

Bennington College:

IN THE BEGINNING

Thomas P. Brockway

Bennington College:
IN THE BEGINNING

Thomas P. Brockway

**Bennington College:
IN THE BEGINNING**

Thomas P. Brockway

BENNINGTON COLLEGE PRESS

Bennington College: In the Beginning. Copyright © 1981 by Bennington College. Printed in the United States of America. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

ISBN 0-914378-77-5 (paperback)

ISBN 0-914378-78-3 (cloth)

Typeface: Baskerville. Typeset and printed at the Poly Two Press, North Bennington, Vermont 05257.

Published by Bennington College, Bennington, Vermont 05201.

Distributed to the book trade through the Countryman Press, Woodstock, Vermont 05091.

CONTENTS

Foreword: Robert R. R. Brooks	vii
Introduction: Barbara Jones	viii
1. Genesis: 1923-1925	1
2. The Plot Thickens	11
3. Who Wants to be President?	23
4. Leigh; More Brochures	28
5. The President's Turn	35
6. Dismal Options, Happy Endings	42
7. Celebration: Building, Recruiting	49
8. Luring Students; the Trustees' Role	56
9. Pioneering Begins	64
10. Education with No Breaks: Religion, Politics	75
11. Counseling; Winter Recess; Eight-Year Plan	83
12. Salary, Tenure, Degrees	89
13. Traditions: Commencement	95
14. Administrators and Others	102
15. Visual Arts: Learning by Doing	113
16. Dance: Martha Hill's Triumph	125
17. Drama: Rival Approaches	139
18. Music: Success Story	154
19. Literature: Trojan Victory	169
20. Science: Change and Continuity	183
21. Social Studies: Roads to Knowledge	196
22. Leigh's Resignation	211
23. Evaluation	220
Acknowledgments	230
Bibliographical Notes	231
Index	233

FOREWORD

The aspect of this book which makes it fascinating, perhaps unique, is that it provides a front-row, aisle-seat report on the way in which a humble idea evolved into a great institution. The idea was born in the snows of Vermont when the single street of a village, deserted by its affluent summer residents, offered few compensations for those left behind. It was a modest idea, promoted by Vincent Ravi Booth and his wife, that "it would be nice to have someone around here in the winter." But it was accepted by others, with a variety of motivations and talents, who re-shaped it into an institution of higher learning which has left an indelible mark on American higher education.

The way in which this came about involved a complex of conflicting personalities, objectives, educational theories, hopes and fears. Events, like the financial crash of 1929, re-wrote the plans. But the plans, like those drafted by Robert Devore Leigh in the same year, gave form to the institution which finally opened its doors in 1932. And the form continued to evolve under the pressures of reality: financial, practical and personal.

All of the educational issues familiar to teachers, from Socrates to the present, were confronted during the gestation, birth and early years: required courses *vs.* free choice; specialization *vs.* dispersion; vocationalism *vs.* citizenship; learning-by-doing *vs.* academic apparatus; the present *vs.* the past; personal freedom *vs.* parietal rules; counseling *vs.* free-wheeling; tenure *vs.* term contracts; hierarchical rank *vs.* status equality; dictatorship *vs.* democracy; innovation *vs.* tradition; men *vs.* women; and many others, but above all, scarce money *vs.* a multitude of costs, demands, needs and ideals.

The manner in which these issues arose and were resolved is detailed in narrative form, and in the vignettes of the lives of those who created the community and were transformed by it.

The front-row seat of the reporter, Thomas Parmelee Brockway, as a teacher, historian, scholar and neighbor gave him a clear view of the stage. And the aisle seat, as an early member of the faculty, made it possible for him to go *on* stage from time to time without climbing over anyone else or losing his scholarly detachment.

A dozen years of research and participation in the events it records have gone into the preparation of this book. Tom Brockway has reviewed the records and probed the minds of founders, presidents, teachers, students and alumnae with the persistence and imagination of Sherlock Holmes and Inspector Maigret. As a result, there is probably no college in this country which knows as much about its origins and growth as this book now makes it possible for us to know about Bennington.

Robert R.R. Brooks

INTRODUCTION

The history of a college is hard to write and sometimes hard to read. Only the typical college catalog has a stronger negative appeal to the experienced reader than the typical college history. The reasons are many. Who can be found to write it? It doesn't pay much. It is a lot of work. Publishers will not jump at it. If it is sponsored by the college in question, discretion will outrank truth, a condition acceptable perhaps to an excessively discreet professor emeritus. Or a more opinionated one, having strong views on the value of his own contributions, and many axes to grind and wield, may produce a livelier unsponsored work, rousing a brief flurry of indignation or approval among his aging colleagues. In neither case will the result be "good" history, if standards of careful, objective research and balanced judgment are among the criteria applied.

Tom Brockway's book is a labor of love, but his love is not blind. To quote terms much in vogue among American sociologists when I first encountered them, about 1928, he could claim to be using the methodology of "the participant observer." But he is a professional historian and has left no stone unturned, nor any letter unwritten, in checking his own observations against those of other participants, observant or otherwise. The experience of students and teachers in the early years of the college — and I suspect throughout its history — was so individual and intense that hundreds of histories would have resulted if anyone had had time to keep a diary. Tom has put it all together with admirable objectivity and clarity. He is fair-minded, modest, never malicious and, one must gratefully add, amiably humorous. This history of Bennington's early years is not only good but eminently readable.

Tom's continuing participation in the life of Bennington College dates from the Year II, 1933. As one of the few remaining survivors of the now legendary Year I, or 1932, may I offer a few supplementary notes.

Most of the faculty were young, without children, accustomed to the free-wheeling life of the big cities. Many of us had not taught before. We were sympathetic to the Bennington educational plan, in which we had been thoroughly indoctrinated by Robert D. Leigh. The problem was, how to do it. We were clear enough only about several negatives: no courses, no requirements, no lectures, no grades, no exams, no pre-determined curriculum. We spent the first week meeting students; I believe every faculty member met every student, to find out about her "interests and needs," and to discuss what we could offer. We met at meals and swapped our bewildering experiences. Indeed, this absorbing shop talk became so much of a habit that the student waitresses objected; they thought they heard too much, and they complained that we sat too long over our meals. Mr. Leigh solved part of this crisis; waiting on tables in the faculty dining room was an honorific and confidential position; and Genevieve Taggart made a passionate appeal to the students to let us sit as long as we liked. After all, this was our only home. Their hearts were touched, and they complained no more. As the year went by, and we somehow organized teaching and learning, we continued to be faced with new decisions, having no settled rules or customs to guide us. This was indeed "learning by doing." It was absorbing, but exhausting.

Mr. Leigh's concept of education was all-inclusive. Every aspect of our lives was supposed to be educational. He would have liked to encourage "wholesome recreation" for the faculty as well as for the students: charades, faculty class in modern dance, mountain hikes and picnics. But in these matters there was something of a generation gap, though that term had not yet been invented. The Leighs must have been in their early forties, and were the parents of two young teen-age daughters. The younger faculty preferred to follow their accustomed urban ways, relaxing from their labors with impromptu parties laced with Prohibition gin. At weekends, we often headed for New York. Trains still ran, fares were cheap, and there was a special rate for academic people: a double room at the Biltmore cost \$5 a night! Mr. Leigh must have been occasionally provoked, and disappointed in us, but he was patient.

Students in the classes of the '70s and '80s may be surprised to learn that we thought ourselves thoroughly "liberated" in 1932. We had grown up during the Roaring Twenties. Women were not much interested in feminism, nor did we feel sexually oppressed. Our mothers had fought for and won the battle for women's suffrage. Their mothers had fought for higher education for women. But the women's colleges were not seen as too much dominated by the earlier need to prove that women were

INTRODUCTION

intellectually equal to men, and had modeled their curricula on those of the men's colleges. Bennington, by tailoring education to fit the current and foreseeable needs of individual women, hoped to develop new methods and content. The same method might later provide a beneficial shaking-up of men's colleges, equally in need of reform.

The Year II, 1933, when Tom Brockway joined the faculty, was of course just as exciting, calling for many new decisions. How did we cope with a doubled faculty, a doubled student body split into two classes? Such questions continued to arise each year until the college achieved its full size, and graduated its first class in 1936. That remarkable class had been pioneers at every step of the way.

Mr. Brockway has brought his narrative to the end of Mr. Leigh's presidency. During the nine years of the actual operation of the college, the need for daily decisions and hot discussions of the Bennington Plan had progressively diminished. Institutional procedures had been tested and established. Successful courses tended to reappear year by year. It could even be said that we had in fact developed a curriculum. It was becoming necessary to pause and examine what we were doing, and where we were heading. It is not surprising that Mr. Leigh, for personal and professional reasons, no longer had the appetite for that particular venture. He had earned the gratitude of everyone who had benefited from the existence of Bennington College for his courageous and patient leadership in its formation, and during its early years.

Because the college was so small, and the focus of interest was on students rather than subject fields, every member of the faculty had to cooperate with and learn from people in other disciplines in a joint task of teaching. This intercommunication is rare in adult life, where lawyers normally fraternize with lawyers, economists with economists, artists with artists. I have been deeply grateful for the education Bennington afforded me. I am particularly grateful now for the continuing friendship of some of the nicest people I know: graduates of the early years when Lewis and I were teaching there. And I am glad that Tom Brockway has written this book.

Barbara Jones

CHAPTER 1

GENESIS — 1923-1925

Bennington College is indebted to a number of founders, but it was Vincent Ravi Booth, pastor of the Congregational Church in Old Bennington, who initiated the endeavors in 1923 which led to its opening nine years later. Further, though others soon assumed control of the project, Bennington College would not have come into being had it not been for the momentum it gained under Dr. Booth's energetic and persuasive propulsion between 1923 and 1925.

