

## Coeducation Introduced

In its 100 years Luther has had five presidents: Laur. Larsen, 1861-1902; Christian K. Preus, 1902-21; Oscar L. Olson, 1921-32; Ove J. H. Preus, 1932-48; and J. W. Ylvisaker, 1948-. The conservative nature of the Norwegian, who is never eager for change merely for the sake of change, is reflected in these tenures.

The long presidency of Laur. Larsen had left indelible marks on the school. Foremost among these were a God-fearing attitude that was serious and genuinely pious, but not pietistic; sound scholarship that tolerated no sham or hypocrisy; and a spirit of democracy and self-control that bred self-reliance. It was Larsen, said one alumnus, who gave the school its "latitude in education." The products of such training knew where they stood; they were not easily misled by outward appearances or by the fashion of the hour; and they chose their course of action on the basis of principle, not expediency. This was the great achievement of the pioneer period.

The college, however, had not kept pace with the material progress of its supporters. Its educational plant and its educational offerings had not grown to meet the expanding needs of the time.

The course of study had changed only slightly from the earliest days of the school. It was still strictly classical. This curriculum, the old leaders firmly believed, was the best preparation not only for the ministry, but for other professions as well. It was not a narrow course, for it involved a thorough grounding in the languages, history, philosophy, and literature — in short, in the culture — of two great ancient civilizations, and an exacting training in at least three modern languages. But science in the nineteenth century was making new advances and new demands; science was creating in the laboratory the new instrument of education. It was time to recognize the altered conditions.

The physical plant, likewise, had expanded only slightly beyond that of early days. In 1876 the edifice of First Lutheran Church was constructed a mile from the campus in downtown Decorah; the college had a half interest in this structure, which was designed to be both a church and the college chapel. When the building was dedicated the president announced that "the building program for Luther College was completed except possibly for some teachers' residences and minor buildings." Evidently Larsen had in mind a small, compact school of a strictly classical nature. In harmony with this view, a small frame gymnasium and a small frame hospital were the only additions up to the end of his presidency.

But for some time there had definitely been a

need for expansion. A new administration, that of C. K. Preus, attacked both problems with vigor. Yet Preus, despite a willingness to experiment and to foster new ideas, found that his own convictions prevented him from departing from the old classical curriculum. True, he permitted slight modifications of the classical course and introduced some electives. But basically, despite considerable debate and several minor changes, the course of study was not essentially altered.

In other areas Preus was more successful. The gymnasium was tripled in size; a new dormitory, Laur. Larsen Hall, with accommodations for 200 men, was constructed, new facilities for the physical sciences were provided, the hospital was enlarged, a dining hall was built, and Koren Library, the first fireproof structure on the campus, was on its way to completion before a heart attack caused his death in 1921. Of Koren Library Hardin Craig, then professor of English at the State University of Iowa, stated at the time of its completion, "I suppose scarcely any other small college in the country has a better library than this."

During the C. K. Preus administration the college was accredited by the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, and its first endowment fund of \$250,000 was raised. The school had also come much closer to the community in which it was situated. The old language barriers had disappeared. When World War I

broke out, the facilities of the college were put at the disposal of the government, an army training unit was established, and more than 350 men saw service in the armed forces.

During Preus's administration Knut Gjerset joined the faculty. In 1915 Gjerset published his *History of the Norwegian People* in two volumes, the first comprehensive history of Norway in English. This was followed by his *History of Iceland* in 1924 and by several studies in the field of Norwegian-American history. Another striking personality whom Preus persuaded to join the faculty was Carlo A. Sperati. Sperati made the Luther College Concert Band an outstanding organization. Under his baton it toured from coast to coast and twice made concert tours to Europe. Its influence became even more widespread through the "Sperati men" who as high school band instructors brought his ideals of music to scores of Midwest communities.

