

"A Man Unsatisfied By Little Things:" The Life and Times of Graves County Native Adron Doran

By Christopher Beckham

INTRODUCTION

Graves County, Kentucky has produced a few famous folks over the years—and the 20th century has yielded a good number. For instance, among its natives are United States Vice-President Alben W. Barkley, and acclaimed novelist Bobbie Ann Mason, just to name two. In the mix of notable natives there are also at least two college presidents. One is less well known; one is widely known.

Few today may have heard of Graves County native Dr. Harry L. Watters. Watters was a graduate of Union University and went on to become the president of Georgetown College from 1931-1934.¹ With the passage of time, Dr. Watters' reputation has faded. He unfortunately died relatively young, and his tenure and impact at Georgetown College was not that distinct. Any Depression-era college president undoubtedly faced many challenges, and perhaps someone will tell us more about Dr. Watters one day.

¹ http://www.georgetowncollege.edu/wp-content/themes/library-arras/archives/finding_aids/findingaid_henry_eugene_watters.pdf?9d7bd4

However, Adron Doran is more widely known.² Doran (1909-2001) was a Boydsville native, graduate of Cuba High School, and served as principal for two Graves County schools. It was as the long time president of Morehead State University, though, that he gained his greatest notoriety. As anyone familiar with the history of that institution can tell you, Doran left an indelible mark there. If reckoned simply in terms of the expansion of the student body and physical growth of the campus, Doran's success at Morehead has been unparalleled. During his 23 year tenure, enrollment at Morehead State mushroomed from the hundreds to over six thousand, and scores of new buildings were constructed. While no one person should or could claim sole credit for these accomplishments (for the era during which he served was a growth period for higher education nation-wide) Doran's personal role was considerable.

Doran's route to the college presidency was somewhat atypical. While he had *bona fide* academic credentials (a doctorate in education from the University of Kentucky) and years of experience as a secondary education teacher and principal, his entry into a college presidency was primarily achieved through a political route. He had never been so much as a department chair or university dean before becoming the top administrator at a state college.

² Note: while many people mistakenly call him "Adrian" Doran, this is incorrect as his name was not pronounced that way. His first name was apparently an anagram of his last name.

This notwithstanding, in retrospect, it seems fair to say that Doran was one of the most politically astute college presidents who served the Commonwealth in the 20th century. This essay traces his early beginnings in Graves County and provides an overview of his career as a teacher, politician and then president of Morehead State University. This essay will hopefully serve as the first foray in a larger project telling the story of this interesting and charismatic teacher-preacher-politician-administrator.

HIS EARLY YEARS

Doran was born in 1909 near Boydsville in rural, southern Graves County; a small, unincorporated community near the Tennessee state line. His parents, Edward and Elizabeth, were farmers, and Adron was the sixth son born in the family.³ Doran characterized his family's farm soil as poor, and thus it never provided the family much prosperity beyond mere subsistence.⁴ Doran's parents encouraged their children to go to school in part because they realized their farm could not offer much of a future. However, "going to school" was not as easy as it sounded, nor did it guarantee a vast return on whatever investment of time was given it. Rural schools in Kentucky were rather hard places in the

³ Kentucky Educational Television's *Distinguished Kentuckian Program*, "Adron Doran." First aired September 29, 2008, recorded 1991. Retrieved from <https://www.ket.org/episode/KDIST%20000128/>.

⁴ KET, *Distinguished Kentuckian Program*. Historian Dr. John Kleber interviewed Doran for this program.

early 20th century.⁵ Kentucky had by and large neglected to make education for its citizens the priority it should have been for a long time; and it showed. Rural schools suffered especially from chronic lack of funding. In many places in Kentucky, rural schools were conducted in ramshackle buildings, and sometimes led by poorly trained (even if highly dedicated) teachers.⁶ By 1920, Kentucky's per capita spending on students had fallen to one-third the national average.⁷ Despite the weak condition of Kentucky's rural schools, Adron Doran managed to get enough years of schooling in of a certain quality to pass an exam for his 8th grade certificate, and he then enrolled in high school in the little community of Cuba.⁸

RELIGIOUS INFLUENCES

At Cuba High School, Doran found one of his life's enduring influences through the leadership of his school principal, Alzono Williams. Later in life, Doran recounted that Williams provided several nudges for him to become active in the Church of

⁵ See Barksdale Hamlett, "History of Education in Kentucky," *Bulletin of the Kentucky Department of Education*, Volume 7, No. 4, July 1914. This bulletin contains an overview of the history of education in the Commonwealth through the administration of Barksdale Hamlett, the Superintendent of Public Instruction in 1914.

