where he graduated with a bachelor's degree in 1942. He earned an M.B.A. from the University of Minnesota in 1943, and a master's and doctorate in economics from Harvard University in 1948 and 1949, respectively.



As a graduate student at Minnesota, he had the Nobel laureate in economics, George Stigler (1982), as a professor, and while teaching at Kansas, he had another future recipient of the Nobel Prize, Vernon Smith (2002), as a student in American economic history. For his doctoral examination at Harvard, Joseph A. Schumpeter (1883-1950), the famous Austrian-American economist, served as chairman.

Before coming to Illinois Wesleyan, Eckley

served as a teaching fellow at Harvard, 1948-1949, an assistant professor of economics at the University of Kansas, 1949-1951, and he was an industrial economist for the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City, 1951-1954. As manager of the Business Economics Department of Caterpillar Tractor Co. in Peoria from 1954-1968, his work included economic research, pricing, production scheduling and product control. After his retirement from IWU in 1986, he became a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institute, and taught a course in international business at IWU.

Eckley received the Phi Kappa Phi Alumni Award from Bradley University in 1966, the Distinguished Alumni Award from Bradley in 1972, and an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree from IWU in 1988.

Along with his presidential legacy at Illinois Wesleyan, Eckley also had an esteemed reputation as an economist. He authored five books, including *Global Competition in Capital Goods – An American Perspective* (Quorum, 1991) and *Abraham Lincoln's Forgotten Friend, Leonard Swett* (Southern Illinois University, 2012). His articles have appeared in publications such as the *Harvard Business Review*, *The American Economic Review*, *The Brookings Review*, *The Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* and the *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*.

In his retirement, Eckley also gained a reputation as a scholar of President Abraham Lincoln. In 2007, he was honored with the Logan Hay Medal from the Abraham Lincoln Association (ALA), the highest medal the organization conveys. He also served as president of the ALA from 2002 to 2004.

Among his civic activities, Eckley was director of State Farm Insurance Companies for 27 years, as well as a board member of Turbodyne Corporation of Minneapolis, McLean County Bank and Central Illinois Public Service Co. (a predecessor of Ameren). He served as president of the Bradley United Christian Foundation, first vice president of the Illinois Council of Churches, a trustee of the Methodist Medical Center of Illinois and a member of the Peoria Mayor's Commission on Human Relations. He was also an emeritus member of the IWU Board of Trustees.

Eckley was a member of the American Economic Association, the National Association of Business Economists and the American Statistical Association.

Eckley chronicled his days at Illinois Wesleyan in the memoir *Pictures at an Exhibition, Illinois Wesleyan University: 1968-1986*. He concluded the memoir with a note he left to his successors when he departed as president: "She is a good ship with a healthy and happy crew, responsive to the rudder, but with a certain momentum of her own. Steady as she goes. Best wishes and bon voyage."

He is survived by his wife of 65 years, Nell B. (Mann) Eckley, four children and five grandchildren: Paul N. and Penny, IWU Class of '80 (Tessa) of Normal, Ill.; Robert George and Mary Anderson (Will), St. Louis; Jane Lennon and David Gartshore, Oakland, Calif. and Rebecca and Ken Melchert (Adriane, John, and Alex) Neenah, Wis. One older brother, Carson, preceded him in death, at age 10.

Memorials may be directed to Illinois Wesleyan University or Wesley United Methodist Church.

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