TOWARD A NEW MATURITY: THE WISCONSIN ACADEMY IN ITS SECOND CENTURY

Presidential Address
Louis W. Busse
President 1972–73
Ripon, Wisconsin
April 27, 1973

President-elect Perrin, Members of the Council, Colleagues of the Academy, and Friends:

On the First of February, 1870, J. W. Hoyt and 104 of Wisconsin’s finest scholars, governmental leaders, and noted citizens circulated about the state a “Call for a Meeting to Organize.” The Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters was about to be born. It was to be, in the words of the authors of the Call, “... an institution that shall be of great practical utility and lasting honor to the State.”

For a number of years the idea for such an institution had been in the hearts and minds of many. As the language of the Call indicates, the founders of the Academy were motivated by the premise that “... the prosperity and power of a State depend not more upon its material resources than upon the culture of its people and the extent of their knowledge of nature and man.” They incorporated this belief within the charter through the listing of such purposes as:

1. Researches and investigations in the various departments of the material, metaphysical, ethical, ethnological and social sciences;
2. A progressive and thorough scientific survey of the State, with a view to determining is mineral, agricultural and other resources;
3. The advancement of the useful arts, through the applications of science, and by the encouragement of original invention;
4. The encouragement of the fine arts by means of honors and prizes awarded to artists for original works of superior merit;
5. The formation of scientific, economical and art museums;
6. The encouragement of philological and historical research, the collection and preservation of historic records, and the formation of a general library; and
7. The diffusion of knowledge by the publication of original contributions to science, literature and the arts.

It was, as can be seen, an undertaking cast in a philosophy and purpose of substantial magnitude. That the Academy was to suc-
ceed in the fulfillment of much of what it had been charged to accomplish, given its financial limitations, is a high tribute to its leadership and to its membership. Through the course of nearly all its first century of existence, the Wisconsin Academy achieved despite, not because of, its monetary resources. The question must always remain: What proud paths might we have traveled and realized what goals had there been a more adequate fiscal base?

I submit to you, however, that a comparable question must be answered today. While the coffers of the Academy are far from overflowing, the fact remains that, thanks to the generosity of such as our late colleague, Dr. Harry Steenbock, our friend and fellow member, Dr. Elizabeth McCoy, and others, we are now in a position to realize goals dreamed of by our illustrious founders and to travel some of the paths chartered by these people. We can no longer plead lack of monetary resources for future failures.

In looking toward a new maturity, there are several ways to look at the Academy. One of them might be to consider the Academy as a 100 years old adolescent, who never quite reached maturity because of a shortage of one essential hormone—that of fiscal resources (money). Suddenly in 1969 he received a $950,000 injection—and now, as a rapidly growing youth, is trying vigorously to find himself and to mature.

Or, we can look at ourselves as a 100 year-old institution or organization, seeking renewal with the vitality of a youngster stimulated by the faith of several individuals in our goals and objectives and their generosity to help us achieve or make progress toward these goals. When we mention the vitality of a society or institution or organization we must include the vitality of its individual members. The society and its members are one and the same. A society or an organization decays when its institutions and individuals lose their vitality. As I have viewed the Academy over these past three years, I see members of long standing and new members demonstrating a new vitality and interest which speaks well for our future.

You know, one of the fascinating things I have found in the Academy is its resilience—its constant ability to renew itself. When organizations and societies are young, they are flexible and fluid, not yet paralyzed by rigid specialization. As they age, however, vitality diminishes, flexibility gives way to rigidity, creativity fades in this environment and finally there results a loss of capacity to meet challenges from unexpected directions. I view the Academy as now at the beginning of a new maturing period. This is necessary for we cannot and should not remain forever with the confusion of youth. The question to which the Academy will have to seek the answer is: How can it become a mature organization and
still retain the flexibility and adaptability characteristic of youth which permit the ever renewing process, when, in fact, the processes of maturing are essentially those that reduce flexibility and adaptiveness.