⁶ Lowell H. Harrison and James C. Klotter, *A New History of Kentucky* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 377-379.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 384.

⁸ Jack Vincent, "Student Writes Term Paper About Doran," *Rowan County News*, July 1, 1954.

Christ, as well as encouraging him to excel as a student.⁹ Williams personally saw to it that Doran became known as a quartet singer throughout the area, and this singing talent earned Doran income that helped pay his way through college.¹⁰ This association with the Churches of Christ became a life-long connection, growing from his early days as a gospel quartet singer to becoming a well-known evangelist. After his retirement from Morehead State University, Doran became a lecturer on Church of Christ history.¹¹ Doran's church work was a significant part of his adult life and was never swallowed up by his political and academic career.

The particular brand of Christianity that Doran practiced was in the "non-instrumental" Church of Christ tradition. The Church of Christ does not generally allow "mechanical instrumentation" (such as a piano or organ) in its church services, finding no evidence that "mechanical instrumentation" was used in the New Testament of the Bible.¹² Hymn singing in this tradition is a *capella*, so when Doran sang in church, it was unaccompanied. Outside of church settings, no objection to "mechanical instrumentation" is made.¹³ This denomination is quite strong in the Jackson Purchase region of

⁹ *Parnassus*, Vol. 1: No. 2, Winter 1976-77, 6.

¹⁰ KET, *Distinguished Kentuckian Program*.

¹¹ John E. Kleber, editor, *The Kentucky Encyclopedia* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1992), 270. Doran wrote *The Kentucky Encyclopedia* entry on the Church of Christ. See pages 189-190.

¹² *Ibid.*, 190.

¹³ Doran's wife, Mignon, for example, was a widely-known organist.

Kentucky as well as in Western Tennessee, where its churches dot the countryside. The non-instrumental Church of Christ, along with the other Christian churches in the "Stone-Campbell tradition," traces its history back to the Cane Ridge Revivals in Kentucky in 1801.¹⁴ In that era, former Baptist Alexander Campbell and former Presbyterian Barton Stone served as co-founders and organizers of this distinctive American religious movement in early 19th century Kentucky and beyond.

While Doran was well-known to be a devout Church of Christ churchman, in his own estimation he did not wear his religion on his sleeve or engage in proselytizing in his work as an educator. He took pains to uphold what he saw to be his religious duties as well as his work as a public school educator—and not let one unduly affect the other. He made a determination as a fairly young man that he would not pursue ministry on a full-time basis, but he was active in ministry throughout his entire career as a teacher, administrator, and politician.¹⁵ To illustrate how he tried to balance his work in both fields, Doran avoided accepting preaching engagements in the towns where he served as principal.¹⁶

Those who observed him seemed to share his assessment that he managed to be religious without

¹⁴ See John B. Boles, *The Great Revival: Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky), 154-155 and Edwin Gaustad and Leigh Schmidt, *The Religious History of America: The Heart of The American Story From Colonial Times to Today* (San Francisco: Harper, 2001), 293-294.

¹⁵ KET, *Distinguished Kentuckian Program*.

¹⁶ KET, *Distinguished Kentuckian Program*.

crossing church-state boundaries in his public work. Journalist Joe Creason described him as a "deeply-but certainly not narrow-minded-religious man," who in his work as MSU's president "established a high moral attitude on campus without in any manner dampening student enthusiasm of activities." While some students in the later 60's and '70's might have disputed this assessment, in 1960, when Creason wrote this, Doran was still in his heyday. As he put it, "the Dorans shake a leg with the best of them at dances and cheer as loudly as the rest at athletic contests."¹⁷ In his own words, Doran said that "I've never been a fanatic or a radical and nobody has ever accused me of being one."¹⁸

HIGHER EDUCATION

After graduating from Cuba High School, Doran enrolled at Freed-Hardeman Junior College in Henderson, Tennessee. Freed-Hardeman was a Church of Christ institution. His enrollment there provided Doran with what he called his "first glimpse of a college."¹⁹ In those days, Freed-Hardeman had become a small college that had gone through a series of academic upgrades. Starting as a high school level institution at its founding in 1885, it morphed into a teachers' college and business school by the time Doran arrived. N.B. Hardeman, a Church of Christ minister, educator, and one half of the college's namesake, had been in leadership

¹⁷ Joe Creason, "Assistant to the President: Mrs. Doran", *Courier Journal Magazine*, Sunday, March 13, 1960, 51.

