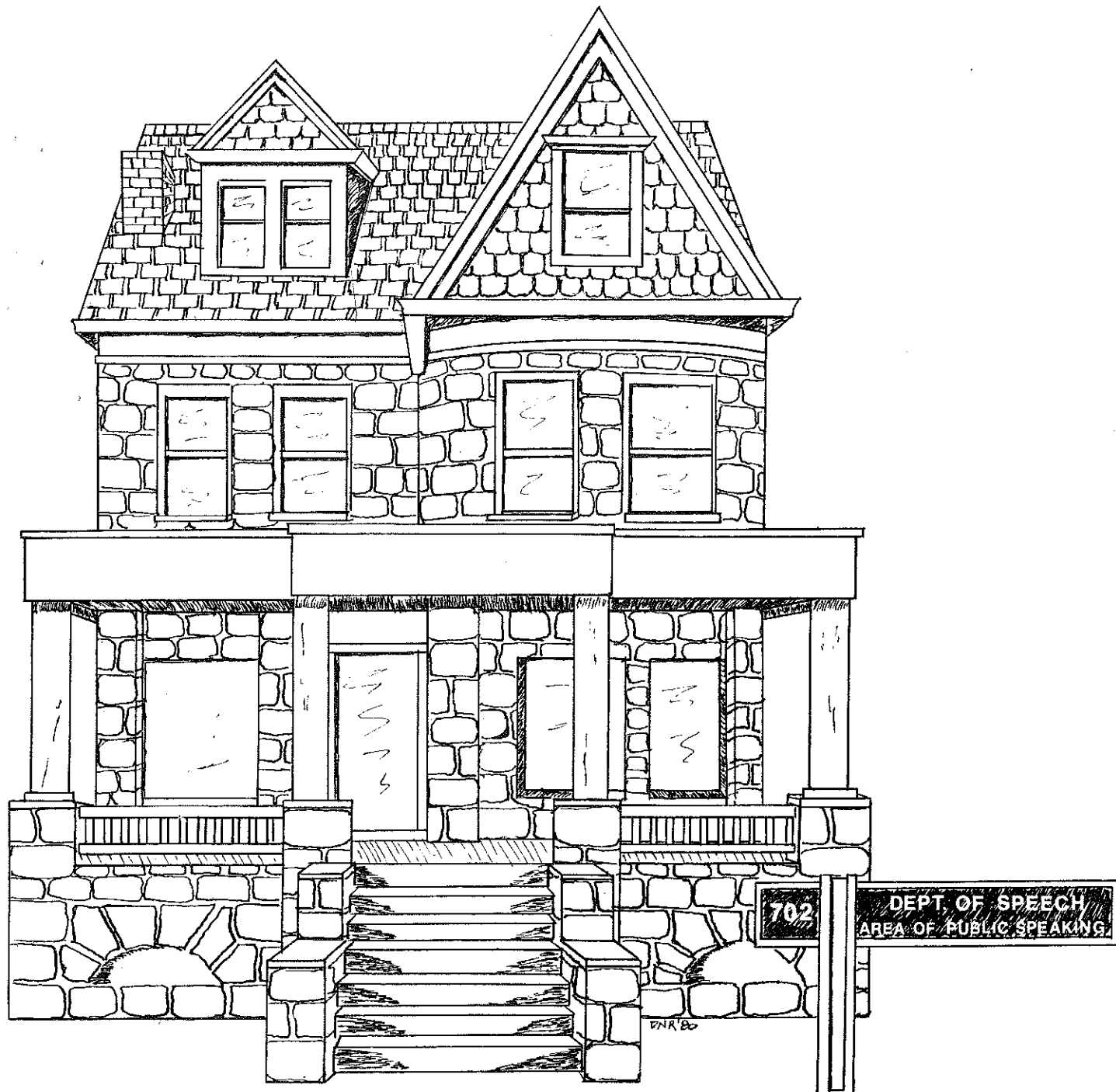


A History of Forensics at Wayne State University, 1956 - 1979

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A HISTORY OF THE FORENSICS PROGRAM AT
WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY: 1956-1979

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

Societies have not the same facilities as individuals for the automatic recall of past experience. They have no organic memory that can store experiences and produce them when required. This is why, from time immemorial, men have had to tell each other and their descendants the narrative which keeps these experiences available for comparison as a preliminary to unusual action. The narrative of past experiences, active and passive, is for societies what memory is for their individual members.¹

History is, first of all, a story--a story of the experiences of people which have occurred and which are worth remembering.² The purpose of this study is to tell the story of Wayne State University's forensics program, including debate and individual events, from September 1956, when Marvin Esch became Director of Forensics, through the end of the 1978-79 season. These twenty-three years saw three Directors of Forensics-- Esch, George W. Ziegelmueller, and James Klumpp--assume the leadership duties of the Wayne program. During these years scores of coaches and hundreds of students interacted for their mutual educational benefit. Finally, these years saw the inevitable changes that occur in extra-curricular programs dependent for their success on leadership, student interest, rewarding competition, and excellence.

