

The Scattergood Seminary

Thomas Scattergood, a Wilburite Quaker of Philadelphia, seeing the need of education in accordance with strict Quaker discipline, gave ten thousand dollars to start a school in Cedar County, Iowa. The quiet rural community of West Branch and Springdale, away from the distractions of the city and the influences of less rigid standards of conduct, seemed to be an ideal location for such a school. Moreover, there were many Wilburite Quakers in that locality, under whose direction the school could be maintained. The local Quarterly Meeting immediately appointed a committee to build the schoolhouse, and in that very spring of 1890 the ground was broken on a beautiful site two and one-half miles southeast of West Branch. Benjamin Ellyson, a farmer residing in the neighborhood, spent the whole summer overseeing the erection of the two and one-half story building.

When the school opened in the fall, with Richard and Sarah Mott as Superintendent and Matron, there were over thirty students enrolled. During the early years, an average of nearly forty boys and girls attended the classes which ranged from elementary work through three years of high school.

It is the practice among Friends to have boarding-schools in which the boys and girls live together in a

wholesome, well-regulated atmosphere. At Scattergood, however, this custom was not strictly followed at first: children living in the neighborhood were permitted to sleep at their homes and attend the school as "day scholars". But this arrangement proved unsatisfactory and was abandoned. Students may now spend one week-end a term away from the school.

From three to seven students have graduated each year. Usually they have gone to the Barnesville Academy of the Ohio Yearly Meeting for their final year of high school. Now, however, with the elementary grades discontinued and the work of the school devoted to older pupils, the last year of high school has been added, and for two years the Scattergood Seminary has been accredited, the majority of the graduates going directly to college.

Scattergood has grown. The original large schoolhouse is still retained as the main building containing the girls' dormitory with its nine double beds, the senior girls' home-room, the room for the junior girls, the freshman and sophomore girls' room, and those of the two "lady-teachers"; the classrooms; the teachers' "den" in which the pupils may confer with their instructors, and which takes the place of the usual principal's office. The furnace room, laundry, and dining room, with its two oval tables, are in the basement. It is here that a few of the girls may help pay for their tuition of eighty-one dollars a term (\$162 a year) by washing the

dishes. The boys and the "man-teacher" have their rooms in a special dormitory built in 1916.

In the fall of 1923, through the influence of the young people of the Yearly Meeting of Conservative Friends, the students of the school, both boys and girls, built a gymnasium on plans drawn up by Will Mott of Iowa City, chairman of the committee. The committee, appointed the year before by the Meeting to investigate the advisability of building a gymnasium, had reported in favor of building if funds could be raised. While the Meeting was at lunch in a large barn, Anna Mott told them why money was needed. The sum of one thousand dollars was raised by personal donation that day, and when the Yearly Meeting closed, fifteen hundred dollars had been pledged. The gymnasium, intended purely for exercise, not as a practice floor for intramural competition, is a one-room building, thirty-six by seventy feet. A scissors truss supports the roof, giving additional height to the basketball floor.

The most recent addition to the buildings of the seminary is the primary schoolhouse given to Scattergood last year by the Hickory Grove Monthly Meeting. Moved over near the main building and equipped with benches and tools, it now houses the manual training classes.

Around the school are many evidences of the work of the manual training classes. As well as repairing chairs and benches, the boys have made for the school a medicine chest, a well-planned magazine