¹⁸ *Parnassus*, 60.

¹⁹ KET, *Distinguished Kentuckian Program*.

there for some time. Hardeman served variously as vice-president and associate president before becoming the chief executive in 1925, serving until 1950.²⁰ For Adron Doran, N.B. Hardeman's influence was monumental.²¹

Doran once said that N.B. Hardeman became "something of an idol" to him.²² Describing Hardeman as a distinguished gentleman with an impressive bearing, Doran also remembered that he had remarkable skill as an orator. Doran recalled that Hardeman was "...a rugged individual...immaculate and articulate. You could not sit in his presence without catching some of this magnetism..."²³ After he spent two years studying under Hardeman, he remembered that he could not help wondering what it would be like to end up just like him—in a position of leadership and significance. This youthful musing and ambition was more than dreamy speculation, though, as this thought really did seem to guide his career. After graduating from Freed-Hardeman with his associate's degree, Doran became a teacher, perhaps a testimony to the influence of Williams and Hardeman. Just how far Doran patterned himself after Hardeman is fairly obvious—later in life, Doran even took up riding and showing Tennessee walking horses, something his mentor did also.

²⁰ <http://www.fhu.edu/about/history>

²¹ Donald Flatt, *A Light To the Mountains: Morehead State University, 1887-1997* (Ashland: Jesse Stuart Foundation, 1997), 167.

²² KET, *Distinguished Kentuckian Program*.

²³ *Parnassus*, 59.

THE SCHOOL TEACHER AND PRINCIPAL

After starting teaching and working on his bachelor's degree at Murray State, Doran married Mignon McClain in 1931. Mignon was from Sedalia, a village not far from Cuba, KY. Adron recounted that their families knew each other for many years as his parents had their corn ground at the McClain store in Sedalia.²⁴ When their paths crossed at a district basketball tournament, Doran decided to try to date Mignon. The story of their courtship appears in a number of newspaper and audio interviews, and the narrative is always the same.

Apparently, for Adron anyway, it was a case of love at first sight, because he became interested in "courting" Mignon McClain as soon as he saw her at the tournament. However, it was not as simple a matter as him asking her out for a date, because she was already seeing another fellow and had been exclusively dating him for some time. Undaunted, Adron developed a plan to win her attention. He decided he would dedicate a song to her when he next sang on his gospel music program on a radio station in Union City, Tennessee, and when the deed was done, word travelled fast. After this public expression of interest on his part, it wasn't long before Mignon was no longer seeing her boyfriend and instead began to date Adron, which of course turned out favorably for them both.²⁵ Adron and Mignon were truly a team; evident from even a cursory review of the archival material, newspaper clippings, and audio recordings of the

²⁴ KET, *Distinguished Kentuckian Program*.

²⁵ *Parnassus*, 7.

two of them together. They were a devoted couple and the love and mutual affection they shared sustained them through many career moves.

Doran graduated from Murray State College in 1932 with his bachelor's degree, returning not long afterwards to complete his Master's degree in education. Murray State was one of the handful of state normal colleges that had been created a few years prior to Doran's enrollment to bolster teacher education in the Commonwealth. While at Murray State, he developed a friendship with another Western Kentuckian, Harry Lee Waterfield. This friendship would prove to be immensely important for Doran's career in the years to come, as Waterfield became active in state politics.

