



## *Landrum Bolling: Advocate for Peace*

**THOMAS HAMM**

**Professor of History;  
Curator of the Quaker Collection and  
Director of Special Collections**

Landrum Bolling was Earlham's most honored president, with a connection to the college that spans six decades. It began when he joined the Earlham faculty as a professor of political science in 1948 and progressed through administrative posts to the presidency and, since 1974, to membership on the Earlham board, first as an at-large and then as a lifetime honorary trustee. Those years also saw him become a national and international figure in higher education, humanitarianism and peacemaking.

Landrum Rymer Bolling was a native of Parksville, Tennessee, born Nov. 13, 1913, the son of Landrum Austin and Carrie (Rymer) Bolling. The Bolling family claims descent from Pocahontas. He entered the University of Tennessee at age sixteen, graduating in 1933. He then went to work for the newly created Tennessee Valley Authority, spending three years under Dr. Arthur E. Morgan, the former president of Antioch College, whose daughter Frances became his wife on July 6, 1936. After a year spent traveling in Europe, in 1938 he undertook graduate study in political science at the University of Chicago, from which he received his M.A. For the next five years, he taught at Brown University, Antioch College and Beloit College, before going to Europe in 1944 as an independent war correspondent. After the end of World War II, he remained in Europe as chief of the Central European Bureau of the Overseas News Agency.

### **Disarming Ability**

In 1946, on a ship returning to Europe from the United States, Bolling met Elton Trueblood, the Earlham religion professor and author who would become a lifelong friend. Trueblood, impressed with the young Quaker reporter/academic, convinced Earlham president Tom Jones to offer Bolling a position on the Earlham faculty, which Bolling accepted in 1948. Over the next seven years he alternated semesters of teaching and writing until becoming the college's general secretary in 1955, with primary responsibility for fundraising. Even then, many at the college saw the position as grooming him for future leadership.

Bolling became president of Earlham College in 1958, serving until 1973. Most of the faculty saw him as Tom Jones's heir-apparent. "His popularity, his teaching and oratorical skill, his experience in the development program, his knowledge of the world, his fertility of ideas, were all outstanding in our community," one faculty member concluded. His appointment was well received by alumni and the Richmond community. One alumnus wrote at the time of Bolling: "He has the disarming ability, almost a genius, of giving extemporaneous remarks the quality of finished prose."

His presidency, spanning perhaps the most tumultuous period in the history of American higher education, saw the completion of Earlham's transformation from respectable Midwestern church college to national institution of higher education. Bolling also became a leading figure in higher education circles, often quoted in the press, the subject of stories in *Time* and *Reader's Digest*. He served as an advisor for the presidential campaigns of John F. Kennedy in 1960 and Richard M. Nixon in 1968 and was himself mentioned as a possible candidate for the United States Senate from Indiana. Nixon appointed him a member of the United States Commission to observe the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the United Nations.

### **Growth at Earlham**

Bolling presided over a prosperous and growing college. By the early 1960s, enrollment was at about 1,200, which was considered optimal. The student body, which before 1940 had come largely from Indiana and Ohio, now came from all over the United States. Enrollment of students from outside the United States continued to grow, as did the enrollment of African American students, who had been a consistent but relatively small presence on the campus since the nineteenth century. Earlham's endowment, about \$4 million in 1958, had increased to over \$20 million by 1973. Other funds went into improving the campus. A long-anticipated new library, named for the Lilly family of Indianapolis, opened in 1963. A new dormitory, Hoerner Hall was built the same year. The campus acquired its first student union, the Runyan Center, also housing a gallery, theater and offices and classrooms for the Fine Arts, in 1968. In 1972, a second building for the Natural Sciences, Stanley Hall, opened for use, with an adjacent science library. Other buildings were remodeled and updated. One mark of the college's growing prestige was the award of a chapter of Phi Beta Kappa in 1964. Like most American colleges, Earlham changed significantly in the 1960s, as many older regulations on student life were relaxed or discarded entirely. Some Bolling resisted, particularly the abolition of convocation attendance, which he saw as eroding the college's sense of community. While Earlham students were politically active and supportive of civil rights and antiwar movements, Earlham activism never became destructive or violent. When the killings of students at Kent State University in Ohio in May 1970 sparked protests on college campuses around the country, Bolling rode to Washington, D.C., with a group of Earlham students on a chartered bus to try to impress members of Congress with the seriousness of their concern.

