

Student Life at Parsons

A good administrator, a strong faculty, and a well-balanced library are essential to any well-rounded college or university. It is the student body, however, that forms the heart of any institution.

The first students at Parsons enjoyed few of the attractive features associated with modern college life. Most of them had never seen a college before. They had no precedents to guide them, no traditions to follow, no loyalties to bind them together, no literary, social, or academic organizations to join.

Parsons College evidently became a coeducational school by accident. The will of the founder and all the records of the Board of Trustees fail to give any positive statement on the admission of women. The Board of Trustees at its second meeting, in June, 1876, stated that the "Committee to whom the manuscript of the first catalogue was referred was directed to leave out of the catalogue the invitation to both sexes," but presumably these instructions were not followed. Seven girls applied for admission on the first day, and the administration could do nothing but accept these determined young feminists. Although women were

not encouraged to attend Parsons, they continued to come and the coeducational status of the college was established.

Campus housing was not provided until the construction of Ballard Hall for women and the provision for sorority and fraternity houses. Dormitories for the "independent" men were not supplied until 1947. For many years students lived in private homes throughout the city. This was the result largely of the ban on secret societies, such as sororities and fraternities. Even an assembly of students without the permission of the faculty was prohibited.

Fraternities did not appear on the Parsons campus until 1922. With the return of World War I veterans to the campus, the housing problem became acute and the organization of local fraternities for "eating and sleeping purposes" was permitted. In February, 1922, fourteen men organized the Alpha Kappa Chi fraternity. The same spring another group formed the "Iron Key Club," and when the faculty relaxed its ruling this group became the Zeta Theta Gamma fraternity. Both groups, as organized in 1922, were active on the campus in 1950.

Literary societies were established the first year the school opened. These groups flourished and became the "rallying centers" for students. Even as recently as 1917, Parsons had six different literary clubs. The major part of their programs

consisted of formal debates followed by discussion from the floor.

The first literary society for women at Parsons was organized on October 5, 1875. It was known as the Alethean Society. This group was active for the first year and then did not meet again until October, 1879. Later, in 1883, ten members withdrew and formed the Elzevir Sorority, so named because "Elzevir" was a synonym for "careful, elegant literary work." This organization is still active on the Parsons campus as one of the two sororities. Eventually the Alethean Literary Society disbanded and the Empyrean Sorority took its place in 1903.

Ten days after the formation of the Alethean Society, the men organized the Aldine Literary Society, named after the historic Aldine printing press of Venice. This group promoted forensic and literary activities and also provided a wholesome social life not only for its own members but for the entire student body. Another literary organization known as the Orio Society was founded in the fall of 1879 by former members of the Aldine Society who withdrew because of the imposition of certain fines. For two years this group was prominent on the campus and then was discontinued for a term, only to become active again in 1882.

One major objective of Parsons College was the providing of a "Christian education" for its

students. Each student was expected to attend church regularly in Fairfield. Daily attendance of chapel was compulsory. In addition, religious services were held every Sunday afternoon in the chapel, at which time a sermon was preached by a faculty member. Chapel attendance is still compulsory at Parsons, but the exercises are held only once a week.

The original religious organization for the students — the "Society of Religious Inquiry" — was merged in 1881 with the Young Men's Christian Association. The first membership of twenty-six included both men and women, but in 1883 the women organized their own association. At the present time the Y. M. C. A. and Y. W. C. A. work is carried on jointly by the two organizations through the Student Christian Association. This group, holding meetings semi-monthly, sponsors a number of all-college parties each year, is active in supplying nearby churches with speakers, and arranges for the Religion in Life week.

The social and personal habits of the students were strictly regulated by the college authorities. The playing of cards, billiards, and pool was absolutely forbidden. Only with the return of World War II veterans was the "no smoking on the campus" restriction lifted. Students in the early days of the school were not allowed to leave the city without securing the proper permission. Study hours were strictly regulated.

Athletics did not play an important part in student life before 1890. The first football team was organized in 1893 when an alumnus at Princeton wrote Wilson Reed of Fairfield that some former Parsons students then at Princeton believed their Alma Mater should have a football team. Harry Turner of Corning, then a member of the Princeton squad and a former student at Parsons, said that he would stop in Fairfield for a week and coach the team. Turner continued to help the team by writing letters containing diagrams of plays. Funds were raised to secure the fairgrounds and to level a field and erect goal posts. The Iowa Wesleyan-Parsons game was initiated in 1893.

The present athletic field was a marsh until an alumni committee in 1894 drained and leveled it. The first game was played on this new field in the fall of 1894: Parsons defeated the Elliott Business College of Burlington 70 to 0. In the winter of 1904 President Parsons suggested that the trustees purchase property lying south of the campus between Main and Third streets. Students under the supervision of Professor Job E. Johnson rebuilt the field and erected a fence in 1906. In recognition of this service, "Alumni Field" was re-dedicated as "Johnson Field" in 1947.