By the mid-1930s, Doran was clearly a man with ambition. With degrees in hand, he soon advanced from school teaching to school administration. The move suited him well, as he himself explained:

I decided long ago that I wanted to be better than I was. And to be better than I was, I would have to have a better education. As I learned that there were advanced steps in education, I decided that I wanted to take them. When I got into a serious college, teaching began to appeal to me...then when I got into teaching, a principalship appealed to me.²⁶

His first principal's job was at tiny Boaz, KY, in northern Graves County. In those days, Boaz was

²⁶ Parnassus, p. 60.

located along the railroad, but then as now, it is a fairly out of the way place. In times past, there had been a store, a coffin factory, and a U.S. Post Office, but Boaz was little more than a small village.²⁷ In 1932, when much of the Commonwealth of Kentucky was still rural in character, Boaz was considered "remote."²⁸ Doran did not receive much pay for his labor, \$64 per month (\$1,067 in 2016 dollars), and Mignon taught music and speech in the school for no pay at all.²⁹ After three years, he left Boaz to become the principal at Sylvan Shade High School, another small school, near Hickman, Kentucky. After a few years, Doran returned to Graves County, arriving at Wingo to serve as principal of the high school there. Wingo High was larger than either Boaz or Sylvan Shade, and closer to Mayfield, Graves County's county-seat.

He served at Wingo High from 1938-1948, and it was while there that his career took new and larger dimensions. Doran had become interested in politics, although research to this point has not yet revealed what fed this interest. His friend, Harry L. Waterfield, had become politically active, having first been elected to the Kentucky House of Representatives in 1937. Perhaps this contributed to Doran's interests.

²⁷ The author's great-grandfather was the postmaster at Boaz in the 1900s.

²⁸ Jack Vincent, "Student Writes Term Paper About Doran," *The Rowan County News*, July 1, 1954.

²⁹ Vincent, "Student Writes Term Paper." For the conversion from 1932 dollars to 2016 dollars, see http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm.

THE POLITICIAN

Doran followed Waterfield into the Kentucky House of Representatives in 1943. He was re-elected without opposition in 1945. Given his professional background, Doran's interests chiefly fell to education legislation while serving as a legislator. As Everett Donaldson wrote in the *Kentucky Encyclopedia*, "During [his terms] he both wrote and supported legislation that had a significant impact upon teacher education and funding for education."³⁰ Doran's own elaboration is as follows:

The first bill I introduced in 1944 was HB 5, which appropriated 3.5 million, retroactively, for teacher salaries. They hadn't been paid much in '43 and '44. This began the steps that led me to be the chairman of the committee on education. That's where the power structure was and I wanted to be in the center of the power structure.³¹

In 1947, Doran did not run for office. Instead, he chose to become the president of the Kentucky Education Association, a long-standing educational advocacy body in existence in Kentucky since 1857. Serving as the leader of the KEA gave him state-wide exposure and opportunities to network with important educators.

It is possible that he was eyeing larger goals than serving in the General Assembly or with the KEA in '47, as he served as the assistant campaign

³⁰ *The Kentucky Encyclopedia*, 270.

³¹ *Parnassus*, 60.

manager for his friend Harry Waterfield. Waterfield was one of the Democratic candidates for governor in a contested primary. When Waterfield lost in the primary, Doran began working with the winner, Earle C. Clements, as Clements campaigned for the office. As historian Donald Flatt remarked, "Doran's ability to adjust quickly to political reality proved to be an enormous asset throughout most of his career."³² Further evidence of this might be seen in the fact that there were buildings named for not only Democratic leaders in Kentucky, but also Republicans. The Doran administration was able to reach out to politicians from both sides of the aisle.

Doran later reflected that his friendship with Waterfield contributed to his moving in important circles in the state legislature and elsewhere in Frankfort.³³ Clements went on to win the general election and became Governor of the Commonwealth, beginning a twenty year run of Democratic control of the Governor's mansion and the statehouse. Moreover, the Clements' win marked the beginnings of a long period of West Kentucky's dominance in state politics.³⁴ Even national politics felt the influence of West Kentucky as Alben W. Barkley was elected Vice President in 1948.

With the campaign work behind him, he enrolled as an education doctoral student (Ed.D.) at the University of Kentucky, and began a term as the

³² Flatt, *A Light To the Mountains: Morehead State University, 1887-1997*, 168.

³³ *Parnassus*, 6.

³⁴ Harrison and Klotter, *A New History of Kentucky*, 400-401.

minister of the Nicholasville Church of Christ in 1948.³⁵ Doran completed his degree work in 1950, having concentrated on educational administration and rural sociology.³⁶ Also, his absence from the General Assembly was not a long one, because late in 1948, Doran was elected in a special election to fill a vacancy in Graves County. In 1949, he once more ran successfully for Representative and won.

