

A Modern Land-Grant College

If Iowa State College has a single "grand man" it is perhaps William M. Beardshear, whose name today has been given to the big limestone building erected on the site of Old Main. Beardshear came to the presidency in 1891, a decade which proved to be the turning point for Iowa State College as well as for all Land-Grant colleges. It was about this time the United States Department of Agriculture gained new strength and status, and the Land-Grant colleges thereupon became better organized and received more financial aid both on a state and national level. The almost explosive force of industry and commerce in the nation and the coming of modern technology increased the importance of the Land-Grant movement.

Furthermore, Beardshear was not only a good educator, public speaker, and administrator, but the sort of a man to inspire love and respect among students, faculty, and the citizens with whom he mingled. More anecdotes, true and apocryphal, cluster about him than any other man in the history of the institution.

When Beardshear died in 1902 at the height of his career, his death was largely attributed to the tireless manner in which he drove himself. The

College had turned the corner into the bright pathway of the Twentieth Century, and it seemed as though Beardshear had been a martyr to a great cause.

Ohio-born, and a Union soldier at the age of fourteen in the Civil War, Beardshear had studied for the ministry at Otterbein University. He had filled several pastorates, and had spent a couple of years in the Yale Divinity School before coming to Iowa in 1881 to head Western College at Toledo. He was Superintendent of Schools in West Des Moines when he was named President of Iowa Agricultural College.

The dissident farm groups were still difficult to handle, and to assure them that teaching and experimentation in agriculture were in safe hands, James "Tama Jim" Wilson was brought in to be head of that program. "Tama Jim," so-called to distinguish him from other Jim Wilsons of the time, was a canny Scotchman whose success in agriculture was surpassed only by his eminence in politics. He reorganized the agricultural program along the lines of thought prevailing at that time, then took a leave of absence to become United States Secretary of Agriculture for four terms, during which he maintained a considerable connection with the College.

Many of the stories about Beardshear — vouched for by people who knew him personally, but possibly embellished in the telling — were

about his relations with students. Some of them concern the drama and the power of his oratory in student convocations where he liked to conduct the affairs of student government.

Herman Knapp tells how Beardshear, after the usual Chapel services one day, advanced to the rostrum and announced that last night a widow lady living near the College had lost six chickens. There were smiles and then laughter, but ten minutes later not a dry eye showed in the audience. Everyone was indignant that any boy or boys had thought it sport to steal chickens from a henhouse or to deprive a poor widow from part of the support for her table. At the close of the convocation Beardshear told Knapp, "I know who stole the chickens. I will call them into the office tomorrow morning and let you know the result." Knapp was surprised that any man could deliver such a lecture and at the same time pick the culprits from the audience, but Beardshear was right, as it proved when the boys were brought to his office. "There were two and only two," he told Knapp later, "I knew I had them."

A. T. Erwin, a long-time faculty member, now retired, has another story about Beardshear's alertness against the chicken thievery of the period. He tells how a group of boys who planned a raid on a farmer's chicken yard on the old Boone road one moonlight night were suddenly joined by Beardshear who emerged from the shadows.

“Good evening, boys, you out for a stroll?” he inquired. “Well, fine, do you mind if I stroll with you?”

They strolled right past the farm that the boys had spotted for the raid. At Boone, thirteen miles away, Beardshear put them on a train bound for Ames. They arrived on campus just in time for breakfast.

John Boyd Hungerford of the class of 1878 has another tale of this uncanny sense of Beardshear. Apparently early students, like their counterparts of today, were wont to complain loudly about the food served in the College dining hall. One evening in May, 1894, the Board of Trustees lingered on the front porch of Old Main after their meeting to smoke, swap yarns, and discuss the business of the session. In time there appeared on the lawn in front of them a dozen or more white-clad figures who seated themselves and began to speak in sepulchral tones. They explained that they had starved to death in a college boarding department at a place named Ames, Iowa, and predicted that their numbers soon would be increased by others now in the process of starvation. By turns they related their stories. One told how rancid butter had destroyed his digestive organs, another could never get half enough to eat, still another said the food was half-cooked, or overdone, never right. College hash came in for a series of indictments. There was a proper finale

to the drama by a speaker evidently not on the program. The voice was familiar rather than sepulchral and the speaker, silhouetted against a clear sky, bore a close resemblance to the College president. With every attribute of command and authority he made the closing announcement that there would be a meeting of all present (he had their names on a pad) in his office at ten o'clock next morning.

Students generally respected President Beardshear's type of discipline. He was inclined to keep a fairly loose rein and encourage them to have fun within bounds.

Beardshear was equally successful in building the academic stature of the College. With the departure of "Tama Jim" for Washington, the way was open for C. F. Curtiss '87 to become Dean of Agriculture. (The idea of divisions within the College as practiced today was just emerging, and the term "Dean" was beginning to be used.) Curtiss, a stern, hard-working individual, was apt to be found in his office weekends and holidays as well as during ordinary working hours and liked to keep himself in trim by chopping wood on his farm south of town. He filled in for "Tama Jim," who was officially on leave from the post from 1898 to 1902, then served thirty more years as dean in his own right. Curtiss was followed by H. H. Kildee '08, who turned administrative duties over to Floyd Andre '31 in 1949. The Divi-

sion of Agriculture at Iowa State College achieved preeminence under these three men.

