

A Pioneer Grows Old

In 1915, the board of trustees of Lenox College accepted with regret the resignation of President Reed, who had been chosen president of Westminster College at Fulton, Missouri. This precipitated a crisis in Hopkinton, as all but two members of the faculty also left the campus. The reason for this exodus was simple. There was doubt that Lenox would be able to continue and the teachers secured positions elsewhere.

The board called on Professor E. V. Laughlin to act as dean and to organize a faculty. This he did, and with success. A. St. Claire Mackenzie was named as president but he had resigned by August 1, 1917, and Dean Laughlin was in charge of Lenox much of the time for the next twenty-four years, although Dr. J. F. Hinkhouse served as president during 1919-1923, and W. W. Carlton followed President Hinkhouse.

In 1916, Lenox felt strong enough to launch another building program, this time for a new athletic building and auditorium. It had been evident for some time that the building for athletics erected at the turn of the century was inadequate for both players and spectators and Dean Laugh-

lin took charge of the erection of a bigger and better "gym". He designed the structure himself and constructed a 116 by 50-foot building using mainly student labor. The project was completed the same year and housed a large basketball court, dressing rooms, a large stage, and storage space.

College officials were not long in putting the gymnasium to use. In the spring of 1917 they invited neighboring high schools to enter their basketball teams in a tournament to be held in Hopkinton. Fourteen schools sent teams and the tourney was played on Thursday and Friday, March 1-2, 1917. Monticello, by defeating Maquoketa 34-9 in the final round, became the first tournament champion. The other teams entered in that first meet were Earlville, Greeley, Cascade, Wyoming, Coggon, Delhi, Strawberry Point, Dysart, Edgewood, Waucoma, Colesburg, and Hopkinton.

Thus originated one of the finest of Lenox athletic traditions — The Lenox Invitational Basketball Tournament. From 1917 until the organization of the Iowa High School Athletic Association with its comprehensive system of elimination meets, the Lenox tournament was one of the best meets in the State. Winning the Lenox "cup" was the goal of high school teams for miles around.

The present system of elimination is more systematic and produces its share of thrills, but many are the fans in northeastern Iowa who remember with a twinge of regret the excitement of tournament week at Lenox. Buying season tickets — taking lunches to the gym — housing visiting players in Hopkinton homes — keeping a record of the score — the excitement of the finals — these were some of the things that made the tournament a gala affair for Hopkinton people.

High scoring games were not unknown thirty years ago, according to the tournament records. In the first meet in 1917, Monticello walloped Cascade 82-3, and two years later, Monticello defeated Strawberry Point 101-7. This interest in high school basketball was carried over to the Lenox team, and basketball soon came to be a major college sport. In 1920, Lenox had one of her best teams, going undefeated in a thirteen-game schedule and defeating such opponents as St. Ambrose College, Iowa State Teachers College, and Buena Vista College.

Financially, the years of the first World War were, as usual, hard for Lenox. Her endowment was rapidly disappearing, or falling into the classification of bad debts. She received only slight financial backing from the Presbyterian Church and stronger colleges nearby were offer-

ing competition which reduced her enrollment. A merger with the Dubuque College and Seminary (the University of Dubuque) was proposed but did not work out. In 1922, the academy was dropped and its work was turned over to the local high school. The college course was cut to two years — temporarily, it was hoped.

At first there was much opposition to the junior college idea among the alumni and people of Hopkinton, but as the years passed, it was admitted that in the modern educational picture Lenox was best suited to carry on as a two-year institution, acting as a feeder for nearby four-year colleges. Indeed, an arrangement was attempted with Coe, also a Presbyterian college, by which Lenox would concentrate on the freshman and sophomore years, and would then channel her graduates to Coe for the final two years.

In 1924, a deferred tuition-payment plan was introduced and a revolving loan fund, backed by thirty businessmen, was set up to aid worthy students. After five years of operation, it was reported that \$10,000 worth of credit had been extended and that \$7,000 had already been repaid, indicating successful operation of the plan.