In the second year of his term, 1950, he became Speaker of the House of Representatives.³⁷ Governor Clements resigned after winning Alben Barkley's old Senate seat, so Lieutenant Governor Lawrence Wetherby became governor that same year. The Wetherby administration appointed Doran as Director of the Division of Teacher Education in the State Department of Education, so his tenure as a state representative ended.

After this appointment, Adron and Mignon were no longer Graves Countians. They had moved to Lexington, and both had growing reputations state-wide. Adron's name was increasingly mentioned as a prospect for higher office and important work in state government: Opportunity arose when an opening at Morehead State University occurred in 1954. President Charles Spain, had resigned to be the Dean of the College of Education at the University of New Mexico. Doran let those in Frankfort who needed to know of his interest in the position. Morehead State experienced several

³⁵ *The Jessamine Journal*, Vol. LXXV: No. 37, Friday, September 10, 1948.

³⁶ Vincent, "Student Writes Term Paper".

³⁷ *Courier-Journal*, Vol. 199: No. 96, Tuesday, April 6, 1954.

"ups and downs" in the nearly 30 years that it had been under state control. Interference in its administration from politicians had been one sticky point in the past that even resulted in the college briefly losing its accreditation in 1946. Doran was one of 12 candidates, and among his competitors was Dr. Forrest C. Pogue, the historian and eventual namesake of Pogue Library at Murray State University.³⁸

With a doctorate from the flagship university of the Commonwealth, favorable connections with the governor, and the endorsement of State Superintendent of Public Instruction Wendell Butler (an ex-officio member of the Morehead Board of Regents), Doran had the needed votes to be named the seventh president of Morehead State.³⁹ His years of work in education and careful cultivation of political connections thus came together.⁴⁰ As he recalled

If Lawrence Wetherby had not been Lieutenant Governor when I was Speaker of the House, I don't know if I would have ever been a university president. When the presidency of Morehead State College opened, he helped me sell the three members [whose votes would give him the needed majority] of the board that they ought to vote for me as president. If it had not

³⁸ *Courier Journal*, Vol. 199: No. 96, Tuesday, April 6, 1954, 1

³⁹ Flatt, *A Light To the Mountains: Morehead State University, 1887-1997*, 166-167.

⁴⁰ *Courier Journal*, Vol. 199: No. 96, Tuesday, April 6, 1954, 1.

been for Wendell Butler, who was Superintendent of Public Instruction, I would not have won, for he cast the deciding vote in my favor.⁴¹

After his election, the town of Morehead rolled out the red carpet for Dr. and Mrs. Doran. Special editions of *The Rowan County News* were prepared, and Doran went on a door to door "meet and greet" campaign in the small town. He had a photographer with him to capture the moment of his meeting with bank officials, county clerk office employees, business owners, and other dignitaries. Doran was a master of public relations, and from the time he entered office in 1954 until he left office in 1977, he was the face of the university in the local paper.⁴²

Doran rewarded the Board of Regents for their selection almost immediately. Enrollment jumped from 698 in 1954 to 1150 in 1956. For most of his 23 years in office, significant building programs were conducted. As a snapshot of the growth, the operating budget at Morehead State in 1954 was \$872,430. In 1966, when Morehead State College had grown to be Morehead State University, the operating budget had grown to \$8.5 million. In 12 years, phenomenal growth had taken place at the university.⁴³

⁴¹ Parnassus, 6.

⁴² Flatt, *A Light To the Mountains: Morehead State University, 1887-1997*, 169.

⁴³ Tom D. Miller, "Once-Dormant Campus Now Booming," *The Herald Advertiser*, Vol. 66: No. 38, 1.

THE COLLEGE PRESIDENT AND HIS FIRST LADY

In his own words, Doran was careful about the choices he made concerning his career. In one of his final interviews at Morehead State he remarked, "my steps have always been well calculated. One step always led to another. But if I had not taken the first step, then the other steps could not have been taken."⁴⁴

In retrospect, Doran of course benefitted from his political connections, but the assistance that he gained from Mignon was immense. She surely deserved her share of the credit for their advancement. Donald Flatt noted that Mignon was considered a "political asset" to Adron when his name was mentioned as a possible gubernatorial candidate in 1958 and 1963.⁴⁵ The newspapers and official publications were ebullient about Mignon's charity work and work on campus as First Lady. Throughout Adron's rise from school teacher to principal to legislator to college president, Mignon was right by his side through it all. Sharing a common career interest, Mignon was also an educator, serving as a high school music teacher in several Kentucky schools. In fact, while Adron was away in Frankfort, Mignon served as acting principal of the Wingo School. Moreover, she was active in the Kentucky Federation of Women's Clubs, serving as state president in 1963. During her term as president, she travelled thousands of miles over land

⁴⁴ *Parnassus*, 6.