Another fortunate appointment of Beardshear was Anson Marston who came from Cornell University to teach engineering in 1892. One of the most colorful figures in the history of the College, and one of the strongest, he was made the first Dean of Engineering in 1904. Under Dean Marston the Division of Engineering gained nationwide recognition.

Marston used to say he became a civil engineer out of contrariness — “my teachers always used to tell me there wasn’t anything left for a civil engineer to do in this nation, what with the railroads already built.” He found plenty to do in Iowa — especially in road building. Iowa roads were terrible. The legislature, shortly after Marston became dean, designated Iowa State College as the Iowa State Highway Commission, with the deans of agriculture and engineering jointly responsible for its administration.

Marston was on the Iowa Highway Commission for twenty-seven years from its founding. During the first years the commission had only advisory authority, but through its efforts there was made available for the first time to road builders a series of standard plans for roads, systems for road drainage, culverts, bridges, and expert advice on how to build them.

For years Dean Marston was a legendary fig-

ure who drove up to the road grade in a 1909 Buick, raised Cain in behalf of proper drainage and crowning, and disappeared with mud shooting from his spinning wheels. The Iowa Highway Commission became a separate entity in 1913, but Iowa State College still does important research for the benefit of Iowa roads, under contract with the Commission.

Iowa had only twenty-one miles of concrete road in 1919, and Dean Marston is credited with a substantial part of the effort that "pulled Iowa out of the mud" in the 1920's. Marston also supervised the construction of College buildings, laid out a sewage disposal system for the College, and served as consultant for many state and national projects. Ironically, Marston was killed in an automobile accident on an Iowa highway in 1949, while still active at Iowa State, although he had retired as Dean of Engineering in 1932. He was followed by T. R. Agg, and then by J. F. Downie Smith who left the College in 1957 for a position in industry.

To find a worthy successor to Beardshear was no easy task. The Reverend Albert B. Storms of the First Methodist Church of Des Moines was finally chosen. Storms was able to show definite progress in the work which Beardshear had left unfinished — that of bringing the College fully into the modern era. Under his guidance the main divisions completed their organization, enrollment

showed marked growth, and, with increased support, the staff was strengthened. Storms himself served as Dean of Science and General and Domestic Science, which now has become simply the Division of Science.

Following the resignation of Storms in 1910 and after two years of temporary guidance by Stanton, the retiring Commissioner of Agriculture in New York, Raymond Allen Pearson, was made the seventh president of the College in 1912. It was in Pearson's regime that there were strong pressures from both within and without to abolish most of the liberal and scientific subjects taught at the College and to return to narrow vocationalism. Another proposal by an investigating committee was that all Home Economics work should be transferred to the State University of Iowa, while all Engineering should be centered at the Iowa State College in the interest of efficiency and economy. Undergraduate men at the College, seeing the possibility of the removal of nearly all of the coeds, were particularly opposed.

Through all such difficulties, the College continued to progress toward its present form. R. E. Buchanan, who has served the College well in many capacities, was first made Dean of Science (1913-1919) and then Dean of the newly-formed Graduate College (1919-1948).

Millikan Stalker became the first Dean of Veterinary Science (later changed to Veterinary

Medicine) from 1898 to 1902. Under Dean C. H. Stange, Veterinary Medicine acquired a first-rate plant for both research and for the teaching program which had been lengthened to four years under J. H. McNeil in 1903. Home Economics, the last area to gain divisional status, was so designated in 1913, and Catherine J. MacKay was named Dean. In 1919 S. W. Beyer replaced Buchanan as Dean of Science, and in 1923 Anna Richardson followed Catherine MacKay as the head of Home Economics.

World War I provided the first real test of what Iowa State College and its sister institutions could do in a national crisis. The original Morrill Act had provided that "military tactics" should be taught in all Land-Grant colleges. In the midst of the Civil War, when the Act was passed, the North was feeling the lack of qualified officers for its armies, and the Land-Grant colleges seemed a good place to train officers for the future. As it turned out, Congress did not see fit at any time to provide much support for these military training programs, and the colleges themselves, in the main, did not comply whole-heartedly with the military training requirement.

When war broke over Europe in 1914 a shocked nation took notice. In December, 1915, the War Department insisted upon a second year of drill, and the next year there was established a full Reserve Officers Training Corps. The fac-

ulty at Iowa State College immediately petitioned for such a unit.

Eventually, the whole College was in the war effort. When the United States itself became a belligerent, President Pearson became one of two assistant secretaries for food production within the United States Department of Agriculture. Other staff members followed into military and civilian tasks connected with the war effort. The Agricultural Extension Service and the Experiment Station aided in food production in Iowa. The most immediate demand upon technical institutions such as Iowa State was the training of selected contingents of drafted men in mechanical trades and special skills. Auto mechanics, blacksmiths, and machinists were trained by the College. It was not until October 1, 1918, that a collegiate program combined with army requirements was finally inaugurated. Although Iowa State — like the rest of the nation — was unprepared, it was generally agreed the College had met its first serious wartime test well.

