

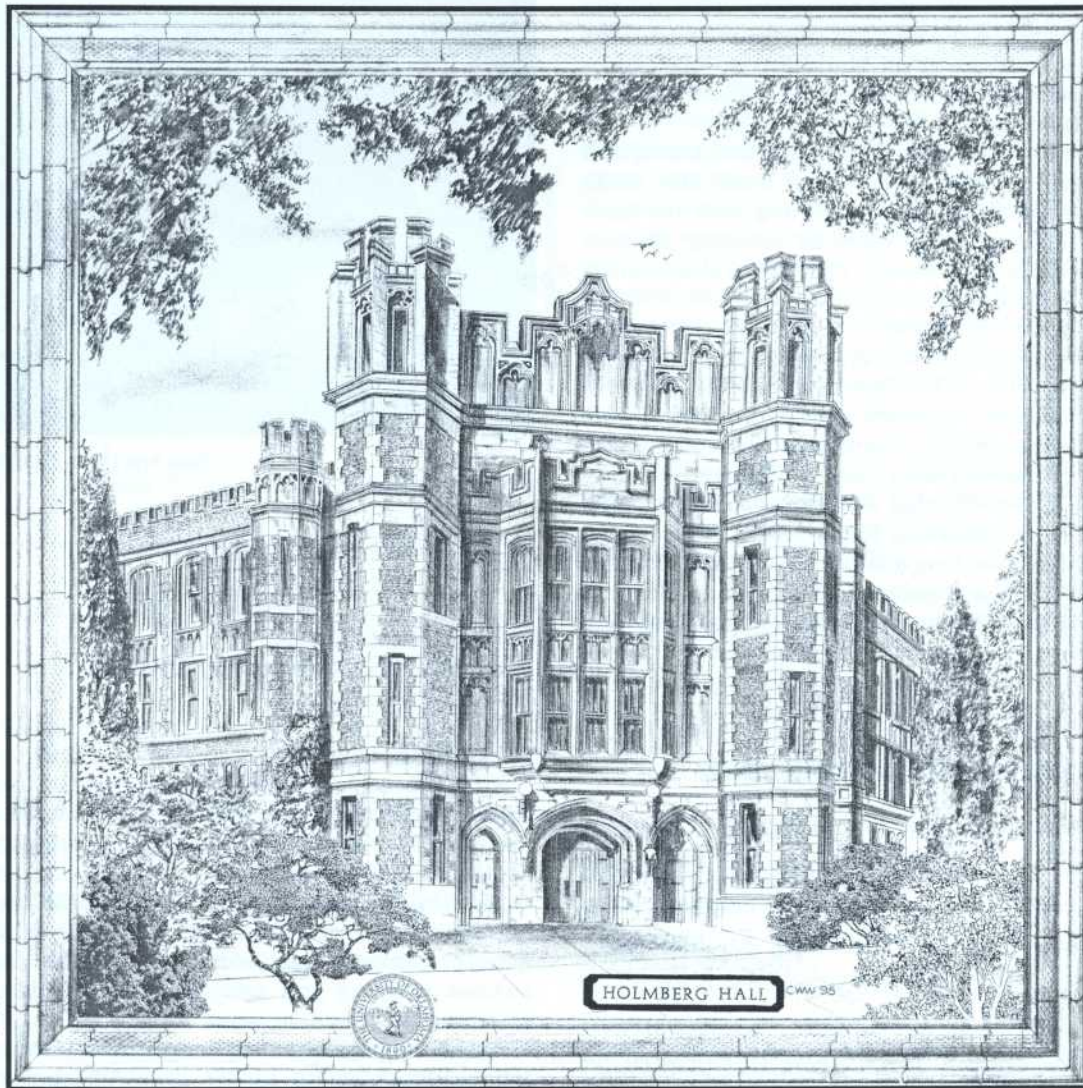
# Treasures from the Archives

14<sup>th</sup> in a series

“An Imperishable Part of Our Traditions”