⁴⁵ Flatt, *A Light To the Mountains: Morehead State University, 1887-1997*, 182.

and by air, speaking to over 150 clubs throughout the state and nation.⁴⁶ Her frequent theme was that women leaders needed to constantly advocate for expanded educational and cultural opportunities in their respective communities.

While often noted for her personal style and fashion, having once been named one of the "best hatted women in America for 1963" by the American Millinery Institute, she was also a person of intellectual substance and great charm.⁴⁷ She maintained a "Personal Development Institute" at Morehead State University, equipping students in important career and business areas involving dress, etiquette, and personal habits.⁴⁸ Mignon was an accomplished musician, and widely acknowledged as a gracious, genial hostess at campus events. Her work on charity boards and cultural activities was broad and significant. During her time as MSU's first lady, she hosted a radio program on WMOR, the campus station, "Tea Time With Mignon," while also serving as board member for the State Heart Association, State Conservation Board, Kentucky Public Health Association, the Easter Seal Society, and Central Kentucky Youth Symphony Orchestra.⁴⁹ Her work at Morehead State included organizing summer workshops on mental health, conservation, and a summer "writers' workshop," which in its early

⁴⁶ *Mayfield Messenger*, Vol. 64: No. 150, Wednesday, October 23, 1963.

⁴⁷ *Murray Ledger and Times*, Vol. LXXXV: No. 70, March 23, 1964.

⁴⁸ Dorothea Kahn Jaffee, "Students Learn Poise From President's Wife," *Christian Science Monitor Weekend*, Monday, September 14, 1970.

⁴⁹ *Paducah Sun-Democrat*, March 20, 1964.

days was hailed as "the only conference for aspiring writers in Kentucky."⁵⁰ Mignon's name still adorns a large complex of dormitories on the campus.

THE DORAN "PERSONA" AND LEADERSHIP STYLE

If one looks through the various photos and newspaper stories about Adron Doran in the Morehead State University archives, a few things stand out. First, this tall, dignified man had a personal "style" that was readily apparent. Doran apparently made sure that if he was photographed, he was in a suit and tie. Not just any tie, either: he always wore bow ties, which became his trademark of sorts. Doran paid careful attention to his appearance and personal carriage. He displayed confidence, charisma and poise in large groups. He was clearly at home when lots of eyes were trained on him.

Then, if one listens to recordings of Doran, one can quickly detect the cadences of a West Kentucky preacher, especially if one is familiar with the "pulpit voice" that was once often found among the Baptist and Church of Christ ministers in that area. Doran never lost his West Kentucky accent, which has different features than the Appalachian accent found in Morehead and East Kentucky. The West Kentucky dialect has a bit more of a drawl. Doran, like other Graves Countians, thus could make a one syllable word last several seconds.

Furthermore, and without any apparent self-consciousness, Doran could talk about himself and

⁵⁰ Joe Creason, "Assistant to the President: Mrs. Doran," *Courier Journal Magazine*, Sunday, March 13, 1960.

his accomplishments in a way that was as warm and breezy as a summer day. In 1960, Doran was awarded the "Kentuckian of the Year" award or 1959. At the award ceremony, University of Kentucky President Frank Dickey introduced Doran as "a man unsatisfied by little things."⁵¹ The Kentucky Press Association awarded Doran the title for his "superior service to education in Kentucky and other Southern States as a member of the Southern Regional Educational Board" and "for his officially recognized contributions to Kentucky Soil Conservation Districts, and for his acknowledged leadership in dealing with racial problems."⁵² The award drew attention to Doran's leadership in the peaceful integration of Morehead State as president.