¹G. J. Renier, History: Its Purpose and Method, The Academy Library (London: Allen & Unwin, 1950; reprint ed., New York: Harper & Row, Harper Torchbook, 1965), p. 19.

²Ibid., pp. 33-39.

Justification

The question, "Is it important to write the story of the Wayne State forensic program?" really breaks down into four sub-questions.

Is it Important Ever to Write a History
of the Program?

The fact that such histories have been frequently written about other programs around the country (Kruger indexes sixteen theses or dissertations from 1946-69;³ the SCA Bibliographic Annual lists three more from 1970-75⁴) is small justification in light of Polk's indictment of them:

Fortunately for the forensic community, most of the chronologies are M.A. theses which are hidden away in the caverns of university libraries. . . . a careful review of twelve such studies offered convincing evidence that the effort involved in a complete review would probably not be worthwhile.⁵

Despite this cryptic condemnation, and with due regard for Polk's recommendations for improving forensic histories, the following reasons justify a history of the Wayne program at some time:

1. Assuming the report which one prepares does more than ". . . focus on the gathering and cataloging of data at the expense of using that data as the basis for analysis and interpretation,"⁶ a

³ Arthur N. Kruger, Argumentation and Debate: A Classified Bibliography, 2d ed. (Metuchen, N. J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1975), pp. 46-48.

⁴ Ned A. Shearer and Patrick C. Kennicott, eds., Bibliographic Annual in Speech Communication, 6 vols. (Falls Church, Virginia: Speech Communication Association, 1970-75).

⁵ Lee R. Polk, "Historical Research in Forensics: Its Status and Guidelines for the Future," Journal of the American Forensic Association 7 (Winter 1970): 37.

⁶ Ibid.

knowledge of the forensic program's past can contribute to its continued success and improvement in the future. As Polk observes,

Increased knowledge of the history of forensic practices, however, is often seen as having no practical value for one whose primary interest is operating and maintaining our largely stylized activities. . . . historical research in debate can answer questions about how the concept of effective argument, as it is reflected in academic debate practice, has changed over the years. Historical research may increase our understanding of those factors which have made participation in forensics relevant to students of bygone days. Whether historical research in forensics seeks to discover changing concepts of effective practice or changing factors of social relevance, such research is capable of providing the perspective necessary to understand and evaluate the present forensic establishment.⁷

2. As a major component of the activities of the Department of Speech Communication, Theatre and Journalism, a history of the forensic program constitutes a significant contribution to the history of the entire Department. As will be seen, significant numbers of students were participants in debate and individual events. Moreover, considerable expenditures were made by the Department for staff and to support travel for forensic participants. Finally, the national exposure which the Department received due to the activities of the forensic program makes that program an essential part of the Department's reputation.

3. In addition to being an essential part of the history of the Speech Department, the forensic program forms a vital part of the history of the University. Many forensic students were not only active in University affairs but they also contributed their skills to the discussion of major issues which faced the University community. Moreover, while athletics brings recognition to many large universities, it was the forensic program that contributed significantly to the

⁷ Ibid., p. 38.

University's reputation across the country.

4. By virtue of the competitive success of its students and the contributions of its staff to the literature, conferences, and leadership of the speech and forensics profession, the history of Wayne's forensic program should definitely be available to those who might seek to write the broader history of intercollegiate forensics in America. That such a project is feasible and desirable was suggested by Dovre over ten years ago:

The day may soon come when there will be a sufficient number of institutional and regional studies of forensics to justify a broader history of forensics than any of the individual studies have been able to offer. The American Forensic Association might eventually consider sponsorship of a collection of debate studies.⁸

Assuming it is important to write a history of the program at some time, a second question seems relevant.

Is it Important to Write About the Period from 1956-79?