## Fredrik Holmberg Departs

BY DAVID W. LEVY



Drawing by Charles W. Ward

**I**n the last issue of *Sooner Magazine*, we considered a reminiscence written by Dean Fredrik Holmberg. Composed in 1934, it was mainly an account of how he came to the University of Oklahoma in 1903, what he found when he arrived and what prospects and possibilities he saw arrayed before him as he began his career. For three decades, Holmberg made the most of those opportunities, doing much to enhance the appreciation of music and the other fine arts, not only on the campus, but also through the hundreds of students he trained and inspired all across the state of Oklahoma. *continued*



**T**he documents printed in this issue illuminate three episodes from the end of his service at the University.

The first involves a campuswide attempt in 1920 to have the Fine Arts Building named in Holmberg's honor. He had campaigned hard to have the structure built, and there were many who thought it appropriate that it should, from the start, bear his name (just as there were many at the same time who believed that the new geology building should be named for Charles N. Gould, the pioneering professor of geology).

The second episode occurs at the end of 1934 and the start of 1935, when, in the midst of the Great Depression that hit faculty members at the University so hard, Dean Holmberg became ill and required surgery at the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota.

And the third episode traces the events that transpired following his death, a year later, on New Year's Day, 1936.

These documents share the refreshing (and too rare) quality of showing everyone involved behaving at their very best. We see Holmberg's modesty, vulnerability, humanity and loyalty; we observe President William Bennett Bizzell's extraordinary compassion and friendship. These letters reveal the sympathy and philanthropy of Charles Mayo. They also show Mrs. Holmberg's devotion to her husband's memory, her admiration of Dr. Bizzell and her generosity toward the University where her husband had served with such distinction. Finally, they indicate a University that was willing to honor a man whose work was so important to the future and so effectively rendered over so long a time.

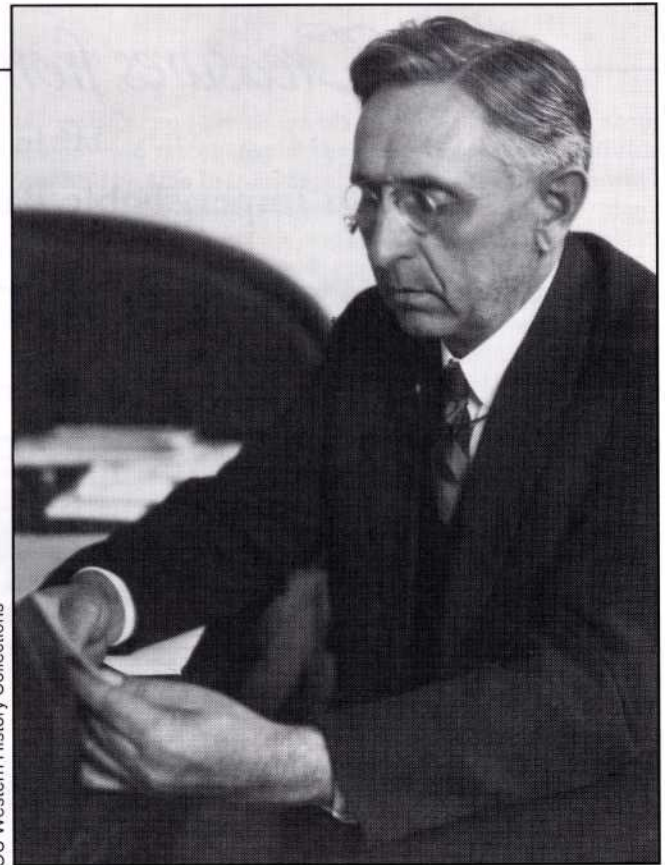
There is, in short, a standard of decency and altruism in these old letters that is inspiring and touching and worth recording . . . and worth remembering.

---

**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN**

We, the students of the University of Oklahoma, do herein ask and petition through the President of the University and the Board of Regents, that the so called Fine Arts Building be dedicated "Holmberg Hall". We sincerely feel that because of his long and devoted services to the University and staff of Oklahoma, Dean Holmberg is entitled to this selective honor. In view of the fact that a larger percent of students study Music and Art in this University than any other State University in the Union, is a self speaking evidence of the efforts of Dean Holmberg.