The library expanded to more than 33,000 volumes during Preus's regime. Karl T. Jacobsen became the college's first full-time librarian in 1920; he carried out the complete reorganization of the library according to the Library of Congress classification. This classification system, it may be noted, was worked out under the leadership of another Luther College graduate, internationally-known James C. M. Hanson, who was chief of the cataloging division of the Library of Congress

from 1897 to 1910. In 1928 Hanson headed the American commission of library experts who were sent to Rome to draw plans for the recataloging and classification of the Vatican library.

Under Preus the museum made further progress. One of his acquisitions was the beautiful altar piece, hand-carved in wood by Lars Christenson, by some regarded as the finest specimen of Norwegian folk art in this country.

The first college annual was published in 1911. Since 1920 this publication has been called *The Pioneer*, a name chosen to honor the early settlers. Intercollegiate debating was introduced in 1903; in the same year oratory was greatly stimulated by the establishment of annual prizes.

Under Carlo A. Sperati, the rendition of great choral works became a tradition. Sperati reorganized the Decorah Choral Union, thus uniting the musical forces of town and college. This group, after singing several of the great oratorios, centered its attention on Handel's "Messiah," and gave it every year. The annual rendition shortly before Christmas is now so popular that the oratorio is presented twice to satisfy the eager demand for tickets to the performances.

The old intramural sports were still cultivated. A group of vigorous young men needs at least a minimum of physical activity. For a time skating became very popular. This was true especially after the return of Professor L. S. Reque to the

college from a tour of duty as United States consul general in Holland. He and his wife were excellent skaters and brought an enthusiasm for the sport back with them. An interesting carryover from these days is the achievement of Orrin Markhus, the "old smoothy" of today's "Ice Capades," whose father taught at the college.

But intercollegiate sports, which had been introduced under President Larsen, became more popular than ever, even though throughout the nation at this time there were some abuses, leading to many discussions in educational circles concerning professionalism and rules of eligibility. In many areas there was also a question as to the propriety of Sunday baseball. A combination of these factors touched off one of the most colorful episodes in Luther baseball history. Six Luther players played with a Decorah town team in Calmar on Sunday, April 29, 1906. Professor Oscar L. Olson, a member of the well-known 1893 team and later third president of the college, at Preus's request investigated the matter. The faculty, which frowned on Sunday baseball, believed that the six players had become ineligible under the rules of the Iowa Intercollegiate Athletic Association. Accordingly, it denied permission to the six to play with the team on a big excursion to St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota, planned for May 17, the Norwegian equivalent of the Fourth of July. The team was crippled, the game was

cancelled, and the excursion abandoned. Feeling ran high in the student body. On May 17 about 100 students, carrying a box made up as a coffin, in which reposed baseball regalia, staged a procession downtown, returned to the baseball diamond, and there conducted a mock funeral for beloved baseball. It is said that one innocent and lovable old professor, meeting the students near the bridge on their way to town and absorbed in thoughts of Norway's natal day, greeted them with lifted hat and a "Hurrah for the Seventeenth of May." There was a considerable stir over the affair, but eventually feelings subsided. Fred Biermann, editor of the *Decorah Journal* and later United States congressman, was moved editorially to break into verse:

Oh, that dim and distant Northfield,  
 We had hoped to journey there,  
 In our glad baseball regalia  
 And Pond's extract in our hair.  
 As those rugged hero Vikings  
 Swore by Woden and by Thor  
 So we swore to down St. Olaf —  
 Quoth St. Olson, "nevermore."

So fare ye well, boys, with your tragic grief. Youth is full of emotion, full of life, and irks at restraint. . . . We have been amused by your demonstration and realize that it is only one phase of manifestations peculiar to life everywhere. Fare you well and march along:

Gather up the well worn sweaters  
 And the mittens and the bats,

Walk the *via dolorosa*  
With the crape tied on your hats.  
Put away the sacred relics  
Underneath the yielding sod,  
Where the burdock and the ragweed  
In the summer breezes nod.

