

TRANSCRIPT OF MRS. HALL PARK McCULLOUGH
SPEAKING ON THE EARLY HISTORY OF BENNINGTON COLLEGE

One beautiful moonlight night in August, 1923, Mr. McCullough said to me, "Won't you drive over to Old Bennington in the open car. Dr. Vincent Ravi Booth, pastor of the Congregationalist Church in Old Bennington, has just telephoned that he wants to see me." Mr. McCullough and I had just returned the day before from a glorious trip to Europe with our four children, and were feeling in a lazy, relaxed and happy state such as one feels after a successful journey. Mr. McCullough left me in the car saying, "I shall probably be here about ten minutes." But it was an hour and a half before he returned and told me that Dr. Booth wanted to start an educational center for girls in Old Bennington -- a school or college -- that the old inhabitants of the town were dying out, that an educational center would bring in young life to the community, fill up the deserted houses, stimulate the old church, bring more business to the town, and that also there was an emergency need for women's colleges in the country, and New England was the perfect setting for them. I said, "Who'll do the work?" And Mr. McCullough said, "Dr. Booth."

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Dr. Booth had already talked to Mr. James Colby Colgate, then chairman of the Board of Colgate College, and Mr. Colgate had said he would be glad to give a campus of forty-five acres, from Monument Avenue in Old Bennington up the slopes of Mt. Anthony, and eventually the whole of Mount Anthony. Dr. Booth said that the next

day he would present the cause to Mrs. Frederic B. Jennings. Mr. McCullough was enthusiastic and I was skeptical but interested.

Mr. McCullough had returned to New York when I was called on the telephone by Mrs. Colgate, who told me of a meeting of the proposed Bennington College to be held at her house, and asked us to come. When I told her Mr. McCullough was in New York she said, "I'll send him an urgent telegram," and to my surprise he came. It was a large meeting. The speakers were Dr. William A. Neilson, President of Smith College, President Paul D. Moody and Dean Ross of Middlebury College, and Dr. Booth.

President Neilson said, "If it be a girls' college, why not try a new type of education? Study the history of textiles, perhaps, and branch out from there."

That interested me because, when a child of fourteen, I had experienced this "branching out" in Italy, when on account of outgrowing my strength I was deprived of school for a year. At that time, I went to a library in Florence on the Tornabuoni every day and educated myself, starting with Muntz's Life of Raphael and branching out into the Italian Renaissance, co-ordinating the galleries and the historic buildings with my reading until I felt, in my adolescent mind, that the Italian Renaissance belonged to me. You see, I was working on my own initiative with perfect freedom.

At the close of the meeting, Dr. Booth read a list of twenty-one women whom he appointed on what he called a Continuation Committee (but which later came to be called the Committee of Twenty-One), to work until the college should be handed over to a board of trustees and a president. To my horror and surprise my name was on the list. Mrs. James Eddy was made chairman, and a few days later had a meeting

to which I could not go. They voted that a new college was to be in Old Bennington. Miss Mary Sanford afterward said, "When I signed, I felt as though I signed for a new constellation in the heavens." I told Dr. Booth that I was completely engrossed in New York work and could not serve on the committee and he said, "Just do a short piece of work. Then you can be released." Mr. McCullough said I had never done work for Vermont, and thought I should, so I did. Dr. Booth planned five committees -- on finance, architecture, education, trustees and statistics. He asked me on which one I would serve and I said, "Education." He said, "Fine. Be the chairman, choose your own committee." I chose Miss Mary Sanford (who later gave the College clock and bell) and Miss Jennie A. Valentine of Bennington.

Miss Sanford and I visited Vassar together, and I visited Wellesley, Swarthmore, Bryn Mawr and Barnard, and corresponded with the presidents of many other colleges. I found the spinster teachers at Wellesley a grand group of old war-horses. One professor at Vassar, who wore Congress boots, told us much of Antioch's plan of alternating six weeks of study with six weeks at a full-time job. I later met President Morgan of Antioch and learned more of this program. At Swarthmore I learned of the group tutorial system and working for honors.

I made my report and went from New York to Bennington in a beautiful December snowstorm to a meeting called by Dr. Booth at the home of Mrs. Arthur J. Holden in Old Bennington. Most of the Committee of Twenty-One were present. Dr. Booth reported that Mrs. Colgate would arrange a meeting in New York of one hundred eminent citizens. Unexpectedly, Mrs. Colgate rose and said, "Dr. Booth, I can't do it. I'm too much interested in the McCall mission." Then, she sat down with emphasis and her camp chair collapsed. She went down on the floor,

the wall behind saving her from a backward somersault. Fortunately she was not injured and Dr. Booth pulled her up very dexterously. However, it created quite a commotion, and Dr. Booth seemed more shaken than Mrs. Colgate and looked perturbed at going on with the meeting. I sat next to Mrs. Colgate, so Dr. Booth in despair asked me if I would take over the New York meeting. I was aware that on the other side of me sat Miss Helen Stokes and Miss Sanford, both Socialists. As Socialists in those days were considered dangerous radicals, however refined and cultured they might be, should Dr. Booth ask them next, Bennington College might be given a Socialistic stigma from the start. So I said yes, meaning to tell him later that I had accepted only to pull him out of a dilemma. However, as the meeting broke up he was surrounded by ladies, and I had to make a train. I expected to telephone him from Albany, where I was spending the night with my sister, Ethel Van Benthuyssen.

My sister had a trustee of Bryn Mawr visiting that evening, and I told them both of my predicament. My sister said, "Before deciding anything, why not consult the New York Commissioner of Education, who lives down the block." The Commissioner was Dr. Frank Pierpont Graves and when she telephoned him, he said he would come right over. This was extraordinary, as he was seldom at home. I told him my plight and he said there was a tremendous need for more women's colleges, but, "I would like to see an experimental college." He mentioned Connecticut College as a courageous example. He said there was a new, planned, progressive training in the Schools of Education at Harvard, Yale and the Universities of Iowa, Washington State, Minnesota and Chicago. They were discredited and hardly known by their own institutions, although endorsed by the best educational minds in the country. These plans had already reached a few preparatory schools, at Tower Hill in Wilmington, Delaware; a

school in Winnetka, Illinois; the Francis Parker School in Chicago; Horace Mann in New York; the Rosenwald School in New Orleans, one in St. Louis, and a few others. He said the time was ripe for a progressive college which would give not only a more liberal education, but unshackle the preparatory schools as well.

I was deeply impressed with what he said because it coincided with many educational concepts that Mr. McCullough and I had developed as we were looking up schools and colleges for our own children. The choices appeared so grim and meager. When I entered our oldest daughter in college in 1920 I told the dean of my excitement, for she was the first woman in both our families to receive a college education. The dean said, "This is nothing to be excited about. It is just sheer grind." And at my son's boarding school they insisted he couldn't learn French in France -- at least not for College Boards. Mr. McCullough and I had at this time been greatly interested in a book by Edward Yeomans, founder of the Ojai School in California, called Shackled Youth. He had also written articles in the Atlantic Monthly on education from a layman's point of view, simple and enlightening. (When first news of the College came out later, Mr. Yeomans wrote to me immediately saying that he was with us. Mr. Yeomans came to the last Educational Conference for the College, and later Mr. McCullough and I spent a day with him at his summer home at Westport Point, Massachusetts. He had Mr. Thomas Surette there to meet us and tell us of modern methods in music used in the Boston schools.) I told Dr. Graves how I taught my oldest child geography by taking her to the East River and showing her ships starting out for different parts of the world and reading books about the countries where they went, doing picture puzzle maps to show the locations, etc. Dr. Kilpatrick said

later that this was really the "project method."

These experiences helped me grasp the points Dr. Graves made, and gladly respond when he said, "Please don't give up the idea of the New York meeting until you come to my office in the morning. I will save three hours for you." I felt it a great opportunity, and went. Dr. Graves said that should the New York meeting be successful, even though Bennington College did not materialize, it would make a revolution in education and would help in the current hard-boiled curricula and unshackle the preparatory schools. Thus I took on a second project for Dr. Booth.

Together Dr. Graves and I began work on a big meeting for New York. We planned out a carefully selected list of sponsors. It was decided to ask Dr. William H. Kilpatrick, [professor of the philosophy of education at Teachers College and an exponent of John Dewey, to make the main address, to ask President James Rowland Angel of Yale to be the moderator and Dr. William A. Neilson to be the other speaker, with Dr. Booth to close the meeting. Dr. Neilson was to speak on "Why Another College," Dr. Kilpatrick on "Why a New Curriculum," and Dr. Booth on "Why Bennington." As publicity, invitations were to be sent to all college presidents east of the Mississippi. That was the plan, but would we get the sponsors and speakers for an idea without money?