One of Tom Jones's proudest accomplishments had been to assemble an extraordinary faculty, an achievement that Bolling built on and maintained. Faculty such as Librarian Evan Farber, historian Jackson Bailey and English professors Paul Lacey and Wayne Booth became nationally and internationally known, and many of the faculty Bolling hired remained central to the college down to the present.

An indefatigable traveler, it was natural for Bolling to encourage the growth of the Earlham off-campus study programs that had begun in the 1950s. By the early 1970s, Earlham faculty were leading programs all over Europe, as well as in Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa and Japan. Programs also began in the United States, in Washington D.C., Oak Ridge, Tennessee, New York City and Detroit, among other places. During a 1958 visit to East Africa, Bolling had developed ties with the rapidly growing Quaker community in Kenya. This led to developing study programs there and the strengthening of Quaker schools in East Africa. Bolling's presidency also saw the institutionalization of Earlham's ties with Japan that went back to the 1890s. In 1962, Earlham

received a large grant from the Ford Foundation, its first from a major foundation since the 1920s, to help develop a program in “non-Western” studies. This was the origin of the college’s now renowned program in Japanese Studies.

As Earlham’s president, Bolling developed a close friendship with Eli Lilly, the chairman of the board of the Indianapolis pharmaceutical company. Lilly was a multimillionaire unusual for his deep interests in history, religion and archaeology. He preferred the company of academics and scholars to socialites. Decades earlier, Lilly had purchased a large tract of land near Noblesville, Indiana, that included the home of William Conner, an Indian trader and prominent figure in early Indiana history. The Conner house, built in 1823, was reputed to be the first brick house in central Indiana. Lilly had furnished the Conner house with period antiques and had opened it to the public, while using the rest of the farm for experiments in stock breeding and raising. In December 1963, Bolling presented Lilly with a proposal under which Earlham would assume ownership of the farm and develop it for educational purposes. Lilly proved enthusiastic, and in 1964 made the first of several gifts to Earlham. It included the Conner house and a large tract of land. Subsequent gifts endowed both Conner Prairie and the college, including a 1973 donation of \$17 million that became known on the campus as “the magnificent gift.” Before his death in 1977, Mr. Lilly said that nothing he had achieved in his life made him prouder than the growth of Conner Prairie. After decades of development and expansion, Conner Prairie became independent of Earlham in 2006.

While Conner Prairie marked a new direction for Earlham away from the campus, the founding of the Earlham School of Religion in 1960 signaled a new direction on the campus. Bolling himself was a convinced Friend who had become a Quaker in the 1930s and had married into a prominent Quaker family. While Quakers had discussed a theological seminary to prepare Friends for ministry for over half a century, the obstacles—lack of money, divisions among American Quakers, and opposition to “preacher factories”—had appeared insurmountable. Bolling, however, began exploring the prospects for a seminary after becoming Earlham’s president. “Friends have a special mission still to perform within the Protestant Church and . . . a Quaker School of Religion could give something of real value to those who are going ahead in leadership among Friends,” he wrote. After considerable debate, the board gave approval to launch the Earlham School of Religion in the fall of 1960. When Bolling left Earlham in 1973, the school, after surviving financial challenges for most of the 1960s, was firmly established. It is now the oldest accredited Quaker theological seminary, with alumni in positions of leadership among all persuasions of Friends around the world.

While at Earlham, Bolling was a firm believer in the value of inter-institutional cooperation, especially for small colleges. His most visible contribution came in his leadership in founding the Great Lakes Colleges Association. By pooling resources, he argued, member institutions would be able to mount programs and initiatives that they could not undertake individually. With support from the Ford Foundation, in the spring of 1961, representatives of twelve colleges in Ohio, Indiana and Michigan—Oberlin, Kenyon, Denison, Ohio Wesleyan, Antioch, Wooster, Earlham, DePauw, Wabash, Albion, Hope and Kalamazoo—met in Cleveland in 1961 and formed the GLCA. Bolling became the first chairman of the board of directors. Today the GLCA oversees and coordinates programs ranging from off-campus studies to faculty development. While at Earlham, Bolling also served on the governing board or as chairman of the Associated Colleges of Indiana, the Indiana Conference on Higher Education, the Association of Protestant Colleges and Universities, National Council of Independent Colleges and Universities, the Task Force on the Financing of Higher Education, the National Council of Associations for International Studies, and the Association of American Colleges.