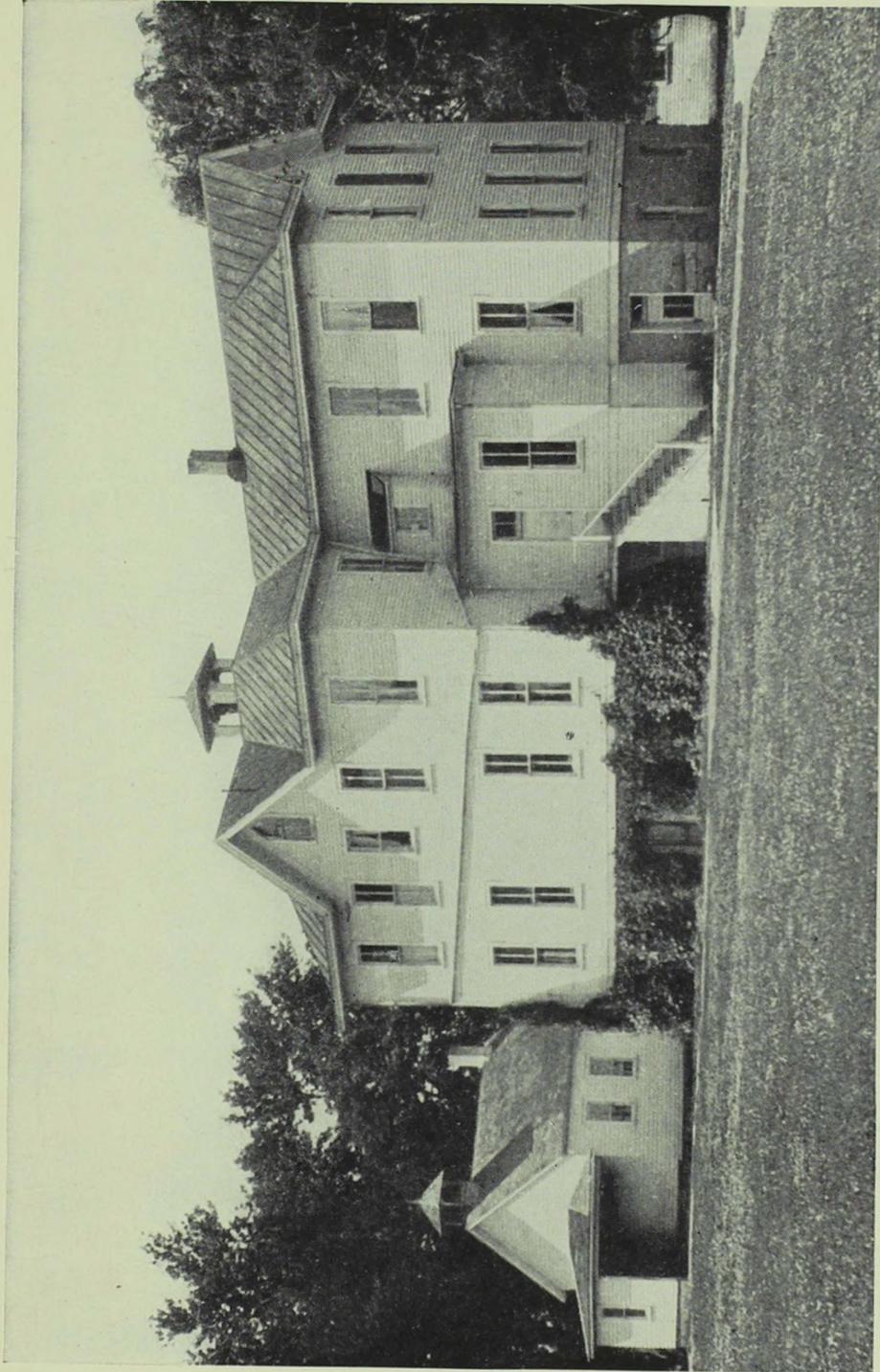
case in the library, and a novel thirty-two hole mailbox for the upper hall in which each teacher and pupil has a compartment for turning in papers, returning corrected work, and for correspondence. The students may not bring newspapers or periodicals into the school, but the school subscribes to a number of interesting magazines which are kept in the library. The library contains several hundred books: last year a gift of fifty volumes of travel and biography was made to the school, and the Friends in Philadelphia allowed the Scattergood Seminary to order seventy-five volumes from the Friends' book store. The only fiction is that required for English work. A large glass-covered case on one side of the library contains a fascinating collection of stones, shells, petrified wood, moss, and fossils, mostly donated by Alva Smith.

Varied interests occupy the lives of the pupils at Scattergood. Debates within the school and literary society work are supplemented by series of slides borrowed from the State University and by an occasional lecturer. Every year the whole school enjoys an all-day picnic at Cedar Valley. Dancing, of course, is not allowed by the Quaker discipline. Although formerly even whistling and singing were frowned upon, in recent years the pupils are permitted to have mouth organs and radio music. Both the boys and the girls have organized for the purpose of governing the performance of certain duties about the school such as keeping the rooms neat and

clean and doing chores. Under this system of student government teachers do not stay in the classroom all the time.

Discipline is seldom needed, although some infractions are inevitable. One time, it is said, as a penalty for some offense, the boys had all been forbidden to go beyond the front gate of the school grounds. Waiting for mail long overdue is tedious and irksome, and the boys were very anxious to fetch it from West Branch — but the rule had been made. At last, however, youthful ingenuity found a way around the difficulty: the gate was lifted from its hinges and carried in front of the boys to the post-office where the letters were obtained and brought triumphantly to the school. The gate, swinging once more on its hinges, had not been passed.

The girls' student government sets the rules of dress. Bright colors are avoided, but the dresses are not drab. Sleeves must come to the elbow, just so they do not wrinkle when the arm is bent, and the length of skirts is set at from twelve to fourteen inches from the floor. They allow no piping, braid, or trimming except plain collars and cuffs of harmonizing color, and no buttons unless made useful by loops or buttonholes. The girls used to wear small bonnets when away from the school, but now they may wear plain colored hats with a band of the same color. Jewelry is not allowed, nor is silk, either in stockings or dresses. The boys' clothes



FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHN E. BRIGGS

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need no special regulations; even the roll collar, which formerly had to be removed from the coats, is now left on.

Primarily a sectarian school, and under the direct supervision of the Meeting, the Scattergood academy has always stressed the religious side of the education of its pupils. Each student commits to memory a passage from the Bible every week. Besides the First-day and Fourth-day Meetings which the school attends, collection (assembly) is held twice each day—in the morning before the first class the Bible is read by a teacher, and the last thing in the evening before retiring the Bible reading is done by the Superintendent.

Scattergood has never been self-supporting. The neighborhood puts up fruit for the school, and barrels of fruit are shipped in by Whittier, Cold Creek, Earlham, and other neighborhoods of Friends connected with the school. Chickens, pigs, and cows are kept on the property (about ten acres), but this is the first year that they have had enough cows to make their own butter. The deficiency in finances is always made up by the Yearly Meeting and by personal donations: one man in the East gives three hundred dollars yearly; Herbert Hoover has shown his interest by subscribing some every year.

The period of sectarian academies in the history of Iowa education has passed. Only the names and faint recollections remain of the flourishing seminaries of fifty years ago. But the Scattergood Semi-

nary still survives. It has been in continuous operation since it was opened in 1890, except during two epidemics of scarlet fever and one whole year when there were not enough students present to pay for keeping the school open. With twenty-two pupils in residence there last year and with an accredited standing now, the school which bears the name of the Philadelphia Quaker who made it possible, bids fair to continue as a worthy example of an Iowa academy.

- WINIFRED STARBUCK