Dr. Graves gave me a very clever introduction to Dr. Kilpatrick, saying, "Mr. and Mrs. McCullough are interested in a new college in Bennington, even though they realize that it may cost many millions to accomplish." This left Dr. Kilpatrick guessing as to whether we had the millions in hand or not. [Dr. Graves also gave me a letter to Dr. Otis Caldwell of the Lincoln School. I saw them both, though Dr. Caldwell was just leaving for China.] Dr. Kilpatrick came to dinner with us, and Mr. McCullough and I were aroused and convinced

by his educational approach and cogent reasons for a new college. He promised to speak for us, provided that it would be on progressive education.

Mr. McCullough and I then went to a "Yale-in-China" dinner where Dr. Angel was the speaker. Afterwards Mr. McCullough caught him and asked him to preside at the New York meeting. Dr. Angel said no. We both thought he was interested and longed to help, but was fearful of the dignity of his office at Yale were the Bennington plan to prove a fiasco. He said to Mr. McCullough, "Why do you people try to start a new college? Do you know what the work means? I know because I was involved in the University of Chicago. It is terrific." Mr. McCullough kept such a poker face that he turned to me and said, "Do you know that you can't start a college without a library of one hundred thousand books? Do you realize what a colossal job it is?" Dr. Angel had a very large mouth and when he said "colossal," it seemed to stretch from ear to ear. He had me so frightened that for weeks I had nightmares, feeling molten lead running down my neck and arms. Many years afterward, I met President Angel in New Haven and he complimented Bennington College greatly and said he always regretted his wrong decision in not speaking for us.

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While we were working in New York, Dr. Booth went to Boston and Northampton and was successful in securing both President Ada Comstock of Radcliffe College and again our good friend, President Neilson, as speakers. We then had a business meeting of the six New York members of the Committee Twenty-One. It was decided to have our big meeting at the Colony Club on April 28, 1924, and Mrs. Frederic B. Jennings was to send out the invitations with our list of sponsors on the back. Meantime we were to hold smaller meetings, bringing in

more and more people to help, asking and interesting sponsors in the cause and attempting to make Bennington College known all over New York and the country. It was decided to ask twenty strategic people to give dinner parties of ten or more carefully selected guests, to assure at least two hundred people at the meeting, and the rest we would leave in the lap of the gods.

My friend Mrs. Ernest Poole came on the committee and asked Dr. Booth to speak at a meeting of the Junior Fortnightly to be held at her house. It was a group of leading New York women. Dr. Neilson was in town, came to the meeting, and spoke with Dr. Booth. Both did an excellent job and all those women came in as sponsors except one Bryn Mawr lady, who feared it was a protest against Bryn Mawr, so we excused her. I remember when the speaking ended, Frances Perkins, later Secretary of Labor and a trustee of the College, stood up and said, "This is just the cause to which I want to give my name." I had written inviting about sixty-five educators and leading citizens representing all professions whom Dr. Graves and I had selected. All accepted gladly, in fact enthusiastically, except the president of one of the big women's colleges. I was amused when later on one of its graduates asked me, "Why did you snub our president on your list of sponsors?"

Shortly after this Dr. Booth spoke at the Woman's Republican Club at the invitation of Mrs. Edgerton Parsons. Mr. Lawrence of Bronxville, New York, attended, and said to Dr. Booth afterwards, "You have made my ideas come to life. I want to give my house and grounds and a million dollars and have you as the president of a college in memory of my wife, Sarah Lawrence." Dr. Booth came to us with the offer. Mr. McCullough and I said we were committed to the Bennington plan and location, but we would not stand in his way if he saw fit to accept the offer, which must have been an attractive and tempting one

for the pastor of a not-too-large country church. But Dr. Booth realized more clearly than Mr. Lawrence that this was the job of a professional educator. He considered it but decided to stand by Bennington.

By holding continuous small meetings and enlisting the interest of sponsors, the news of Bennington College spread all over New York so that on the night of the Colony Club meeting, we were overjoyed to find the Club so packed that we had to open up a second ballroom and turn away a hundred or more people. Mr. ^{Carl} ~~Mark~~ Van Doren, then headmaster of the Brearley School, said he considered it the finest group of citizens at any meeting he had ever attended. I had gotten in touch with a National Conference of Headmistresses being held in Philadelphia and they came in a body, which was of great significance as they spread the news of the College all over the country. Mr. Ivy Lee, the big publicity man of the period, asked who was our publicity man. The news of the College, he said, "literally had spread from the Atlantic to the Pacific." Mrs. Jennings had enlisted the interest of Colonel Stone of the Associated Press, who was a great help, and I talked to reporters from the New York Times, the Herald Tribune and the Evening Sun. As the Colony Club did not allow publicity regarding meetings, all this demonstrated clearly that parents, students and many teachers were receptive to the new program, and it even seemed that we were trying as much to catch up with the publicity as to get it going. As Dr. Graves had said, the time was ripe.

The Colony Club meeting was of endless value to the schools of education, as heretofore they did not know that parents or students cared. President Comstock was a gracious and charming moderator, the speeches were excellent, Dr. Kilpatrick's scintillating. He felt that "women have reached a position where a different education is required for

their living, different from the old curriculum provided for men." One educator rose and claimed that "women have reached a position equal to men and should be able to take the same curriculum." Dr. Kilpatrick said that "curriculum was started for the clergy," and denounced the old curriculum for either sex. There was a lively discussion. Closing the meeting, Miss Maria Bowen Chapin of the Chapin School rose and moved that a standing vote be taken to endorse the founding of Bennington College. The meeting then adjourned.

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Miss Marion Coates, just appointed president of Sarah Lawrence College which was to open in the autumn of 1924, was at the meeting and met with Dr. Kilpatrick the next morning. Without hesitation she changed her whole curriculum to the Bennington Plan. A few days later, Mr. Hamilton Holt, a classmate of Mr. McCullough's at Yale, came to call on us. He had just taken the presidency of Rollins College and questioned us about the Bennington Plan. We sent him also to Dr. Kilpatrick, who helped him with the curriculum of Rollins. So Dr. Graves prophesied revolution had started.

The College committee had now increased. It consisted of Dr. Booth, Mr. Colgate, Mr. Wilson M. Powell of New York and chairman of the Swarthmore Board of Trustees, Charles H. Hall of Springfield, Massachusetts, Dr. Kilpatrick, Mrs. George S. Franklin of New York, Mrs. Arthur J. Holden of Old Bennington, Mrs. Ernest Poole of New York, Mr. McCullough, and myself as chairman. I did not want to accept the chairmanship but did so because of the fact that I was in New York in the winter and in Bennington in the summer and thus could work continuously, which seemed imperative for the time being. Dr. Kilpatrick agreed to preside at the meetings. Mr. Colgate tried to console me by

saying that in time a great leader would turn up.

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It was decided that the next move was to have a Conference of Educators at North Bennington at the home of Mrs. John G. McCullough, Mr. McCullough's mother, and to have it in August, 1924. Dr. Booth invited the presidents of women's colleges, and although most of them were in Europe at the time, they sent representatives. Dr. Kilpatrick presided, and it was an interesting conference of about twenty educators.* Dr. Kilpatrick made a stimulating leader, and Professor Burgess Johnson of Vassar, Professor Norton of Wellesley, Mr. Eugene Randolph-Smith of the Beaver Country Day School, Dean Frances Fenton Bernard (later Mrs. Edwin Avery Park) of Smith, and Miss Amy Kelly helped greatly with its problems. They all voted for a new progressive college in Bennington. This conference ended with a meeting at the Yellow Barn in Old Bennington. The speakers were Dr. Booth, Dr. Kilpatrick, Dr. Johnson and Dr. Norton. Later on Dr. Booth, Mr. Colgate and I, spoke at the Bennington High School on August 19, 1924, and some people came over from the Institute of Politics at Williamstown.

The summer of 1924 brought in the Honorable Morton D. Hull of Chicago, and Congressman from Illinois, as a committee member. Before accepting, Mr. Hull sent for Mr. Duncan, then in Chicago, of the John Price Jones Corporation, to investigate the potentialities of the venture, and Mr. Duncan gave a sanguine account. Mr. Hull made an invaluable trustee later.

In the autumn of 1924 a meeting of the Continuation Committee decided, as a result of the vote at the Colony Club and later of the

* See "Addendum to Curriculum," page 38 and minutes of the Conference in the files.

vote at the Educators' Conference, that the College was a potent need for the future of education in the United States. At this point the Charter of the College was essentially in the line of procedure.* It was granted on August 19, 1925, and then the Continuation Committee became the Board of Trustees of Bennington College.