In spite of all efforts and programs, however, the financial resources of Lenox were seldom adequate to meet the needs. Year after year a "small

deficit" was reported, and gradually a large debt was built up. When the Hopkinton banks failed during the depression, it was necessary for the college to turn over much real estate to settle its debts. The endowment virtually disappeared.

In the early 1930's, however, Lenox enjoyed something of a revival in enrollment. When the depression reached Iowa, many young people found they could receive two years of accredited college work at Lenox at a figure far under the usual cost in larger institutions. In 1931 a bus route was started and continued for several years, bringing students from surrounding communities and students commuted from Monticello, Delhi, Delaware, Buck Creek, and Manchester. By 1936, however, the enrollment was again dropping off and each year the struggle for survival became more difficult. In 1937, sixty were enrolled and the next year only forty-eight.

For many years Dean E. V. Laughlin had been in active charge of Lenox. It was his lot to administer affairs during many difficult years and many were his worries and his troubles. But he was unusually resourceful and each problem was met with some "little scheme", which, if it was not a complete solution, at least postponed the end.

One of Dean Laughlin's greatest contributions to Lenox was his building genius. The gymna-

sium was largely his creation. That it remains one of the best athletic buildings in its section is a tribute to both the planning and the workmanship of Dean Laughlin. Much repair work and many improvements were made on the physical plant because the dean knew how to do things and could get them done with a minimum of expense.

But in November, 1938, Hopkinton was shocked to learn that Dean Laughlin had slept away in the night. After the first shock of sorrow, came the burning question of the future of Lenox. Dean Laughlin had been administrator, business manager, teacher, and field representative. But, as in former times, Hopkinton people rallied to the support of their college and with the assistance of the local ministers and the loyal work of Miss Franc Earhart and Miss Mabel Briney, the college year was completed.

During the summer of 1939, friends of Lenox were encouraged when the board of trustees secured as dean Orville Eckberg, a graduate of Wheaton College and the University of Illinois. Mr. Eckberg was an energetic young educator and with the coöperation of the other members of the faculty and the backing of the townspeople, he attacked the problems of Lenox with vigor.

His plans were scarcely bearing fruit when World War II caused a cancellation of many

hopes and plans. Dean Eckberg joined the armed forces, along with many enrolled and potential students. Once again Lenox was cast upon troubled waters, but, again, through the efforts of Miss Earhart, Miss Briney, and a few alumni, the college remained open until the spring of 1944 when classes were finally suspended.

Two years later, in 1946, when the Federal government began to underwrite the largest experiment in mass higher education the country has ever seen, and with colleges all over the nation bulging with students, the time seemed appropriate for the reopening of Lenox and Dr. Don Hawkins, formerly connected with Upper Iowa University, was elected president. A campaign for funds was started and favorable press releases immediately began to appear. Friends from afar were encouraged, but those on the scene began to have doubts regarding the future of Lenox and, after a trip east, Dr. Hawkins sent his resignation to the board in May, 1946, ending the short-lived hope that the college could be restored.

Even after this abortive resurrection, one further attempt was made. The board made a more complete survey of the situation and a Mr. Mitchell was elected to head the school. His administration was scarcely a month old when it was decided that the problems were too great and on

June 7, 1946, the board issued a long statement in which it announced the closing of Lenox. There was some talk of a boys' school at Lenox, but this did not materialize, and in August, 1946, after some legal maneuvering, the Hopkinton Independent School District paid the Lenox trustees \$4,000 for various equipment, and the buildings and grounds were turned over to the Hopkinton public schools. Lenox College was dead.

As is always the case when a loved one dies, there were many regrets. If only this thing, or that, had been done in time Lenox might have continued. It is always depressing to see a pioneer lose youthful vigor and strength. Lenox withered away, but her influence is not dead. There is scarcely a county or large school in Iowa that has not had Lenox men or women as teachers. Lenox sons and daughters occupy many important positions in the religious and educational world. And each of those personalities carries with him a part of the little Christian college at Hopkinton.

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