

Mason City Junior College

Early in the fall of 1915, the Mason City Board of Education decided to keep the public schools open throughout the entire year. This was a resolution with far-reaching results, for the newly adopted plan prepared the way for another innovation in the educational system of Iowa — the establishment of the junior college as a part of the local public school system.

The all-year-round school program provided for a reorganization of the grades in Mason City and the operation of the schools on a four-quarter basis. F. E. Palmer, who was at that time supervisor of the grade schools of Mason City, instigated this plan. The former scheme of four and one-half months in each semester was replaced by four terms of three months each. The first summer quarter went into effect in 1916.

The adoption of the all-year-round school was accomplished with little discussion and meditation. F. M. Hammitt, at that time principal of the high school, soon realized that the operation of a twelve months school program would enable children to finish the elementary grades much sooner, and after eight or ten years of operation children would enter high school two years younger than the usual age. The new plan meant that children admitted to the

first grade in 1916, at the age of five, would enter high school in 1922 at the age of eleven through the operation of the all-year-round school, and would graduate at the age of fourteen instead of seventeen.

The problem with which Mr. Hammitt was concerned, was what to do with these young people graduating at fourteen and fifteen years of age. Little Sue would be leaving home with pig-tails still hanging down her back. Jack would set out for the university before he knew the uses of a Gillette razor. Something had to be done, but no one could find the solution. For some time the school board debated the question, while parents were worried for fear that the education authorities, if not carefully watched, would snatch their children from the cradle and send them away from home to be educated.

Out of this quandary emerged the idea of the junior college. Although by 1915 the junior college held a permanent place in the educational system of California, it was practically unknown in the Middle West. Both parents and school authorities regarded the new idea with an attitude of skepticism. In the opinion of many parents and some of the members of the school board, both the all-year-round school and the junior college had serious disadvantages.

"But Charles is too young to be in high school," Mrs. Jones argued. "Not only is the work too difficult for him, but he will graduate too young. And

then, a junior college will not offer the advantages of a real university."

Mr. Hammitt's reply was that the courses of study would be modified to meet the capacities of these younger children, and a junior college would be established to keep them going in their educational career, at the same time giving them the advantages of remaining at home. The curriculum, content of courses, and scholastic requirements would conform to the standards set by the State University, and in a very real sense, the junior college would coöperate with the University in promoting higher learning.

On March 19, 1917, the Mason City Board of Education passed a resolution establishing a junior college. Hammitt had won, and the Mason City Junior College became a pioneer in a new phase of the Iowa educational system.

Because the junior college in Mason City was authorized and put into operation during war time, the growth of the institution was considerably retarded. Nearly all of the young men of the city and vicinity had enlisted in the army or were engaged in the production of food. Consequently the enrollment during the first year consisted mostly of women. Of the twenty-eight students entering the junior college during the first semester, only eighteen finished the year's work and fourteen of this number were women.

In spite of the war, however, the interest in the

junior college was not lessened, and the first class started work, in the fall of 1918, in five different fields of study. The following item in the Mason City *Globe-Gazette* for September 9, 1918, tells of the first popularity of the junior college. "The more important side of the school work in the new high school building will be the junior college work. This is a new institution in Mason City and its popularity has already been demonstrated by the fact that young people have come from both city and county to take advantage of the advanced course."

The junior college was located in the high school building, and, although the college and high school were separate units in the Mason City system of education, they were in many ways closely related. Only the rudimentary studies were included in the curriculum of the first year, but as soon as students passed into higher classes new courses were added. After a year and a half the authorities applied to the North Central Association for accredited standing. The college was visited by representatives of the Association from other institutions and became fully accredited for two years of college work.

By the year 1923, the enrollment of the Mason City junior college had increased to ninety-one. Capable instructors, good equipment, and the most desirable courses for the first two years of college work had increased the popularity of the institution. Most of the classes in the junior college were small, which made it possible for the students to

receive much individual help in their work. In 1923, courses in mechanical drawing and psychology were added, and a school of music offered instruction in piano and violin. In 1924, the college glee club was organized, and the work of its members in the school opera soon proclaimed it to be a worthy organization.