Dr. Booth was born in Naples in 1876, the son of a Sicilian father and a Scottish mother whose name he added to his own in 1916. His father, Vincenzo Ravi, had begun his career as a Roman Catholic priest but soon turned to Protestantism and was pastor of a Methodist church in Florence when his son, Vincent, was ready for college. The father's choice of Ohio Wesleyan followed his attendance at a Methodist conference in the United States, and he sent his son and daughter there in 1893. After working his way through Wesleyan, Vincent earned the degree of Bachelor of Sacred Theology at Boston University and was ordained a minister of the Methodist Episcopal church in 1901. He became an American citizen in 1905. Before accepting a call from the Congregational Church in Old Bennington in 1919, Dr. Booth had served as pastor of the Congregational Church in Manchester, Vermont, from 1906 to 1909, and of the North Congregational Church in Cambridge, Massachusetts, from 1909 to 1919.

The village of Old Bennington had long since ceased to dominate the town of Bennington, and in 1920 had a population of only 152 in a town of almost 10,000. Nevertheless, when Booth came to the Old First Church in the summer of 1919 the pews were respectably filled and he felt that the

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

beginning was auspicious. But within months he was depressed by the stillness that descended on Old Bennington and the echoing emptiness of his church when the summer residents returned to their homes in Troy, Albany, Cleveland and Chicago. No man to yield to the comforts of hibernation, Booth began asking how Old Bennington and the Old First Church might regain their year-round animation and importance. Some time in 1922 or 1923 Mrs. Booth had the answer: establish a school for girls. The Booths did not consider the local high school "adequate or desirable" and Mrs. Booth may have hoped to avoid sending her daughters away to school. The school idea was soon dropped and Nora and Katherine Booth entered Northfield in 1924.

Inquiries had convinced Booth that there was less need for a school than for a college because existing women's colleges were "frightfully congested," and each year turned away more and more qualified applicants for lack of dormitory space. Fearing that his solution for Old Bennington's resuscitation would be thought absurd, Booth proceeded with circumspection. He had given lectures on Italian literature at Russell Sage College in Troy, and before proposing a new college he offered that established institution an opportunity to move to Bennington. In the spring of 1923 he quietly secured an option on two vacant houses on Monument Avenue across from the Parsonage, which were flanked by other houses that were for sale. Then on March 30 he wrote the acting president of Russell Sage that Old Bennington could provide a "beautiful site" for "a promising educational institution, unfavorably situated in some dirty, congested city."

Nothing came of this curious overture but he kept on mulling over his idea. In May at a church conference he shared his dream with the Rev. Paul D. Moody, president of Middlebury College, which made Booth an honorary doctor of divinity in 1920. To his surprise, Dr. Moody was not merely sympathetic; he was enthusiastic. With this encouragement, Booth conferred over the summer with persons of wealth and influence in the Bennington community, and found them interested if not immediately convinced. Notable among them were Hall Park McCullough of North Bennington and New York, and James Colby Colgate of Old Bennington and New York.

At the time, Colgate seemed to be Booth's most likely sponsor because higher education had long been a family philanthropy. He had graduated from Colgate University before it took his family name in recognition of repeated benefactions and in 1921 he became chairman of the Colgate trustees as his father had been. Mrs. Colgate once told me that her husband took his duties as chairman very seriously and that nothing occurred at Colgate that he had not approved. On his mother's side, the Colbys of New Hampshire had founded Colby Academy in New London, N.H., which

was favored by Colgate benefactions before and after it became Colby Junior College in 1928.

Mrs. Colgate was a Vermonter and the Colgate mansion in Old Bennington was built on land that had been in her family for generations. An active member of the McCall Mission which promoted Protestantism in France, she felt a bond with Booth, whose father had been a Protestant leader in Italy. She liked Booth's proposal of a college in Old Bennington and encouraged her husband to take on the responsibility for a third institution of learning. The result was a Colgate offer of 45 acres for a Bennington College campus extending up the slopes of Mt. Anthony from Monument Avenue, a site which happily promised a close relationship between the college and Booth's church.

The success of a new enterprise in Bennington, it used to be said, depended on having the backing of two of the town's chief benefactors and in August, 1923, Booth arranged a meeting with Hall Park McCullough. Though born in San Francisco, McCullough was a Vermonter whose family had supplied the state with two governors, his father, John G. McCullough, and his great grandfather, Hiland Hall. Mr. and Mrs. McCullough lived in New York City most of the year, but they spent long summers in their North Bennington home "the Farm House" adjacent to the Governor McCullough mansion, and during national elections they returned to Bennington to vote, she for the Democrats, he for the Republicans.

McCullough was always a devoted Yale alumnus, and in 1919 he was made a life trustee of Middlebury College, which his father had been; but thinking primarily of benefits the town would derive, he encouraged Booth to go ahead with his plans, and Bennington College gradually became his educational preoccupation. Mrs. McCullough soon became even more deeply involved in the project and together the McCulloughs were to be its most indomitable founders and supporters.

Next Booth persuaded Mrs. James Eddy, a summer resident from Troy, to invite in for tea 12 ladies of his choosing, and in the midst of this select audience he rose and outlined his proposal. They stared at him, he wrote, with incredulity and astonishment, and he was certain that he had failed. But Mrs. Colgate stood up and said it would be "a wonderful thing for Bennington to have this college," and pledged the cooperation of the Colgate family. With that "the others made haste to climb on the band wagon," and the ladies all signed a document which Booth pulled from his pocket. The statement began with a hearty endorsement of the project and ended with a list of the factors which made Old Bennington "the ideal location for a great educational institution."

In Booth's account of the Eddy tea party, Mrs. Colgate saved Bennington College, and therefore she must head the honor roll of individuals

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

whose intervention at critical moments kept a flickering flame alive for nine years. But Booth may not have been as near failure that day as he thought, and his own contribution to his success deserves attention. He knew that he could depend on Mrs. Colgate, and he must have counted on others as he made up Mrs. Eddy's guest list. There is no record of what he said that day, but he was an acknowledged master of the art of persuasion, and he must have suffused the college of his dream with great radiance. Miss Mary Sanford declared later that as she affixed her name to the Booth statement she felt as though she were signing for a new constellation in the heavens. It is to Booth's further credit that no more than four of the 13 were members of his church, only two had attended college, and only two had daughters who might conceivably attend a college in Old Bennington. The endorsement was no idle gesture for 10 of the 13 were on Dr. Booth's first list of donors two years later.

With this encouragement Booth set about building a broad base for his enterprise. Late in September, 1923, a carefully selected audience of 75 men and women assembled at Ben Venue, the Colgates' home on Mount Anthony, to hear the case for a women's college in Old Bennington. President Moody and Dean Elinor S. Ross came from Middlebury and President William A. Neilson from Smith. Neilson had attended Booth's church in Cambridge while a professor at Harvard and their theological compatibility was sealed by their common Scottish origins. His attendance marked the beginning of Bennington's cordial recognition by the Ivy League sisterhood. The presidents of Mt. Holyoke, Wellesley and Vassar declined Booth's invitation but sent letters in warm support of the Old Bennington project.

With Booth happily presiding, President Moody set the stage for him by stressing the urgent need for another women's college and chivalrously pointed to the disadvantages of coeducation ("the men are a drawback to the women and the women are a drawback to the men; the women take all the honors and tend to discourage the men"). Booth then reviewed the genesis of his idea and declared that the salubrious air, natural beauty, historic traditions and accessibility of Old Bennington made it an ideal site for "a great college, dedicated to the service of womankind for generations to come, rising like a beacon on the slopes of Mount Anthony."

Dr. Neilson provided the surprise of the day when he said the need was not for another women's college patterned on the men's colleges, but for a new type of college deliberately designed to meet the needs of women. Mathematics and the classics had been emphasized by existing women's colleges; "the next great college should be organized around...art, music, literature, the social sciences, and the consideration of problems arising out of the industrial conditions of the modern world...If Bennington College could pioneer and blaze a new path in higher education, it would

render a great service to the women of America."

* * * * *

The idea of educational pioneering was not in the Booth script, and it might have expired with slight communal mourning. What kept it very much alive was Booth's appointment of Mrs. Hall Park McCullough to head first a small committee on education and three months later a larger committee to arrange a Bennington College meeting in New York. Near the end of the Colgate meeting, Booth's distinguished neighbor, John Spargo, moved that a continuation committee be named to further the enterprise. Everyone concurred and Booth at once read off a list of 15 ladies he wished to be members. Mrs. McCullough to her "horror and surprise," heard her name read and privately asked to be excused. Booth assured her that she could be released at any time, and persuaded her not only to remain on the continuation committee (later enlarged and known as the Committee of Twenty-One), but to be chairman of its most important subcommittee, that on education.

Mrs. McCullough had not attended college, but she believed deeply in higher education for women. She conceived of learning as a joyous endeavor, which it had been for her as she pursued it on her own in Italy and elsewhere, and she was impressed by Edward Yeoman's *Shackled Youth* which confirmed her views. But she had had direct if limited evidence that the dominant view was very different. Three years before, she had been happily excited as she entered her eldest daughter in Vassar, the first woman in either family to enter college, and the mood continued until Vassar's dean remarked, "This is nothing to be excited about. It is just sheer grind." Now Mrs. McCullough and her committee on education visited the "standardized eastern women's colleges" and it is not surprising that they found little for Bennington to emulate. What stood out in her memory as she wrote her *Recollections* three decades later was the "spinster teachers," whom she described as "a grand group of old war-horses." Nonetheless, Booth credited Mrs. McCullough's committee with recommending changes in admission procedures, the introduction of an honors program, and contraction of the college course to three years.