Basketball has been a major sport at Parsons since 1905. In 1950, the "Kelly Greens" were the champions of the Southern Division of the Iowa Conference, their first title trophy in twenty-four

years. Baseball, track, and golf are other sports offered in the men's athletic department. The Letter Club, an honorary organization composed of all athletes who have won a letter in any of the major sports and have successfully passed twelve hours of academic work, is active on the campus. This group is in charge of many of the activities connected with Homecoming Day and sponsors the annual Homecoming Dance.

A girls' basketball team is the main attraction of the women's physical education section, playing other college teams, high school squads, and business and professional college teams. Each year the Parsons girls' varsity squad plays a benefit game with the faculty members to raise money for the World Student Service Fund. This contest is inevitably won by the more powerful feminine string. In 1947, the Women's Athletic Association was formed. This group sponsors intramural girls' games in basketball, volleyball, kittenball, and hockey.

An excellent music department plays an important role in student life. The Parsons College Philharmonic Choir participates in the regular Tuesday chapel, the Sunday vespers, special Christmas programs, and several radio broadcasts. Each spring the choir makes a tour of many Iowa towns, presenting programs before high school assemblies and church groups. In 1950 concerts were presented in thirteen Iowa cities. In addi-

tion, a college ensemble and a band have been organized.

As in all colleges, the student publications are important since they record student life on the campus. *The Portfolio*, which appeared in December, 1881, was the first student publication at Parsons. Originally planned as a monthly literary magazine, it later assumed its present newspaper form. Not until 1909 did the first Parsons annual, the *Peira*, make its appearance.

The need for a building other than the gymnasium in which to hold the all-college parties has long been recognized by the administration. Soon after Dr. Shearer assumed his position as executive vice-president, a student canteen, known as "The Hut," was opened in a surplus government warehouse. While not a large building, there was space for a snack bar and room for card playing and dancing. The walls, decorated by the art classes, portrayed aspects of student life on the campus. Although originally sponsored by the Student Christian Association, a board composed of the co-presidents of that organization, the college treasurer, and a faculty member was named to supervise the new student center. In 1949 "Broadview," the former residence of the presidents, was set aside as a student union until it would be possible to build the Carter Memorial Student Union.

Student government was established at Parsons

in 1921. The nomination and election of members of the student council has taken on all the aspects of a modern political party system, particularly since the return of World War II veterans. A caucus-convention is held in the chapel where nominating speeches are made and slates of candidates presented. Parades are organized and handbills are distributed over the campus.

Another important feature of student life consists of the days set aside for special observances. Among these is the Pan American Day celebration which was first held on the Parsons campus in 1944 and since has become an annual event under the supervision of Professor W. Jefferson Dennis. The Fairfield Rotary Club cooperated with the college in holding the first two-day event, which included art and education exhibits, music by a Spanish chorus, and lectures by Professor Dennis and Forrest W. Seymour of the Des Moines *Register*. The 1950 observance presented Mexican folk dances by native artists.

"Campus Day" usually occurs in April. Classes are dismissed and students and faculty members are supplied with rakes and shovels with which to clean the campus. At noon a picnic dinner is served to the workers. One day during the winter is designated for the "Snow Carnival." The activities of this event include ice skating, coasting on Gym Hill, a "Fun Chapel" in the afternoon, and a carnival dance in the evening at the union.

The academic side of college life is emphasized by the selection of students to membership in Phi Kappa Phi, an honorary scholastic fraternity. In addition, several students are honored each year by being listed in "Who's Who Among Students in American Universities and Colleges." The members are nominated by the vote of the entire student body and elected by the faculty.

Parsons students have always taken a great interest in speech and dramatic activities. A forensic club was organized in 1917, but long before that date representatives from the school had been entered in many state oratorical contests. In 1919 the club affiliated with Pi Kappa Delta, the national honorary forensic fraternity. The group sent from Parsons in 1924 to the national convention of Pi Kappa Delta was listed as "the outstanding delegation" at the meeting. A dramatic club was organized at Parsons in 1916, and each year produces at least two major plays. In 1918, the school secured the first Iowa chapter of Theta Alpha Phi, national honorary dramatic fraternity.

The origin of the college colors, Old Rose and Gold, is not known but is believed to have been suggested by a campus committee. The source of the old college yell is also a mystery. *The Portfolio* on June 6, 1896, stated that thereafter the college yell would be "Hi yi, Hi yi, Hi yi, Hippikanoori, Ki yi, Parsons." To increase the school spirit, two college songs have been used by the

student body. The first song was composed by Charles Sanger of the Class of 1917, with the music provided by Professor C. W. Mountain of the Parsons Conservatory of Music. The other song, entitled "Alma Mater," was written by Susan Fulton (Mrs. Carl Welty), a daughter of C. J. Fulton of the Class of 1883.

A great change has occurred in the student life at Parsons since 1875 when the chapel and the literary societies provided most of the campus activities. Today, clubs and associations are organized for every aspect of student activity. Many college parties are now enjoyed. Among these are the annual Homecoming Dance, the "Flunkers' Bawl" between semesters, the Emerald Ball on the eve of St. Patrick's Day, and the spring formal dances of the sororities and fraternities. Still a part of the old tradition is the wearing of the green cap by the freshmen. Gone is the austerity associated with the early days of Parsons: present student life on the campus is much like that of any denominational college.