When the charter was granted and the College became a legal reality, Dr. Kilpatrick was asked to write a letter, giving a skeleton plan of the curriculum assembled by the Colony Club and Educators' meetings, in answer to the many questions pouring in to the trustees. Dr. Kilpatrick agreed to do this and wrote an explanatory letter in March, 1926.** It was decided to enlist the aid of the John Price Jones Corporation to organize for a money campaign and to write a College brochure that, as Mr. Colgate said, "should be written in two-syllable words so that the man in the street can understand it." Mr. Seymour did this.***

At that time a new impulse came into the College when Mrs. Joseph R. Swan, a graduate of Teachers College who had just returned from Europe, came on the Board. All through her association with the College she did the hardest and most notable work, never sparing herself mentally or physically. The John Price Jones Corporation organized committees: a Committee on Organization, of which I was chairman, a Special Gifts Committee of which Mrs. Swan was chairman, and a men's committee, leaving the chairmanship of the money campaign to be filled in the future. Dr. John J. Coss, Professor of Philosophy

* For more information see the Charter document in files and refer to Mr. McCullough.

** See page 41.

*** See the College files and documents before 1932, also for the list of trustees.

at Columbia University and Director of the Columbia Summer School, who had just returned from China, joined the Board and became one of its strongest members. In the autumn of 1925 a committee to choose a president got under way. It comprised Dr. Kilpatrick, Mrs. Swan, Mrs. Dwight W. Morrow, Mr. Edmund N. Huyck of Albany, Mr. Morton D. Hull, Mr. Charles Hall, Mr. McCullough and myself.

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In looking for a president we expected to choose on the basis of personality alone. Getting deeper into the problem, however, we decided the president should be a man. The work involved forming a curriculum, a heavy job in money raising, with much travel and speaking, and the building program to oversee as well as the formation of a faculty -- really too much for a woman. Also a woman would either be a spinster or would have to be away from her husband, unless he were willing to give up his work and be second in command. Also, with an experiment, we thought a predominately male faculty would be more inclined to take chances on a man. Dr. Neilson, Dr. Graves and Dr. Kilpatrick argued for a woman, but when we asked them if they would be as apt to take a position in an educational venture with a woman as with a man, they all three said no, emphatically, if somewhat sheepishly. We did want a president with a home and family, to give a center of solidity to the family life of the College.

Dr. Kilpatrick sent out a hundred letters to educators asking for names of promising candidates. We investigated them all and culled the list down to ten, then to five of the most promising. Dr. Stephen Duggan of the International Institute helped us greatly by informing us when our candidates from out of town turned up at his educational center. In January Mrs. Swan and I went on a trip, first to see

Chancellor Samuel P. Capen of Buffalo, then to Chicago to meet with Dr. George Counts and with Dr. Ernest Hatch Wilkins, a professor of the romance languages, both of the University; then we went on to Rockford, Illinois. We were greatly impressed with Chancellor Capen and found him interested and cooperative, as we also found Dr. Wilkins. Dr. Capen was a New Englander, an administrator, a scholar of culture and refinement, and a progressive educator. He had had some European education, also had an international mind, and a spiritual vision, qualities which I especially sought. We had an interesting two-hour talk with Dr. Counts who said, "This Bennington College is either the biggest thing ^{in education} or else nothing." The president of Rockford gave us a great ovation, having an "open night" in his home at which we met his entire faculty, and he took us to chapel the next morning. Dr. Wilkins had also a spiritual vision and an international mind; definitely an administrator, he was interested in the League of Nations and served on committees for international peace. In talking to Dr. Wilkins and describing Bennington's plan, I said that Mr. McCullough and I thought there was great waste in colleges not charging the full cost of tuition and at the same time having a sliding scale of tuition for those who needed scholarship aid. At this time one of our children was in college and, since we were favoring this new plan, we wrote we would be glad to pay the full cost, over and above the regular tuition charge. It was months before we had an answer. No one had ever asked them such a question before and they had to figure out just what it did cost to educate a student. They found there was a \$300 a year loss for each student, paid for by the inadequate faculty salaries, and by their endowment fund; this meant a \$1200 loss for the college per student for four years. I asked Dr. Wilkins if he thought it feasible for us

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to charge the total amount at Bennington, with a supplementary scholarship fund for those who could not afford it. He said, "I agree with you absolutely. Mr. Trevor Arnett of the Rockefeller Foundation is working on that now and his plan is to come out soon. You must meet him at once. I'll give you a letter to him." Mr. Arnett and I became great friends and he spoke for the College later.

On Mrs. Swan's and my return to New York with our report, unfortunately Mrs. Dwight Morrow had to leave our committee as Mr. Morrow was then appointed Ambassador to Mexico.

It was decided to ask Chancellor ^{Samuel P. Capen of Buffalo} Capen to be our president.

He was a man of great culture and experienced in running a college. Mr. Colgate, Mr. McCullough and I went to Buffalo to see him. He was interested and said it appealed to him greatly. The only objection was that he had promised to do a four-year reorganization job in Buffalo University. But he was willing to come and meet with the trustees and perhaps he could be released. He came to our meeting and was interrupted three times by long-distance calls from Buffalo. He came back smiling and said the Buffalo trustees had called to offer him all the power and money he wanted, even to raising his salary, and this he owed to Bennington College. He said he would still consider the offer for another week, but it was no. A bitter blow to us.

It was next decided to ask Dr. Wilkins, untried in presidency, but of eminent capability. ^{Ernest Hatch Wilkins a part of Bennington} The next week Dr. Wilkins spoke at the Lincoln School. Mr. Colgate, Mr. McCullough and I went, and after the meeting asked if we could see him the next morning, which we did -- and offered him the presidency. He was surprised and pleased, and said it was his first invitation to be a college president and that he thought he might consider it favorably. The only hesitation was the money-raising. He had just recovered from a serious operation and questioned

his strength, as he felt we would have to raise ten million dollars. During the next four months he was offered the presidencies of Amherst, Rutgers, Colorado College and Oberlin. Oberlin and Bennington were the two that interested him. He had asked for time to decide; as it was late in the spring of 1926, we told him not to hurry. He took three months and then declined Bennington on account of the money-raising, as Oberlin had an endowment of thirteen million. ^VAt the time Dr. Wilkins came to our house, when he was offered the presidency, he wanted to make a memorandum; looking for a pad, I found a bridge score and as he was in a hurry, I gave it to him to write on. When he said no to Bennington later, he said one of the inducements to accept the presidency was to work with trustees who gave him a bridge score instead of a pad!

In the autumn of 1926 Mrs. Swan and I went to New Haven to see Dr. Robert N. Hutchins, the new dean of the Yale Law School, to consult him on the careful selection of students. He had been recommended to us by Dr. Wilkins and was unknown to us at the time, except that his father had been president of Berea College and that he had just been called to Yale. We asked a Yale professor to sound him out as to whether he would accept any college presidency and he said no, he was obliged to stay at Yale for two years at least. So that was that.

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We were feeling pretty depressed by this time. We had started our presidential search in the autumn of 1925. It was December of 1926 and we had not yet found our crusader. In the spring of 1926, in order to keep the project alive and before the people, it was decided by the Board to send Miss Amy Kelly out

through the country to make a survey of women's education. In order to keep ideas and suggestions free for the incoming president, it was decided to send her under the auspices of the "Friends of Bennington College." Dr. Frank Aydelotte, President of Swarthmore, Mr. Colgate and I served as her committee. Miss Kelly at the time was the headmistress of the Bryn Mawr School in Baltimore, had taught before that at Wellesley and later wrote the outstanding biography, Eleanor of Aquitaine.

In December, 1926, Dr. Wilkins was given a large testimonial dinner at the Commodore Hotel in New York as the new president of Oberlin. My sister and I were going to it, and at five p.m. that day Dr. and Mrs. Wilkins came to tea at our house. They were leaving at six to be ready for the dinner at seven, when the telephone rang and I asked them to wait a minute until I answered it. It was Dr. Coss saying he had a splendid young candidate for Bennington College -- a Robert Devore Leigh -- professor of political science at Williams College. A graduate of Bowdoin, he had taught at Reed College in Oregon, at Barnard and Columbia, and had just been offered a fine position at the University of Chicago and was to decide in four days, so we must hurry. I flew back to Dr. Wilkins to tell him the news. He thought it sounded very favorable, and said, "You must see him tomorrow." While dressing for dinner I called long-distance to our Board member Mr. Huyck, a Williams man, to ask if he would call all the professors he knew at Williams for recommendations, and I would call him back at eleven p.m. I then called President Garfield of Williams and President Foster of Reed College, who I knew was in town. Both gave splendid reports of Dr. and Mrs. Leigh. I went to the dinner and sat next to Dr. Charles E. Merriam who, it seemed, was

the person who had just asked Dr. Leigh to go to Chicago. I did not know this, and did not mention Dr. Leigh, and he gave me names of candidates, but also did not mention Dr. Leigh. I called Mr. Huyck back late that night and he gave me his many reports; they were not only favorable but enthusiastic. I then woke Mr. McCullough up in North Bennington and asked him to call Dr. Leigh in Williamstown early the next morning, which was a Sunday, for a three p.m. appointment. I also asked him to call Mrs. Swan in Salisbury, Connecticut, to meet us at the Williams Inn at two o'clock for lunch, and I would leave on the early train in the morning.