*[signed by 218 University of Oklahoma students]*



OU Western History Collections

Fine Arts Dean Fredrik Holmberg

March 4, 1920

Dr. Stratton D. Brooks  
President, University of Oklahoma  
Faculty Exchange.

Dear Dr. Brooks:

I have been informed that students in the University are preparing a petition asking you and the Board of Regents to have the Fine Arts building dedicated "Holmberg Hall".

Naturally, I deeply feel and appreciate the students taking this position and if you and the Board will in any manner consider this petition, I have the following to suggest (hoping you will pardon me for suggesting anything).

If the Geology building is dedicated to a living man, I have no objection to the Fine Arts building being officially named "Holmberg Hall". If the Geology building is not dedicated in the name of a living man, I prefer that the Fine Arts building be not named "Holmberg Hall".

If after I am dead the University authorities unanimously think that I have lived and worked for the University in such a manner that my memory may be worthy the distinction of having the Fine Arts building named "Holmberg Hall", I have no objection.

Respectfully,  
Fredrik Holmberg



**If the Geology building  
is not dedicated in the  
name of a living man,  
I prefer that the  
Fine Arts building  
be not named  
"Holmberg Hall."**

Dr. Fredrik Holmberg  
Saint Mary's Hospital  
Rochester, Minnesota

December 27, 1934.

My dear Dean:

Our entire college family has been greatly concerned about you during these Christmas days, but it is comforting to learn that you are getting along well. I am sure it was the wise thing for you to go to Mayo's and have this operation. I hope that you will come back to us feeling fine.

Mrs. Bizzell talked to Mrs. Holmberg over the telephone a day or two ago, and I saw Louise yesterday; they are all well.

Everything is going fine here at the University, so there is nothing to worry about.

Sincerely your friend,  
W. B. Bizzell  
X.

\* \* \* \*

Dear Dr. Bizzell:-

Please pardon lead pencil. It was fine of you to send that letter. I truly appreciated it.

I'll be out of here about the middle of the week and home a day later. My hospital and nurse fee amounted to \$200.00 which I have paid. My hotel & board bill will be about \$60.00. R[ail]. R[oad]. fare etc. \$45.00 or close to \$300.00 in all. But then comes the Clinic fee and the surgents [**sic**] fee, and that is where I am going to impose upon you as follows:-

Will you please write a letter and send same by air mail asking that the surgents fee and clinic fee be made as reasonable as possible. Please tell them of the large reduction in income—less than half what it used to be, of financial losses on investments, large expenses because of illness that I have had over a period of years etc.

It will help if you make an appeal for me. It is all true and I am really "hard up". I don't know when I'll be able to get on my feet again. I surely will be grateful if you do this for me. Add[ress]. letter to Dr. Charles Mayo, Mayo Clinic, Rochester, Minn.

Thanking you most sincerely, I am as ever,  
Fredrik Holmberg

\* \* \* \*

Dr. Charles Mayo  
Mayo Clinic  
Rochester, Minnesota.

January 7, 1935

Dear Dr. Mayo:

One of my associates, Dean Fredrik Holmberg, is a patient in St. Mary's Hospital. He has recently been operated upon and we are all happy to learn that he is getting along nicely.

I write to give you a little information that I am sure you will be glad to have. Dean Holmberg, like all the other members of our staff, has had his salary cut drastically in recent years. He should have gone to you some time ago, but I am sure he postponed it as long as possible because of his financial situation. I am sure you are more or less familiar with the financial conditions in our colleges and universities due to your connection with the University of Minnesota. I shall appreciate, under the circumstances, any reasonable concession you can make with reference to the cost of Dean Holmberg's hospitalization. I know that he will greatly appreciate any consideration you may be able to show him.

All of us here at the University are profoundly grateful for the excellent consideration that has been shown him, and we are looking for him to return greatly improved in health.