Every would-be historian faces the question, "Where do I begin?" The answer is determined in part by the events themselves (one would not begin a history of World War II with the second week of the Normandy invasion). In light of the fact that the strength of the forensic program has been largely a function of its professional director, rather than, say, the student Forensic Union or the University President, it seems reasonable to pick up the story at the beginning of a director's appointment.

Choosing the arrival of Director Marvin Esch in 1956 as the point of departure for this study rather than Rupert Cortright or James

⁸Paul J. Dovre, "Historical-Critical Research in Debate," Journal of the American Forensic Association 2 (May 1965): 77.

McMonagle who preceded him or George Ziegelmueller who succeeded him has been done for two reasons:

1. James Irwin has already written the history of speech activities at Wayne from 1918-56, a period which includes the whole of Cortright's tenure as Director of Forensics from 1938-47 and McMonagle's from 1947-54.⁹

2. George Ziegelmueller arrived at Wayne State in 1957, and considering his great influence on the program that event might seem to be a reasonable place to begin. Despite the obvious fact that such a beginning would leave a void for 1956-57, more importantly an understanding of the "Ziegelmueller years" requires an understanding of the program that he inherited.

Knowing that a history of the forensic program should be written, and that the period from 1956-79 is a reasonable one to write about, a third question of justification should be addressed.

Should Such a History be Written from the
Relatively Close Vantage
Point of 1980?

There may be those who, like some historians, feel that, ". . . the title of history should be denied to the account of anything that happened within the last 20 or 30 years . . ."¹⁰ The objection is based on a feeling that objectivity is impossible from such close range, and that no significant sweep of history can be ascertained. Nevertheless, we see considerable work done in contemporary history, and

⁹James Robert Irwin, "Student Public Address Activities at Wayne University, 1918-1956" (Master's Thesis, Wayne State University, 1968).

¹⁰G. Kitson Clark, The Critical Historian (London: Heinemann, 1967), p. 2.

Clark gives us one reason for discounting the apparant lack of objectivity from close range:

Those who believe this [lack of objectivity in writing contemporary history] exaggerate the ease with which objective judgements can be made about any period of history. A glance at the problems of any century since 1500, and probably before that, should undeceive them. Many of the passions and prejudices which darken the mind today did not begin yesterday; they strike ever events they touch. There are some conflicts which since they began have never been cold. There is for instance the conflict between the Churches which started at the Reformation. There are clashes between continuously opposed nationalities. There is the struggle between proletarian and bourgeois. . . . distortions produced by bias are potentially present in any attempt to write history.¹¹

While it cannot be denied that a future historian may look back on the period of this study and draw different conclusions about it, it is precisely for that reason that the story should be told now. Many of the people involved in the story are still alive. Their interviews form a necessary part of the record of the past twenty-three years, especially since detailed records in written form are not always available. What contemporary history lacks in depicting the broad sweep of events it makes up for in its detail and its communication to future scholars about what was viewed as important near the time the events took place.

A final question, similar to the last in that it addresses the issue of objectivity, should be raised.

Should a History of the Forensic Program
be Written by one who
Participated in it?

Modern historians not only accept the validity of histories written from close range, they also discount the feasibility or desirability of ever writing "objective history." Of course, one must be

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 2-3.

accurate and ethical in the selection and reporting of facts, but as Carr points out,

To praise a historian for his accuracy is like praising an architect for using well-seasoned timber or properly mixed concrete in his building. It is a necessary condition of his work, but not his essential function.¹²

The job of those who would write history, perhaps especially contemporary history, and perhaps even more so contemporary history in which they themselves have figured, is not to deny their point of view, but to avoid ignoring facts because they do not support a pet dogma--in short, to be thorough and ethical in their research and selection of events. However, readers should be aware of the point of view of the historian they read; ". . . when we take up a work of history, our first concern should be not with the facts which it contains, but with the historian who wrote it."¹³

So that there will be no ambiguity on the matter, the reader should know that the author of this study was an active participant in the forensic program at Wayne State from 1964-68, primarily in debate, but also in oratory and extemporaneous speaking. He held offices in the Forensic Union and Delta Sigma Rho-Tau Kappa Alpha. His social and academic life centered around the forensic program.

Given this experience, what fairness--what truth--can the reader expect from the following history? First, it should be remembered that the author's direct participation in the program accounts for about 17 percent of the time covered in this study. Second, he is guided by the same standards that guided Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. when he wrote his

¹² Edward Hallett Carr, What is History? The George Macaulay Trevelyan Lectures Delivered in the University of Cambridge January-March 1961 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), p. 8.

¹³ Ibid., p. 24.

