



CELEBRATING 125 YEARS

Prelude to an amazing future

Elon's evolution from a small regional college to a nationally recognized university can be seen as a rapid rise to prominence. But those who have a lifetime relationship with Elon know the special qualities that characterize this academic community were present from the outset—established by founders who had a vision for a unique approach to higher education. To kick off Elon's 125th anniversary celebration, President Leo M. Lambert, together with emeriti presidents J. Earl Danieleley '46 and J. Fred Young, reflect on the university's history and the boundless possibilities that lie ahead.



Resilient and bold, Elon moves to the national stage

LEO M. LAMBERT (1999–PRESENT)

One of my greatest pleasures over the past year has been reading chapters of Professor Emeritus George Troxler's richly illustrated book about the history of Elon, titled *From a Grove of Oaks: The Story of Elon University*, which will be released next spring as part of our quasiquintennial celebration. Professor Troxler's volume put a number of ideas in perspective for me.

First, Elon is still a very young institution. While 125 years is indeed a milestone to celebrate, Elon was relatively late to arrive on the scene in American higher education, to say nothing of Oxford's founding more than nine centuries ago. Harvard and The College of William & Mary are both more than three centuries old and the flagship campus of The University of North Carolina was founded in 1795.

Considering that more than 60 percent of our alumni are under the age of 40, and that much of the modern campus has been constructed within the past 20 years, I often think of Elon, paradoxically, as a new university that has been around since 1889. Our relatively recent founding also established a pattern of doing things a bit differently, such as admitting women from the beginning—a novel move at a time when coeducation was rare in North Carolina. Near the end of her life, distinguished alumna and former Raleigh mayor Isabella Cannon '24 asked me never to forget the importance of the opportunities Elon provided for women in the college's early years.

Second, the people who have comprised the institution for the past 125 years have been courageous. Elon of old survived the Great Depression, two World Wars, a calamitous fire, loss of institutional accreditation, dwindling enrollments and missed payrolls. But showing incredible grit and determination, its people hung tight. Considering the details in Professor Troxler's book, I'm sure you will agree it is nothing short of miraculous that the institution survived its early decades, only to be transformed, Phoenix-like, through the trial of fire and adversity. In modern times, the people of Elon have exhibited a different kind of courage—daring to be great and pursue big goals—resulting in a high level of academic excellence and national acclaim.

Above: A panoramic view of the historic campus in 1920.

Below: President Leo M. Lambert poses with students after receiving their oak saplings, a symbol of their growth, during the 2011 Commencement Exercise.





Third, Professor Troxler's book reminds me that despite the many profound changes that have taken place at Elon over the decades, our real institutional character is defined by constants:

- › A deep commitment to the transformation, learning and growth of each student
- › A commitment to the palpable sense of community that defines Elon in a very real sense
- › A spirit of innovation in every aspect of institutional life, but especially in the ways we engage intellectually with our students

- › Our nimbleness as a university, allowing us to be responsive to the continually changing needs of the university community and society more broadly.

As we look forward to the decades ahead, there is much important work yet to be done. Elon will fulfill its vision to be an institution of true national stature reflected in the increasingly national and international makeup of our student body, a national reputation for engaged learning, the scholarly work of our faculty and the bigger national stage upon which Elon athletics will play as it joins the Colonial Athletic Association in fall 2014. Elon will continue to build its distinguished reputation for innovative, liberal arts-based undergraduate education on a residential campus, with distinctions in international education, civic engagement, undergraduate research, internships, writing across the university, residential learning communities and other high-impact learning practices. We will also continue to work diligently to address the issue of college costs, remaining one of the great values in American private higher education and making Elon more accessible to deserving



students who do not have the full financial means to attend. Expanding scholarship aid remains our top fundraising priority.

And especially in our 125th anniversary year, we commit to redouble our efforts to keep alumni connected to the life of the university. The opening of the Martin Alumni Center this fall, the hiring of new alumni engagement staff, renewed emphasis to connect alumni to the Elon Network to mentor and support current students, new alumni awards programs and much more, all signal progress toward our strategic priority of creating one of the most vibrant alumni networks in the nation. Nothing speaks more to the power of an Elon education than the accomplishments of Elon alumni in a wide range of fields, collectively making the world a better place. As you have heard me repeat many times, the world needs Elon graduates.

Please join me in wishing happy birthday to an institution, a place and a people we all love and cherish. Long Live Elon!

One of many Elon traditions, New Student Convocation marks the beginning of students' college careers. At the end of the ceremony, they receive acorns to symbolize their potential.

A solid foundation

PRESIDENT EMERITUS J. EARL DANIELEY '46 (1957–73)

Looking around campus today, I marvel at how much Elon has grown since I first took the reins of the college on July 1, 1957.

At that time, the school was small and relatively unknown and closely related to the Southern Convention of Congregational Christian Churches, but with very little financial support from the churches. Surrounded by old oaks, the campus was beautiful but the physical plant was inadequate, faculty salaries were low and almost every high school graduate who applied could be admitted.

As a proud former Elon student, faculty member and dean, I was determined to change that. Elon was a special place for me and having grown up in a poor family, I knew all too well the value of having a good name and could not be the president of a college of which people did not think highly. But I was also mindful that almost every need the college faced required spending money. Our tuition, room and board were low, and the Board of Trustees was reluctant to raise the fees, fearing an enrollment decrease.