Doran is an intriguing "type" of college president, an interesting amalgam of the "typical" 19th century college president and a 20th century college president. He had the correct pedigree and credentials for the 19th century "type": Doran had been a school teacher and administrator first, as many of the "old time" presidents had been, but also was a clergyman, another common feature in the "old time" college presidents of the 1800s. Doran's pulpit background gave him the know-how to deliver strong orations—he could do his own public relations and promotion of the university by way of effective speeches. Unlike many 20th century presidents, though, Doran was not a college-level academic prior to his appointment.

⁵¹ Rowan County News, "Kentucky Press Association Names Doran 'Kentuckian of the Year,'" Thursday, June 23, 1960.

⁵² Ibid.

Doran was not without his flaws, however, as no one is. One of the most famous anecdotes told about Doran, repeated to this day at Morehead State University, is really not all that flattering. The story is told that when he explained to students at Morehead State University the rules of the university, if they did not like it, there was "a bus going east and a bus going west."⁵³ As time went by, and as the student culture of the 1960s waxed ever more tumultuous, Doran apparently grew fonder and fonder of using the statement to squelch dissent and protest from various corners, as Donald Flatt noted in his official history of the University, *A Light To the Mountains*. The context of the statement is worth noting—nation-wide campus unrest in the 1960s, when this statement was apparently most often used by Doran, was significant. As John Thelin noted in *A History of American Higher Education*, across the country, state legislators had demonstrated little patience for college presidents who could not maintain control on their campuses.⁵⁴ That was not going to be an issue for Doran, who knew the mind of the Kentucky Legislature, and had their respect and support. He could afford to exert strong leadership, and he did. This did not, however, always endear him to everyone. In interviews later in his career, Doran favored the term "youngsters" when referring to Morehead students—students who would have been in their late teens at the youngest,

⁵³ Flatt, *A Light To the Mountains: Morehead State University, 1887-1997*, 186 and 232.

⁵⁴ John R. Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 311-314.

but twenties for upper classmen. Granted, college students are young adults, and many (besides the G.I. Bill veterans who were coming to Morehead State) had not seen that much of the world when enrolled in college, but it suggests that Doran saw students as immature and in need of much supervision, which he and his administration would certainly provide. It is worth noting that he was a fairly young man himself when he arrived at Morehead State—only 44—and prior to that, when he began his work as a school principal, he was only 22. One might wonder how he would have liked being called a “youngster” by the parents of his school students and by the community members where he served, or to have had it suggested that he was not old enough to voice his opinions or make his own important personal and leadership decisions.

Doran's relationship with the faculty had its ups and downs during his tenure as president. As early as 1954, Doran had some disagreements with them. Donald Flatt noted that Doran's belief was that most who opposed him simply opposed the growth of the small college into a much larger enterprise.⁵⁵ Undoubtedly, more research into this area is needed, but the tensions did not overshadow the growth that took place. During the 1950s and 1960s, the campus of Morehead State dominated the skyline of Morehead itself—and the college was an economic engine for the growth of

⁵⁵ Flatt, *A Light To the Mountains: Morehead State University, 1887-1997*, 185-187.

the town.⁵⁶ During the Doran era, the "gown" tended to be the dominant feature of the "town/gown" relationship. As *The Morehead News* put it in 1966, "Morehead State University is the lifeblood of our community, and the cultural and educational center of Eastern Kentucky."⁵⁷

Doran weathered the tumultuous years of the 1960s, sometimes absorbing sharp and strong criticism. As the 1970s began, speculation grew about when he would step down. When he retired in 1977, Doran had completed 23 years as president of Morehead State, the longest serving president in the institution's history, and a notable accomplishment for a farm boy from Graves County hailing from humble origins.

In conclusion, Graves Countians should know more about one of their "famous sons." His quick rise to leadership roles in state politics and higher education from humble beginnings makes for a fascinating story that merits additional research and writing. Apart from newspapers, the treatment he received in the official history of Morehead State by Donald Flatt, and a short entry in *The Kentucky Encyclopedia*, there has not been much scholarly work done on Doran. The "Adron Doran Era" at Morehead State University certainly bears remembering as a time when higher education and state government closely cooperated in order to dramatically expand higher education to an

⁵⁶ Ibid., 188-189.

⁵⁷ *The Morehead News*, "University Appreciation Day," March 22, 1966.

impoverished and underserved region of the Commonwealth.

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