

THE PALIMPSEST

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In The Beginning—1847-1860

February 25, 1847! On this day the First General Assembly of the new State of Iowa passed a bill establishing the State University of Iowa at Iowa City—only 59 days after Iowa had become a State. The bill was signed by Governor Ansel Briggs the same day—the last day of the session.

This action took place in the Old Stone Capitol. It marked the beginning of an institution which has become a leader in education not only in Iowa but throughout the nation and the world.

The University of Iowa took its roots from the people themselves. From the outset, the Iowa pioneers had given evidence of their devotion to education by the establishment of schools and academies. This Act of the First General Assembly was evidence of the people's determination to have an institution of higher learning.

The Act creating the University consisted of thirteen sections one of which provided for a Board of Trustees, fifteen in number, to control and manage the University. The General Assem-

bly elected fifteen trustees, but eight years passed before the University opened its doors.

For seven years the Trustees had little to do except to select the two sections (46,080 acres) of public land donated by the Federal Government for University support, and to provide for their sale. Delay in the selection and sale of lands left the Trustees without means of support, and the delay in moving the capital to Des Moines left them without a building for University purposes.

Before the University could get under way, the Board of Trustees at a special meeting held February 21, 1850, recognized the College of Physicians and Surgeons of the Upper Mississippi—an institution established at Davenport by certain medical gentlemen—as the College of Physicians of the State University of Iowa. It was stipulated, however, that such recognition should not render the University liable for any pecuniary aid, nor were the Trustees to acquire any control over the property or management of the medical school.

Shortly thereafter, the school was removed from Davenport to Keokuk, where the liberality of the citizens enabled the faculty to erect a suitable frame building for their use.

The General Assembly, by an Act of January 22, 1851, placed the institution under the supervision of the Board of Trustees of the University. This arrangement continued until 1857 when its connection with the University was terminated by

the provision of the new Constitution fixing the University at Iowa City without branches.

At the sessions of the General Assembly from 1847 to 1857, Iowa legislators, anxious to please their constituents, attempted to secure a branch of the University for their home town. The Act of 1847 permitted the establishment of such branches "as the public convenience might require."

By acts of the General Assembly in 1849 two branches of the University, to be located at Fairfield and Dubuque, and three Normal Schools to be located at Andrew, Oskaloosa, and Mount Pleasant, were created. These branches were placed on equal footing with the University to be established at Iowa City, although each was to have its own Board of Trustees and to be under the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. This would make six institutions seeking support from the sale of the two townships of land allocated to the University.

The five institutions established by these acts were doomed to failure. The branch at Dubuque never got started; the one at Fairfield, after many difficulties, was discontinued January 24, 1853. Of the proposed Normal Schools, the one at Mount Pleasant was never organized; but the other two operated for several years. Although their administrators petitioned the Legislature, the Board of Trustees of the University, and the Superintendent of Public Instruction, they were never able to

get money from the University fund. The new Constitution of 1857 settled the matter once and for all by locating the University at Iowa City without branches at any other place.

By 1854 the University was still a paper institution and a tide of irritation was rising. Among the impatient was Governor James W. Grimes who in his inaugural declared: "I think the time has come when steps should be taken to carry out the design of Congress in making the grant."

The Trustees had been delayed not only by the difficulty in selecting and disposing of the township grants throughout the State, but also by the task of securing an administrator and assembling a faculty for the proposed institution.

In the fall of 1854, the Board elected William C. Larrabee of Asbury University (later DePauw) of Greencastle, Indiana, as President of the University at a salary of \$1,500 and Hiram Moore of the same institution as Professor at a salary of \$1,200. Neither accepted but Mr. Larrabee made a trip to Iowa City before declining.

Spurred on by letters from the Governor and the Superintendent of Public Instruction to the General Assembly that the time had come for the University to be put into "practical operation," and by a resolution of the Legislature, the Board apparently took steps to make a start in March, 1855. Early that spring, the small two-story brick building, known as Mechanics Academy and lo-

cated on the northwest corner of Iowa Avenue and Linn Street, where a wing of East Hall now stands, showed signs of activity. A pile of wood, neatly cut, stood ready for use. Inside a pleasant warmth radiated from a stove that was unmistakably new. An Iowa City newspaper advertisement had given notice that the University was open to receive students.