Pulitzer Prize-winning history of the Kennedy administration, of which he had been a vital part: "This work is based on papers as well as on interviews and recollections. Every statement, I believe, has its warrant."¹⁴ Third, to the extent that this author reflects a contemporary perspective, such a perspective may prove informative to those who discover this paper in the "caverns" of the University library fifty years from now. At best this account benefits from a combination of familiarity and scholarship resulting in a thorough picture of forensics at Wayne State during the years studied; at worst it is a researched but personal account that may contribute to the understanding of the program by those who never knew it. Either way, it is justified that this study be done, that it be done at this time, and that it be done by this writer.

Limitations

In addition to being limited to the period from 1956-79, this study is further limited to an examination of those activities commonly considered to belong to the realm of intercollegiate forensics: debate, discussion, public speaking, and oral interpretation as a contest event. Moreover, any history is limited by the data which the writer has available or can find, and while every reasonable effort has been made to uncover available material, the study is limited by whatever data was not available or not discovered. This limitation should not negate the general conclusions to be drawn from the study. However, there may be those who won a certain contest, participated in a given event, or held a particular office who are not recognized in this study for their

¹⁴ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House (n.p.: Houghton Mifflin, 1965; reprint ed., Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publications, A Fawcett Crest Book, 1967), p. x.

achievement. These omissions, while unavoidable, are a limitation of the study.

Methodology

The method used in this study is, as nearly as possible, that suggested by Polk:

. it seems justifiable to state that historical research in forensics includes the systematic gathering of data about past school forensic contests and programs as well as the description, explanation and interpretation of that data in some logical and coherent manner.¹⁵

Specifically, the following constitutes the major sources used in the "systematic gathering of data:"

1. Existing studies of Wayne State, including the forensic program. James Irwin's Master's Thesis, "Student Public Address Activities at Wayne University 1918-1956" proved invaluable, not only by providing necessary background, but also as a trace to further research. Moreover, Leslie Hanawalt's book, A Place of Light: The History of Wayne State University,¹⁶ was extremely helpful in supplying a broad picture of the University.

2. Under the supervision of the Chairman of the Department of Speech Communication, Theatre and Journalism, the author examined selected personnel files of faculty members and graduate assistants who were employed by the Department during the period covered by this study.

3. Scrapbooks and other materials collected by students of the forensic program were examined. Ever since 1959 a student historian has been given charge of keeping records of forensic activities in annual

¹⁵ Polk, p. 36.

¹⁶ Leslie Hanawalt, A Place of Light: The History of Wayne State University (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1968).

scrapbooks. As might be expected, some years are better represented than others, but in general the scrapbooks have proven to be an essential source of information on the program.

4. Interviews were held with current and former staff members and students. As indicated above, these interviews helped fill in gaps, confirm or correct impressions left by written material, and offered insights that would have been impossible to obtain otherwise. All of those interviewed were candid and gave willingly of their time. It should also be noted that several of the interviewees were pleased with an opportunity to reminisce about their experiences in the Wayne program.

5. Historical studies of other forensic programs were read. While it did not seem useful to read many of these given Polk's observations cited above, one widely-recognized classic in the field was carefully studied. David Potter studied the debate programs and literary societies in the Colonial Chartered Colleges from 1642 to 1900, and this work provided considerable insight into the requirements for a useful historical study.¹⁷ In addition, Jack Kay studied the literary and debating societies at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale¹⁸ which provided a good example of an institutional study done for a Master's Thesis.

6. Relevant professional literature was consulted. In order to place the Wayne program in some perspective and help guide a final

¹⁷ David Potter, Debating in the Colonial Chartered Colleges: An Historical Survey, 1642 to 1900 (New York: Teachers College Columbia University, 1944).

¹⁸ Jack Kay, "Literary and Debating Societies of Southern Illinois University at Carbondale: 1874-1940 (Master's Thesis, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, 1975).

evaluation of it, professional journals and other publications were consulted. Publications of Delta Sigma Rho-Tau Kappa Alpha were very helpful since they occasionally included information about Wayne State. The works which were used will be cited, as appropriate, throughout the study.

7. The files of Dr. George Bohman were an invaluable resource. Some of his files have been placed in the University archives, while others remain in the Department. Without them, several significant events could not have been properly reported.