Within the first four years a few clubs had been organized and nearly every student had joined one or more. The college Y. W. C. A. and the Y. M. C. A. were both growing organizations. Members of the Wig and Mask Club displayed considerable dramatic ability and developed appreciation for a high type of dramatic production. For much of the friendly spirit and interest displayed, the college paper, the *Pulse*, was responsible. The Lambda Phi Literary Society aimed to provide a cultural background in the reading and discussion of literary articles. It was through this organization that prominent authors and poets were brought to the college. During 1925, for example, Lambda Phi sponsored a lecture by John Towner Frederick, professor of English at the University of Iowa, and one of the foremost literary leaders of the Middle West.

The Mason City junior college has assumed a position of leadership in two extra-curricular activities. One is athletics, the other is debate. In 1923, a football team was organized and, although beginning without a coach, the team started a career of

victories. In 1924, the college "Trojans" won five of the seven football games played, defeating Albert Lea High School, Waldorf College, Northwood High School, Wartburg College, and Waukon College.

The basketball team, too, early justified its existence, fighting with determination to uphold the honor of the "orange and blue". In 1926, when track first became a recognized sport in the junior colleges of Iowa, the Mason City "Trojans" won both northern Iowa meets. Of course the college has had its ups and downs in athletics, a rather unsuccessful season in one sport being offset by a victorious team in another.

The junior college debating club, organized at the end of the first semester in 1924, started its career with a victory over Waldorf College. In addition to regular debates, the club sponsored weekly programs and discussions. The prominence of debating has increased until, in 1929, four teams were used and two questions were debated, thus making necessary an assistant debate coach.

In 1923, the first annual junior college homecoming was held during the Christmas holidays. By that time the institution occupied a permanent place in the educational system of Mason City, and the affair proved to be an evidence of maturity as well as an occasion for establishing a spirit of fellowship among alumni. Indeed, the junior college homecoming has become one of the principal events of the Mason City Christmas holidays, an opportunity

to meet former classmates and make new acquaintances.

And so the junior college has progressed. New courses, football games, parties, debates — and even the Gazooks, a pep organization, have sprung into prominence. Busy students, laughing, talking, fun-loving, and carefree, yet at the same time possessing a vein of seriousness, have developed a typical collegiate atmosphere. High standards have been maintained in scholastic work, social life, and in the activities of its clubs and organizations.

In 1925 the creation of the position of Dean produced a further similarity between the organization of the junior college and that of larger institutions. In addition to his duties as Dean, Jay B. MacGregor, who was the first to fill the office, also served as chairman of the committee on student relations and acted as head of the Social Science Department. It was mainly through his efforts that the real college spirit was developed among the students. Open house at Dean MacGregor's home every Sunday evening became important among college social activities. Books were reviewed, short stories and poetry were read, and the meetings proved both interesting and educational.

Two years later the student council found a place in the junior college, and although it was new, it was not of little importance. The council was organized as an elective body, chosen by the students with the purpose of managing school affairs and

strengthening the bond between the administration and the students.

Expansion of the curriculum has kept pace with growth in other ways. Speech and American Government were added to the list of courses in 1924. The college now offers the first two years of a general liberal arts course, a commerce course, education, law and medicine, as well as the first year for nursing, and engineering. Instructors of academic work in the junior college must all have Master's degrees. The junior college was, at first, supported entirely by taxation: there were no tuition fees until a law was passed by the State legislature making it compulsory to charge tuition to the extent of the expense of instruction for work done beyond the fourth year of high school.

The junior college in Mason City was only an experiment in 1918—a modern idea with modern aims and advantages. Since that time, it has been “in the making”. Although there has been nothing spectacular about the growth of the institution, “numbers” is not the only criterion of a Liberal Arts college. More than a thousand students have attended classes in the Mason City junior college, and approximately six hundred have graduated from its two-year course. Most of these students have gone on and completed their college training for a B. A. or a B. S. degree, while others have been content with the fundamentals of the first two years. Student graduates of the junior college have suc-

cessfully completed college courses in the University of Chicago, Northwestern University, the State universities of Illinois, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Iowa, and in nearly all of the private colleges of the State.

The progress of the Mason City junior college has been steady and consistent. It has aimed to stress the things which are lasting, genuine, and worth the time and effort of any student. The results are highly gratifying. Undoubtedly the community will come to appreciate more and more the service of providing at home and at moderate expense, first-rate collegiate facilities. Other cities are rapidly adopting the same program. By building upon the experiences of the past, Mason City junior college may continue to maintain its unique leadership, through the adoption of still higher standards of instruction, the addition of more elective courses to its curriculum, and provision for a still better balanced program of extra-curricular and social activities.

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