The program to be offered was under the supervision of Abel Beach, Professor of Ancient Languages, and Alexander Johnston, Professor of Mathematics. Their appointment was recognized by action of the Board March 15, 1855, fixing the term at sixteen weeks and tuition at \$4 per term.

At the end of the term three salary warrants were issued for instruction in the University. Abel Beach was paid \$130 for seven weeks, Alexander Johnston was given \$416.67, and William A. McGinley received \$200 for eight weeks as a substitute for Abel Beach, who had resigned because of illness. Further expenditures included \$76.45 to the Presbyterian Church for the purchase of a bell and an additional amount for equipment—seats, desks, and blackboards.

During sessions in 1855 the Board selected a faculty in preparation for the opening of the academic year in September. Lorin Andrews of Gambier, Ohio, was elected president, but he, too, declined. James Hall of Albany, New York, was elected Professor of Geology, Zoology, and Natu-

ral History at a salary of \$1,500 a year, and Josiah D. Whitney was appointed to the chair of Mineralogy, Meteorology, and Chemistry at \$1,000. H. S. Welton was selected Professor of Languages, John Van Valkenburg, Professor of the Normal Department, and E. M. Guffin, Professor of the Preparatory Department. Upon the recommendation of Professor Hall, Amos Dean of the Albany Law School was chosen Chancellor of the University and Professor of History.

With a president (although not in residence), a faculty, and laboratory equipment valued at \$500, the University opened on September 19, 1855, for a term of seventeen weeks, to be followed, after a vacation of two weeks, with a term of twenty-three weeks. Tuition for the short term just completed was ordered refunded, and tuition for the 1855-56 school year was to be free to residents of Iowa.

The Board allowed funds for further advertising, \$106.21 for books, \$266.74 for repairs and equipment, and \$109.25 for wood (no coal for three more years). The faculty, which actually served during the year, consisted of only four—Professors Welton and Johnston in the University proper, and John Van Valkenburg and E. M. Guffin in the Normal and Preparatory Departments respectively.

Chancellor Amos Dean, fifty-two years of age, scholarly, and interested in education, accepted

the office on condition that he could retain his position in the Albany Law School. He made only three trips to Iowa, but his plan for organization of the University was adopted by the Board in January, 1856, and he purchased books as a nucleus for the University Library. He also helped draw up Iowa school laws but never assumed administrative nor instructional duties.

On January 7, 1856, the Board of Trustees adopted Chancellor Dean's plans for the University which included the following departments: Ancient Languages, Modern Languages, Intellectual Philosophy, Moral Philosophy, History, Natural History, Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, and Chemistry. Added to these were a Normal Department and a Preparatory Department with a Professor for each. Male students were to be at least 15 years and female students at least 14 years on admission. No student was permitted to take less than the studies of three departments.

Under Dean and a reorganized faculty, the school year began on the third Wednesday of September, 1856, and continued for fifty-one weeks with one week of vacation at holiday time. Tuition was set at \$10 per term.

According to the first University catalog, issued for the year 1856-1857, the total number of students enrolled was 124—males, 83, females, 41, of whom 105 were in the Normal and Preparatory Departments—males, 68, females, 37—and the

number of collegiate students in various departments was males, 15, females, 4. Expenses for the year, including appropriations for library, apparatus, and all other objects was \$8,577.91.

The year, 1857, opened auspiciously, but the new Constitution placed the control of all education in Iowa, including the University, in the hands of the newly constituted Board of Education which in turn appointed a new Board of Trustees—seven in number—to govern the University.

This Board, beset by financial problems, decided to close the University for one year—it proved to be two—but to retain the Normal Department if the Chancellor could find a principal. Dean selected D. Franklin Wells for the position. The Board also voted to exclude females. This action aroused opposition and never took effect.

The third and fourth catalogs are of the Normal Department alone as all other University work had been suspended and the faculty dismissed in 1858. Certain students selected by the Governor, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, and District Court Judges received free instruction upon agreeing to teach in Iowa for a specified time.

At the close of the college year, 1857-58, the University, on recommendation of the faculty, conferred diplomas upon graduates of the Normal Department. Its first degree, B.S., went to Dexter Edson Smith, who had completed the required work in the collegiate department.