

## Iowa Wesleyan College

Like most older institutions of learning, Iowa Wesleyan may claim distinction in several respects. The preëminence of such a school depends more upon significant events and achievements associated with the institution than upon material progress. Indeed, it is the indelible traditions, looming as mountain peaks through the mists of the dim past, rather than the expanse of campus, spacious buildings, and generous endowment, that contribute character to the biography of any college. These ethereal traditions, clustering ghost-like about the people who have passed through her venerable halls, constitute the principal though intangible asset, more valuable, many times, than mere stocks and bonds. Vast endowments, perchance, may be accumulated, but a notable heritage may be attained only through the character of faculty and student body. Of such Iowa Wesleyan is infinitely rich.

Genealogically, Iowa Wesleyan is the direct lineal descendant of the Mount Pleasant Collegiate Institute. On her campus stands old "Pioneer Hall", a neat, modest two-story brick building, erected during the year 1844. Upon completion, the work of the Institute was carried forward on the lower floor, and the families of the president and of the presiding elder resided in apartments upstairs. While the

college now occupies seven substantial buildings, this original structure is still serviceable, having seen eighty-six years of continuous use with but slight alteration and repair. What more striking evidence might be cited in proof of the character of its construction and its builders?

The origin of the Mount Pleasant Collegiate Institute probably dates at least two, or possibly three years farther back. As early as 1841, while Mount Pleasant was yet a small pioneer village less than five years old, the promoters of the town held committee meetings, made plans, and in 1842, publicly discussed the relation of the future prosperity of the young Territory to higher education. An academy was proposed and trustees selected. On the eighth day of March, 1843, the trustees, after considerable correspondence, elected and entered into formal contract with the Rev. Aristides J. Heustis, A. B., A. M., an Easterner, who was to be the first president and field secretary of the Institute. His duties required that he "look to the acquirement of property, erect suitable buildings, and do other things necessary to carrying out the plans of the trustees".

In the archives of Henry County on March 11, 1843, was recorded what appears to be a draft of the original "Articles of Association". The sixth of these articles provided that "This institution shall be placed under the patronage and control of the Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal

Church in the bounds of which it is located, said Conference, or the President thereof, having the power to appoint the professors, and a board of visitors." Iowa Wesleyan was thus "ordained" to become a Methodist institution.

One year later, the new school was incorporated by an act of the legislature of the Territory of Iowa, approved by Governor John Chambers on February 15, 1844. The "objects and purposes" of the corporation, according to the law, "shall be wholly confined to the acquiring of sufficient real estate, erecting suitable buildings, endowing professorships, establishing a library, and sustaining an institution of learning, designed and kept open for the education of all denominations of white citizens." Nevertheless, the authorities hoped to secure the support of the Methodist Church.

This was no easy task. When the Iowa Conference was organized at Iowa City on August 14, 1844, the trustees sought to have the new conference "accept, govern, control, and direct their material and educational interests". Little headway seems to have been made in the matter, however, until August, 1849, when a conference committee was appointed to "negotiate with the trustees to the end named". On September 11th, this committee agreed that "the Mount Pleasant Collegiate Institute shall be recognized as our Conference University, and that we as a Conference will give the above-named Institute our perpetual patronage."

This action was confirmed at the next regular session of the Iowa Conference, held at Fairfield on August 7, 1850. At that time the Mount Pleasant Collegiate Institute passed out of existence, and a new name, the Iowa Conference University, was adopted. That the school might become yet more definitely associated with Methodist sentiment and tradition, however, the name was again changed, on October 3, 1854, to Iowa Wesleyan University. A new charter was accordingly obtained from the State legislature in January, 1855, authorizing certain important changes in the management and curriculum. There can be little doubt that the serious purpose of the founders was to establish a college which they hoped would later develop into a great university. The field was virgin and the foundations were well laid.

On the same day that the Association for establishing Mount Pleasant Collegiate Institute was organized, March 11, 1843, pledges of endowment were secured and land for a spacious campus was donated. First, John Jones gave "four acres from the south end of his land in such form as to connect the national road and Main Street"; second, J. C. Hall contributed "six acres from the north end of his land connecting also the national road and Main Street". These ten acres comprise the present central campus. Third, Samuel Brazzleton gave "five acres on the east side of Main Street and directly east of the ten acres" donated by Jones and Hall; while Peter Smith gave "five acres west of

the national road and directly west of the ten acres'' donated by Jones and Hall. These two latter tracts comprise the present east and west campus. But recently the college has acquired five additional acres, known as the south campus, lying between the central campus and the main line of the Burlington railroad. The national road referred to in the original gifts of land was the old military highway from Iowa City to Keokuk. This same main artery of travel, now known as U. S. Federal Highway 161, passes directly through the campus, as of yore.

Here, indeed, were spacious grounds upon which to found a university, but in those formative days the mere necessities of a pioneer school were many and such as to require in their accumulation no mean degree of executive ability. There were buildings to be erected, equipment and endowment secured, a library acquired, a faculty employed, and a student body attracted. All this called for the expenditure of much time and energy.