Mr. McCullough met me and we met Mrs. Swan on time, and at three o'clock we were in Dr. Leigh's living room. He had expected to see Mr. McCullough only and was surprised and rather suspicious, I think, at the visit of three formidable people. We asked him for a criticism of the Bennington Plan, which he knew all about. He said he would be in New York in a few days, and it was arranged that he would be at our house with his criticisms. On the following Tuesday afternoon, about four days before Christmas, he came. Mrs. Swan could not be there, but Dr. Kilpatrick, Mr. McCullough and I saw him, and Dr. Kilpatrick asked him to be the first president of Bennington College provided the trustees voted him in the next day at a meeting at which he was to appear. He came, and in spite of the Christmas season, most of the trustees were present. Dr. Leigh then left and was to come back to dinner with us. He made a fine impression and had the unanimous vote of the Board. On his return to dinner with Mr. McCullough and myself, he asked many questions about the College, then called up Mrs. Leigh in Williamstown, and accepted. It was a tremendous relief to us all.

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Before this, Mrs. Swan and I had talked to many other possible candidates, and met with, and asked advice from, Dr. Abraham Flexner, Dr. ^{Wick}Wielcliffe Rose, Dr. Lawrence Frank and Dr. Beardsley Ruml, all of the Rockefeller Foundation, Dr. William Russell and Dr. Edward Lee Thorndike of Teachers College, Mr. Walter Pettit of the New York School of Social Work, Mr. Rollin Reynolds of the Horace Mann School, Dr. James G. McDonald of the Foreign Policy Association, Mr. Robert Frost, Dean Harry Carman of Columbia and Dr. John H. Finley, editor of the New York Times. I corresponded with Dr. Paul ^{Hanus}Hanus of the Harvard School of Education and with Dr. Seashore of Minnesota, and Mrs. Swan talked with President Suzzalo, of the University of Washington. I remember sitting next to Dr. John Dewey at Dr. Kilpatrick's table at a Foreign Policy lunch, and I was disappointed in not getting more from him. He seemed disinterested, and smiled only when I told him that when Dr. Booth attempted to enlist President Coolidge's interest in the College, he had replied, "There are two women's colleges in Vermont and that's enough."

Would just be a list of names - ??

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In the meantime, Dr. Booth had done a superb job in raising \$671,000 in pledges from people in Bennington and in Vermont, so with a campus and a president and nearly \$700,000 we felt we were well on our way. Dr. Leigh could not be relieved from Williams until the following June of 1927, but he came to New York as often as he was able for special occasions and during the holidays. Our house at 10 East 82nd Street became the College office. As we were giving all we could toward the College expenses and did not want to ask outsiders for money before the expected big money-raising campaign began, my oldest daughter and I did all the secretarial work. It was complicated, as our house became the storm center of "sixty-four dollar questions," such as long-distance calls from Johns Hopkins and Harvard, both looking

for presidents and asking us to suggest good candidates; the president of a big New York hospital asking how the Bennington Plan could be used in medical education; one of the first-desk players of the Philharmonic Orchestra, whose wife had left him, asking how to educate his daughter; and a dean asking me to help him on his Ph.D. thesis on education. Then, one hundred letters came from angry feminists who were incensed that we had chosen a man for the presidency. Each asked separate questions, so they had to be answered individually. Later, President Ham and I had a good laugh about the feminists, as he had been attacked by the same crowd when he took up the presidency of Mt. Holyoke. Our children entered into the whole Bennington College project with patience, sympathy and interest; but complained that their own education had been ruined, as in the evenings they would hear educators denounce the mistakes of bad teaching, and the next morning at school they would be subjected to just those mistakes. In the spring of 1927 Mrs. Elon Huntington Hooker gave a large lunch at Greenwich, Connecticut, to which Dr. Kilpatrick, Mrs. Swan and I went. ^{which} The lunch brought in \$40,000 and enlisted the valuable work of Mrs. Clarence M. Woolley, who came on the Board of Trustees. During this year Mr. Joseph P. Cotton, Mr. Vernon Munroe, Mr. Nicholas Kelley, Mrs. Dorothy Canfield Fisher, Mr. Arthur A. Ballantine and Mrs. Samuel Lewisohn became members of the Board, as well.

It was decided at a meeting of the Board to send Dr. and Mrs. Leigh to Europe for the summer of 1927, before starting work on the College, to study the school and college systems of France, Germany, Switzerland, England and Denmark. In Dr. Leigh's absence a College office was opened at the Academy Library in Old Bennington and Miss Bax, the secretary, compiled the records and planned out with Dr. Booth a money-raising campaign.

On Dr. Leigh's return from Europe, the winter of 1927-28 began with a College office at the New York home of Mrs. Jennings, as she had moved to the country to live. Mr. Austin McCormick, later New York Commissioner of Prisons and now Professor of Penology at the University of California, acted (during the time of waiting for a big prison job) as professional money-raiser. He worked with Dr. Booth and Dr. Leigh. The Leighs and the McCormicks lived at Mrs. Jennings' house at 109 East 73rd Street. Dr. Booth went on a money-raising expedition to Florida, and after that took a church in Florida every winter, returning each summer to Old Bennington and the work of the College.

At Dr. Leigh's first board meeting that fall, he handed in his resignation to take place seven years from the day he took office, which conformed to the Bennington Plan, as in order to keep the College abreast of the latest ideas in education, a survey was to be made by outside educators every seven years to see if the work of the president had been of sufficient value to warrant offering him another seven year term. (This investigation was made later by Dr. Flexner and Dr. Hauck, President of the University of Maine. It was a most favorable report and Dr. Leigh was asked to remain for another seven years.)

This same autumn, 1927, at a large meeting of the Progressive Education Association at the Commodore Hotel, Dr. Leigh made his first speech for Bennington College. Miss Coates, president of Sarah Lawrence, also spoke and the head of the Association, I remember, described the old type of education as "the teacher who expounds from the textbook, through the fountain pen, to the notebook of the student -- the idea not passing through the mind of either." The Stephens Clarks gave an evening meeting at their home on East 70th Street, at which the speakers were Dr. Leigh, Dr. John J. Coss,

Dr. Lois ^{Meek} Meak of Teachers College, and Dr. Trevor Arnett of the Rockefeller Board.* In 1928 an evening meeting was held at the Cosmopolitan Club at which Dr. Wilkins, Ernest Hutcheson, the musician, the Honorable John W. Davis and Dr. Leigh spoke, with Mrs. Franklin presiding. There was also an afternoon meeting at the home of Mrs. Hutton, (later Mrs. Joseph E. Davies, wife of the ambassador to Russia). With Mrs. Henry James presiding, the speakers were Elizabeth Bergner, at that time acting in "St. Joan," and Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt. Mrs. Raymond Ingersoll, wife of the ^{Boro Pres.} Mayor of Brooklyn, gave a large lunch to interest people in the College there.

Dr. Leigh spoke at luncheons and dinners and seldom had a chance to eat. One week we gave four dinners, four days in succession, for Dr. and Mrs. Leigh to meet possible donors. During that time my son came home very ill from boarding school. Answers to the invitation to the Stephen Clark's meeting were coming in to me, so in the morning between being called incessantly on the telephone, keeping the mail straight, and looking after my son and the arrival of the doctor, the orders for my patient Czechoslovakian cook were always late. When I would meet her on the stairs, I would wave my hand and say, "Have the same menu as last night, Teresa." Nothing was said by Mr. McCullough or the Leighs about the regular diet of mushroom soup and lobster Newburg, etc., until Mr. McCullough said to Mrs. Leigh on the fourth night, "More pepper in the soup tonight!" and later Mrs. Leigh confessed to having a bad lobster rash.

* Refer to the pamphlet on this meeting in the files.

