CHAPTER TWO

ORIGINS OF ROCKHURST UNIVERSITY AND RECENT HISTORY

Founded by members of the Society of Jesus, Rockhurst University was awarded a charter to grant degrees in the State of Missouri in 1910. College classes were inaugurated in 1917. The charter allowed Rockhurst to call itself either Rockhurst College or Rockhurst University. Rockhurst College was used until 1999, when the name was officially changed to Rockhurst University.

Since its inception, Rockhurst has been an institution engaged in a gradual but continual process of change. The major changes are listed in the "Rockhurst Traditions" section of the Rockhurst University 2002-04 Catalog (p. 325-327). A number of changes have occurred during the decade since the last North Central Association's comprehensive review of Rockhurst. In 1993 Rockhurst joined Saint Louis University in opening the Ignatius Center, now also known as Rockhurst - South Campus, which is located on Wornall Road just south of highway I-435. The campus is used primarily for graduate courses in business and for conferences. At one time Saint Louis University offered a graduate degree in public health at that campus, but this was discontinued due to low enrollment. In 2001 Rockhurst University took a three-year note to become the sole owner of the campus.

The main campus underwent a major beautification process. The former entrance to the campus, 53rd Street, was closed to traffic and turned into a pedestrian mall with flowers in the middle. The upper campus parking lot was removed, the quadrangle was expanded, and a bell tower, pergola, and fountain were constructed. An attractive sign and stonewall mark the campus entrance, which was moved to 54th Street, and a winding road takes one from Troost Avenue to the heart of the campus. A secluded, flower-filled courtyard is "tucked away" in the area bounded by the Greenlease Gallery, Van Ackeren Hall, and Sedgwick Hall.

New buildings include the Richardson Science Center, the Town House Village, the Student Activities Hall, the Rockhurst University Community Center (which houses the security central office, a storage area, the Literacy Clinic, and a community/neighborhood meeting center), and the Greenlease Art Gallery. The University purchased surrounding residences and began work on Loyola Park. This will include baseball and soccer fields, a stadium, and tennis courts. Work on the baseball field began in September 2002 and will be ready for use in the 2003-04 academic year. Dowling Hall was demolished and replaced with a parking lot. The renovation of Conway Hall was completed in August 2002 and similar renovations are planned for Sedgwick Hall.
A number of new educational programs and support services were begun during the past ten years. These include a Master of Science in Communication Sciences and Disorders degree and a Master of Education degree. A Master of Integrated Humanities and Education degree was offered from 1998 to 2002 but has been discontinued as an independent program, since it proved less popular with prospective students than had been anticipated. It is now a track in the Master of Education degree program.

The School of Professional Studies opened in 1997 and offered baccalaureate completion programs culminating in either the Bachelor of Professional Studies or the Bachelor of Liberal Studies degree. In 2002 this school became part of the new School of Graduate and Professional Studies, which also includes those graduate programs that had formerly been part of the College of Arts and Sciences (communication sciences and disorders, education, occupational therapy, physical therapy), the undergraduate programs of communication sciences and disorders and education, and the Office of Life Long Learning.

The Center for Service Learning was established in 1994, the Center for Teaching Excellence in 1999, and the Thomas More Center for the Study of Catholic Thought and Culture in 2000. In 2001 the School of Management was renamed the Helzberg School of Management in honor of Rockhurst benefactors, Barnett and Shirley Helzberg.

Significant changes in personnel also occurred during this period. The Rev. Thomas J. Savage, S.J., president since 1988, resigned in 1996 and was replaced by the Rev. Peter B. Ely, S.J. The Board of Trustees and Father Ely mutually decided that he and Rockhurst were not a "good fit" and Father Ely resigned after less than a year to be replaced by Janet Watson Sheeran, Ph.D. (a long-time faculty member and then Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences), who served as interim president for one year. The Rev. Edward Kinerk, S.J. became Rockhurst's thirteenth president in 1998. He is the first Rockhurst graduate (1964) to serve as president of the University.

Titles of some higher administration positions were changed. The Dean of Students became the Vice President for Student Development (later changed to the Vice President for Student Development and Administration), the Chief Financial Officer became the Vice President for Business and Finance, and the Director of Admissions and Financial Aid became the Vice President for Enrollment Management. Personnel changes occurred in the latter two positions and in the position of Vice President of Advancement. In 2001 President Kinerk created the position of Vice President for Academic Affairs. William Haefele, Ph.D. was asked to serve in this position as well as in the position that he already held, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. In July 2002 Dr. Haefele relinquished the position of Dean. Also in 2002 the position of Vice President for Enrollment Management was abolished and that office now reports to the Vice President for Academic Affairs.

The three colleges/schools that constitute Rockhurst University also experienced changes in leadership. Dean Janet Sheeran of the College of Arts and Sciences served as interim president during the 1997-98 academic year. Corey Simmonds, Assistant Dean
of the College of Arts and Sciences, served as interim dean of the College that year and again the following year after Dr. Sheeran resigned. Dr. William Haefele, a Rockhurst professor of psychology, assumed the position of dean in 1999. In July 2002 Professor Anita Salem assumed a one-year appointment as interim dean with a national search for a new dean beginning in September 2002. The Dean of the Helzberg School of Management, Dr. Robert Clark, resigned in 1998 and was replaced for one year by a long-time faculty member, Dr. Thomas Lyon, who served as interim dean. Dr. Earl Walker assumed the position of dean in 1999 but resigned in June 2001. Dr. John Darling, an experienced administrator, served as interim dean until, after a national search, Dr. James Daley became dean in July 2002. (It should be noted that both Dr. Sheeran and Dr. Clark had served as deans of their respective schools for a number of years prior to their resignations.)

When the School of Professional Studies was instituted in 1997, Dr. Nancy Evanson, a long-time Rockhurst administrator, was selected to serve as dean. She served until March 2002 when she accepted the position of Vice President for Institutional Advancement. At that time, Dr. Haefele assumed the position of Dean of the School of Professional Studies in addition to his positions as Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. In June 2002 when the School was incorporated into the new School of Graduate and Professional Studies, Dr. Robin Bowen became interim dean for a period of two years. Dr. Bowen was formerly a Rockhurst professor and had also served four years as Associate Dean for Graduate Studies in the College of Arts and Sciences. For a number of reasons, a decision was made to delay the search for a permanent dean until the 2003-04 academic year.

It would be logical to assume that the turnover in administrators would cause administrative difficulties for Rockhurst University and perhaps also morale problems. There is no evidence that significant problems occurred, perhaps because almost all of the "new" administrators had been Rockhurst faculty members or administrators for a number of years and thus were not only familiar with Rockhurst University but were well known to the Rockhurst community. The exceptions or partial exceptions to this were the two Jesuit presidents (one of whom, Father Kinerk, is a graduate of Rockhurst and had served on the Board of Trustees, although most faculty/staff did not know him), the current Vice-President of Finances, and the two "permanent" deans of the Helzberg School of Management.

While the past ten years have been a period of change, Rockhurst University has remained committed to its traditional educational objectives such as a commitment to the liberal arts, a curricular emphasis upon theology and philosophy at the undergraduate level, the offering of rigorous graduate programs in subject areas that serve the needs of the community and the larger society, and a dedication to community service.