The Committee of Twenty-One met on Dec. 18 at the home of Mrs. Arthur Holden to hear reports from its subcommittees on finance, architecture, statistics, and education. Booth presided, since the ladies had graciously co-opted him to be chairman, and while no minutes survive, there is evidence that everything was going his way until he announced that Mrs. Colgate would arrange a Bennington College meeting of 100 eminent citizens in New York City. At that, Mrs. Colgate rose abruptly and said that she could not do it — she was too deeply involved with the

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

McCall Mission. Booth was shaken by this unexpected defection and asked Mrs. McCullough, who was sitting next to Mrs. Colgate, to be the New York chairman. The assignment did not appeal to her for she was involved in more likely causes, but she saw that if she declined Dr. Booth would have to ask Miss Helen Phelps Stokes or Miss Mary Sanford, who were Socialists, and that might give the college "a socialistic stigma from the start." Consequently she consented but had in mind explaining that she had accepted only to "pull him out of a dilemma."

En route to New York, Mrs. McCullough spent a night in Albany with her sister, Miss Ethel Van Benthuisen. There she planned to phone Booth that she must decline the New York assignment. Her sister persuaded her to wait until she had talked with a neighbor, Frank Pierpont Graves, New York State commissioner of education. Dr. Graves was invited in and asked to comment on the idea of a college in Old Bennington. He immediately picked up the Neilson theme which would at once revolutionize higher education and unshackle the secondary schools. He considered the New York meeting very important, urged Mrs. McCullough not to walk out on the committee, and offered to spend the following morning helping her plan a program and list the educators to be invited.

When she left for New York, Mrs. McCullough was inextricably but happily involved, not only in the New York meeting but also in the promotion and shaping of Bennington College. Dr. Graves had given her a letter addressed to William Kilpatrick, professor of the philosophy of education at Teachers College, Columbia, then in his early 50s, whose writings had already "catapulted him to national and international fame." Further, Dr. Graves nominated Kilpatrick to be the keynote speaker at the proposed New York meeting since he was the foremost proponent of progressive education. The commissioner could not know that Mrs. McCullough would be chosen chairman of the Bennington College trustees in 1925 or that, with less probability, Kilpatrick would be chosen to succeed her six years later. He did know that he was sending Mrs. McCullough to an extraordinarily able and persuasive personality.

In New York Mr. and Mrs. McCullough met with Professor Kilpatrick and found his educational ideas congenial with their own and his argument for founding a new college for women particularly compelling. Booth was then invited to New York and he and Kilpatrick had no difficulty in agreeing that Bennington College for Women must be of the first rank with a curriculum based on the best available evidence and such administrative control "as to insure that in the remote future the best thought of that day, not the dead hand of tradition, should rule." At some point Kilpatrick agreed to speak at the Bennington meeting so long as his subject would be progressive education. It was understood that Booth would speak, and there may have been some ambiguity over which was to

deliver the keynote address.

For a brilliantly successful meeting more was needed than a professor of philosophy and a country clergymen. For the key choice of a chairman, McCullough thought of his alma mater and he and Mrs. McCullough waited on James Rowland Angell, Yale's president. Angell brusquely declined and asked them condescendingly if they realized what "a *colossal* job" they had undertaken. Mrs. McCullough wrote in her *Recollections* that Angell had a rather 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."

Booth then wrote Miss Ada Comstock, who had just become president of Radcliffe, and she accepted the chairmanship. The cast was completed when President Neilson of Smith agreed to repeat his endorsement of the preceding fall. With the program settled Mrs. McCullough's committee turned energetically to the problem of ensnaring an audience. The meeting had been scheduled for the evening of April 28, 1924, at the Colony Club. Mrs. McCullough and her committee exploited all their connections to recruit distinguished sponsors whose names were then printed on the invitations.

Forty-eight prominent laymen and educators who accepted the function of sponsorship included six heads of the Ivy League colleges for women and the presidents of Cornell, Middlebury and Swarthmore. The invitations were then sent to hundreds of school, college and university principals and presidents and to leaders in other fields in New York and beyond.

For several weeks, lunch and dinner parties were held to make Bennington College known and to publicize the Colony Club meeting. For these gatherings Neilson was sometimes available, Booth always. Following his eloquent address at one of these meetings, Booth was approached by a member of the audience who said he wished to found a college in memory of his wife, Sarah Lawrence, and would like Booth to be its first president. After conferring with the McCulloughs, Booth "decided to stand by Bennington."

When the great day of the Colony Club meeting came, the conspirators had induced 20 friends each to give a dinner party for at least 10 "carefully selected guests" to make sure of an audience of quality and amplitude. The committee had done its work so well, and the topic of new departures in higher education for women was so timely and challenging, that the Colony Club was jammed even after a second ballroom was opened up, and numbers had to be turned away. All but one of the educators on Commissioner Graves' list had accepted; the National Conference of Headmistresses, then in session in Philadelphia, arrived en masse; and numberless parents came for light and counsel on their daughters'

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

education.

The presiding officer, Miss Comstock, began by listing the diverse motivations which had led to the founding of colleges, stated that 132 "first rate institutions" were then granting degrees to women, and challenged President Neilson to explain why another women's college was needed. Neilson's main point was that students have different kinds of ability, and the capacity of many of them for higher education was by no means measured by existing entrance examinations or the kind of education the standard college provides. He said it was the universal experience of teachers that many students with no taste or aptitude for the conventional studies "yet turn out to be as robust intellectually as those who are gifted in those particular ways." Why Bennington could accept and educate such young women and existing colleges could not, Dr. Neilson made abundantly clear:

"It is harder to try certain thorough-going experiments in an old institution than in a new; and when I heard of the possibility of the beginning of a college...in Old Bennington, I confess I felt, as I suppose every man and woman here feels: What a great chance to start afresh, on clear ground, without a conservative faculty to persuade; without conservative alumnae who want their daughters trained as they were, in spite of the awful warning provided by the mother's life (laughter); without trustees who think that the old college did pretty well for their grandfathers and will do pretty well for their grandsons..."

Continuing the argument, Professor Kilpatrick asserted that there was need for "a new deal in women's education" because there were now available better methods for solving educational problems, "wonderfully fine means of measuring," and "an enormously better educational philosophy." The elementary and secondary schools had taken advantage of these advances; Bennington could now be the first to apply them in higher education. What he himself hoped was that Bennington would do away with the traditional entrance requirements and rely mainly on "some type of intelligence test"; that it would offer more students the advantages of the honors system; that the student herself would be studied with a view to wiser guidance during and after college; that it would not require courses of no value to the student; and that the content of all courses should be re-worked "for the sake of students, not subjects." His summary statement, which fits the basic assumption of his mentor, John Dewey, was that we "must consider education as life and not a mere preparation for life."

Kilpatrick's speech, which Mrs. McCullough described as scintillating, was followed by a stereopticon talk by Booth on the advantages of Old Bennington as the site of this new pioneering institution. After illustrating his remarks on the colorful past of Old Bennington with slides of his

church, the Bennington Battle monument, and various historical markers, he concluded with a memorable peroration. With slides of the Italian Renaissance, he reminded his audience what great works of art Raphael, Michelangelo and Ghiberti, inspired by "the divine creative power," had made out of mere paint, stone and metal; and then insisted that this "creative power is constantly asserting itself."

"Give us an opportunity to touch a little heap of yellow gold, and you will see it speedily transformed into an institution of learning, rising on the slopes of Mount Anthony, a college for women through which many a child of God may pass into the kingdom of the spirit."

The conclusion of Booth's speech came as something of a shock to the committee, for its rhetoric seemed out of key and no allusion to fundraising had been planned. The Bennington Banner had announced that the meeting would launch a campaign for \$5 million but the Colony Club would not have lent itself to such a crass objective; and the invitations had stated that the purpose of the meeting was "to awaken interest...not to raise funds."

What followed the Booth stereopticon lecture was not wholly reassuring. With the lights on again, the chairman invited questions and remarks. Dean Virginia Gildersleeve of Barnard at once rose to applaud the idea of a new college for women; but she spoke as a "defender of some of the old things still existing" and made it clear that Barnard exhibited none of the defects in women's colleges that had been alluded to by Kilpatrick. This he must know, she said, "since he philosophizes just across the street from my office at the same university." Another member of the audience rose and said that "women have reached a position equal to men and should be able to take the same curriculum." Kilpatrick replied that "that curriculum was started for the clergy" and was unsuitable for either sex. Someone then asked him to be more specific, but after mentioning orientation courses, he said he had been careful not to commit himself because he did not know.

Fortunately, at this point Miss Maria Bowen Chapin, founder of the impeccable Chapin School and president of the Headmistresses Association, closed the meeting on a resounding high note. Booth had thoughtfully provided her with the drafts of four resolutions, any one of which would be helpful to the cause. Miss Chapin had chosen and modified the fourth, and now moved that a rising vote be given the following resolution:

"That we cordially endorse the proposed plans for the college for women at Old Bennington, Vermont, as presented to us this evening and commend the

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

enterprise to the very favorable consideration of all concerned."

The motion was carried unanimously and the meeting adjourned. What had been cordially endorsed was not crystal clear, but everyone had learned that the projected college for women would be modern and bright, free of prevailing evils, and prepared to change in the future in accord with new knowledge and inspiration. Everyone had also learned that a pioneering venture of this sort had enormous appeal both to leading educators and to an active and influential segment of New York's social elite.

CHAPTER 2

THE PLOT THICKENS

The success of the Colony Club meeting made it clear that Bennington College had a metropolitan clientele and that its future could no longer be entrusted to committees of Bennington ladies picked by Booth. Furthermore, it was clear that Professor Kilpatrick must be incorporated in the conspiracy. Mrs. McCullough's New York Committee now became in effect the executive committee, which Booth called it, and it was gradually reconstituted until the men outnumbered the women and New York was better represented than Bennington. But this geographical distinction was blurred by the fact that the Colgates and the McCulloughs had homes in both places, and two other members had Vermont roots and were relatives of McCullough: Mrs. George Franklin of New York and Charles H. Hall of Springfield, Massachusetts. Booth was of course a member of the committee but his primacy was now challenged by Professor Kilpatrick, five years his senior, who had been co-opted. Since by then he was an established authority on education, Mrs. McCullough asked him to preside at the meetings although she would continue to be chairman.