Such episodes may seem like the froth on college life. But they often have a deeper significance; they are sometimes part of the birth pangs of new ideas. The serious, earnest, and devoted Luther faculty, like other similar faculties, had viewed many student activities with alarm. Such activities, they thought, interfered with study, which should be the student's main business. Only reluctantly did they sanction intercollegiate contests of any kind. Such events were new; and faculties are traditionally conservative. Moreover, they shrank from anything that smacked of the professional. But a strong reaction leads to reflection. Ideas change, even if slowly. It became apparent that intercollegiate activities were here to stay and that they needed, not suppression, but supervision. Beginning in 1917, therefore, regular coaches for the various sports (which students had requested years earlier) were engaged, and student activities entered a new era.

World War I had obliterated many sectional and nationalistic lines. Americans, no matter what their national origin, were brought together from every section of the country and worked to-

gether for a common cause. This influence reached into even the remotest hamlet of the country; it was felt in the postwar period, too, when men returned from far places to a world which could never be the same as before. Luther College was not immune to these influences.

Under Oscar L. Olson, the first president who was a layman and who had been educated wholly at American universities, the college moved rapidly to adjust to the postwar world. Enrollments increased; the Preparatory Department was dropped; buildings were renovated and grounds were kept up in an attractive manner; the C. K. Preus Gymnasium, a completely modern building 97 by 197 feet, was constructed; Nustad Field, a first-class athletic area, was laid out and made ready; paving was extended from the city into the college grounds; an 80-foot flagpole was erected; several lots were added to the campus proper; the endowment funds were more than tripled; the Frank Jewell farm of 360 acres which adjoined the campus to the north and west, was acquired; KWLC radio station was licensed in 1927 and equipped; facilities for the study of the sciences were expanded; the first honorary degree was granted in 1924; publicity was stepped up considerably; and the library was almost doubled in size to about 60,000 volumes.

During this period, under the direction of Knut Gjerset, who became curator in 1921, the museum

had its most dramatic growth. In 1925 it was officially designated the Norwegian-American Historical Museum. In 1926 similar institutions in Norway sent over extensive gifts to be added to the collections already on hand in Decorah. In 1932 the three-story building of the former Lutheran Publishing House was secured to house museum articles. Here Gjerset arranged exhibits to give a picture of Norwegian life and culture in both Norway and this country, including many rare and valuable articles from pioneer days. Under his direction the institution became widely known and was placed on the recognized list of museums of the Smithsonian Institution as outstanding in its portrayal of the life and history of a national immigrant group.

The curriculum, despite several attempts at change, had remained essentially a strictly classical one. At length, after the stock market crash in 1929 had upset economic conditions and caused a decrease in enrollment, the school in 1931 adopted a reorganization which dropped the classical requirements entirely and wholly modernized the course of study. It was a sweeping change, but long overdue.

In the same year President Olson proposed that Luther College become coeducational and admit women on equal terms with men. The suggestion caused a sharp division of opinion among alumni and friends of the school. The situation was com-

plicated by the fact that the depression following the 1929 crash involved the institution in serious financial difficulties. Expansion had outrun its available resources. The two problems, coeducation and finance, were intertwined in the discussions that arose. After the Board of Education of the supporting synod which, under the Articles of Incorporation of the college at that time had a decisive voice in its affairs, refused to support the proposal for coeducation, Olson resigned. He continued on the staff until his retirement in 1952 after fifty-one years of service, the longest in the college's history. Long before his retirement he had the satisfaction of seeing his proposal adopted and of watching women take their place on the college campus. Oscar L. Olson Hall, a dormitory for men, was named in his honor in 1954.

Olson was succeeded by Ove J. H. Preus, son of the second president of the college and at the time of his election president of Augustana College, Sioux Falls. Preus's first task, as he took the helm of the troubled institution, was to keep the craft afloat and to persuade well-meaning supporters not to rock the boat. Finances slowly mended. Meanwhile, in 1932, proponents of coeducation in the Decorah vicinity had organized the Decorah College for Women. They secured an agreement under which Luther College furnished most of the instruction. They were also successful in obtaining accreditation from the

North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools. Women began to be seen on Luther's campus and in its classrooms. Decorah College for Women granted its first two B.A. degrees in June, 1935.