Mr. Arthur Ballantine, later Assistant Secretary of the Treasury, accepted the chairmanship of the money-raising campaign, so with him and the president, and the plan, and Dr. Booth and \$671,000, we thought we were doing well when the depression of 1929 hit us, and Mr. Ballantine felt he could not continue as he thought the College could not possibly survive. Mrs. Swan then took on this killing job and did it superbly, but at great cost to her health. She had weekly meetings at the Cosmopolitan Club and also at the Women's City Club during that winter. Mr. Frederick Kent, who had been money-raiser for the Museum of Natural History, assisted her, and Mrs. Arthur Masters did a splendid piece of work, having Mr. Kent at her house one day a week from lunch time until six p.m., people dropping in and out and hearing the College story.*

In the spring of 1930 Dr. Leigh had been asked to speak at the Chilton Club in Boston, and when the time came he was quite seriously ill and appeared to be on the verge of a nervous breakdown. One doctor told me he thought Dr. Leigh would have to give up the presidency as his great interest and devotion to the College, combined with the anxiety of the depression, might be permanently injurious to his health. Dr. Kilpatrick took Dr. Leigh's place at the meeting and Dorothy Canfield Fisher spoke and Miss Comstock was the moderator. I had been ill, too, but was able to get out of bed, and went with Mrs. Leigh who valiantly took her husband's place. It was a crowded meeting of proper Bostonians. Although Mrs. Leigh and I went feeling Dr. Leigh's illness and the depression would end the College, we did

* For details of this consult Mrs. Arthur Masters.

not tell of our pessimism to Dr. Kilpatrick or Mrs. Fisher. They spoke with great faith and assurance of its security, and pledges of \$45,000 came in as a result. I never felt so dishonest in my life. Mrs. Leigh and I also spoke at the Winsor School in Dr. Leigh's place, and at a dinner meeting later at the Reed Powell's in Cambridge.

Dr. Leigh went to Bermuda for a two weeks rest and returned, to our joy, completely recovered.

* * *

As Dr. Leigh thought he was not conversant with musical theory and practice, he, Mrs. Swan and I went to consult Leopold Stokowski on his ideas of how a musical program, in such a college as Bennington, should be included in the curriculum. Mr. Stokowski advised our moving the College to California, and having modernistic buildings as the right setting for a modern college. Dr. Leigh and I talked with Ernest Hutcheson, head of the department of music at Columbia, and he encouraged us by saying that simple equipment such as a chicken house would not handicap the work. We also talked with Richard Aldrich in his very interesting musical library. I remember his saying: "If a musical student read, for instance, the books in this library, they would have knowledge of the history and understanding of music."

In view of the financial situation caused by the depression, in the summer of 1930 Mr. Colgate finally lost all hope for the College, and as two of his daughters were being married, he withdrew his offer of land because it contained two available houses for their use. Mrs. Jennings then gladly offered one hundred and forty acres of her farmland in North Bennington. Then we had a very exciting trustees' meeting at the Academy Library in Old Bennington, in September, 1930, to decide about the campus and whether, in spite of the depression,

the Board could continue its work.* The vote to continue the plan and accept the new campus was finally passed by a majority of one or two votes. The Jennings campus site was accepted.

Then the great struggle began. The depression by this time had become so acute that as new pledges came in, old pledges started falling off. Dr. Leigh made new estimates for the College, changing the buildings from brick to wood, and instead of attempting to raise \$2,500,000, reduced the amount to \$1,250,000. This included the building of four dwelling halls and the Commons; the remodeling of the farm barns into science laboratories, a library, and administrative and faculty offices, which, in view of the small classes planned could be used for teaching purposes as well. The chicken house was to be transformed into music studios, and the brooder into a sculpture studio. The \$1,250,000 also covered the faculty deficit until the tuition from the first four classes would balance the budget. As we appeared to have nearly a million dollars already in pledges that seemed to be dependable, it seemed feasible to go ahead.

When the campus was removed from Mr. Colgate's estate to that of Mrs. Jennings' in North Bennington, Mr. Henry W. Putnam withdrew his pledge of \$100,000 which had been given because of his interest in the town of Bennington only. This set us back to nearly \$200,000 still to raise. Mrs. Willard Straight and Mrs. Edward H. Rumsey came in to help us, both through Mrs. Swan.

In the autumn of 1930, pledges began falling off again, members

* For details see Dr. Leigh.

of the money-raising committee began disappearing and trustees began resigning. The extended expiration date of the first pledges was approaching, so re-pledging was necessary. How many would repledge was the big question. I went to Dr. Leigh's office at the beginning of March, 1931, and although a pledge of \$25,000 had just come in, Dr. Leigh and Mr. Kent thought it was hopeless to continue more than a few weeks, as over \$100,000 still had to be raised to make up for Mr. Putnam's pledge. Dr. Leigh then said, "If only we were within \$100,000, I think that with a last big effort we might make it."

My old uncle had died a few weeks before and I was one of his heirs, so I immediately went to my very conservative cousin, the executor of the estate, and asked for an estimate of the income on my share. He gave me a very definite answer, so I went to the College office and pledged the income ^{on my share} for five years, just enough to bring us within the \$100,000. I felt very guilty pledging it, as my uncle had warned me many times of getting too deeply involved in the College. He had told me again and again how Mr. Wells, of Wells College, had died in the poor house. Little did I know that most of his investments were in the New York Central Railroad and American Locomotive, both of which in a short time went down completely. All that was left bearing interest were Chiclets Chewing Gum, and American Cigar and Snuff. Thank God for these!

* * *

The winter of 1930-31, Mrs. Percy Jackson took on weekly lunches, filling the ballroom at the Cosmopolitan Club and having excellent speakers for the cause.* Mrs. Franklin at that time took

* For details of this consult Mrs. Percy Jackson.

over the chairmanship of the Architectural Committee and began her twenty-five years of notable work for the College. Mrs. Ernest Poole, Mrs. Vernon Munroe, Dr. Coss and Mr. McCullough were on her committee, and Mr. Ames and Mr. Dodge of Boston, who were recommended a few years before by President Comstock, were the architects.*

Just then an offer came to combine with Russell Sage College in Troy. We also had been offered the gift of a college by a Mr. Pugsley to be called Pugsley College, near Poughkeepsie. An Episcopal Bishop offered a block of good buildings in Kansas City if we would come there. The McLean Farm on the Hudson River and Miss Helen Gould's estate at Tarrytown were also offered. Some of the trustees were very anxious to join with Russell Sage. Others faded away.

In June, 1931, Dr. Leigh called a conference of thirty heads of progressive schools to advise him as to whether we should reduce the budget and the high tuition and, with the depression still on the increase, to ask if they, as masters of preparatory schools, felt the need strongly enough for a college such as Bennington, to warrant going ahead when there was still money to be raised? They were a splendid and very serious-minded group, and went into every detail of the risk. After several days of discussion, they voted to continue the effort, great as the work and danger was.

Meanwhile Dr. Booth had been going to the donors asking that they repledge, and those who had not already done so or previously pulled out, responded favorably. We had by then gotten down to within about \$65,000, with four weeks time to go. People began to give us dark looks, called us fanatics, fools. One lady almost slammed the

* Consult Mrs. Franklin.

door in my face and said, "How many times have I told you that Bennington can't go through!" They were really right in their thinking and we knew it, but Mr. McCullough and I felt that if the College failed, it would put progressive education back for years. People could say that it had been tried out and failed. Mr. Kent and I finally sent out telegrams to a list of people all over the country as a last resort. To our surprise \$5,000 gifts came in from quite a number of people, and smaller pledges as well. Mrs. Woolley, Frances Perkins, Dorothy Canfield Fisher and Mrs. Irving Warner from Delaware, who was a very new trustee, raised money also, so that by the deadline we had our \$1,250,000 and \$3,000 to the good.

We called a jubilee meeting at once. Everyone had renewed his pledge except Mr. Hull, who was down for \$100,000. He had been in Hawaii with Mrs. Hull who was not well. They arrived in San Francisco on the day we were meeting in New York to ratify the College. Just before the meeting, Dr. Leigh called long-distance to check on his pledge. Mr. Hull was most friendly to the College, so this was no more than routine. However, Mr. Hull said, "The depression is so terrible I think it very unwise to proceed, and to save you people I shall probably have to say no and put the old cat out of its misery, but I'll meet with you in New York first." Dr. Leigh pleaded with him but he said, "If I answer now, it will be no." Mr. Hull was a wonderful and conscientious person. His hesitation was from the kindest of motives, but our jubilee meeting was more like a funeral. We sat down and Dr. Kilpatrick wrote a letter to Mr. Hull, while we all criticized and discussed. It became so late that we adjourned; the letter was to go by air mail in the morning. Then in the morning papers the announcement of the death of Mrs. Hull appeared. She had died a half-hour after Dr. Leigh's telephone call. We decided then

not to send the letter but to send the minutes of the meeting only, to Mr. Hull. He and Mrs. Hull were devoted, and those of us who knew her were devoted too.

