

Taken from a May 1973 edition of The Penman's Newsletter (IAMPETH Publication) dedicated to Mr. Watkins.

Joe Vitolo

F. Leland Watkins

F. Leland Watkins followed his father's footsteps as president of Dakota Business College, Fargo, N.D. and has long been a great promoter of good penmanship. As long as he was allowed to do so, he gave his students two full periods of Penmanship every school day. D. D. Tysdal is one of his teachers and the most enthusiastic young man you could meet in a day's travel, an excellent penman too. Much of Del's success as teacher, penman and the greatest collector of fine penmanship in our modern world is due to Mr. Watkins' inspiration, guidance and encouragement. In his letters, he has nothing but the highest praise for Del and his ability.

Leland says, "Mrs. Watkins and I attended the Zanerian in 1921. We had just been married. I was 21 and she 20, R. E. Bloser and his father were there but Parker was never in evidence so far as I can remember. We exchanged letters but never met."

Leland is a most remarkable man, 11, , 73 year, of age and has gone back to the beginning of the Bailey Course in Penmanship and is doing every exercise of the business penmanship course, He is a fantastic worker he does as many as 20 pages of each exercise. He had great skill before he began and made good use if it. When he reports to the parents of his students, it is with a letter written in longhand. He writes as many as 45 to 50 letters in one day. Who can match that record? How fortunate those students are to have someone who shows such a genuine interest in each one of them.

We visited the Watkins at their college in Fargo last summer. They have a wonderful, large building with space galore. There is one classroom with lofty ceilings which can accommodate 200 students. They have large office-size desks for the students so 'hat they get the feeling of what it is like to work in a, office. His students won the trophies in the Business College International competitions in Penmanship year after year. They also won in Bookkeeping and Accounting.

With commercial courses being offered free to students in the public systems, it has naturally cut down the attendance drastically. The present system makes it very difficult for private business colleges today. The owner must pay high business taxes to pay for courses provided in the public system. In other words he is paying for courses offered by his competitor. Not a very fair deal, is it?

Leland's charming wife, Luella, was his father's secretary when he ran the school. She is an expert teacher and has worked very hard along with her husband to make Dakota Business College the best in the west, and certainly the best anywhere for courses in Penmanship today. Students from DBC hold top posts in business and industry all over the nation. Recently one of the students was hired as a private secretary for a Senator.

In addition to his other many fine qualities, Leland has a tremendous sense of humor. He has a story to fit every situation. He is a giant of a man, well over six feet tall. His chief attribute of genius is his tremendous capacity for concentration and hard work. He has what is regarded as the most important characteristic of a great teacher - a love of learning and perfection accompanied by great humility.

It is obvious from the serious parts of his many letters that one of his main concerns is to help today's young people to develop modern rapid penmanship. He suggested that the association might consider holding competitions and issuing certificates for proficiency in penmanship.

- Eileen Richardson, Editor

F. Leland Watkins, Jr.

His Family was Devoted to Dakota Business College for Nearly 90 Years Until School Closed Last Fall

Ask F. Leland Watkins how long he has been associated with Dakota Business College in Fargo, and the 80 year old patriarch of business career training in Me state - who at one time had more than 250 of "his boys in executive positions as presidents or cashiers of North Dakota banks - reacts with one of his familiar pixyish grins that lets you know that your question has once more struck the mother lode, unlocking still aother of his fascinating and seemingly endless reminiscences.

"SOME OF MY FATHER'S STUDENTS RECALL that my mother used to teach her shorthand classes with the textbook in one hand and me slung across her shoulder," he reveals. "it has pretty much been my life."

Corridors and classrooms of the old 3-story, L-shaped, red-brick DBC building (which faces both Eighth Boost South and Main Avenue in downtown Fargo) have been silent since last September when Mr. and Mrs Watkins closed the school which for four generations had trained come 30,000 Upper Midwest youngsters in the fine arts of penmanship, accounting, bookkeeping shorthand, typing and stenography

The venerable institution - North Dakota's oldest and largest business school and one of the meet widely known private schools of fir fund In the nation - was a victim, according to Watkins, of governmental intervention, particularly at Me federal level.

DBC's ENROLLMENT PEAKED shortly after World War I when up to 750 students at a time flocked to Fargo to prepare for business careers at the school which confidently invited them to "FOLLOW THE SUCCES\$FUL'.

"Dad had them packed in here so tight that I sometimes felt he would need an ice tong to get everyone out for lunch at noon," Watkins smiles, "After Mesa's lean early years he had endured, he just didn't have the heart to turn anybody away."

Despite the ravages of grasshopper plagues, and the dustbowl during the Great Depression, Dakota Business College flourished. And the school likewise survived World War II - later training thousands of veterans who returned to North Dakota and western Minnesota with GI Bill benefits to prepare themselves for new peacetime careers.