The History and Development of the
Community College of the Finger Lakes

by Paul T. Phillips
Instructor of Criminal Justice
Community College of the Finger Lakes
May 1987
Introduction

The principle focus of this paper will deal with the history and development of the Community College of the Finger Lakes. My approach will be chronological and will address the physical, academic, and philosophical growth of CCFL from its conception as a "store front" operation to the present day campus facility.

The topics to be examined to determine significant changes during the transitional periods of the institution will be: A. The college campus facility  
B. Curriculum and program growth  
C. CCFL's role in the community  
D. CCFL's philosophy of education and mission

The collection of information for this paper will be accomplished by conducting interviews with five senior faculty members and the president of CCFL. I will also review the documentation, articles, and essays which have focused on the topics to be discussed. This paper will reflect the information received through review of the literature and personal observations of personnel employed by the institution during its development stages.
"The Beginning of a Concept"

It was during the late 1940's when the community college began to emerge in New York State as an institution for education above the high school level. Prior to the evolution of community colleges, two year technical colleges were established to provide vocational and technical training, particularly for veterans of World War II and others aspiring to enter the work force.

The concept of the community college was a new beginning in the field of education for the state of New York and Ontario County wanted to be part of this new movement.

It was during the early 1950's when residents of Ontario County considered the idea of establishing an institution to provide an educational opportunity above the secondary level. This was to become a tedious process but by 1960 the Loveless Report and the Hetherington Report recommended in favor of establishing a community college in the Ontario County region. At the same time Governor Nelson Rockefeller's Heald Commission Report called for an expansion of state supported community colleges. These reports, combined with the efforts of community leaders and interested citizens, were instrumental in bringing attention to the need for a community college responsive to the needs and ambitions of Ontario County residents.
While community interest groups were pushing for formation of a community college in Ontario County, educational leaders on the state and local level were emphasizing that such a college would serve a three-fold purpose:

"1. It would provide the first two years of education for students who wished to transfer to a four year institution to complete work toward their degree.

2. It would provide terminal courses (two years or less) for students wishing to study for occupational and vocational fields.

3. It would provide evening courses, both terminal and degree oriented, for adults and others who wished to further their education while continuing to work in daytime jobs." (Dannenbrink 1)

In 1964 the New York State Board of Regents expanded on the philosophy of the community college and included the following objectives:

1. To provide educational service to the entire community.

2. The college should be open to all high school graduates.

3. Community colleges should be operated at low cost to the students.

4. These colleges should be located within reasonable daily commuting distances. (Palinchak 146-147)
This philosophy of education was significant for developing a foundation on which a community college would be established to serve the Finger Lakes region, and this would become its mission statement.

The college would operate utilizing a non-selective process in its admissions policies. This "open door" policy is based on the concept that every high school graduate has the right to pursue education beyond the secondary level and the college should be flexible enough in its admissions requirements to serve all citizens of the community. Of course this would result in the acceptance of a wide range of students with assorted abilities and a variety of personal educational needs. These students would be veterans, housewives, disadvantaged, young, senior citizens, and adults taking refresher courses, just to name a few. The policy was not designed to allow all students who were accepted to enter any course or program of their choice. Certain students would be restricted in their selection of courses based on testing and past records. This meant that under-prepared and under-achieving students would have to be provided with remedial and supportive services after admission, but this again is all part of the community college philosophy.

This open door policy did not guarantee graduation to every student at the end of four semesters. On the contrary, a student who was in need of remedial coursework might have
to extend their stay at CCFL until they completed the requirements for graduation at an acceptable level of competence.

A significant step in the process of establishing a community college took place in September of 1965 when the Ontario Board of Supervisors took action to establish the Community College of the Finger Lakes and eight months later approval for the college was given by the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York. A Board of Trustees was appointed for the college. This board would establish policies for the college and direct the president of the college and his staff in the execution of these policies. This board would also approve the operating budget and have control over college programs and personnel.

On November 14, 1966 the first meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Community College of the Finger Lakes was held and approval for the operating budget for the college and the capital budget for operating equipment for 1966-1967 was given.

After numerous discussions regarding the official name of the college, the College Board of Trustees selected "The Community College of the Finger Lakes" as the official name and in April of 1967 the college seal was officially adopted by the board.

The college seal is similar to the Ontario County Seal in that it shows an Indian with drawn bow standing against
the waters of Canandaigua Lake. It also displays the official name of the college and four words: vision, integrity, strength, and humility. The college colors, blue and gold, also appear in the seal, representing the lakes and hills found in this region.