The delay was very awkward, as several headmistresses of schools had called me just before the meeting and asked if the College had gone through, as they wanted to change their curriculum. I said I would let them know the next day. It was hard to call them and say things had been delayed but that I would let them know later. After a week, Mr. Hull wrote that he would meet with the trustees in New York in another week's time, and gave a date. I called the whole Board together and then he wrote to me not to have the whole Board, just his special friends on the Board, which was also awkward. We met, and he asked two questions: "Why do you think the pledges will be paid?" Mr. McCullough answered by saying that the pledges had been winnowed down and that all the pledges left were from people who really cared and could make good unless the country went into complete bankruptcy. Then he asked: "Why do you think you'll have students?" Dr. Leigh answered that by citing the numbers of applications that had come in, and said that two hundred and fifty girls were not a large number to expect. Mr. Hull then stood by the window and said, "Well, I don't know where the world is going. It seems to be sliding out from under us." Then he paused and said, "It's very, very dangerous." Then he paused even longer and said, "You people seem to want it so, I'll go with the ship." And there was the Bennington College.

* * *

There followed, of course, much publicity and excitement and exhaustion. In the meantime, the Architectural Committee, under Mrs. Franklin, had done a beautiful piece of work and the plans for the buildings were ready for execution. We had a meeting of the trustees

at our home in North Bennington in June, 1931, and to my dismay many of the trustees thought that because it was too late to finish the buildings by that autumn, the interest of the public would wane and that we should not continue. It was decided, finally, after much pessimism and discussion, to open the College in the autumn of 1932. It was agreed that a series of meetings would be held during the winter of 1931-32 to keep the College a reality to the public, and a ground breaking ceremony was to take place in August of the current year. It fell to Mrs. Arthur J. Holden who was always such a cooperative, conscientious and devoted trustee, and to the Leighs and ourselves, to entertain out-of-town guests. The ground-breaking was ^{Aug 16 1931} one weekend and a daughter's marriage the next, which was hard going for me.

The speakers spoke from the foundation of the old silo. Among them was Governor Wilson of Vermont who was to open the ceremony, giving a welcome from the State. There had been some worry about the Governor's speech beforehand, as he was in pretty fast company and a state governor is rarely an orator. He said, "I don't know why I'm here. I don't know anything about education and I only went through eighth grade myself; but I have been on a silo base before and know all about silage. But perhaps education based on a silo has some appropriateness after all, because both silos and colleges are supposed to take green things and, through great fermentation, mature them." He certainly received an ovation and made a great hit. Mrs. Fisher gave a charming welcome from the women of Vermont, and Dr. William Rappard, Chancellor of the University of Geneva, Switzerland, gave a welcome from the Old World. Then Dr. Booth spoke and turned the spade for the first digging of Bennington College. Dr. Booth was a man of boundless initiative who

turned over to professionals the final implementation, and as he started to speak, the one thousand people present rose in a body and gave him a standing ovation. It was a thrilling moment, as his dream of eight years had finally been realized. Dr. Anson Phelps Stokes pronounced the Benediction.

I was so excited that I lost my head completely, and when I met people from a distance whom I did not expect, I would hear a voice saying, "Won't you come for supper at our house?" and then found the voice was mine. I had gotten a caterer up from Troy and expected one hundred persons, but due to this aberration, the waiters came to me and said, "We have only enough for one hundred, and one-hundred and fifty are here." I was so busy that I just waved my hand and said, "Reduce the portions the best you can." I don't know what happened, as I had not time to eat, but the waiters had a good sense of humor and somehow we got through; and we pulled through the wedding the next week too.

* * *

The next day Stella the Steamshovel (as they called it) arrived, and about one hundred men were working on the campus. As the shovel started going down, the stock market was going down, down, down, in a frightening way. There was always the hazard of possible failure of pledges and possible fear on the part of parents, of the high tuition planned. It was an awful experience to live through.

By the following fall, November, 1931, the main buildings were well on their way to completion. The College had a president, a well advanced curriculum, an application list three times its capacity, and the certainty of its being a college instead of dust and ashes, as it nearly came to be so many times. With trustees now easy to obtain,

it seemed unwise to set a precedent by having members of the same family on the Board. Mr. McCullough remained and I handed in my registration as Chairman and Board member to Dr. Leigh, but continued working and accepted the chairmanship of the Committee on New Trustees. Dr. Kilpatrick was willing to replace me as Chairman, so Mr. Colgate's prophecy about a great leader had certainly come true. Mrs. Clarence M. Woolley consented to act as Vice-Chairman. Mrs. Woolley unhappily is not here to tell of her work, but I remember she organized a large meeting at the Junior League Club at which some of the new faculty were present, and Dr. Leigh and Mr. Harold Gray were the speakers. Mrs. Woolley was always so quiet and unassuming in her work for Bennington College that I think it is hard for many to realize what a big part she played in holding out faith and hope.

Mrs. Gladys Y. Leslie was one of the first members of the faculty to arrive. She came very early to organize the library. I remember having to interrupt her work incessantly to show off a real faculty member to visitors still skeptical of modern education. With her intelligence and charm she always convinced them of the solidity of the College plan. I also want to pay tribute to the very fine work that Mrs. Mabel Barbee Lee, the first Director of Admissions, did in choosing the first class of Bennington College, really like an orchestra, as planned. I never ^{worked} ~~knew~~ with the rest of the faculty, who came after my time as a trustee.

When the College buildings were finished and the faculty had arrived and were settled in their class rooms, there was again a big crowd invited, as at the ground-breaking, to view the buildings. I remember we had a big lunch for out-of-town people and the faculty at our home, and everyone was in a state of happiness. The buildings

were so spick and span, and due to Miss Louise DeWilde, the landscape architecture was remarkable. The people remarked, "Here is the picture of the perfect college. Why have the girls come and tousle it up?"

But the day the girls arrived was a day of great emotional happiness. The young life rushing in, cars packed with luggage, fathers, mothers, sisters and brothers accompanying them -- it seemed a big surprise and joy which had no relation whatever to our years of strain and stress.

I want to say that these very personal recollections of the beginnings of Bennington College are only my part in this very perilous adventure. My contribution was worry, feeling I was totally inadequate, never having been to college myself and only having had eight years of formal education. My sister put it correctly when she said I was not really a chairman of a board of trustees of a college, I was chairman of a scramble. I saw intimately the struggles and baffling trials endured by Dr. and Mrs. Leigh. Mrs. Leigh (also a Ph.D. Dr. Leigh) stood by her husband at every turn and through every vicissitude, entertained beautifully at their home in Old Bennington, and did great work in supplying constructive ideas for the comfort and happiness of the faculty. Dr. Leigh kept calm, used excellent judgment and never lost his sense of humor or faith in the College. How they came through it all and started an influential institution of learning still remains to me a miracle.

* * *

In the spring of 1932 it seemed necessary to raise money for the Scholarship Fund. Our son, John McCullough, a freshman at Yale and devoted to music, came home one day with a recording which had on one side a most beautiful piano composition by Beethoven called "Fur Elise" written for a little girl on her birthday and played by Artur Schnabel, a musician whom John had been hearing on records and

had read about, but of whom I had never heard. I said, "That is so beautiful, let's go over to Europe and hear him." John said, "Why not get him over here? To play a concert for the Bennington College Scholarship Fund!" We both jumped at the idea, and found Schnabel had been making a great sensation in Europe but had only been in the United States once, some years before, advertising the Bechstein piano at Wanamakers. We talked to the Bennington trustees, who thought it was a good idea, but it involved underwriting the concert and no one cared to undertake it. Mr. McCullough's mother had given money to her grandchildren before her death as a fund to be used by them at twenty-one years of age. John went to his father and asked if he could use that fund to underwrite Schnabel. Mr. McCullough thought it a good idea for a boy to take on such a responsibility, and said he could arrange it. John and I then saw Mr. Marks Levine, Mr. Schnabel's American manager, and learned that Mr. Schnabel would like to come to America if under the right auspices. Mr. Levine had heard of Bennington College, but took the trustees' names and said he would investigate and communicate with Mr. Schnabel. In a few days we heard from him that Mr. Schnabel would come, that he was delighted to have his first appearance in the United States under the auspices of Bennington College, and would play an entire program of Beethoven, unheard of in those days. The trustees, not many of them music lovers, were not enthusiastic though good sports about it, and we turned to musical groups to make a large committee for the concert. Mr. Allen Wardwell was chairman, and Mme. Alma Gluck Zimbalist, the soprano at the Metropolitan, was acting chairman.