Fortunately for the functioning of the executive committee, there was no open feuding between Booth and Kilpatrick, in spite of the minister's readiness to make educational pronouncements that were clearly in the professor's domain. From the first they had had no difficulty in agreeing on the superlative if vague terms by which the future college should be described; Booth later described Kilpatrick as "our mentor"; and it was at Kilpatrick's suggestion that Booth was invited to address the annual convention of the Progressive Education Association. One might then

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

have foreseen difficulties ahead if the Kilpatrick views failed to gain consensus in the committee and it seemed unlikely that Booth's backers in Old Bennington would enthusiastically underwrite educational ideas that could be called new-fangled.

The executive committee now faced the necessity of obtaining a Vermont charter, electing trustees, and undertaking three interlocking tasks: raising money, finding a president, and determining within broad lines what Bennington College would be like. Could any one of these tasks be successfully confronted before the other two had been completed?

In the spring of 1924 the executive committee decided that a conference of distinguished educators might help to formulate specifications for Bennington College and at the same time broaden its support. Invitations were sent to school heads and college presidents to attend a two-day conference at the end of August in the Governor McCullough mansion in North Bennington. Although 17 educators attended, the committee was disappointed that none of the Ivy League presidents had accepted; and President Moody of Middlebury arrived late and stayed just long enough to confirm his suspicion that Bennington was moving off in the wrong direction. Some months before, he had written Booth that he had "no sympathy whatever" for the type of institution that Kilpatrick advocated. He admitted that colleges were not doing much to fit students for life but felt that reform would come by moving "back toward more conservative conditions rather than away from them," and specifically he recommended that electives be limited, Greek and Latin restored. With Kilpatrick presiding at the conference and unpleasant remarks being made about existing colleges, it is not strange that President Moody left a few hours after his arrival.

More serious than Moody's disaffection was a schism in the executive committee which the conference brought to light and probably deepened. Two of the papers read by women educators made innovative proposals which were quietly buried at the end of the conference. One argued that Bennington College should "develop the whole person," not merely the intellect; that to this end the knowledge of modern psychiatry must be employed in selecting and guiding the students, and that therefore there must be a psychiatrist on the faculty to teach mental hygiene and to serve generally as a consultant. This startling proposal was made by Dean Frances Bernard of Smith College, who came to Bennington eight years later as a faculty wife, Mrs. Edwin A. Park. In the history of the college she was the first to suggest the contribution psychiatry might make, though there is no evidence that her remarks caused Leigh to appoint a psychiatrist to head the college health department seven years later, and some of the executive committee must have been highly skeptical of her entire argument.

Equally divisive, Miss Amy Kelly's paper on curriculum was anathema to Kilpatrick but delighted Booth. Miss Kelly had graduated from Oberlin in 1900, had a master's degree from Wellesley where she taught rhetoric and composition from 1907 to 1923, and then became headmistress of the Bryn Mawr School in Baltimore. At Wellesley she had argued that the usual curriculum left students "mentally unarranged," and offered as a solution six required courses covering everything a modern, educated person should know. Wellesley ignored the offer, which was published in an alumnae magazine where Booth found it and Miss Kelly eagerly accepted Booth's invitation to repeat her proposals in the presence of fellow educators and the promoters of Bennington College. In its recommendations the conference might have included an endorsement of Miss Kelly's six orientation courses had it not been for Kilpatrick's hostility to any scheme of required courses that did not originate in an analysis of individual students' interests and objectives. In view of his prestige as educator and his position as presiding officer, it is not surprising that in the end the conference made no reference to Miss Kelly's plan, but in line with Kilpatrick's views urged only that the curriculum "be based closely upon life and the enrichment of life." It is also possible that the executive committee decided not to publish the typescript of the conference at the "prohibitory" cost of \$275 because of Miss Kelly's persuasive case for a clear-cut curriculum and Dean Bernard's insistence that Bennington College give psychiatry its due.

The conference report thus dropped from sight and memory in spite of its warm endorsement of the proposed college; but Miss Kelly was to reappear in Bennington's chronicles with the backing of Booth and others who considered Kilpatrick's views on curriculum vague and impractical. At a public meeting in Old Bennington following the educators' conference, Kilpatrick asserted that "women must study those things that take hold of them and give them a new outlook and insight...new attitudes and new appreciations..." But he mentioned no subjects to be taught.

In contrast, Booth favored the adoption of Miss Kelly's scheme of six orientation courses and later suggested that she be chosen Bennington's first president. This early disagreement over curriculum indicates that there was no educational consensus among members of the executive committee; and it is probable that the continuing lack of consensus helps to explain the long nine years that elapsed between the idea of Bennington College and its realization. It is probable also that without Mrs. McCullough's moderating skills as chairman of the executive committee and then of the trustees, basic differences of educational outlook would have doomed the enterprise.

Earlier in the summer of 1924 the committee had assigned McCullough the seemingly simple chore of obtaining a charter from the state of

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

Vermont. As a first step he had drafted a charter which departed from a tradition he was familiar with as a life member of the board of trustees of Middlebury College to which he had been appointed in 1919. In his *Recollections* he quoted the judgment of Francis Wayland, 19th-century clergyman and president of Brown University, that "a body chosen for life is peculiarly liable to attacks of somnolency," and that such trustees "rarely die and never resign." He then argued the advantages of continuity and change if trustees were not elected for life but two retired each year at the end of a fixed term to make way for new members. He apparently expected some trustees to be re-elected, for he counted on the "steadying influence" of old members "to see to it that too radical, untried innovations were not rushed into without due consideration."

The McCullough draft was accepted, and the provision for trustee renewal, though by no means unique, has been considered a source of the vitality and resiliency of the Bennington College board throughout much of its history. Leigh was convinced that the annual infusion of new trustees saved the college from stagnation and in 1938 he referred to trustees chosen for life as "a bulwark of complacency against questioning and revision."

The next step was to recruit Bennington incorporators whose names would impress officials in Montpelier, and that meant for the first time involving Main Street in the enterprise. At a public meeting in the Bennington high school in August, 1924, Mrs. McCullough, Colgate and Booth talked about the proposed college and the cultural and economic benefits it would bring the entire community. Booth closed the major address of the evening with a stirring call to action:

"I believe that this is a decisive hour in the history of Bennington. Your ancestors made history [but] we cannot go on forever living on their achievements. We too must make history...Are we equal to the task? Shall the answer be yes or no?"

Whatever the direct results of this effort may have been, the committee had no trouble in signing up an array of politically potent incorporators in the following months.

It soon became clear that the real question was whether Vermont would grant Bennington College a satisfactory charter. The question came up sharply when McCullough discovered that the constitution and statutes of Vermont provided that a corporation organized for educational purposes and chartered under the general laws would have no power to confer degrees; and that no charter could be granted by special act of the legislature except to institutions under the control of the state. McCullough pondered this dilemma, discussed it with Judge Robert E. Healy

and Judge O. M. Barber of Bennington, John W. Davis and Frank L. Polk, his New York law partners, John G. Sargent, the United States attorney general, and others without finding a solution. Outright repeal of the negative provision of the general corporation law was a possibility, but McCullough and his Vermont consultants feared that Middlebury College and the University of Vermont would fight the change. Frustrating months went by before a simple solution was suggested by an obscure state official: Add a clause to the corporation law permitting a college chartered under the act to grant degrees provided it was certified by the secretary of state. A bill to this effect was passed without difficulty, Bennington was certified by the secretary of state on April 21, 1925, and the college thus became a legal entity.

The incorporators might have been convened at once to elect trustees, but the executive committee, meeting in New York and then in Bennington, put the election off until August and in the meantime gave thought to who should be elected to the board of 15 members. During the past year the committee had co-opted Morton D. Hull, a Chicago lawyer and Congressman whose wife was a Bennington Bingham and who had a summer home in Old Bennington; and Mrs. Joseph R. Swan of New York, who had a degree from Teachers College and whose remarkable organizing ability, steadfastness and tact gave her a decisive role in bringing the college into being. They brought the membership of the committee to 12. Eight of that number had signed the articles of incorporation but they were outnumbered by Bennington incorporators who might insist on substantial representation from the lower village. Actually, only 13 of the 21 incorporators attended the August meeting, and the outcome appeared to have been not only planned but engineered.

Mrs. McCullough, Colgate and Booth were elected for the seven-year term; Kilpatrick and Mrs. Swan for six years; Hall and Hull for five and Mrs. Franklin and Edmund N. Huyck of Albany for four. In the three-, two- and one-year slots McCullough and Wilson M. Powell were joined by four prominent townsmen in law and medicine: Judges Barber, Healy and E. H. Holden, and Dr. Lucretius Ross. For a brief period the town as a whole was better represented in the counsels of the college-to-be than at any later time.

The newly elected trustees chose Mrs. McCullough president of the corporation and chairman of the board, Colgate treasurer, and Booth secretary of both bodies. At their meeting a month later they discussed the major tasks ahead and decided that priority should be given to money raising. This seemed to be a reasonable choice since it was unlikely that anyone would accept the presidency until funds for buildings and salaries were pledged. On the other hand potential donors might prudently prefer to postpone commitment until the trustees had reached agreement on the

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

nature of the future college, handsomely set forth in a prospectus, and a president had been found.

Booth was not in the least influenced by these negative thoughts, and one day after the trustees gave him the signal he began ringing "front doorbells and back doorbells, striving to convince all who would listen that the greatest opportunity in the history of the town was knocking at the door." Booth's powers of persuasion had already been demonstrated, but it was his accomplishments as a money raiser that led Dorothy Canfield Fisher to remark that he got whatever he asked for so resistance was just a waste of time.