Through much of his regime, President Pearson carried on a running feud with President Walter Jessup of the State University of Iowa, and with the finance committee of the State Board of Education (now the Board of Regents) over matters of appropriations and areas of teaching and research proper for one institution or the other. The University, in general, seemed to feel that it

was the leading educational institution of the state, while the College felt it had advanced to a stage where it should be accorded equal status and treatment. The legislature authorized one of its periodic surveys of higher education at this time, and two prominent educators from outside Iowa, who formed the survey committee, generally agreed with Pearson's idea of equality and urged cooperation. Complete cooperation did not come about, and Pearson resigned in 1926 to become president of the University of Maryland.

Of Pearson's administration, Professor Earle D. Ross declares:

Pearson's failure to achieve more fully for the College the ideal which he declared at his election was due, in part at least, to his own limitations. His vision of the Land-Grant idea was somewhat restricted. A vigorous, and in general, understanding champion of the technical lines, from his training and personal interest he was less sure of the general. . . . Furthermore, to the overemphasis of his critics and the regret of his friends, Pearson was a victim of an obsession for details to which too much of his time and energy were devoted. . . . These shortcomings are noted not by way of depreciation but rather in partial explanation of the circumscription in development of the most achieving administration to that time. With all the inhibiting conditions, Raymond Pearson had contributed most to the working out of the great idea upon which the College was established, after the formative contribution of Adonijah Welch. . . . Pearson had brought the College to the verge of the promised land although he was not destined to lead in the full occupation of it.

Raymond Hughes, who succeeded Pearson, was a native Iowan who had lived in Ohio since childhood. He was a graduate of Miami University, where, after graduate work at Ohio State University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, he returned as professor of chemistry, dean, and then president.

The presidency of Raymond Hughes was marked by moderation, by increasing harmony with the State University, by the building of a stronger college, by excellent relations with students, and — unfortunately — by the vicissitudes of a great depression. Hughes served until his retirement from administrative duties in 1936. Genevieve Fisher became head of Home Economics in 1927, Charles E. Friley came from Texas to take the deanship of Science in 1932, and Charles Murray became Dean of Veterinary Medicine in 1936.

Friley, who followed Hughes to the presidency, was a graduate of Texas A. & M. College whose special interest and field of study was college administration. Let Ross, the historian of Iowa State College, speak again:

The new executive was to be numbered among a new generation of forward-looking Land-Grant leaders who recognized not alone the great responsibility of training experts in the branches of technology, but no less than that of providing a competent rational understanding of the broad social implications of applied science in all

realms and of the consequent essential place of the general subjects. This conception of the true Land-Grant idea was the thesis of his inaugural address on "The Place of the Technological College in Higher Education." Such an emphasis was in the best tradition of the college—a fuller application of the philosophy of progenitor Welch. Especially among the younger scientists there was an increasing appreciation of the essential place of the general subjects in any program of higher education and of the dependence of their own professions, not only upon directly 'supporting' sciences but upon the humanities as well.

In 1938 Harold V. Gaskill, a psychologist, was appointed to succeed Friley as Dean of Science. He was succeeded in 1957 by Richard Bear who came from Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

As Friley assumed the presidency, the worst of the depression was passing. Enrollments climbed. Research and extension agencies turned from emergency activities connected with that depression to long-range projects. And a second World War loomed on the horizon. From the late 1930's the campus was alerted to the international scene through lectures, broadcasts, forums, and discussions. In 1940 the College took further "measures" looking toward national defense. The attack on Pearl Harbor speeded the preparations. In June, 1942, a non-collegiate naval training school was organized for three groups—electricians, diesel firemen, and cooks and bakers. Schooling for amphibious firemen was added later. Young women

were trained for work in the engineering department of Curtiss-Wright airplane corporation. A naval collegiate V-12 program began July 1, 1943, with eight hundred cadets. An Army specialized training program was begun that same year. Research and extension programs again were geared to wartime activities. When peace came again, the College was faced with a flood of ex-G.I.'s who made notable records in scholarship and established the pattern of marriage as relatively common for students in college — a pattern that has been maintained to this day.

Henry D. Bergman succeeded Charles Murray as Dean of Veterinary Medicine during the war, and he in turn was followed by I. A. Merchant in 1952. Ralph Hixon became Dean of the Graduate College in 1948. New buildings were erected after the war to compensate for the almost total lack of campus construction since the depression began. Campus programs were expanded.

When the tenth president of Iowa State College assumed office in 1953, he was indeed the head of a "technological university." After a careful search which had included consultation with all segments of the faculty, James H. Hilton was chosen. Hilton, a native of North Carolina, and Dean of Agriculture at North Carolina State College at the time of his selection, was the first alumnus of the College to serve as its president.

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