Then our trials began. An influential New York musician spread the news that Mr. Schnabel was only a third-rate musician as

he had done commercial work for Bechstein. Others said they had never heard of Mr. Schnabel, so it was an up-hill fight.

In the summer of 1932, Mr. McCullough, who was never a music lover or in any way connected with music, received a cable from Mr. Schnabel asking his permission (because we had engaged him for his first American appearance) to play with the Philharmonic Orchestra. My son, who had underwritten the concert, was still a minor, so could not give the required consent. We were delighted to have the Philharmonic publicity, so Mr. McCullough, much amused at his musical authority, answered in the affirmative. Our concert was set for November 9th, 1932, at Carnegie Hall. The week before, we went to hear Mr. Schnabel play the Beethoven G-Major Concerto Number 4, Opus 58, with the Philharmonic Orchestra. Our tickets had not gone well, and time was running short, so we went to the concert in fear and trembling. John McCullough had brought a crowd of Yale boys down from New Haven. We could hardly contain ourselves with excitement when Schnabel appeared on the stage and played the first strains of the concerto. One of John's very musical friends' hair literally rose right up on end. It was a wonderful performance. The audience roared their approval; Olin Downes and Lawrence Gilman wrote long and enthusiastic editorials for the musical reviews and the Times and Tribune headlines were: "Schnabel hailed by Philharmonic audience."

We had a meeting the following Monday morning, and the College secretary reported that the Friday sale of seats had been very poor. She was waiting for the Carnegie office to open to get the Monday report. As usual, the non-musical members shook their heads and said they had never approved of the concert anyway, and others agreed, so it took the pessimists by surprise when Miss Martha Biehle returned to say that over the weekend the house had been nearly

sold out, with several days still to go.

We were all thrilled and happy, until the news came that Schnabel had a severe cold and the doctors feared pneumonia. As there was but a short time for him to recover, our anxiety was intense, and not until the day of the concert were we really sure that he could play. His performance was a noted and distinguished success and Mr. Schnabel was pronounced among the great. He played five sonatas, Opus numbers 13, 22, 78, 109 and 110. The house was sold out, and many were turned away. It was all a hair-breadth escape. We cleared \$5000 and won endless musical recognition. I always remember Mr. Julian DeGray took the first box -- which was such an encouragement to me at the time when everyone was so pessimistic. Mr. Schnabel played again for us in 1933, the Beethoven Diabelli Variations. There was much advanced news about it, as it had seldom been heard in this country. It was a success, but not a sell-out, as there was a big Tristan benefit that afternoon and a performance of Don Giovanni in the evening at the Met, but we took in over \$4000.

The following year John McCullough suggested having Hans Lange with a chamber orchestra of Philharmonic first-desk players, at the Town Hall, doing early and rare music. Mr. Lange, Carleton Sprague Smith and Otto Luening searched for unusual pieces in Europe the summer before. There were five concerts of old music. Mrs. Theodore Steinway of New York became the chairman. Purcell's Fantasia was played for the first time in America; there was an unknown trumpet concerto by Leopold Mozart played by Harry Glanz, and a Mozart bassoon concerto played by Kohon. Toscanini came to one of the concerts and sat in Mrs. Woolley's box and was very complimentary. The Philharmonic players had never played solos before. After that they were asked

constantly to play on the radio, and also as a result of these concerts many chamber orchestras were started throughout the country. The concerts were too high-brow to be popular, and we simply balanced our budget, but it contributed creative work in the musical world, gave great prestige to Bennington College for its music, and as one public relations man said, "gave it \$50,000 worth of publicity." So we did not feel it a failure. These chamber orchestra concerts were continued in 1935.*

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Transcribed September, 1954

* See Mr. Otto Luening.

(Footnote to page 11)

Addendum to Curriculum

Suggestions from Dr. Graves, Dr. Kilpatrick, and also from people attending the Colony Club meeting and the first Educators' Conference at North Bennington:

For entrance requirements, instead of the old system of examinations and marks a Director of Admissions was to use intelligence tests, full reports from the school from which the student came, depend on the whole personality of the girl, giving attention to her interests, attitudes and emotions. A student could apply if poor in some subjects but gifted in others. Latin and mathematics were available at the College for those seeking it, but would not be a requirement. Dr. Kilpatrick often said that the College should avoid what he called "the dead hand of tradition." He was emphatic that the old idea of mathematics training the mind was a spurious conception; he felt that mathematics trained the mind for mathematics only, that if seeking the means of mental training physics should be the subject. When some of the interested people were reminded by members of the "old school" that certain subjects provided mental exercise, Dr. Kilpatrick prompted that mental exercise would be efficacious if the mind were a muscle, but as the mind was not a muscle, it could not help. This floored the people completely. In the large student application for enrollment, the Director of Admissions would choose the student body like choosing an orchestra, having in mind enough different interests and localities to make an inspiring and harmonious group; that the teaching body need not be PhDs or research professors, but chosen rather as inspiring and able teachers, young and dynamic and

with democracy of age, rather than the old stodgy teacher-student attitude. This faculty must have an idea of pedagogy. Written reports rather than numerical marks were to be used to record student progress, and I remember Mr. Robert Frost saying, "They prefer adjectives to numbers."

The first two years might have orientation courses, and the last two years be given to the girl's living interest and her branching-out into her major. Should a girl start college with a major interest already, she could arrange her program to include it, more or less from the start, the rest of the time to be given to other fields of interest. Should she be planning a musical career, for instance, she could continue her music, giving two-fifths of her time to music and three-fifths of her time to broadening her education in a manner that would not be possible in a musical conservatory. The arts were all to be major subjects and included in the tuition -- which had not been done anywhere before. The group tutorial system used at Swarthmore was suggested. It was also suggested having the first two years as a junior college, from which many girls could be graduated, with those remaining, majoring in their special field or working for honors. As classes would be small and mostly for the tool subjects, each girl would work on her own initiative and momentum and expand into, and inter-relate, the different fields. Religious education was brought up at the first Educators' Conference* as a great need for mothers, social service workers, church workers and directors of religious education. Dr. Kilpatrick said, "It has come to be one of the three largest divisions at Teachers College, and has brought in a very high class of students who average in intelligence above any group except

* See files for complete speeches.

those in psychology. It is a subject widely open to women and one of the most promising lines from the educational point of view."

As to student personnel work and counseling, Dean Bernard of Smith, in her speech at the Conference, felt "a new college can help the individual student to realize her full potentialities, enable her to give her best service to her community, and can develop the whole person, not just the mind." She quoted a psychiatrist who said he considered that twenty lectures should give enough information to enable sixty per-cent of the ordinary student body to pick out the forces, obstacles and difficulties of adjustment they would meet; a few consultations would take care of another thirty per-cent, and ten per-cent would need outside psychiatric attention, therefore probably leaving the college.

Tuition was to cover the expenses of those who could afford to pay, and there was to be a sliding scale of scholarships for those not able to pay the total amount. Many presidents of girls' colleges told me this would be impossible, as girls did not like it to be known that they were on scholarship; therefore the idea was for the comptroller only to know, and the president if necessary; but when the College opened, the girls were frank about it themselves and told about it naturally.

Co-education was often considered, but always voted down, as with a new college and a new plan, the educators felt it would draw a poor type of man.

One educator explained the differences between the old regime and the new this way: the old regime was like planting a flower, packing down the soil around it, and then pouring water on it until it was killed; the new regime was also planting the flower, but loosening the soil about it so that it could get enough moisture and air to nourish itself so it could grow along[^] its own momentum.

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(Footnote to page 12)

COPY OF DR. KILPATRICK'S LETTER

This letter was mimeographed and sent with a brief covering note to various people making inquiry about the College. In this form it was addressed to Miss Mary W. Butler because her's was the first name on the list. Miss Butler's further connection (if any) with the College is not known at the time of this copying, (September 1954).

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March 23, 1926

Miss Mary W. Butler
32 Newlin Road
Princeton, New Jersey

My dear Miss Butler:

It is a pleasure to discuss Bennington College, especially when as here this can be done informally and unofficially. The account now presented aims to be only the concensus of opinion among the friends of the enterprise, colored a bit, to be sure, by the ideas and wishes of the writer.

Our general
aim

Bennington College aims to be an "up-to-date" cultural college for girls. Its claim for special consideration is that it means to be really up-to-date; and to this end it proposes to make a fresh start and an unusually stubborn effort to solve the problem of the right education for a girls' college.

