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History of Hope College: Forty Years of Presidents and Growth Change

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History of Hope College: Forty Years of Presidents and Growth Change

The 1960s brought four new presidents in forty years to Hope College along with much change in the spiritual and physical environment of the campus.



DE WITT CULTURAL CENTER GROUNDBREAKING, 1968 (From left, Hugh De Pree, Vander Werf, Dick De Witt, Jack De Witt)

Calvin A. Vander Werf (1917-1988) served as president of Hope College from 1963-1970 and was an administrator remembered for his love of teaching and invested much of his energy into strengthening the science departments and furthering international education.

Vander Werf was born in 1917 and graduated from Hope College in 1937 with a dual major in chemistry and English. He earned his doctorate in chemistry at Ohio State University in 1941, and the same year joined the chemistry faculty of the University of Kansas. (He is semi-legendary for bringing Wilt Chamberlain to the Kansas basketball team on the merits of the school's curriculum and its racial tolerance, both of which Vander Werf worked to improve.)

He became president of Hope College in 1963 and served until 1970, bringing to the college both the idealism of youth and the dedication of a scientist in education, as well as chemistry. During his administration, exchange programs with Meiji

Gakuin University of Tokyo, Japan, and a May Term in Yugoslavia were established. Construction on new college facilities such as the Peale Science Center (now the Schaap Science Center) and the DeWitt Student and Cultural Center also began during the Vander Werf years. In 1982, the physics/math building was named Vander Werf Hall.

After the Hope presidency, Vander Werf taught briefly at the University of Colorado (1971), and then became dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Florida, Gainesville. He moved from the deanship into classroom teaching in chemistry, and once again proved himself a rewarding and memorable educator. Calvin Vander Werf passed away in 1988, shortly after handing in his spring term grades.

The next man to guide Hope College was William Vander Lugt (1902-1993). Vander Lugt was a Hope professor of psychology (1954-1959) and of philosophy (1959-1967) who also served as dean of the college (1955-1967). He distinguished himself further by serving as chancellor (1970-1972) during the search process for a new president. He oversaw the start of a major fund drive and the construction started under Dr. Vander Werf. He retired in 1972 and was granted emeritation. William Vander Lugt died in Holland, Michigan, in 1993.

The 1970s dawned with the presidency of Gordon J. Van Wylen, who served as the college's president from 1972-1987. He concentrated his tremendous energy and fund raising skills to campus developments.

Van Wylen attended Ottawa Hills High School, Calvin College and the University of Michigan. Subsequently, he worked for DuPont and served in the Navy. He taught at Penn State and completed a doctorate at MIT in 1951. After teaching mechanical engineering at University of Michigan, Van Wylen became chairman of that



WILLIAM VANDER LUGT



GORDON VAN WYLEN

department in 1958. By 1965, he was dean of the College of Engineering and had authored a textbook on thermodynamics. In 1972, he was appointed president of Hope College, retiring in 1987.

Throughout his life, he has been active in Christian organizations and churches. During his administration, Hope saw the construction of the Peale Science Center, the DePree Art Center and Gallery, the Dow Physical Education and Health Center, College East Apartments, the Maas Conference Center, and the Van Wylen Library. Van Wylen left his mark on future administrations by establishing a provost-dean structure. The Critical Issues Symposium, an annual event which draws the college and community together in thinking about current events, also found its beginnings during Van Wylen's presidency.

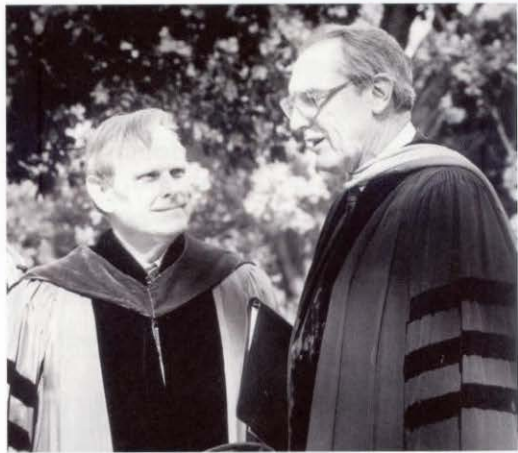
John H. Jacobson (1933-2005) began his tenure as president in 1987 and had a strong commitment to strengthening Hope's endowment ending his term with \$100 million, and increasing enrollment.

Jacobson graduated from Swarthmore College. After he completed his doctoral program at Yale University at age 23, Jacobson taught philosophy at Hamilton College, in Clinton, New York, and Florida Presbyterian College (now Eckerd College), in St. Petersburg, Florida. He began his career in academic administration in 1968 at Florida Presbyterian College, where he served as Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of the Faculty. In 1972, he and his family moved to New York, where he served for two years as Dean of the Rochester Center of Empire State College, State University of New York, and then appointed vice president of Academic Affairs and later provost, serving twice as acting president. Thus, when he became president of Hope College at age 53, he had a background of twenty years in academic administration.

When he came to Hope College, the

college's endowment was 20 million dollars; a major fund drive during the presidency of Dr. Gordon Van Wylen had just been successfully completed. After a strategic planning effort, Jacobson initiated another major fund drive, which raised 57 million dollars, surpassing its goal. Before retiring, he initiated a second major fund drive, Legacies: A Vision of Hope. A major purpose of the campaign was funding the construction of a new science center; 23 million dollars was raised in the drive's first phase. At the end of his final year at Hope College, the college endowment stood at 105 million dollars. He worked closely with the vice president for Advancement to achieve an annual gift goal that came to exceed 12 million dollars a year.

Jacobson left an enduring legacy at Hope College, through his strong commitment to maintaining the college's Christian character. He helped to craft the campus ministries program, which remains a vibrant ministry to the Hope College and Holland communities. His commitment to the multicultural dimension of the college and to egalitarianism in hiring and promotion enriched the college's diversity. His tenure was marked by growth of the college itself and significant recognition for Hope College and members of the college community. During his presidency, enrollment grew to over 2,900. Additions to the campus during that time included the



JOHN JACOBSON, LEFT, AND GORDON VAN WYLEN, 1987

Knickerbocker Theatre, Lugsers Fieldhouse, DeWitt Tennis Center, Haworth Inn and Conference Center, and Cook Residence Hall. Hope College became the only private, four-year, liberal arts college in the country to have national accreditation in art, dance, music, and theater.

John H. Jacobson passed in Florida on February 8, 2005.