For almost a decade, during a cycle of financial depression and the political uncertainty preceding the Civil War, the school struggled along, making slow but steady progress. In due time, however, at commencement in June, 1856, the first collegiate Bachelor of Arts degree was conferred upon Winfield Scott Mayne of Keosauqua. He was the only graduate and being, therefore, as he has often remarked with a merry twinkle in his eye, the sole member of the class, he was "both the class and the

class president". He was one of the first six men to graduate from a full liberal arts course in Iowa, possibly in all this vast territory west of the Mississippi River. The class of 1857 contained five members, all boys—John Ballard, Wray Beattie, George W. Byrkit, Erasmus T. Coiner, and Amos Summers Prather.

In June, 1859, history was made, for on this occasion the class contained one girl, Lucy W. Kilpatrick. She was not only the first girl to graduate from Iowa Wesleyan, but also the first from any co-educational college of Liberal Arts in the world. In recognition of this distinction, President Charles Elliott gave her a special diploma setting forth this fact as a memento of an honor which may come to only one woman.

Doubtless the most eminent personage ever connected with the school was James Harlan. It is through him that Iowa Wesleyan acquired its "Lincoln tradition". Upon the resignation of President James MacDonald in the spring of 1854, James Harlan succeeded to the presidency. This position he held until 1855, when he was elected United States Senator. During his service in the Senate and as Secretary of Interior, a romance developed between his daughter, Mary, and Robert T. Lincoln, a romance culminating in their marriage. For many years the ancestral Harlan home in Mount Pleasant, at the head of Main Street adjoining the campus, was known as the Robert T. Lincoln home. In No-

vember, 1907, Mrs. Lincoln deeded the old place, with furniture and belongings, to the college.

Upon his retirement from the Senate in 1869, Harlan again took the presidency of the college, to serve for one year, when he tendered his resignation. Later he was made chancellor, which position he held until the time of his death on October 5, 1899, having been a member of the board of trustees for forty-six years.

It was during his first administration that old Main Hall was finally completed, after much difficulty and delay. The erection of this building, forty-five by one hundred feet and three stories high, marked the beginning of a period of expansion. Much additional space was made available. The entire east half of the third floor was used for a chapel, while at the west end were the literary halls. Other parts of the building were occupied by class rooms, library, and laboratories. A gymnasium was fitted up in the west end of the first floor.

These were days of intense literary activity. Debating and oratory played an important rôle in many programs. Here Hamline Literary Society was organized, and a charter was granted by the State of Iowa on February 22, 1855, to this first society of its kind so chartered within the State. For nearly seventy years Hamline functioned as a "torch of culture", and made enviable records in debate and oratory, the like of which few literary societies can boast. Its members have won more

State oratorical contests than the representatives of any other literary society. At one time eleven such societies functioned on Wesleyan's campus. Now there is none.

At Iowa Wesleyan a pioneer school of music was established in 1877, under the able direction of Dr. A. Rommel. No more eminent educator and scholar was ever connected with Iowa Wesleyan. In musical circles he was a national figure for nearly half a century. A May Musical Festival of four days duration was given in 1902 in commemoration of his twenty-fifth anniversary in connection with the conservatory.

"Old Main" functioned as the principal center of college activities for more than a generation. The ambition of the "fathers" to found a university was in part realized, for immediately following the Civil War a College of Law was established which graduated classes intermittently from 1865 to 1874. In the seventies a College of Pharmacy also was operated which graduated classes from 1872 to 1880. The School of Music, however, could scarcely be considered more than a department, as it is even to this day. One degree from the College of Oratory was granted in 1891. It would seem that the school had reached the pinnacle of its early career during the period between 1870 and 1885. These were buoyant days. The halls were filled with students and large classes were graduated from the College of Liberal Arts.

The growth of other strong colleges and universities made it difficult for any school of this type to forge ahead. Indeed, many small denominational colleges were unable to continue in the face of such keen competition. Times became increasingly hard for old Wesleyan and the trustees realized that their ambition to maintain a university was futile. Only the Liberal Arts College was retained, with a Conservatory of Music and Fine Arts Department operating in conjunction. The commercial and the preparatory departments have also long since lapsed. In keeping with these inevitable conditions, the name of the institution was changed in 1911 to Iowa Wesleyan College.

Many traditions have grown up about the halls of "Old Main". One in particular, which has caused this building to become one of the shrines of America, concerns the founding of the P. E. O. Sisterhood. In a little room in the northwest corner on the second floor, seven young college girls, feeling the need of mutual association and guidance, organized a unique society on January 21, 1869. These seven girls — Alice Bird Babb, Mary Ellen Stafford, Alice Coffin, Ella Stewart, Frank Roads Elliott, Suela Pearson Penfield, and Hattie Briggs Bosquet — are the "immortals" in a group of more than fifty thousand women, organized in over sixteen hundred chapters located in forty-three jurisdictions, which include two Provinces of Canada, and the Hawaiian Islands. They are engaged in many

philanthropic endeavors. They own and operate a college, and have raised a fund of approximately one million dollars which is employed in revolving loans to worthy, needy college girls.