I do not have the answer, of course, but I would assume that the first step would be to recognize the facts: to know the difference, that is, the difference between maturity and rigidity or lack of flexibility. So, I would urge our future leaders and especially our members to constantly be on the alert for the appearance of those disastrous side effects of the maturing process and to treat these quickly as they appear. In this kind of an organization, the ever-renewing process can take place, and then what matures is an organization or framework within which continuous innovation, renewal and rebirth can occur. I think this is what we all want for the Academy and with your help we can develop this kind of organization.

Now, before an organization can proceed toward its major objectives and program goals, it must have a certain stability. It must have its machinery in working order. It must solve its day-to-day operating problems and get out from under these uncertainties. It must get out of the confusion of youth.

I thought tonight I might make a portion of my message to you in the form of a "report from your President." This is not to set a precedent for future presidents. However, your Academy has had three busy years—two under the leadership of Norman Olson and F. Chandler Young, and this past year with me and Dick Perrin. These were good years for me and I greatly appreciated the opportunity to serve with all of these people.

I would like to indicate some of the significant events or happenings over this past year for I think they reflect stages in the maturing process that the Academy is now going through, and they give proof to the claim that we are getting our house in order and going on to greater accomplishments.

THE FIRST EVENT

Of great significance to the Academy was our success in clarifying our tax status with the Internal Revenue Service. As some of you know, due to errors in previous reporting to the Revenue Service we were classified as a private foundation and our income from our investments, thus, would be taxable. This classification was an intolerable situation for the Academy. Therefore, competent legal counsel was retained and the Academy’s income, operating expenses, and contributions were properly identified and established. A brief was prepared and submitted to the I.R.S. and just last month we were notified of our new classification as a tax-
exempt foundation. This had to be established in order for the Academy to continue to develop to its full potential. It pleases me to be able to report our success in this effort. The amount of staff time which went into this effort was enormous and how our Director was able to keep anything else going is testimony to his effort. In this relation also I must acknowledge the help of Walter Scott and express my appreciation for the tremendous help he was in leading us and supplying us with information on the Academy.

In order to protect the Academy from any further mistakes in this area and because of the increasing activities of the Academy which may have legal implications needing interpretations, I have recommended to the Council (and they have approved) the contracting of legal services on a retainer basis. We have secured the services of the law firm of Werner, Lathrop, Heany, which handled our tax case.

One of the other events which gave me real pleasure was to observe and work with Bob Dicke and our Facilities Committee. Bob was persistent and insistent that a basement office in a lumber yard was no place for a distinguished organization such as ours. Bob believed in the “shock technique.” He first came to the Council, as many of you know from our meeting last fall, and presented a plan which involved an expenditure of some $350,000. First, he got all of us to agree that our location at that time just was not acceptable and then in turn he agreed that maybe $350,000 was a little high and that he and his Committee would look again. So, when he came back with a request to the Academy to purchase a $70,000 building, which was on University Avenue and just off campus, we were relieved to get off that easily.

I am especially enthused with our new headquarters building at 1922 University Avenue, which the Academy has purchased and is remodeling for its needs. It was purchased with capital gains from our investment trust for $67,500. Our distinguished member, Dr. Elizabeth McCoy, suffered through this agonizing period with us, and very early in our deliberations offered us a location on her farm or estate along with a contribution of $22,500 to remodel a building there. This we considered very seriously but hesitated only because of the distance from the campus and central city. However, when she saw Bob’s and my pleasure at the opportunity of the University Avenue site she couldn’t resist and said, “This is what you need; it’s the right location; and it is fitting for the Academy.” After another two seconds she said, “What’s more, I’ll round it off to $25,000 toward the purchase or remodeling, whichever you wish.” Ladies and Gentlemen, that’s why you have a home, a headquarters building, an image if you will, and one in which you may feel happy and comfortable for many years.
It's a charming little building, a delightful place for the staff to work in, and an extremely pleasant place to visit. I know you will be pleased and I urge you to come and see it and experience the revitalization, the renewed effort that this facility has stimulated in all of us. We will be moving in on Tuesday, May 1 and although it will not be completely furnished, we might be able to find you a chair to sit down on.

The acquisition of the building and the contracting for remodeling and redecorating services has taken a tremendous number of hours of staff time this past month, so if some of the daily routine or deadline schedules were not met, please bear with us for another month or so.