Very sincerely yours,  
W. B. Bizzell, President.

\* \* \* \*

DR. CHARLES H. MAYO  
ROCHESTER, MINN.

January 11  
1935

Frederik [**sic**] Holmberg, Dean  
School of Fine Arts  
The University of Oklahoma  
Norman, Oklahoma

My dear Dean Holmberg:

Since you left I have had a letter from President Bizzell of the University, and in view of what he writes concerning your financial circumstances I am reducing the balance of your account to \$100.00. I, too, know what hard times educators have had during the last few years.

I hope you will continue to improve, and that you will let us hear from you from time to time as to how you are getting along.

With every good wish for the New Year, I am  
Sincerely yours  
C. H. Mayo

*continued*



\* \* \* \*

Dr. W. B. Bizzell, President  
University of Oklahoma  
Norman, Oklahoma

January 23, 1935

Dear Doctor Bizzell:

I have been to your office a couple of times in an attempt to see you but found that you were very busy and I did not feel like imposing upon your time unless it was absolutely necessary. Naturally, with the legislature meeting and you attempting to get funds for this school this is the busiest time of the year for you. I wanted to thank you, from the very depth of my heart, for the letter which you wrote to Dr. Mayo. My bill, yet due, was \$200.00 and you will notice from the enclosed letter which Dr. Mayo wrote me that this has been cut exactly \$100.00, due to your letter.

I feel that the Mayo Clinic did me some real good and that the operation was successful. I have not, of course, as yet gained my full strength and have to take it a little easy but hope to be as good as new pretty soon.

If there is anything in particular that I can do or any way that I can help you in connection with your difficult work in having the right thing done for the University I hope you will call on me.

Most sincerely your friend,  
Fredrik Holmberg  
Dean, College of Fine Arts



**The Norman Transcript, January 2, 1936, p. 1:**

**Funeral Rites For  
Dean Holmberg Held  
In O.U. Auditorium**

**Veteran Head of Fine Arts College Is Given Tributes  
For Work in Spreading Music Appreciation**

Dr. Fredrik Holmberg, 63-year-old dean of the University college of fine arts who died Wednesday morning, was mourned today by Norman residents who knew him as a good citizen, by University people who know him as a capable dean, and by music lovers all over the state who recognized him as an outstanding exponent of the fine arts.

Dean Holmberg was stricken with a heart ailment shortly before Christmas and went to the University infirmary for treatment. He was taken to St. Anthony's hospital in Oklahoma City Monday, and died Tuesday morning.

Funeral services were held at 2 o'clock this afternoon in the University auditorium, in the Fine Arts building which Dean Holmberg had made an outstanding center of fine arts appreciation . . .

\* \* \* \*

Mrs. Fredrik Holmberg  
766 DeBarr Street  
Norman, Oklahoma

January 30, 1936

My dear Mrs. Holmberg:

The Board of Regents at its meeting Thursday, January 23, adopted a resolution, a copy of which I am enclosing.

I was requested to send this to you and the Secretary of the Board of Regents was instructed to include a copy in the minutes of the board.

Sincerely your friend,  
W. B. Bizzell, President.



The death of Dean Fredrik Holmberg on the morning of January 1 was a great shock to everyone who had known him through his long connection with the University. Dean Holmberg had served the University for thirty-three years and for twenty-seven years of that time he was Dean of the College of Fine Arts. When he came to the institution it was limited in equipment and the attendance was small. During the long period of his connection with the University he saw the enrolment increase from hundreds to thousands. Under his direction music increased from a department to a school and finally to a college, coordinate with the other major divisions of the University.

But facts and figures do not reflect adequately the service of Dean Holmberg to the University. He not only touched the lives of hundreds of students, but his knowledge of music and appreciation for all of the fine arts quickened the cultural lives of thousands of people in the State who never were students here.

The College of Fine Arts will forever be a monument to his devotion to the University and to his talents as a musician. His memory abides in the hearts of all of us who knew him and appreciated his worth as a man, a citizen and as a cultured gentleman.