As a memorial to the seven founders, the sisterhood erected on the south campus at Wesleyan in 1926 a beautiful P. E. O. Memorial Library, costing nearly \$150,000. The international headquarters of the sisterhood are located on the second floor. This Memorial Library and the small room where the sisterhood was founded, which has been fitted up as a parlor filled with rare antiques of the period of the founding, are visited annually by hundreds of people from almost every State in the Union. P. E. O. is Wesleyan's proud contribution to the womanhood of America.

In early days the innovation of co-education, being without precedent, presented many perplexing problems. In fact the more reactionary branch of the college constituency frowned upon any arrangements whereby young men and women were to be educated in the same institution, and sages declared that it would never work. Partly to overcome such opposition and as a matter of expediency, a lengthy code of rules was formulated for the conduct of male and female students with respect to one another. Many of these rules, which all students were required to memorize, seem ludicrous to-day.

The college campus was connected with the town by a half-mile stretch of narrow "two-plank" walk,

running up Main Street across a marshy prairie. One rule, No. 18, directed that boys and girls might not walk together upon the streets of Mount Pleasant, but should maintain a discreet distance of not less than twenty paces between them, under penalty of expulsion. One April day, a certain young man, in possession of an umbrella, was trailing along the regulation distance behind a certain comely young lady, sans umbrella, on her way to town. Suddenly a shower burst forth, threatening to ruin bonnet and gown and a pretty girl's disposition. No boy could have been in a worse predicament. What was he to do? Should he obey the rule, or offer to share his umbrella and risk the penalty? Apparently he chose the latter course and, being seen and reported by some spying eye, was "called upon the carpet" by the president. On being appraised of his offense, he looked the president straight in the eye and very meekly ventured to ask him what he would have done under the same circumstances. Then and there Rule No. 18 was modified, and eventually stricken from the list.

This was the entering wedge, and finally, one by one, all the old rules were discarded. One, however, remained much longer than the rest, the regulation that men and women should not be seated together in chapel. Indeed, it has been only during the period of the last quarter of a century that boys and girls were seated together promiscuously during chapel exercises. Prior to that time all boys sat on

one side of the chapel and all girls on the opposite side.

Of all objects connected with Iowa Wesleyan none is so impressive as the old college bell. The history and traditions of three-quarters of a century cluster around this splendid relic. From generation to generation it has called the classes to assemble, and pealed out the announcement of victory on the athletic field and in forensics. On other occasions it has tolled our sorrow, as upon the assassination of President Lincoln, the death of Senator Harlan, and, at a midnight hour, the passing of Ian Mac-laren. It was originally placed in the tower of old Main Hall but had to be removed because it was too heavy. It is remembered, however, as situated upon a low pedestal on the campus.

During the darkest moments of the Civil War, some college boys removed the clapper, which weighs thirty pounds or more, and sent it, express collect, to Senator Harlan in Washington. Thinking that it might be an "infernal machine" it was opened by the secret service with the greatest precaution. The Senator took the joke graciously and returned the clapper to Mount Pleasant.

Prior to 1875 the bell was broken, for in that year it was recast at the brass foundry in Mount Pleasant. At least on one occasion it was stolen, presumably by the students of some rival college, and removed on a sled in the dead of winter to a cornfield eight or ten miles from town, where it was

not discovered until the farmer "broke stalks" the following spring.

In 1872, Mount Pleasant German College was organized under the patronage of the German Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The German College building, erected upon east campus, is now occupied by the Conservatory of Music. For many years German College grew and prospered, being closely affiliated all the while with Iowa Wesleyan. Upon the consolidation of the Iowa and Missouri Conference of the German Church, the school was eventually, in 1909, consolidated with and removed to Central Wesleyan at Warrington, Missouri. Upon its removal, Iowa Wesleyan inherited the substantial three-story brick building and one-half the endowment.

In 1888, foundations were laid for the University Chapel, which was completed in 1891 at a cost of more than \$45,000. Recently the chapel has been completely remodeled and now stands as one of the finest buildings of its type in Iowa. In 1897, Elizabeth Hershey Hall was erected on west campus, a spacious girls' dormitory, the capacity of which was later doubled by building an additional wing to the west, thus providing a fine home for nearly one hundred and fifty students. The Gymnasium was added to the already splendid group of buildings in 1918, and the last and finest hall of all, the P. E. O. Memorial Library, has just been occupied.

During the course of her history, Iowa Wesleyan

has absorbed the alumni of two other institutions of collegiate rank. The alumni of the Black Hills College, which was located at Hot Springs, South Dakota, were adopted in 1905, while the graduates of Mount Pleasant Female Seminary were accepted in 1913. Including these groups, Iowa Wesleyan has more than fifteen hundred alumni and several thousands of former students scattered widely throughout the world, occupying positions of honor and responsibility in nearly every walk of life.

Each year at commencement time many come back to renew old friendships, to pass the old thresholds, to tread the familiar halls, and to view the changes time has wrought. At times they may be a bit disappointed that material progress has not been more rapid, but always, on second thought, they are thankful that things are as well with the old school as they are. Wesleyan's spirit is unquenchable: she will continue to fill her small but important nook in the economy of things educational for many years to come.

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