Another event, with rather severe implications for the Academy, was the establishment by the Governor of a task force on the status of the arts and humanities in Wisconsin with Dean Adolph Suppan, a past president of the Academy, as its Chairman. The task force did hold several meetings in the state and in Madison, but for some reason neither I nor our staff were made aware of the work of this committee until just a few months ago. The recommendations of the Committee were already formulated and the Governor already had in his budget the funds for the establishment of a State Board for the Arts and Humanities. This board is to disperse the funds contributed to the arts in Wisconsin by the National Endowment for the Arts and thus will relieve the Arts Council of the state of this responsibility.

As many of you know, this situation resulted in the resignation of Mr. Lauch as Executive Director of the Arts Council and the publishing in the Milwaukee Journal of an interview with him in which he denounced the work of the task force and took serious exception to the creation of this new board or state agency.

Even though it was late to intervene, I felt that the implications for the Academy were so great that appearance was necessary in opposition to the bill at the hearing before the Joint Finance Committee. Mr. Batt and I appeared there and spoke in opposition and presented the Committee with much material relating to the Academy's activities in the Arts and Humanities. Needless to say, the Committee was very surprised there was such an organization closely connected to the State by charter, already performing these functions, and seemed pleased to be made aware of this alternative. I can inform you that the staff of this committee considered three alternatives for the responsibility:

1. To leave in the hands of the Arts Council;
2. To place in the hands of the Academy of Sciences-Arts-Letters;
3. To follow the Governor's recommendation for a new State Board.
Mr. Davis, of the Committee, informed us that the Committee is recommending going along with the Governor's proposal.

In spite of this, the Academy will continue to maintain a vigorous program for the Arts and Letters, and will work with the Board, if and when one is created.

Two other areas in which progress has been made in the past two years has been in membership and publications—the vitality and life blood of our organization.

We have increased our membership by approximately 300 and quadrupled our life memberships. The new membership directory has been published and it makes an impressive appearance. Membership drives will continue and in the meantime all of us as individuals can help tremendously by each bringing in a new member next year. Doubling our membership next year would be an encouraging step.

I am particularly pleased with the improvement of our publications this past year and I hope that you are too. The TRANSACTIONS has always been an exemplary publication. Now, the ACADEMY REVIEW has been expanded and takes on a new look, and I think does the Academy proud. The last two issues were particularly good and carried a good balance between our three cultures.

In addition, you now have received an issue or two of the ACADEMY TRIFORIUM, our new monthly newsletter, designed to keep you informed of Academy developments in a more up-to-date manner. I think it is interesting and will help to keep the Academy in the forefront of our minds and our interest.

Publications, to my mind, are the life blood of the Academy and will determine its future. I think it is essential that the Academy have an extensive publishing program for it is only through this mechanism that we can really create and maintain the image and the status we seek. Our publications will determine whether the mass of the membership continues to remain in the Academy or to withdraw for lack of contact with our programs and objectives.

This is costing the Academy money; however, early results seem to indicate it will also bring in money. Nevertheless, the budget for 1973–74 will show a significant increase in the item for publications. In addition, this cannot be accomplished without increased manpower and so our budget will show that we have acquired the full time services of Miss Monica Janigh. One could say that we are doing it with womanpower instead of manpower.

Seriously, I think our staff, Jim, Nancy, Marie and Monica, are doing an excellent job in their areas of Academy responsibility and we owe them a vote of thanks for their dedication.
These accomplishments, I like to think, are in the category of getting our house in order:

1. Our status as a tax-exempt organization
2. A house befitting our image with adequate space and facilities to do our job
3. Publications reflecting our progress toward our goals and objectives.
4. Membership buildup

Significant progress has been made in all of these this year.

We are now just in the process of assessing our future role and goals, hopefully exhibiting the vitality, flexibility, and adaptability necessary to assure our success. There are two things I would like to mention in this regard.

First is the reorganization of our Junior Academy, which has been growing rapidly under the direction of Mr. LeRoy, Lee. More high schools are participating, more students are participating, more institutes for both school and summer months, are being organized. I think over 600 students have been at the various institutes this past year.