In 10 days Booth had in hand pledges dramatically totalling precisely \$500,000 by 1 p.m. Sept. 24. Eight donors accounted for \$450,000 and 47 others for the remaining \$50,000. By the end of the year Booth informed the trustees that the figure had risen to \$630,000 and he urged that a bronze tablet with the names of the 125 donors be placed in the principal college building when there was one. In August, 1928, he referred to these local donors as the founders of Bennington College.

The feat of collecting in 10 days promises worth half a million dollars in 1925 proved Booth to be a money raiser without local peer, and it confirmed his right to be consulted even though he had ceased to be proprietor of the future college. Booth's swift success was misleading, however, since each pledge was conditional on the trustees raising \$2,500,000 by October, 1928, a goal they would fail to meet. Still, Booth had single-handedly met the immediate aim of raising half a million dollars, and the trustees were thus freed to begin the search for a president and to continue the quest for agreement on the character of the college-to-be. It was now generally believed that Bennington would have a college. Robert Frost living nearby wrote on May 26, 1926, that the only thing that worried him was that Bennington College "is coming in on our pastoral serenity."

* * * * *

For some years Bennington College issued no definitive description of itself, there was no particular consistency in what individual trustees said about its aims and nature, and it is not surprising that some startling notions about the projected college gained currency. At the educational conference of 1924, Dr. Charles F. Thwing, president emeritus of Western Reserve University, referred to the current notion "that you are trying to provide a haven for lame ducks that cannot get into college anywhere." Shortly after the Colony Club meeting, the Smith College weekly stated that Bennington College planned a curriculum which would fit women to play their traditional roles but at a high esthetic and spiritual level. This

thought was based on an unidentified quotation which may have been a Booth statement: Bennington would "prepare for their high destiny the young women whose ambition it is to become mothers and the founders of beautiful, wholesome homes."

Booth was eager to draft a Bennington College prospectus to facilitate fund raising beyond the confines of the town, but the trustees, still lacking consensus, were unwilling to commit themselves to what he might write. What he would have proposed in 1924 or 1925 owed something to Kilpatrick, something to Mrs. McCullough's subcommittee on education, something to Miss Kelly's curricular proposals, and the rest to his own experience and temperament. Shortly after the Colony Club meeting, speaking at the University Women's Club in New York, he described the college he wished to found. Bennington College would have a new type of education for women "designed to meet their peculiar needs." Students with "great gifts" would be admitted on the basis of intelligence tests whether or not they were puzzled by mathematics. The curriculum would include music and art, literature, sciences "which make for the betterment of the home" but also astronomy and geology, both modern and ancient languages (the latter not required), social sciences and history beginning with modern "institutions and tendencies." At the end he repeated Kilpatrick's refrain that the college should be so administered that its future policy would be guided "by the clearest light of that day, not the dead hand of tradition."

Though some of Booth's educational ideas survived, his proposals were never discussed by the executive committee or trustees and he himself had evidently lost interest in them by the time he wrote an ill-fated prospectus in 1927. His various pronouncements show him receptive to innovation as he eagerly grasped at whatever appealed to him or had appeal to others, and fitted it into his plans for the still imaginary women's college near his church in Old Bennington.

From 1924 to the appointment of a president in 1928, however, it was Professor Kilpatrick rather than Dr. Booth who acted as spokesman for the college. He gave the keynote address at the Colony Club meeting, he presided over the educational conference of 1924, he was made chairman of the committee to draw up a formal statement of college aims and it was to him that the task of replying to inquiries was given in 1925.

Though the trustees allowed Kilpatrick to speak for them, they evidently remained puzzled by his views on curriculum. John Dewey had argued for a carefully planned curriculum and declared that its formulation was as challenging a task as any that progressive education faced. Dissenting from his master, Kilpatrick strongly opposed a curriculum that was "fixed in advance": the choice of subjects must be determined by thorough analysis of student interests. Consequently his warming rhe-

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

toric was virtually unmarred by specifics, aside from a veto on mathematics and foreign languages; and the trustees remained in the dark on what would be taught in a Kilpatrick college.

For guidance on curriculum the trustees decided that they should find out what higher education was then offering the young women of America. Such knowledge, embodied in a survey and recommendations, might serve as "a basis for the Bennington College curriculum," although it must be understood that the president, when found, would not be bound by it. To make the survey the trustees chose Miss Amy Kelly whose curricular proposals at the Bennington educators' conference of 1924 had pleased Booth and displeased Kilpatrick. Miss Kelly was voted a stipend of \$7,000 for the task and \$3,000 for travel while on leave from the Bryn Mawr School.

Miss Kelly's commission was to tour the country to find out what women were studying at institutions noted for curricular innovation and then make her recommendations for Bennington College. In her *Recollections* Mrs. McCullough said that Miss Kelly was sent out through the country "in order to keep the Bennington project alive and before the people." This purpose must have been partially negated by a provision, clearly expressing Kilpatrick's doubts, that Miss Kelly go out under the auspices of a committee of educators who had no connection with the college. Though such a committee was named, Miss Kelly made no reference to it in her eventual report and stated that her study had been made "under the auspices of a group of men and women interested in the establishment of a new college...in Bennington, Vermont."

Following her visits to Swarthmore, Antioch and Reed, as well as to Columbia, Chicago and Wisconsin, Miss Kelly elaborated on the proposal of six orientation courses that she had made at the Bennington educators' conference, and contributed to the Bennington pool of educational ideas several features which were to reappear in President Leigh's program of 1929 and in its eventual implementation. Miss Kelly's proposal of six required orientation courses failed to survive beyond 1927 when Booth propounded them as the Bennington curriculum, and the fine arts course she described would have been no more than a lively course in esthetics. Yet her insistence on individual work has a familiar ring in the Bennington saga, and her view that every student should begin to specialize as early as possible, a view already stated by Kilpatrick, may have influenced the institution of Bennington's "trial majors" for first- and second-year students. What can be said with certainty is that Miss Kelly's report was a suitable document to hand presidential candidates for comment. Robert Devore Leigh was soon to pass this test in the presence of trustees and become Bennington's first president.

While waiting for Miss Kelly's survey and a president, the trustees had to

answer the questions that came in almost daily from educators and parents. To meet this need, Kilpatrick was authorized to draft a form letter, replying "informally and unofficially" to such inquiries. The letter went out over Kilpatrick's signature as the "consensus of opinions among the friends of the enterprise, colored a bit, to be sure, by the ideas and wishes of the writer." In it Kilpatrick repeated the argument that "a fresh start offers the best opportunity for introducing new ideas...the best that the modern world has to show," and then made four points.

First, Bennington would devise a model admissions system which would not exclude worthy girls nor admit girls who could not or would not profit from college. Second, Bennington would make a "stubborn attack" on the difficult problem of curriculum, and while the curriculum would fall within the province of the future president and faculty, a "cardinal principle" would be to make every year "for each student the richest possible year of growth-living of which she is at the stage capable." That is, each year every student would study what contributed most to her growth in outlook, insight, taste, "differentiated attitude" and "power of effecting." While orientation courses were promising for beginning students, every student should choose a field of specialization early in her career and seek mastery in it before graduation. Third, "personnel work" would serve both admissions and guidance through college to the end that students "choose more intelligently their lines of work in college and their careers afterwards." And fourth, to save Bennington from paralysis based on complacency, permanent provision would be made for continuing external criticism.

Bennington characteristics are foreshadowed in the first three points but the provision for perpetual outside criticism on which Kilpatrick set great store found no foothold in the Bennington structure. Kilpatrick's law about educational institutions was that no matter how "intelligently progressive" they may be in the beginning, they become in time "stupidly conservative." Still being an optimist he imagined that Bennington might be spared this dreary fate if it sought continued criticism from a prominent school of education (such as Teachers College) which itself would apparently be exempt from the workings of Kilpatrick's law. The criticism would be constantly publicized so that friends of the college would force the administration "to take proper action in accordance with the criticism so made." No school of education ever rode herd on Bennington, though some imagined that Teachers College was in fact in the saddle when Kilpatrick, its professor of educational philosophy, became chairman of the Bennington College board in 1931.

* * * * *

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

The Kilpatrick letter had little value in fund raising and Booth continued to insist on the need for a brochure if more pledges were to be signed. Late in 1926 the trustees authorized him to seek possible donors in other parts of Vermont, appointed McCullough, Hall and Colgate to oversee his activities, but ignored his remarks about a brochure. Undeterred, Booth proceeded to write a brochure without consulting anyone but Colgate, who willingly paid for its publication. In January, 1927, Booth sent Mrs. McCullough a copy, along with a letter implicating Colgate. She was aghast and wrote Booth that any use of the publication "just now would be most inadvisable." She felt strongly that no definite plan should be put forth without "the most mature consideration and full approval of the trustees, and probably not before the president had been selected. In looking for a president we cannot afford to prejudice our cause in advance by putting forth a plan." At the same time McCullough went to Colgate's office, showed him the Booth booklet, and asked him what he knew about it. Colgate did not at once admit his complicity but finally opened a drawer and tossed McCullough an unopened bundle of the brochures.

The Booth prospectus, entitled *Effort to Secure \$5,640,500 to Establish Bennington College*, was a remarkable document. After making the case for another college for women, Booth described Old Bennington as an ideal location as he had many times before and then drove home his insistence that the area was historic by listing "The Monuments of Old Bennington" and giving each a full-page picture. They were the Battle Monument, the First Meeting House Monument and its Bronze Tablet, the Catamount Tavern Monument, the Garrison Marker, and the interior of Booth's church, "the oldest, Most Historic, and Most Beautiful Meeting House in Vermont."