## **Beyond Earlham**

In October 1972, Bolling announced his intention to leave Earlham at the end of the 1972-1973 academic year to become the executive vice president of the Lilly Endowment in Indianapolis. Bolling's close friend Eli Lilly, the endowment's chief benefactor, had become concerned by accusations that it, then one of the nation's three largest foundations, was parochial and provincial in its vision and operations. Bolling continued half time at Earlham for the first six months of 1973, concluding his presidency with the announcement of a \$17 million Lilly gift at the 1973 commencement. A year later, in an unprecedented action for a former president, he became a member of the college's board of trustees, a position he continues to hold. Bolling spent five years at Lilly Endowment, retiring in 1978 after serving as chairman of its board.

After leaving Lilly, in 1978 Bolling moved to Washington, D.C., to become the chairman and chief executive officer of the Council on Foundations, a national research and support group for philanthropies. He spent four years there before theoretically retiring to become a research professor in the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy of Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service. In 1985, at the request of Father Theodore Hesburgh, the president of the University of Notre Dame, he moved to Jerusalem to become president and rector of The Ecumenical Institute, a center for advanced study that brings together Christian, Jewish and Muslim leaders, scholars and lay people interested in deepening their understanding of all three faiths. He retired from that position in 1988, in his seventy-fifth year.

While still at Earlham, the American Friends Service Committee asked Bolling to head an international working group studying Israeli-Palestinian-Arab conflict in the aftermath of the Six Days War of 1967. Its findings were published in 1970 as *Search for Peace in the Middle East*. The book went through several editions. Some saw it as an even-handed but compassionate analysis of the region's problems, with its clear sympathies for the plight of Palestinians. Others attacked it as unduly critical of Israel and unrealistic in its call for Israeli withdrawal from occupied lands. Because of his unofficial but deep involvement in Middle East affairs, Bolling became well acquainted with many leaders on all sides of the conflict. In the 1970s, he began to act as an unofficial intermediary between leaders and governments that did not have diplomatic relations or could not officially communicate for other reasons. In particular, he served as a channel of communication between Yasir Arafat and the Palestine Liberation Organization and the U.S. State Department and the White House in more than one administration. He developed a close friendship with President Jimmy Carter, which continued after Carter left office.

From age 75 to 94, Bolling kept up an impressive pace of international work. He served as a senior fellow at the Center for International Policy, a Washington-based research organization concerned with human rights, democratization and peace issues in areas of regional conflict, and, particularly, with United States policies toward those regions and issues. He also continued the interest in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union that dated back to his days as a war correspondent. In 1988 he was one of the organizers of the De Burght Conference, an international endeavor based in the Netherlands that works to free prisoners of conscience and religion. In the 1990s, as conflict broke out in the former Yugoslavia and the phrase "ethnic cleansing" became part of our vocabulary, Bolling was actively involved in peace efforts there. He also continued to be involved with Mercy Corps International, a non-governmental organization that does relief work in parts of the world suffering from war, such as Afghanistan, Sudan and Cambodia.

Bolling was the recipient of more than twenty-five honorary doctorates, including degrees from Oberlin College, Haverford College, Indiana University and Waseda University in Japan. He received an honorary doctorate of humane letters from Earlham in 1973. At that time the college established the Landrum Bolling Chair in Social Sciences. When the college opened its first new academic building in three decades in 2002, for the social sciences and interdisciplinary programs, it was named the Landrum Bolling Center. He also became one of the most respected figures in American higher education and peacemaking work.

On Bolling's departure from the Earlham presidency, Herman B. Wells, long-time president of Indiana University and an Earlham trustee, stated: "He has discovered within himself, ...a hitherto unknown man—a man whose wisdom, justice and courage have prevailed against all the powers of apathy, indecision and timidity and a man around whom good men have gathered so that together they have brought this precious college through many ordeals in the past decade to achieve its present high position of respect and esteem in the world of American higher education." Father Theodore Hesburgh, himself the most honored figure in American higher education, said of Bolling: "There are few people I've met in life that I've been more inspired by, more humanized by and, I hope, more liberated by, than Landrum Bolling."