In our reorganization, we will be dropping the Junior Academy nomenclature and thus not have a separate organization. Instead, we will have a youth program in which these students are associate members of the Academy which will make them feel more a part of us—an example of our adaptability and flexibility. I look for this aspect of our activity to mushroom over the next years and I am sure that it will require a full-time director for this program in a few years. As an example, the Academy, through the efforts of LeRoy and Jim, is the recipient of a grant of $7,500 from the Atomic Energy Commission to sponsor institutes on our energy crisis at the high school level. There is no end to the kinds of programming the Academy can sponsor and develop for these young people. However, as we involve ourselves more with the young crowd, or to put it the other way, as we take the young people more into our establishment, we must be prepared to accept change and to have the framework which will accept and permit constructive changes.

Second, I would like to mention some of our efforts to decide our future roles and objectives. In this respect I would like to express my appreciation to Bob Gard and Don Emerson for their contributions. In the role of stimulators, particularly in the Arts and Letters, the Academy is embarking on the following pathways:

1. The Council has authorized an Academy literary award of $5,000 for the best book published by a Wisconsin author or author with Wisconsin heritage, to be given in 1976 as a part of the Bicentennial celebration.
2. We are giving citations in “The Theatre” category and Professor Gard informs us he has already had the pleasure of presenting one award on
behalf of the Academy before an audience of 600-700 people in Stevens Point, who were thrilled at the recognition bestowed upon them by our organization.

3. We are also establishing a Citation for the best book in Science published by a Wisconsin author and it will be presented by and for the Wisconsin Library Association.

4. Our Fall Gathering probably will be held in Ft. Atkinson this September 22 and 23 in conjunction with the Wisconsin Regional Writers Association and the dedication of the Wisconsin Authors Hall of Fame.

I mention all of these items to you because they indicate to me two things: (1) the Academy is actively seeking to find its role in its relationship to the specialty organizations making up the Arts and Letters; and (2) is attempting to bring them into our Academy home and to nourish them as individuals in any way we can. I think this is marvelous progress, and much credit should go to our Vice Presidents and to our Executive Director.

In this same vein, Dick Perrin will be appointing a committee to study the feasibility and mechanism by which the Academy could enter into a cooperative arrangement with the U. W. Extension Division in support of a faculty member who would work at the Academy offices. This person would study the role of the Academy as a co-ordinator for all of the Arts and Letters organizations in the state and develop a procedure by which the activities of these organizations could come under the umbrella of the Academy. In addition, he will determine how the Academy can help these organizations to fulfill their goals and objectives. If this were to come about and prove to be successful, I can visualize a similar role in the Sciences and with this kind of work power the Academy should be able to fulfill the goals and objectives so forcefully stated in our Charter of 1870. I do look for this to happen!

In closing, let me say these have been three wonderful years. I hope I may continue to serve the Academy in the future. As you know, Wisconsin is one of the few Academies of Science which encompasses the Arts and Letters as well. As a pharmacist and scientist one of the real pleasures of this opportunity to serve you was the chance it gave me to meet and know so many people in the other cultures, and to know and understand the working of the mind of the artist and the writer. I hope similarly it gave the artist and the writer a closer view of the thinking and the orientation of the minds of the scientists and professionals. I no longer think of the artist and writer in an adversary relationship and I hope they too can begin to see professionals and scientists in non-adversary relationships.

I think it is extremely important to stable progress in our Academy that these adversary relationships between these cultures be reduced and that this be replaced by mutual understanding. It
seems to me that this is a particularly significant role for the Academy to perform, and since it is an organization of all three cultures it is ideally suited to perform it. Members of the Academy, if the Academy can accomplish this for me, I know it can accomplish it on a much greater scale for the people of our state. I urge you to make this a major effort in the next years.

It has been an honor and a pleasure to serve you.

And now it is my privilege and pleasure to turn the reins of the Academy over to your President-elect, Richard Perrin, who now becomes your President for the coming year. I hope I give the Academy to you in as good a state as it was when it was turned over to me by President Young. I know the Academy will be in good hands. Members, your new President, Mr. Richard Perrin.