A single page was finally given to the nature and organization of the college. To educate its 500 students, the college was to be divided into six separate schools. Following Miss Kelly's proposals, the schools were to instruct in the physical and biological sciences, social institutions, languages, fine arts and philosophy; and each school was to have a building to itself, its own headmaster and six faculty members. The total to be raised would include \$2,000,000 for buildings and \$3,000,000 for endowment. With tuition at \$400 and a 4 percent profit on the dormitories, there would be a \$41,925 surplus each year for unforeseen expenses and scholarships.

Mrs. McCullough's attempt to suppress the unauthorized prospectus is understandable, but Booth was not easily put off. Waiting until summer when the trustees customarily met in Bennington with little or no representation from the Kilpatrick faction, Booth circulated copies of his brochure at a meeting on July 3 and asked that it be approved. The trustees

avoided immediate judgment by voting to send a copy to Dr. Ernest Wilkins for comment. For some months Wilkins had been the most likely candidate for president, and though Bennington had just lost him to Oberlin, he graciously accepted the assignment.

Wilkins began his comments with a few sentences of muted praise before suggesting a specific change and offering a general criticism. He thought that the portrait of Mary Lyon (1797-1849), founder of Mount Holyoke College, should be omitted. Booth had included her because Holyoke had been founded approximately a century before, and Bennington's establishment would mark the beginning of the second century of higher education for women in America. Wilkins felt that the Lyon portrait connoted "an old-fashionedness which is counter to the spirit of the document." His major criticism was then embodied in a single Italian word, which he knew as a scholar of Italian literature and which only Booth among the trustees would recognize. Wilkins said that the disproportionate space devoted to the historic monuments of Old Bennington produced "an impression of *campanilismo*." The minutes of the meeting, written by Booth as secretary, state that the Wilkins letter was read to the trustees but do not say whether Booth explained that *campanilismo* means "the excessive and boastful love of one's native village."

Still persisting, Booth got the board to agree that each trustee would study the brochure and submit criticisms in writing, and that revisions would then be made by Booth, Colgate and Hull. By the following meeting, however, Booth had been persuaded that the editing must be done by someone less clearly in his camp, and after reading the comments he had received he proposed that McCullough make the necessary changes. This was agreed to and another meeting was scheduled for Aug. 18.

What gave the Booth brochure the *coup de grace* is not revealed in the proceedings of the board for the minutes of what may have been the decisive meeting on Aug. 18 are missing. But a few surviving letters make it clear that the fate of the college had become intertwined with the fate of the curious prospectus. In a letter of Aug. 13, 1927, Mrs. McCullough urged Mrs. Swan to telegraph if she did not approve the prospectus "as corrected by Wilkins" and said that if Mrs. Swan resigned, "Mr. Huyck, Mrs. Franklin and I go off with you," and probably also McCullough and Hall. She wrote that when she told Booth of "impending resignations, he said nothing but looked ashy white." She added that Mrs. Franklin felt that the prospectus in its present form could not do any harm in Vermont, and she herself thought that a fund drive in Vermont "would keep Booth busy and happy." The minutes make no further reference to the Booth-Colgate publication and when the topic of a prospectus came

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

up later in 1927 the Kilpatrick forces were in command.

This episode undoubtedly marks the decline of Booth's influence on the board though he continued to be treated with respect and as a sort of consolation prize was given a seven-week trip to Europe later in the year. In rejecting the Booth brochure the trustees had rebuffed Colgate who had approved and paid for the publication, and it is not surprising that Booth's earliest supporter soon gave evidence of disaffection.

This episode also signifies increased acceptance of the Teachers College outlook among board members although there was as yet no consensus. Toward the end of 1927 the John Price Jones Corporation was engaged to conduct a fund campaign and its first move was to insist on a brochure. Thereupon Mrs. Swan, once a student of Kilpatrick at Teachers College was appointed chairman of a brochure committee on which the professor was the commanding figure. The record throws little light on how this further step toward the Kilpatrick approach to education came about, but Bennington's first president was convinced that McCullough had a key role in the decision. Leigh told his brother-in-law, Dr. Joseph Chassell, that at some point the trustees asked McCullough to study and report on the Dewey-Kilpatrick school of progressive education. This he did with the thoroughness of a corporation lawyer working up a case for the Supreme Court. The result, according to Leigh, was that McCullough convinced himself and most of the other trustees that Kilpatrick was the man to follow. That this development did not signify consensus is suggested by the fact that the Swan-Kilpatrick committee had no more success than Booth in producing an acceptable prospectus for Bennington College.



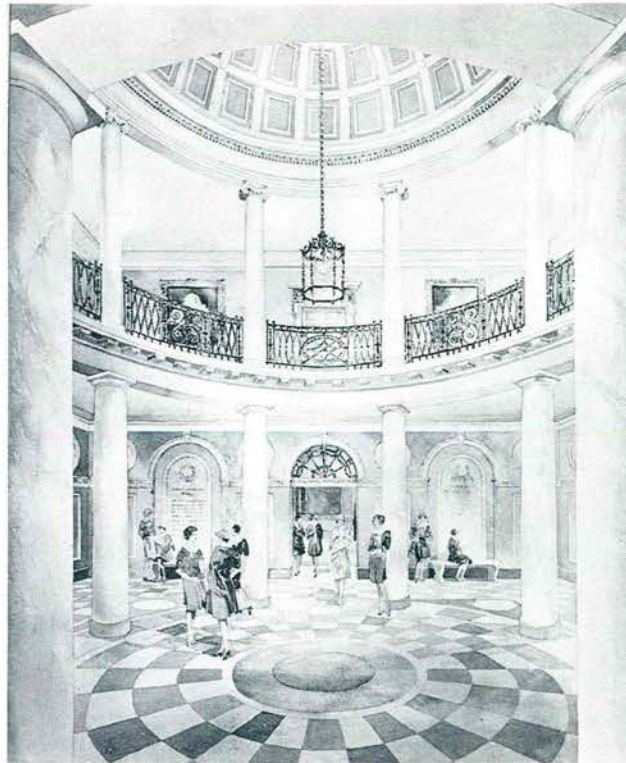
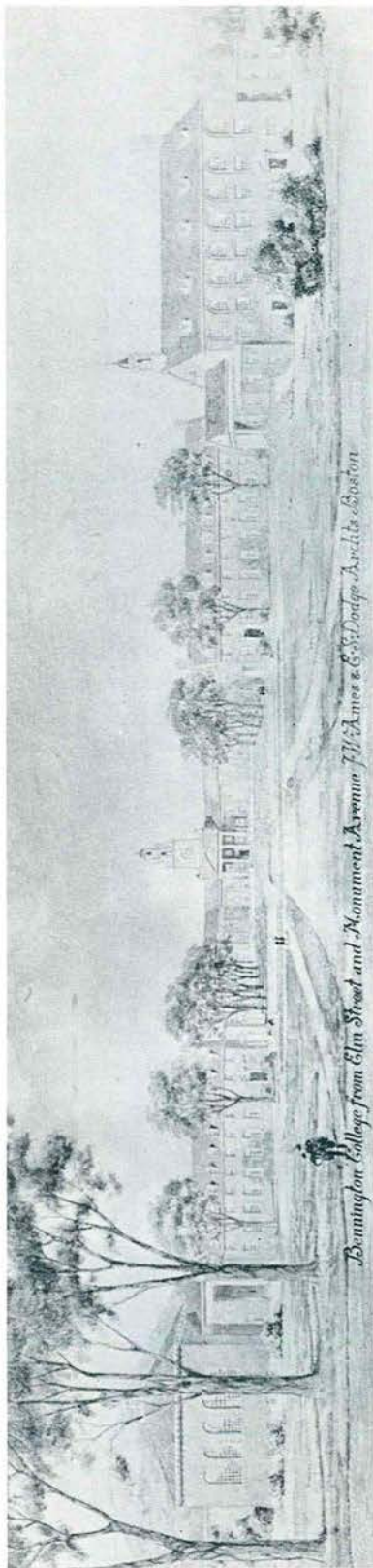
*Clockwise, from above: Vincent Ravi Booth,
William H. Kilpatrick, Mr. and Mrs. Hall
Park McCullough.*



Park-McCullough House Association



Clockwise, from above: Robert D. Leigh, Mildred Leigh, Mrs. George S. Franklin (Elsie Jennings Franklin), who gave her North Bennington estate for the campus.



At left, the original watercolor sketch by Ames & Dodge of Boston for the proposed campus at the foot of Mt. Anthony off Monument Road in Bennington. Above, the Ames & Dodge sketch of the library that was never built. Below, the west wing of the Barn, photographed in fall, 1931.