—W. B. Bizzell

\* \* \* \*

Board of Regents  
University of Oklahoma  
Norman, Oklahoma

We, the family of the late Dean Fredrik Holmberg find words inadequate to express our appreciation for the resolution you adopted at your meeting January 23, 1936. This expression of yours will always be treasured with the deepest of feeling. We are sincerely grateful for this tribute paid to our beloved husband and father.

Mrs. Fredrik Holmberg  
Louise Holmberg Crawford  
Linne Fredrik Holmberg

\* \* \* \*

Dear Dr. Bizzell,

We only wish that all the people in the state knew you as we know you—your bigness, thoughtfulness and many other splendid qualities we shan't attempt to record here.

The chances are we would never be able to do a great deal for you—however, in this world one never knows—but please count us as truly loyal and sincere friends who would be happy to do anything for you at any time.

Sincerely yours,  
Mrs. Fredrik Holmberg  
and Louise

November 13th  
—1936—

\* \* \* \*

Press Release [undated]:

### Fredrik Holmberg Memorial

President Bizzell announced today that Mrs. Fredrik Holmberg had authorized him to announce that she would make three awards of \$50.00 each, to be known as "The Fredrik Holmberg Memorial Awards"—one for the School of Art, one for the School of Drama, and one for the School of Music . . . Presentation of the Fredrik Holmberg Memorial Awards will be made annually at commencement time.

\* \* \* \*

Dear Dr. Bizzell,

Enclosed you will find a check for one hundred and fifty dollars for the award given in memory of my beloved husband.

It is of some comfort to me to be able to do this little bit and that is increased by you being the one to make the presentation.

Your friend,  
Mrs. Fredrik Holmberg

May thirteenth  
—1937—

\* \* \* \*

Mrs. Fredrik Holmberg,  
766 DeBarr Avenue  
Norman, Oklahoma.

May 17, 1937

Dear Mrs. Holmberg:

This is to acknowledge receipt of your check for \$150.00 which is to be awarded to three outstanding students in the College of Fine Arts. I have already asked Professor Salter to take the necessary steps to have these students selected and it is my plan to make these awards and others personally in a special exercise

at 3:00 p.m. on Sunday, June 6.

I want you to know I think this is one of the finest things that has ever happened here. You have touched my heart deeply by providing an award in memory of Dean Holmberg whose work for the University is an imperishable part of our traditions.

With kindest personal regards, I am

Very sincerely your friend,  
W. B. Bizzell, President.

\* \* \* \*

Mrs. Fredrik Holmberg  
766 DeBarr Avenue,  
Norman, Oklahoma.

January 5, 1938

Dear Mrs. Holmberg:

I am pleased to advise you that at the meeting of the Board of Regents held here on Monday, the Fine Arts Building was officially designated Holmberg Hall, in honor of Dean Holmberg.

I am requesting Mr. Walter W. Kraft, Superintendent of University Utilities, to have a bronze plaque made, . . . and placed in the entrance to the building. I am also requesting that a designation be placed over the entrance to the building. As soon as this can be done, an appropriate dedication will be arranged in the Fine Arts Auditorium.

I want you to know that I am gratified at the action of the Board, and it was a genuine pleasure to me to recommend that this be done.

With kindest regards, I am

Very sincerely your friend,  
W. B. Bizzell, President.

\* \* \* \*

Dear Dr. Bizzell,

I believe you know without me telling you that I am happier (if such a word can apply to my present life) than I have been for two years, over this permanent memorial for my late beloved husband. The part you have played in these last two years of my life, the sympathy and understanding, is one of the major forces that has kept me doing "the best I can". It is also very comforting to read in your letter that you are making arrangements for the plaque, the name over the entrance and the dedication services—knowing this I know everything will be done, and done beautifully.

Your sincere friend,  
Mrs. Fredrik Holmberg

January ninth  
—1938—

[SOURCE: All the documents printed here are to be found in the personnel file of Dean Fredrik Holmberg, Office of the Provost, Evans Hall, University of Oklahoma.]