

# 107 Years, Five Leaders

RETIRED CITY JUDGE SHARES MEMORIES OF FORMER PRESIDENTS

When a presidential search committee asked for the public's opinion about the qualities UL Lafayette's next leader should have, it got a rare perspective from one man.

Retired Lafayette City Judge Kaliste J. Saloom Jr. has known all five university presidents. He also served as parliamentarian for the panel which ultimately recommended Dr. Ray Authement to become UL Lafayette's fifth president in the 1970s.

Saloom asked committee members to select someone who will continue to improve the entire state by continuing to improve the university.

In an interview with *La Louisiane* a few weeks later, he provided his views on the university's presidents.

Authement, Saloom said, showed strong leadership skills while serving as vice president in Dr. Clyde Rougeou's administration.

When Rougeou took a one-year leave of absence in 1973, Authement became acting president. In 1974, he was named Rougeou's successor.

Saloom credits Authement with increasing the amount of national and international recognition UL Lafayette has received in several different areas. He noted Authement's success in recruiting and keeping top-notch teachers and researchers. The university's president has "a broader vision and he created a confidence in the faculty. He's always sought to keep a high level of faculty," he said.

Here's a brief look at UL Lafayette's first four presidents, along with Saloom's observations about them.

Dr. Edwin L. Stephens became the first president of Southwestern Louisiana Industrial Institute, at age 27, on Jan. 3, 1900. The school had no campus, no faculty and no students.



Dr. Edwin L. Stephens

So he literally began to build it from the ground up. In January 1901, Stephens planted oak tree seedlings on campus. Many flourished; a few remain today and are known as the Century Oaks.

When SLII began offering classes, it was a vocational educational institution. By the time Saloom was born in 1918, much progress had been made. The "Main Building," DeClouet Hall and Foster Hall had been built. Baseball, football and track teams had been formed and Stephens had formed an alumni associa-

tion. *The Vermilion* student newspaper and *L'Acadien* yearbook had been established.

Saloom said he grew up "in the shadows of the university." When he enrolled in 1935, the street in front of the school was known as "Industrial Avenue," decades later, it would be renamed University Avenue.

Southwestern had become a four-year college in 1925 and had dropped "Industrial" from its name. By 1932, it was accredited as a College of Teacher Education, with degrees ranging from art to biology to physical education.

Saloom described Stephens as "an academic leader. He believed in a well-rounded education and liberal arts. He

encouraged people to go to college. He was known for encouraging students to excel in education and to do well academically."

According to the retired city judge, one of the keys to Stephens' success was his selection of faculty members. "Dr. Stephens was instrumental in getting some excellent teachers who stayed with the school for many, many years," he said. One of them was Stephens' wife, Beverly Randolph Stephens, who taught drawing and gymnastics.

Saloom recalled that Stephens was an avid photographer who used his camera to document much of the first four decades of campus life.

As an SLI student, Saloom was a sportswriter for *The Vermilion*.

Stephens would also organize events for students. "On freshman day, we'd have what we called the freshman parade. The male freshmen usually sheared their hair, and they wore skull caps," Saloom said. They would parade from their dormitories, down Jefferson Street and then back to campus.

Stephens retired as president in May 1938 and died in New Orleans less than seven months later.

Lether Edward Frazar succeeded Stephens in 1938. Although he served only two and a half years, Frazar supervised the construction of many campus buildings, such as the president's house, Mouton Hall, Broussard Hall, Burke Hall, Hamilton Hall, Earl K. Long Gym and Stephens Memorial Library.

Saloom said Frazar also helped the campus grow through the purchase of additional land, primarily the former Whittington Estate.

Frazar, who was 34 years old when he became the school's second president, developed the Colleges of Agriculture and Engineering and added the Departments of Music, Commerce and Publicity.

Saloom said Frazar "believed in modernizing the college and bringing in faculty that would expand the college."

The second president also created the campus marching band and the school's first

intercollegiate athletic program.

According to Saloom, Frazar organized the effort to get a railroad company to take students to out-of-town football games on trains, so the team would have fans "on the road."

Saloom finished his college studies during Frazar's term.

Frazar resigned from SLI in 1940. He went on to serve as a state representative, dean of McNeese State College and as lieutenant governor during the Earl K. Long administration. He died May 15, 1960.

The university's third president, Dr. Joel Lafayette Fletcher Jr., was known for

his personal interest in students' welfare.

Any student who was planning to resign from SLI was required to first talk with Fletcher so the president could determine whether anything could be done to enable him or her to stay in school.

As dean of the College of Agriculture, he had taken advantage of the National Youth Administration and the Works Projects Administration to provide jobs for poor students who needed money to attend SLI. Some of those students grew vegetables on the school's farm. Others worked in campus offices. Many worked in the dairy, where they helped make cheese and butter.

"The dairy farm made some of the best cheese in the world. From time to time, they would distribute it in the community," Saloom said. Fletcher would also have barbecues at Whittington Hall and invite members of the community to attend.

"President Fletcher served in difficult times during World War II," said Saloom. "He had the campus all out for supporting our air force, our army, our navy. And he did a lot after the war to bring the veterans back to finish their education."

During Fletcher's presidency, F. G.

Mouton Hall, Montgomery Hall, Madison Hall, Angelle Hall, Olivier Hall, Griffin Hall and Coronna Hall were built.

Saloom served as Alumni Association president from 1958-59.

In 1960, SLI earned university status, which enabled it to change its name to the University of Southwestern Louisiana.

Fletcher retired in 1965 after 25 years of service. He died April 25, 1972.

Dr. Clyde L. Rougeou began teaching at SLI during Stephens's presidency. He was also head of the Department of Animal Husbandry before being named the institution's fourth president.

From 1966 to 1974, Rougeou guided the university through a critical period of rapid growth and curtailed budgets. During his term, enrollment rose from 8,400 to more than 12,000 – a 43 percent increase.

To accommodate the larger student population, Rougeou coordinated \$34 million in construction projects. Maxim Doucet Hall, Wharton Hall, the Student Union, Cajun Field, the Athletic Complex and the two upper floors of Dupré Library were constructed during his presidency.

The university also expanded academically, as it added graduate programs in English, history, microbiology, mathematics, statistics, computer science and education. In 1968, USL began granting doctoral degrees.

"He saw that the university would have to move to more liberal arts teaching than agriculture or the applied sciences," Saloom said.

Although Rougeou was a "very quiet president," according to Saloom, he kept "a high profile for the school."

Near the end of his presidency, Rougeou asked Saloom to serve as parliamentarian for the selection committee that would recommend his successor.

When Rougeou took a year-long leave of absence in 1973, Authement became acting president of USL. Rougeou died in 1980. ■



Retired Lafayette City Judge Kaliste J. Saloom Jr.

DOUG DUGAS



Lether Edward Frazar



Dr. Joel Lafayette Fletcher Jr.



Dr. Clyde Lee Rougeou