We were always very careful not to spend money we didn't have; our business manager, in fact, didn't believe in having a budget. ("If you give faculty a budget," he used to say, "they'll find a way to spend it.") With limited funds, we relied on federal grants and low-interest loans to expand the campus. By carefully managing our funds, we were able to build Powell Building, Long Student Center, Jordan Gym, Hook, Barney, Brannock and Sloan dormitories, and renovate Duke, Alamance and Carlton buildings, among other projects. We also built McEwen Library (now the communications building) and Holland House, which was the formal residence of Elon's presidents through 1990 and now serves as the Catholic Newman Center on South Campus.

Our alumni base was not wealthy and, quite frankly, I knew nothing about raising money, but if I learned anything, it's to be patient. Case in point: my first gift solicitation from a student who attended Graham College, Elon's forerunner institution, came via his will roughly 100 years to the date he attended. Thankfully for Elon, there was a core group of trustees and community members, including Iris Holt McEwen, who believed in the college and were willing to invest in it.

Any improvements we devised went beyond buildings and were always in line with our values and desire to build a solid institution. While we continued serving low-income, first-generation students, we became more selective in our admission process by requiring SAT scores and gradually improved the quality of the faculty. We planted the seeds for the study abroad program and peacefully integrated the campus, opening the doors for future generations of black students.

In an effort to raise Elon's reputation among its peer institutions, we installed a state-of-the-art language lab



and offered workshops that attracted teachers from across the state, Virginia and South Carolina. Thanks to influential friends of the college, we were able to bring to campus renowned speakers, including then-Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson and then-U.S. House Minority Leader Gerald Ford, who put the college on the map.

I took great pride in positioning Elon at the head of the line in everything I did and in the knowledge that when I left, the college was starting to get some recognition. Although there were no organized long-range planning efforts at the time, I'd like to think we made a difference and set the stage for the growth and development that has taken place over the past 40 years. One of my greatest blessings has been to see Elon achieve its current level of academic prominence.

Oh, yes. We've come a long way.

Top to bottom: President J. Earl Danieley and members of the Elon community move books from Carlton Building to McEwen Library in 1968; students in a 1970 study abroad program in London; inside a renovated lab in Duke Building in the 1960s; the foreign language lab in Mooney Building in 1959.

A time of transition

PRESIDENT EMERITUS J. FRED YOUNG (1973–98)

What is it about Elon that makes it such a special place? I've often asked myself that question, and after serving as president for 25 years, I think I can start to answer it.

At the heart of it all is a deep sense of community that thrives on one key shared value: respect for others, particularly those who hold different beliefs from our own. This has been the driving force behind many of the changes throughout Elon's history.

When I became president in 1973, Elon was financially stable, academically solid and doing a good job attending to the needs of the students who were enrolled, many of them first-generation. The old campus was beautiful.

But major shifts in higher education soon forced us to make changes to remain competitive in a new landscape. For one, the states developed community college systems and solidified regional state universities with acceptable quality and low costs. At the same time, churches that had often funneled students and resources to private colleges shifted from promoting higher education to tending to social welfare issues. To make matters more challenging, demographics changed dramatically and the number of high school graduates decreased almost 25 percent.

We had to make significant changes during my first decade at Elon for the institution to grow and even survive; some private colleges that did not adapt had to close their doors. We realized we had to start marketing at the national level and shift our recruiting to areas of the country where our tuition cost was not out of line.

We transitioned from a student body that came almost exclusively from North Carolina and Virginia to one drawn from the entire Eastern Seaboard. We also expanded the academic offerings and improved the quality, developed a comprehensive campus plan aimed to improve the architectural landscape, and established the Elon Experiences—what I like to call the organized manifestation of our values: an emphasis on academic learning through study abroad, service, internships, leadership and research. As a result, the institution became more diverse, enrollment doubled and SAT scores increased by several hundred points.

When I thought about the future of Elon in the early to mid-1970s, I would have never dreamed of the things that took shape during my presidency. For instance, I never could have envisioned that demolishing 50 buildings and structures to create common green areas would turn the campus into a showcase—Fonville Fountain, a gathering place for students and visitors in the heart of the campus, stands where a parking lot used to be and near the old water tower, or that expanding the campus from 150 to 500 acres would be the foundation for future growth. We also couldn't have imagined the construction of Moseley Center, the Center for the Arts, Koury Center, McMichael Science Center and Belk Library. It would

have certainly been impossible for me to have envisioned the magnificent additional progress that has taken place during the 21st century.

Changes? Yes, there have been changes. Elon is a different institution from the one I encountered—and fell in love with—that day in 1973 when I first arrived on campus with my wife and children. But the changes have been good. I love that Elon is confident but not pretentious, rooted in its desire to serve students and grow by incorporating new ideas. I'm most proud of the progress it has made, both while I was there and since then, particularly when considering that it all happened, and continues to happen, while maintaining that strong sense of community and those long-standing values that have characterized the institution since its founding.

The best still lies ahead. 🍷



For more about Elon's quasiquintennial, including historical information and forthcoming events, visit elon.edu/125.



Above: Views of campus showing the parking lot in front of Alamance Building where Scott Plaza, including Fonville Fountain, was later built. Left: President J. Fred Young talking with students in the 1970s.