8. There were many newspaper accounts which reported events involving the forensic program but particular mention should be made here of the University publications, the Collegian, later the Daily Collegian, and finally the South End. In addition, the Forensic Union published a mimeographed newsletter, although not on a regular basis, which gave accounts of activities that would have otherwise been lost forever. It was sometimes called the "Forensic Newsletter," and at other times the "Forensic Union Newsletter," and the citations will reflect this minor inconsistency.

As Polk suggests, one must not only gather data, one must explain and interpret that data in some logical way. It is a misconception that a writer of history first collects all the available data, organizes it, and begins sorting, selecting, and writing. The ". . . description, explanation and interpretation of that data" is like alternating rather than direct electrical current. Some data is gathered, evaluated for validity and reliability (internal and external criticism), and a piece of the story begins to emerge. When it does, questions arise as to causes, links are found missing, contradictions surface, and the search

for more data takes place. With this new data, the story changes and must be rewritten. This back-and-forth movement from research to writing back to research is the method which has been employed in this study. As the historian Carr describes his own method he describes the method used here:

For myself, as soon as I have got going on a few of what I take to be the capital sources, the itch becomes too strong and I begin to write--not necessarily at the beginning, but somewhere, anywhere. Thereafter, reading and writing go on simultaneously. The writing is added to, subtracted from, re-shaped, cancelled, as I go on reading. The reading is guided and directed and made fruitful by the writing: the more I write, the more I know what I am looking for, the better I understand the significance and relevance of what I find.¹⁹

As to which of the "facts" discovered during research are finally included in this document, that is determined, as it is with every writer of history, by ". . . the degree to which it fits in with other narratives based upon other traces, but more still by the integrity which, as intellectual workers, we bring to our task."²⁰

Organization

The organization of this study departs somewhat from that used by Irwin when he studied the history of public speaking at Wayne from 1918-56. Irwin divided his study into three chronological periods, and within some of the periods, divided further into debate and oratory, extemp, and discussion. While useful in allowing the reader to locate the contests and events of any particular period the strict chronological approach becomes repetitive as one moves from year to year, contest to contest. This study is organized topically, so that

¹⁹Carr, p. 33.

²⁰Renier, p. 162.

the reader can study the major parts of the forensic program as well as get a sense of the changes that occurred over time. Specifically, the organizational pattern is as follows:

Chapter II discusses the coaches and staff of the forensic program. Since forensics is an educational activity directed and coached by faculty and graduate assistants, it is appropriate that one understand them as a prelude to reading about the activities themselves. This chapter includes biographical information on each Director and key members of his staff, the philosophy of coaching espoused by the Director and the extent to which it was practiced by him and his staff, the contributions of the faculty and graduate assistants, and finally the circumstances surrounding their resignation from the University where appropriate.

Chapter III is about debating. Included in this chapter is a discussion of the recruiting methods used to obtain students, the orientation of new debaters and the coaching of all debaters, the special events debates in which students participated, tournament competition and national championship competition.

Chapter IV discusses individual events competition. In addition to discussing similar discrete topics like recruiting, coaching, and competition, this chapter traces the dramatic changes which occurred in individual events beginning in the 1970s.

Chapter V deals with the non-competitive activities of the forensic program at Wayne State between 1956 and 1979. Although forensic programs are often judged on the basis of their competitive successes, an essential part of the Wayne program was the social life that surrounded participation in debate and individual events competition. Moreover, Wayne State played host to other colleges and universities by conducting

tournaments in debate and individual events, as well as providing the facilities for several state and national events as a result of the unique style and efficiency of its operation. Finally, Wayne State had a commitment to improving high school debate and forensics, and that commitment is discussed in this chapter.

Chapter VI draws conclusions based on the events portrayed in the earlier chapters. If, as Polk suggests, the real value of historical studies of institutional forensic programs is to aid in our understanding of what contributes to successful forensic experiences, then analytical and evaluative conclusions are a necessity.

In addition to the chapters outlined above, the study also includes eighteen appendices, which provide a quick reference source on staff, student leaders, results of competition in debate and individual events, and other material not suitable for inclusion in the text but valuable in preserving the story of the forensic program.²¹

In summary, the study which follows tells the story of forensic activities at Wayne State University from 1956 through the 1978-79 season. It tries to capture not only the competitive successes and failures in debate and individual events, but it also tries to preserve the human experiences of those who participated in the program. If it succeeds in doing both, then it will have succeeded in accomplishing the objective of any history:

To enable man to understand the society of the past and to increase his mastery over the society of the present is the dual function of history.²²

²¹An Alumni Index has been added since the original study was done.

²²Carr, p. 69.