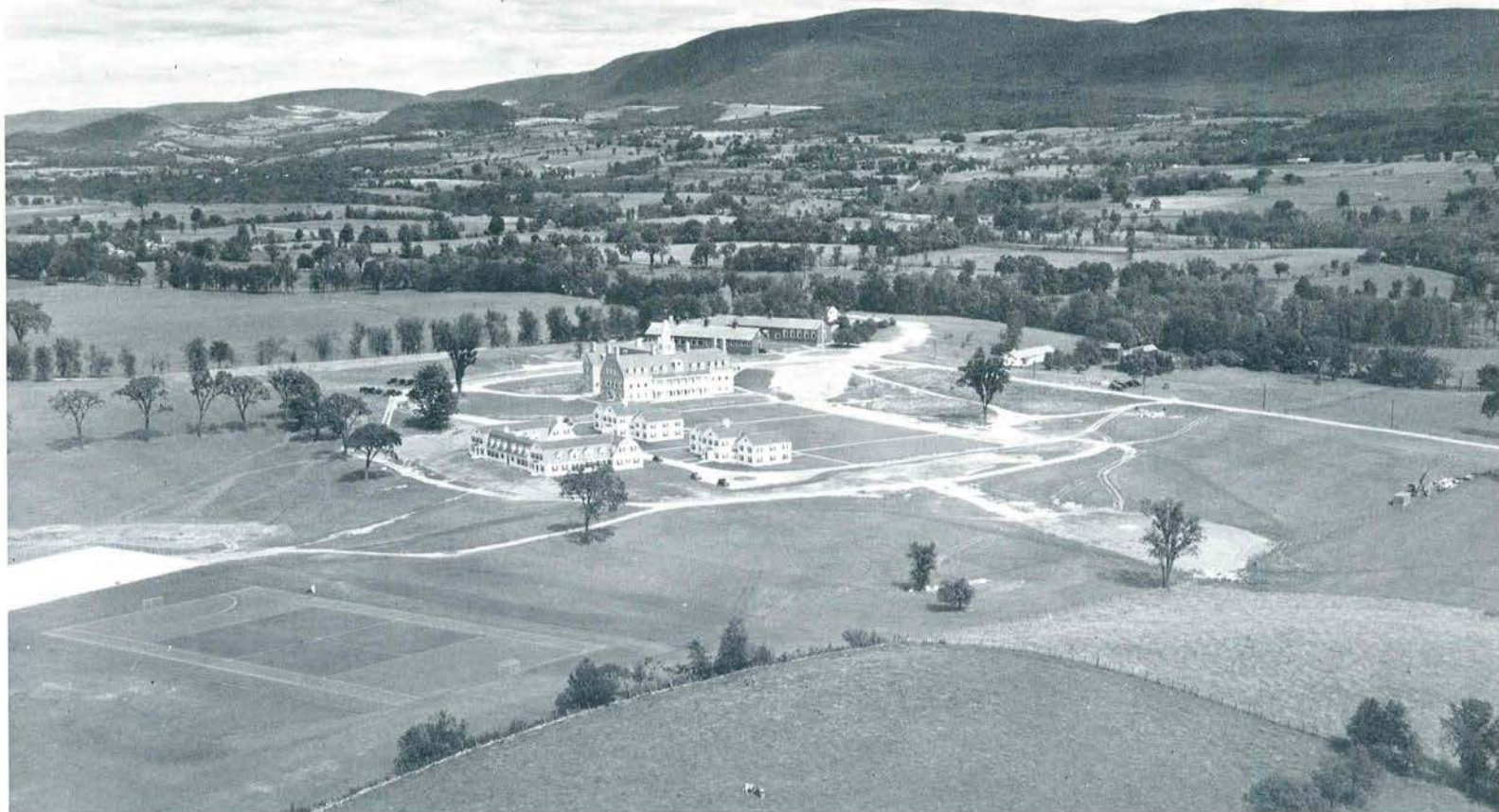




About a thousand people attended the dedication of Bennington College on Aug. 13, 1931, a date chosen for its proximity to Bennington Battle Day, Aug. 16.

Speakers at the college dedication were, left to right, the Rev. Anson Phelps Stokes, Booth, Leigh, author Dorothy Canfield Fisher, President Neilson of Smith College and William E. Rappard, the Swiss scholar and jurist who brought international greetings. At far left is Franz Lorenz, who directed musicians.





The college engaged Fairchild Aerial Surveys Inc. to photograph the campus on Sept. 7, 1932, opening day. A year later, the mirror image of these student houses had been built. Barely visible in this photo are some cows in the foreground, and a man can be seen mowing the lawn next to the field hockey field.



With President Leigh in the center, and his wife next to him, the entire faculty and staff were photographed in June, 1933, on the silo base.

The entire student body and faculty posed for a group photograph as the college opened in September, 1932.



CHAPTER 3

WHO WANTS TO BE PRESIDENT?

In December of 1927 the long search for a president was nearing its end after a year of unrewarding effort. In a report to the trustees a year before, Mrs. Swan, chairman of the search committee, stated that consultation with knowledgeable college and foundation officials and others had produced some 70 names from which 12 had emerged as worthy of serious consideration.

There were no women on the list though women's colleges often chose female presidents. Booth had proposed Miss Amy Kelly and Kilpatrick argued the feminist case until he was forced to admit, Mrs. McCullough thought somewhat sheepishly, that he would be more likely to accept appointment to the faculty if a man were president. Mrs. McCullough felt that the president's duties in establishing a new college would be "really too much for a woman." The committee's explanation to the trustees was that it had studiously listed the qualities Bennington's president should have and then judged that none of the "few outstanding women in education" had enough of them. Moreover, the few with executive experience "were somewhat lacking in the feminine attributes which would be one of the chief reasons for having a woman." Mrs. McCullough recalled that when a man was finally chosen, the committee was obliged to reply to a flood of letters from incensed feminists.

How many men were approached, consulted, sounded out, or actually offered the Bennington presidency will probably never be known. In a memorandum of 1944, Booth declared that everyone on the trustees' original list had been asked to be president and "all seventy turned us down." This egregious overstatement contained the palpable truth that

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

the Bennington presidency was no plum, a fact that was hammered home as the search committee continued to report no progress. In their *Recollections* Mr. and Mrs. McCullough named four men they wanted as president but failed to get: Robert M. Hutchins, then acting dean at the Yale Law School, John J. Coss, professor of philosophy and director of the summer school at Columbia, Samuel P. Capen, chancellor of the University of Buffalo, and Ernest Hatch Wilkins, professor of Romance languages and from 1923 to 1926 dean of the college at the University of Chicago.

Hutchins told an intermediary that he felt obliged to remain at Yale for at least two more years (he accepted the presidency of the University of Chicago in 1929), but surprisingly he warmly endorsed Bennington's eventual educational plan of 1929. Similarly, Professor Coss said he could not desert Columbia when asked obliquely what he would say if offered the Bennington presidency. He was deeply interested, however, and later became an outstanding trustee. Both Capen and Wilkins were definitely offered the Bennington presidency and seriously considered accepting it.

Dr. Capen took the Bennington offer very seriously but finally declined when his own trustees, apparently aware of his frustrations as chancellor, promised him "all the power and money he wanted." Nevertheless, Capen enthusiastically endorsed the establishment of a college for women in Bennington where "experiments in higher education could be undertaken, unhampered by tradition" and he became a Bennington trustee ten years later.

In January, 1927, Mrs. McCullough and Mrs. Swan went to Chicago to judge whether Professor Wilkins was the man they were looking for and whether he would be interested in Bennington. Impressed by his alert intelligence and modern outlook, the two trustees asked Wilkins to draft an educational and financial plan for Bennington College. This he did with ease, for he had been active in drawing up new plans for the University of Chicago and in writing a book, *The Changing College*, which was published that year. The plan required the raising of \$10,000,000 but it so impressed the trustees that they adopted it, invited Wilkins to come to New York and there offered him the presidency. In a masterpiece of non-commitment Wilkins replied that if the trustees raised the necessary funds by March 20, 1928, he "should very seriously consider a tentative acceptance." The search committee told him to take his time about replying less tentatively, but by early summer he had accepted the presidency of Oberlin.

This was a stunning blow at the end of three months of hopeful if increasingly anxious waiting. Whether Wilkins would have been the right president for Bennington is conjectural, but his plan was studied by Bennington's first president as well as by the trustees, and it may not be

mere coincidence that several of his proposals were consonant with features of the eventual Bennington program. He urged that the faculty be chosen on their ability and desire to teach *and counsel*, that the curriculum include the fine arts and be "individually planned for each student," that honors work fill the last two years for all students, that extracurricular activities be closely related to the curriculum, that the staff include a psychiatrist, and that tuition cover the costs of education.

Wilkins must have known that more of his educational ideas could be realized at a new institution than at one dating from 1833, and when he finally attempted to restructure Oberlin in 1936 the faculty voted predictably and according to Andrew Bongiorno's *Memorial Minute* Wilkins "abandoned forthwith all efforts at educational reform." Still, his choice of Oberlin over Bennington is understandable. Oberlin existed and Bennington might never have emerged from the chrysalis state. Furthermore, Wilkins had himself made the presidency less attractive by setting the fundraising goal at \$10,000,000. One may suspect also that Mrs. Wilkins had a voice in his decision to accept the Oberlin offer.

From the day Wilkins declined to the end of the year, the record throws no light on the activities of the presidential committee. Having exhausted the sources of likely names, and having been rebuffed by the most promising candidates, the trustees "were feeling pretty depressed." The shock of losing Wilkins, the crisis over Booth's prospectus, and a complete standstill in moneyraising seemed to doom the project. Yet despite this dismal outlook Mrs. McCullough never lost hope. Counting on personal resources not enumerated in the record, she assured Mrs. Swan in the midst of the prospectus crisis that aside from the problem of controlling Booth "the college was never in better shape to forge ahead." Gradually, her optimism and perseverance were validated and rewarded as the Booth brochure was forgotten, the trustees lowered their sights from the Wilkins goal of \$10,000,000 to half that figure and then to the original \$4,000,000, the John Price Jones Corporation was preparing a campaign for funds, and at last someone was found who would accept the presidency.

At dinnertime on Dec. 9, 1927, Kilpatrick phoned Mrs. McCullough at her New York apartment to say that Professor Coss had just thought of a promising nominee for the presidency: a young professor of government at Williams College who had been a graduate student and instructor at Columbia. His name was Robert Devore Leigh. If the committee was interested it would have to act fast, since Leigh had just received an attractive offer from the University of Chicago and had four days in which to decide. Mrs. McCullough at once phoned Edmund N. Huyck in Albany, Bennington trustee and Williams alumnus, and asked him to find out everything he could about the candidate by phoning Leigh's faculty colleagues that evening. Before midnight she had had telephone conver-

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

sations with President Harry A. Garfield of Williams and William Trufant Foster, former president of Reed College, where Leigh had done his first teaching. Both enthusiastically supported the Leigh candidacy and Huyck reported similar responses from Williams faculty. Mrs. McCullough then woke her husband in North Bennington and told him to arrange an appointment with Professor Leigh for the next afternoon and to ask Mrs. Swan to motor up from Connecticut; she herself would arrive on the early train.