"The Store Front Operator"

In September of 1967 the Community College of the Finger Lakes began instruction by offering non-credit, community interest classes to 98 part-time students in the new wing of Canandaigua Academy. Just prior to this, the College Board of Trustees completed the task of hiring four faculty members and four administrators. Dr. Roy I. Satre, Jr. was named the first president of CCFL and Dr. Charles J. Meder became the first dean of the college. Four weeks later the SUNY Board of Trustees would authorize CCFL to offer three degrees: an Associate in Arts degree, an Associate in Science degree, and an Associate in Applied Science degree. Curriculum approval was also given in the following areas:

1. Business administration
2. Secretarial Science
3. Mathematics and Science
4. Liberal Arts
5. Accounting
By January of 1968 instruction began for full-time students enrolled in credit courses. Instruction for these courses took place in a non-campus setting and to this day senior faculty members refer to this period as the "store front days" and, on occasion, the "good old days".

The first administration and faculty offices were located in Brigham Hall on Bristol Street, an old folk's home where bedrooms were converted into office space. Some of the first classrooms for Science and Math were located in the Perego Building on Main Street in Canandaigua. Classrooms for the Social Sciences were constructed in the Sommers Building on Main Street where a car dealership once operated. Instruction for the new nursing program took place in the Education Building of the Veteran's Administration Hospital. Portable classrooms soon became part of the campus and were located behind the Hook Building. Other faculty offices were in Thompson Hospital and in the Hook Building where the student center was located. The library was located behind the Sommers Building and the bookstore operated out of a back room at 34 Main Street and later moved to a garage on Parrish Street.

This unusual setting might have seemed inappropriate for a college campus in terms of a conducive atmosphere for instruction, administration, and learning, but this college was successful in its mission despite the working conditions.
Something extraordinary developed during the years of the store front operation that would extend far beyond the mission statement of the college. For the most part it was a young faculty who shared the same personal and philosophical commitment to the goals and objectives of the college and its philosophy of education. The faculty and administration were free to create and innovate within an atmosphere of devotion and camaraderie. A special relationship developed between the faculty and the students. They would meet, mostly on Friday nights, for discussion and shared participation. Small class sizes enabled instructors to know every student and understand their personal needs and aspirations. The faculty demonstrated a willingness to listen, stimulate, and assist at every opportunity. Light enrollment provided more time for the faculty to serve as counselors, assist students with activities, and teach in the true sense of the word, in order to make the college a community institution dedicated to teaching. Faculty could work with students on an individual basis to help them form goals and especially if they were in need of remedial services. This became obligatory on the part of the faculty because, unlike today, there were no structured programs or learning labs to meet the needs of the under-prepared students.

There were certain drawbacks during the storefront days. The task of getting from one class to another sometimes became difficult, especially if your next class was several
blocks away. Snowstorms and other weather related setbacks hampered students and faculty members from attempting to arrive in class on time. This was not perceived to be a major problem and everyone seemed to take it in stride. It became part of the struggle toward making the institution successful in spite of the physical barriers.

The physical condition of the buildings used for instruction and administration were sometimes poor at best. Classrooms and offices were sometimes uncomfortably cold during the winter months and during warm spells it often became necessary for some teachers to hold classes outdoors to escape the heat in the classrooms.

No one really knew how long the college could function under these conditions, and even though the faculty and administrators were truly dedicated and committed to the mission of the college, they felt skeptical about their future. Rumors seemed to always be present on campus with regard to the college closing down or continuing its service to the community. A new campus would not only help facilitate the mission, but it would also help secure the future of the college.

"The College Grows"

Within two years of its formation the college had grown immensely in terms of student enrollment and faculty membership. As enrollment increased, additional instructors were hired.
New programs were also added once authorized by the State University of New York Board of Trustees.

The first commencement took place on June 8, 1969 at which time twelve degrees were awarded. One year later, 141 students would graduate at the second commencement ceremony. To accommodate this growth, and for the college to survive, it was decided that a new facility would be constructed. Several sites were considered for the new college campus but the College Board of Trustees, the Board of Supervisors, and the State University of New York approved the Lincoln Hill site just east of the city of Canandaigua. The new campus would be constructed on 235 acres overlooking Canandaigua Lake.

In July of 1969 the Lincoln Hill property was purchased by Ontario County and in December of that year Tallman and Thomas of Ithaca were selected as the architects of the new facility. In the early months of 1971 the College Board of Trustees and the County Board of Supervisors would approve construction of the new campus. An educational master plan was also approved. This 54 page document described courses and programs to be offered, student enrollment projections, and the amount of space needed to manage them. This document would serve as a basis for design of the new campus which would cost a little over eleven million dollars to build.

This new facility would expand CCFL's role in the community. The college could now serve the public by providing more than
just educational services. Resources available for use by the community would be a modern, well-stocked library, recreational facilities such as tennis courts and athletic fields, and cultural events sponsored by the college.