A fresh start seems a wise move. There is ample room for yet another first-class college in the Northeast. The better colleges are overwhelmed with applicants for admission. They are properly not willing to enlarge themselves to care for these growing numbers. But the reasons for a fresh start lie deeper. When our better colleges for

women were founded, a prime motive with them was to demonstrate that women could equal men at hard study. Besides, at that time all good colleges believed in a disciplinary education, the harder a subject the more educative they thought it to be. Women's colleges accordingly took over the men's curriculum and leaned over backwards to make it hard. Remnants of these old origins are still too much in evidence. Meanwhile the modern world has been studying educational matters as never before. In a quarter of a century this study has gone forward with leaps and bounds, especially in this country; so that now in this study of education America leads the world. Elementary and secondary education are being everywhere remade. The college is the last to feel the impulse, and the girls' college possibly least of all. It is full time to bring this wealth of new thought to bear upon the college for girls.

A fresh start in a new college offers the best opportunity for introducing new ideas. With the best of intentions old teachers are apt to see things in older ways. Any proposal to change the curriculum is almost sure to be hard fought. Any change is almost sure to be at best a compromise of conflicting interests. Recently in one of our foremost colleges for women the faculty voted to abolish certain compulsory courses in mathematics, but reversed its action upon seeing that the proposed change would cause worthy colleagues to lose their positions. Thus do vested interests grow up in college faculties, nowhere more so. Bennington College with a slate clean of hampering traditions can introduce from the start the best that the modern world has to show.

Better entrance

First, we propose to devise better admission conditions.

Our colleges are already making progress in this regard, but much yet remains to be done. Written examinations, as hitherto conducted on existing requirements, do not adequately select candidates

for admission. Some very worthy girls who could well profit by a college course are excluded. Many others are admitted who in fact do not profit, some because they cannot, more because they will not. Moreover, certain entrance subjects as Latin and parts of subjects as in mathematics, now generally required, are for most students no longer educationally defensible. In connection many will think of the hurtful strain too often put upon growing girls by the effort to prepare for such examinations. These evils can be lessened. Even in advance of the special study needed in connection with the problem it is clear that some subjects are wrongly required, that examinations need not be of the kind that costly and skillful cramming can circumvent, and most of all that methods of personnel study can play a much larger part than hitherto. We wish as part of our plan to make a careful study both of the candidates' present aptitudes and abilities and of their past records. With a determined and open-minded study of the problem, Bennington College hopes to find fairer and better ways of picking such candidates as will in fact promise best to make a success of their college career.

A better
curriculum

Second, Bennington College proposes to make a better curriculum, one better suited to the needs of the girls and to the demands of present life. We do not deceive ourselves that this is an easy task or that there is any get-rich-quick answer to the problem. It is here if anywhere that the stubborn attack is needed. At the outset we propose to avail ourselves of the best that is known and thought about curriculum making, now so much studied in our public school education. Then in the light of principles so got, we mean to study all forward-looking suggestions anywhere being made to improve the college curriculum. With no binding traditions and no faculty vested interests, we hope for better progress than others can make who work under less favorable conditions.

What is the curriculum forecast? Are there details that can even now be suggested? I myself think yes, even though our Board officially appreciates that curriculum making is properly and finally the work of those who are to teach, namely the president and instructors of our college. First a principle of exclusion: we will not load down the Freshman and Sophomore years with required courses that profess to discipline the mind or to prepare for what is to follow, but which in fact mainly succeed in dampening enthusiasm. We believe that able youth well taught abounds in eager enthusiasm for intellectual adventure. Our entrance conditions, we hope, will have greatly prepared such students for admission. We will feel it a sacred duty to nourish this enthusiasm. We fear the theory of preparation for the future that dries up the present. A cardinal principle with us will be to make each year as best we can for each student the richest possible year of growth-living of which she is at the stage capable. Please note this term, growth-living. It contains the theory on which we would found our curriculum. For each student during each year we shall wish real life, rich, fine, joyous; but also life of a kind that brings growth. When we say life, we mean then not indulgence, not "mere excitement," not "mere pleasure," but rich living of a kind that means also most for growth, growth in outlook and insight, growth in taste and differentiated attitude, growth in the power of effecting. This is the "growth-living" that we shall seek for our girls.

It is well perhaps to be yet more specific about the curriculum. We see definite promise in the "orientation" course. While it has not everywhere succeeded, we believe that properly managed it has definite possibilities for good. The world of available thought and study is very great. The beginning student needs orientation in it. This will be our first line of attack. We hope through orientation

work not only to make our students better at home in the range of human achievement but also at the same time enable them to choose more wisely their further study. In connection, the way in which students are taught has great influence. Here the idea back of the "honors course" offers a worthy suggestion. Too much has America thought of education as a matter of textbook assignment or of lecture and of consequent recitation of what has thus been handed out. Experience seems to show that best learning comes otherwise. Accepted student responsibility seems an essential factor. In the matter of standards we mean to stress scholarship, but we shall avoid a scholarship of mere assigned tasks and seek rather a scholarship where learning is loved. So far the intellect and its affairs alone have appeared; but as life is more than body, so it also is more than mind. We propose to give place in our curriculum for the many-sidedness of life. Lines heretofore thought of as extra-curricular are worthy of more serious consideration. We expect to provide a due place in the life of each student for what might even be called a hobby, pursued in joy, not for scrutinized points. A closing word is needed about vocational work. We hope that each of our students will early choose a vocation, a vocation in that true sense which calls forth along a definite line the best efforts that one has to give. Such a choice should mean ^{an} nucleus of specialization in which mastery is sought. Some thus may study economics, others, the improvement of our political system; still others may ultimately look forward to more definite professions as teaching or law or medicine. For some of the better established professional outlooks we propose to offer pre-professional work. We will thus provide preliminary medical work in definite contemplation of later (postgraduate) work in the better medical colleges.

This sketches our present thought of the curriculum.

The problem, as said before, is very difficult. Moreover it will never be finished. Curriculum making is an abiding problem. It is here the fresh start, the stubborn effort, and the abiding attack on which we rely and to which we pledge ourselves.

Personnel
work

Third, we propose to stress personnel work. This will form our main reliance for selecting students better qualified to profit by our college offerings. The same personnel study will also go with the girl through her whole college career to help her decide intelligently upon each matter of serious concern. This will mean larger and better provision for personnel work than has hitherto been thought necessary. Such larger service we propose to provide, believing that the returns will justify the expenditure. We hope thus to help our girls choose more intelligently their lines of work in college and their careers afterwards. We recognize here again that we face a difficult problem, one as yet not solved; but again we rely on and pledge ourselves to the stubborn attack. Bennington College proposes to make personnel work one of its most important departments.

Provision
for keeping
up-to-date

Fourth and last, we know the tendency of institutions to become wrongly satisfied, wrongly set in their ways.

Institutions too often begin intelligently progressive, only to become in time stupidly conservative. This we wish if possible to avoid. Our thought takes the line of permanent provision for competent external criticism. The desired criticism can in the long run probably best come from those university departments which are foremost in our country for the study of education. If Bennington College can manage to secure, as the years come and go, from these institutions a continuing criticism of its status and problems, and if this criticism be given proper publicity, we may then hope that the friends of the College will take such note of what is said as to force by the pressure of opinion

those then in charge of the College to take proper action in accordance with the criticism so made.

With these things in mind it has been proposed that Bennington College permanently endow a generous fellowship for the study of higher education of women, open to competent graduate students anywhere, nominations to be made by the half dozen foremost schools of education in this country, or, even better, of the world, selection to be made from these nominations by Bennington College. The appointee would be expected to ally himself or herself with some of these universities and under its direction take for study some phase of the work or administration of Bennington College. The study so made might form the doctoral thesis of the candidate and in any event must, if approved for quality by the university, be published in permanent book form, the Bennington College endowment bearing the expense. It might be wise to stipulate that the fellow should spend a full year (possibly more upon reappointment) studying the problem mostly at Bennington College. It might be well in some cases to have the fellow give a course at Bennington College so that our college students might the better contribute their part in helping forward the criticism.

Our trustees are not as yet committed to this precise plan but we are, I believe, agreed on the necessity of the general policy. We are very anxious to have our College remain plastic to thought, able and disposed to grow as the coming years may make their new demands and show new and better avenues for service to growing womanhood.

Conclusion

Such is our program for Bennington College. That the program is general rather than detailed would trouble us more if we did not know the danger lurking in a perfection of detail

made too far in advance of actual experience. The main outline such as is here given is properly the work of a Board of Trustees, the final details can only be made by those who are in first-hand touch with the actual situation, our president and our faculty. Under such circumstances I close as I began, by saying that our claim for consideration is that with a clean slate we propose to make a fresh start and an unusually stubborn effort to solve the problem of the right education in a cultural college for women.

Yours very truly,

/Signed/ William H. Kilpatrick

