

OU historian cites Adams as a model for presidents

By Carol Azizian
staff writer

President Ronald Reagan could learn a valuable history lesson from the nation's second president.

Reagan could learn how to curtail defense spending, quell conflicts between opposing factions in his own party and reach a compromise on controversial issues such as abortion.

That's according to Oakland University Prof. Charles W. Akers, who wrote a study on John Adams' presidency. The work will appear as a chapter in "The Presidents: A Reference History," to be published this year by Scribner's.

ALTHOUGH THE study doesn't compare the two presidents, Akers does argue that Adams was a model leader.

Adams thought a president should be strong and independent, rise above party and mediate between contending forces in society," said Akers.

"If Reagan wants to win re-election in 1984, he must rise above party (considerations) and curb extremists. But he seems committed to his own ideology," the Rochester resident said in an interview.

"That makes it difficult to come to terms with issues such as nuclear disarmament, prayer in schools and abortion."

"Someone has to take a middle position on those issues to bring the country together," said Akers, a professor specializing in American history at OU since 1968.

A World War II Navy veteran, Akers is author of three books on important figures in early U.S. history — Abigail Adams, Jonathan Mayhew and Samuel Cooper. He also teaches courses on the history of sport and American religion. He has conducted



Charles W. Akers
'rise above party'

research on the history of American women and the social history of medicine.

AKERS' RECENT work on John Adams reveals the second president followed a middle course between his own Federalist Party and Jefferson's Republicans. This course enabled the country to weather international and domestic storms from 1797 to 1801, Akers said.

"If Reagan carefully studied the example of John Adams, he might decide that not all defense expenditures are justified."

Adams made that decision when — during the crisis of possible war with France in 1798 — he disbanded the Army, headed by Alexander Hamilton, a leading member of the Federalist Party.

"He felt the country's defense could rest with the Navy," Akers said.

THAT MOVE was opposed not only by the Federalists but also by a great many Americans, Akers said.

"Americans were just as divided then over the issue of whether we should support France as they are now over the abortion issue."

"Supporting France had become a moral issue. As the French Revolution became more radical, many Americans associated siding with France with an attack on Christianity. Nevertheless, Adams made peace with France."

Adams exhibited the same spirit of independence when handling domestic issues, Akers said.

"Although he signed the infamous Sedition Act — which made it a crime to criticize the president or Congress — he refused to enforce it vigorously as many in his party had hoped."

And he pardoned Pennsylvania Republicans who led a tax rebellion.

AKERS BELIEVES Adams' presidency best represented the intent of the Founding Fathers, who made no provision in the Constitution for political parties.

"But Adams himself predicted that, in the long run, the democratic process would turn into a contest of factions and special-interest groups."

That prediction has been proven correct, Akers said. "Congress has turned into representatives of special-interest groups. Political action committees are the most potent political force in the country."

In addition, most political scientists believe the government runs smoothly only when the president and a majority of congressmen and senators are members of the same party, Akers said.

ONE WAY to address the problem is to change the current method of electing the president, Akers added.

"There has to be a better way to encourage more qualified men to run for office," he said.

"The president could serve a six-year term and be ineligible for re-election. That would encourage him to be more independent of Congress."

With the Bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution approaching (1987), it's an appropriate time to re-examine the presidential system, Akers said.

"The Founding Fathers believed that any constitution should be periodically revised. But we've never had another constitutional convention."

GOP names district chiefs

Besides electing Spencer Abraham their state chairman, delegates to last weekend's Republican state convention also elected district officers and members of the GOP State Committee.

In the 17th Congressional District, Gerald Rosen, Detroit attorney and 1982 congressional nominee, defeated Oakland County Commissioner James E. Lanni for the chairmanship of the district committee.

The 17th's four members of the Republican State Committee will be Dan Bovolenta of Dearborn Heights, Marge Small of Detroit, Bettie Solida of Royal Oak and Jim Robinson of Berkley.

Alan May of Bloomfield Township is new chairman of the 18th Congressional

al District, which also includes major portions of the old 19th District in Oakland County.

State committee members are Dottie McIntosh of West Bloomfield, former state Rep. James DeLoach of Bloomfield Township, Mary Lu Bennethum of Bloomfield Township and Arthur Saltzman of Franklin Village.

The state committee is the governing body of the party between conventions.

In balloting for the third (youth) vice-chairman, John Guskak of Livonia won with 1,202 votes. The Michigan State University junior topped Mike Cassa of Southfield with 442 votes and Frank Vaughn of Farmington Hills with 129.

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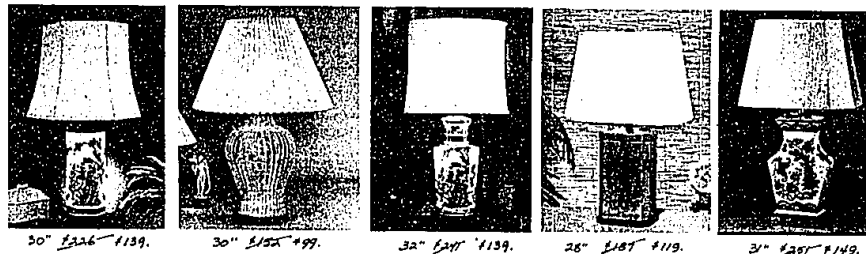
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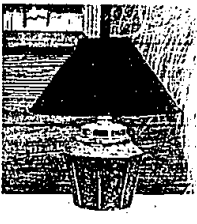
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