By September 1975, the new facility was operational under the leadership of Dr. Charles Meder who became the second president of CCPL in October of 1973. This four level terraced campus would contain four units, A, B, C, and D, and was designed to accommodate additional construction. Of its four units, section A would house a 50,000 volume library and support services. Sections B and C consisted of main academic classrooms, cafeteria, student center, counseling center, laboratories, and faculty offices. Section D housed large group instruction rooms, administration offices, records, the bookstore, and the gymnasium with a seating capacity of 2500. The interior design was unique in that it incorporated removable interior walls to allow for flexible use of classroom space. The exterior has the appearance of being four separate units, but are actually designed into one building allowing movement throughout the entire structure without having to travel outdoors. Student dormitories were not constructed as part of the campus, but like most community colleges, student housing would be available off campus in private homes, apartments, and motels.

In September 1975, enrollment had reached 1187 full-time students, an increase of 782 over the previous year. Part-time
enrollment totalled 1198 students. As the student population
grew, additional staff were added totaling 85 members.
Academic programs included Associate in Arts, with 9 areas
of concentrations, Associate in Science, with 6 areas of
concentration, and Associate in Applied Science, with a major
in 6 different areas. (CCFL catalog 8)

During the late 1970's and early 1980's CCFL developed
new programs and expanded its current programs to address the
needs of the student body and the needs of the community.
Some of these programs were:

-- certificate programs designed to meet specific student
goals
-- cultural, social, and community service programs to
  meet community needs
-- part-time degree programs, workshops, and courses for
  job skill enrichment
-- college proficiency examination programs
-- education opportunity program for disadvantaged students
-- two-plus-two program for students wishing to transfer
to another college after graduation in pursuit of a
  baccalaureate degree
-- developmental studies program designed to provide help
  for students who need to improve their academic skills
-- continuing education program providing opportunities
  for adults to pursue degree programs not only during
regular college hours, but also at night and on weekends. Courses are also offered during January and in the summer.

In 1982 construction began for a permanent Finger Lakes Performing Arts Center on the CCFL campus. The facility is owned by the County of Ontario and managed by the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra. This center has a 65 foot stage, an orchestra pit, rehearsal rooms, dressing rooms, a backstage area, and 2600 seats. This permanent summer home for the RPO provides the community with entertainment throughout the summer and also serves as the location for CCFL's graduation ceremonies and convocations.

"CCFL 1987"

Over the last twenty years CCFL has grown in many ways. It has grown physically with the construction of a modern facility and all its amenities. Today, over 1500 full-time and 1600 part-time students are enrolled and the college now employs 127 full-time professional staff members. The college offers instructional services at eight off-campus sites, along with library resources, laboratory and computer access, and student support services.

One off-campus site in particular, the Geneva Extension Center, is a throw back to the store front operation of twenty years ago. It is an older building converted into classrooms and offices with full AV services, an academic...
computer center, and a developmental center library. A small staff operates the center under the direction of one full-time administrator. It seems that even though the college has grown over the years it has also returned to where it began, as a store front operation.

The college has also grown academically. Today CCFL offers 20 degree programs in both the transfer and career areas. It has seven academic departments and five divisions. Academic standards has always been a concern of CCFL. Today all incoming freshmen are tested in order to evaluate the academic status of each student. This enables the college to accommodate each student based on their individual needs. An exit essay has also been implemented by the English department as part of a course. Students must demonstrate a minimum competency to pass this course and graduate. (Middle States 36)

The programs that were developed in the 1970's to better serve the student body and the community still remain and new programs were implemented as the college grew.

It is obvious that the academic growth of CCFL over the past 20 years has been dictated by the needs of the community and the responsibility of the college to address those needs.

CCFL's philosophy of education has not drastically changed over the years. The new faculty members can not relate to the store front days as they are not involved in a day to
day struggle to help the college survive. Job security and working conditions are excellent, but some faculty members describe today's college as busy, impersonal, and bureaucratic in contrast to the adjectives used to describe the college 20 years ago. The college still remains dedicated to its mission and the faculty members understand the college's philosophy of education and work hard to achieve the goals and objectives of the mission statement.

The growth of CCFL's academic programs, its faculty and staff, and the facility itself has all been the result of the college's responsibility and desire to serve the community.

Over the past 20 years CCFL has become a success story, not just because it has achieved the objectives stated by the Board of Regents in 1964, but also because thousands of individuals were provided with the opportunity and the resources to fulfill their needs and aspirations through an institution dedicated to improve the quality of life in the Finger Lakes region.
Works Cited

1. A Brief History and Chronolog of CCFL, CCFL Archives, A01-580-3, (1973)

Persons Interviewed

1. Dr. Charles J. Meder, President of CCFL
2. Jack L. Bricker, Professor of Political Science
3. Raymond P. Smith, Professor of Mathematics
4. Darrow G. Dunham, Professor of Mathematics
5. Henry Maus, Professor of History
6. John L. Haluch, Professor of Biology