Sentiment changed so rapidly that the Luther College Corporation in June, 1936, wholeheartedly voted coeducation for Luther College. Decorah College for Women, having served its purpose, was taken over by the older institution and its alumnae were made alumnae of Luther College. The same meeting of the corporation adopted a set of new and revised Articles of Incorporation which, in addition to providing for coeducation, enlarged the Board of Trustees and gave the college a far greater degree of autonomy than it had enjoyed in the past. Thus, after seventy-five years as a classical men's school, the college entered on a new period in its development. It had modernized its course of study and had broadened its objectives so that it might serve "the young people" of the church without restriction as to sex.

The introduction of coeducation brought some new problems; it also helped to solve others. It brought more students, and these first increases in attendance were absorbed without the necessity of greatly enlarging the faculty. Two buildings on campus, Sunnyside and Campus House, were easily converted into residences for women at only

nominal expense. Thus the immediate effect on the finances of the college was beneficial.

Moreover, the final decision that brought women to the campus seemed to release energies that had long needed outlets for expression. The Diamond Jubilee in 1936 brought a sizeable money gift from alumni and friends which enabled the college to discharge its remaining indebtedness. A memorial to the early pioneers was erected on the campus; the Olaf Angelo Sperati Memorial Organ was installed; Pi Kappa Delta, the first national honor society to be represented at the college, formed a chapter at Luther; an art department was begun; and the college joined the Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association to make provision for retirement for its teachers and other employees. The endowment funds, which had suffered severely during the depression, were gradually rehabilitated; KWLC, the college radio station, was rebuilt; and a campaign for funds to erect a women's dormitory made some progress.

At this point the outbreak of World War II not only brought a halt to constructive efforts, but created a new crisis by sweeping away most of the male students and many promising young instructors. The financial crisis of nine years earlier might have been repeated if it had not been for the influx of women students, who took, in part at least, the places of men. What seemed like an even severer blow occurred when the Main Build-

ing, beloved by several generations of students, was destroyed by fire May 31, 1942. This caused dismay and regret among all who cherished its quaint Gothic lines. Friends and alumni rallied; an Emergency Appeal was launched; and a sum well in excess of \$300,000 was raised to replace the building. Wartime restrictions made immediate rebuilding impossible. By war's end, inflation had made the sum inadequate and it was necessary to raise additional funds before New Main could be erected.

In spite of the fire, the college in 1942 carried out successfully plans to reintroduce a summer school. Each year since then summer sessions have been conducted, consisting of one six-week and one five-week term. Attendance has averaged about 20 to 25 per cent of that of the nine-month school year.

In 1942, in accordance with plans formulated earlier, the C. K. Preus Gymnasium (which at the time of its construction had been regarded by many as far too large for a school of Luther's size) was remodeled. The large ground-floor baseball batting cage was made into a gymnastic area with baths and lockers for women; separate entrances and exits made it an independent unit, adequate at the time for physical education for women.

Despite the crises caused by the depression, by World War II, and by the burning of Old Main, the college, although its physical plant was far

from satisfactory, had made substantial progress. Its curriculum had been modernized and women had been admitted to its student body and its faculty. Its finances were under control. Its debts had been paid. Its endowment funds had been largely rehabilitated and were once more productive of income. Substantial funds were on hand for construction whenever war restrictions should be lifted. Tenure of teachers was much more attractive because of improved provisions for retirement. Enrollments, which had hit a low in 1943-44 when all but eighty men had been swept away, had already started up before the war ended. Sympathy and loyalty were apparent on every hand. If there was some impatience, it was an impatience that chafed at the seeming slowness in coming to grips with the tasks ahead.