The visit in Williamstown went well, and in the next week Leigh met with the McCulloughs and Kilpatrick in New York. He was then offered the presidency on condition that he pass a final test in meeting with the entire board on Jan. 3, 1928 when he would be expected to comment on Kilpatrick's form letter about the college and Miss Kelly's proposals. At the January meeting, according to Mrs. McCullough, Leigh set forth "in masterly fashion" his "views and convictions" as to the type of college he would like to see established in Bennington, and when he left the trustees unanimously voted his appointment as president.

After dinner with the McCulloughs, Dr. Leigh talked with Mrs. Leigh by phone and then announced his acceptance of the Bennington presidency. The salary agreed on was \$10,000 with an additional 5 percent toward his annuity, and his tenure was to be indeterminate; that is, he might continue indefinitely or he might be asked to resign — in effect, dismissed — at any time but with due notice and a year's salary. At the Feb. 8 trustee meeting Leigh offered a contrasting view of the presidential tenure when he placed on file his resignation, to take effect seven years later unless he was reappointed on the recommendation of a committee of outside experts. Later the presidential term was reduced to five years, like the faculty's; but the president, unlike a faculty member, had no recourse if asked to resign within the five-year period though he would continue to draw his pay for a year.

The election of a president after the disheartening search was, in Mrs. McCullough's words, "a tremendous relief to us all," and the trustees now turned almost lightheartedly to building plans and fundraising with no premonition of the trials that awaited them. In April, 1928, the trustees chose Ames and Dodge of Boston to be the architects on the recommendation of Mrs. Franklin's committee, and in the following October the architects were instructed to draw up specifications to carry out the plans they had submitted. The trustees cheerfully expected the college to open in September, 1929. Actually, however, they had not even reached the halfway point between September, 1923, when Dr. Booth sent up his trial balloon at Mrs. Eddy's tea party, and the arrival of students in September, 1932. The college now had a charter, trustees and a president; and the search for a president had shown where power lay. Although

Booth and some of his party were on the committee, Mrs. Swan, chairman, Mrs. McCullough and Kilpatrick were the active members. Kilpatrick had no hesitation in exercising a veto power as when he wrote opposite the name of President Aydelotte of Swarthmore, a man Booth admired, "An undoubtedly good man if we wish to repeat at Bennington what he has already been doing. I don't think so."

Still there was no consensus on what sort of a college the Kilpatrick philosophy would produce, the funds so far pledged were totally inadequate, and the country's worst depression was soon to break.

CHAPTER 4

LEIGH AND MORE BROCHURES

Robert Devore Leigh was born in Nelson, Nebraska, in 1890 and grew up in Seattle, Washington. In 1910 Robert came East to Bowdoin where he proved to be a serious, able and ambitious young man, and he graduated in 1913 with the only *summa cum laude* Bowdoin awarded that year.

During 1914-1915 Leigh was a graduate student in political science at Columbia and there met and married Mildred Boardman, who received a bachelor's degree in education from Teachers College that year. In the summer of 1915 they moved to Portland, Oregon, where Leigh began his teaching career at Reed College, which in its four years had already demonstrated that learning flourishes in the absence of grades, fraternities and extracurricular distractions. Leigh's three years at Reed profoundly influenced his educational outlook and his Bennington faculty members were to hear annoyingly frequent references to Reed College as exemplar. In 1918, the Leighs moved to Washington, D.C., where he took a war job with the Public Health Service. Then they returned to Columbia where he taught and continued his pursuit of a doctorate while Mrs. Leigh earned a master's degree in education at Teachers College.

When Leigh was invited to join the Williams College faculty in 1922, his colleagues at Columbia advised him to decline, saying that Williams would be a dead end. With this in mind Leigh wrote President Garfield that he would not consider leaving Columbia for less than a full professorship and mentioned a salary absurdly out of line with his age, experience and degrees. Garfield was then trying to rejuvenate the Williams faculty by appointing promising young teachers as full pro-

fessors, and he immediately appointed Leigh the A. Barton Hepburn Professor of Government, though Leigh would not have his doctorate for another five years.

Leigh taught at Williams until he assumed the Bennington presidency in June, 1928. For some years he was chairman of the government department, helped organize honors work, and for a time administered an inter-departmental course on national problems. President Garfield wrote Mrs. McCullough that Leigh was one of the "young professors who have done much to leaven our college life." In reply to specific questions he said that he could not be sure about Leigh's sense of humor, that he had "an international mind," and was a man of spiritual vision "but not aggressively so." Dr. Leigh was known to Williams students not as a brilliant lecturer but as a man of understanding and integrity to whom they could turn for counsel. In the fall of 1927 the fraternities chose him to arbitrate disputes under their Inter-Fraternity agreement.

During this time Mrs. Leigh defied local mores by being the first woman to run for membership on the school board. As her campaign advisor, her husband was given some credit for her victory. Professor and Mrs. Richard Newhall were well acquainted with the Leighs in Williamstown and recalled that Mrs. Leigh was able and energetic though some found her "difficult" and suggested that she violated local customs "with a conspicuous sense of moral virtue."

Neither of the Leighs looked forward to staying at Williams indefinitely and they were both delighted by the thought of the Bennington presidency. Leigh was convinced that only a new college could experiment with new ways of teaching and learning; existing institutions, he told the Bennington trustees on the eve of his appointment, were paralyzed by "traditions, prejudices, vested interests and administrative machinery." Mrs. Leigh looked forward eagerly to the role of president's wife, which she conceived to be that of an equal partner with her husband. Both viewed the doubling of his \$5,000 salary with equanimity and neither could have overlooked their own daughters' eventual interest in a Utopian college less distant than Reed.

Following his appointment to the presidency in January, 1928, Leigh finished out the year at Williams, though the Bennington trustees began at once involving him in money raising. He was frequently in New York to attend promotional lunches and dinners, and he began contemplating key appointments as if the college would materialize in 1929 or 1930. A few days after becoming president he wrote Mrs. McCullough that he was eager to meet Miss Amy Kelly and was confident that she would join the staff even if her program was not adopted. This suggests that Leigh did not know Miss Kelly, for she had warned Mrs. McCullough that if Bennington was not interested she would try to get her plans adopted elsewhere. Her

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

curricular scheme has been forgotten, but Miss Kelly is remembered as the author of *Eleanor of Aquitaine*, a scholarly biography published by the Harvard Press in 1950 and an instant best-seller.

When summer came and Williams College closed, even Leigh's sporadic services for Bennington ceased and he and his family went off to Europe at Bennington's expense. In February Mrs. Swan had informed the trustees that the General Education Board thought the new president should visit European schools and universities before getting down to work on specific plans for Bennington. The money was voted and soon after the Williams commencement the Leighs and their two daughters went to Europe for a long and memorable summer. It is not customary to give college presidents sabbaticals in advance, if at all, but the General Education Board was the dispenser of Rockefeller moneys and its advice was not to be taken lightly. Possibly also the trustees felt that a grand tour would give the president and his family something in common with the Bennington students and their families to whom European travel was commonplace. In Leigh's view the European jaunt was "sort of compensation" for the sabbatical that Williams would soon have owed him.

When the Leighs returned from Europe the president's house in Old Bennington was not ready, and in any case New York continued to be the Bennington College headquarters from September to June each year, until the spring of 1931. Consequently it was arranged that the Leighs should live in the capacious house of Mrs. Frederic B. Jennings at 109 East 73rd Street. Mrs. Jennings was Mr. McCullough's aunt and the mother of Mrs. George Franklin, an active trustee and later chairman of the board. Mrs. Jennings had already provided space for a college office in her New York home and was soon to give the college a substantial part of her North Bennington estate for its campus.

Settled in New York in the fall of 1928, Leigh was able for the first time to devote himself continuously to the propagation of Bennington College. As before his appointment, fund raising remained a constant but unproductive preoccupation. In hiring the John Price Jones Corporation to run a campaign, the trustees had hoped that this would solve all their financial worries. While still at Williams, Leigh said the hope was naive and argued for another approach. The idea of Bennington College, he said, appealed strongly to educators and the discriminating public, while people in general accepted the existing educational situation with complacency. The trustees should therefore appeal directly to a few persons of enlightenment and means, and for this John Price Jones was not required. The trustees agreed and in June paid off the public relations firm (the amount, \$23,602.64), leaving a balance on hand of \$1,009.33.

Following Leigh's line of thought, Mrs. McCullough and other trustees compiled lists of persons of discernment and wealth; and in due course

invited them to elegant luncheons and dinners to meet the new president. Leigh now discovered that his duties required him to fast for Bennington since month after month his probing and possibly skeptical questioners gave him little time to eat. Both he and Booth were authorized to write letters of appeal to various foundations; Austen MacCormick, a Bowdoin friend of Leigh's, was appointed "financial secretary;" and Booth was voted \$2,000 and expenses to visit Southern resorts in February and March of 1929 in search of donors who had escaped the trustees' drag net.

* * * * *

Even before the calamitous stockmarket crash in the fall of 1929, the intermediate goal of \$2,500,000 on which pledges were conditioned was being approached at a snail's pace, and at almost every trustee meeting someone remarked on the continuing lack of a prospectus. In the end it was Leigh who wrote the definitive statement of Bennington's aims and features, but before he could assert his leadership Mrs. Swan's "Committee on Educational Plans" had no hesitation in publishing two brochures which promptly followed Booth's prospectus into oblivion.

The first, prepared and published while Leigh was finishing out the year at Williams, was a handsome brochure of 32 pages on whose front cover was a colorful map of southwestern Vermont, northwestern Massachusetts, and adjoining New York as far as Troy, with all highways converging on Bennington. While the cover suggests the influence of the John Price Jones staff, which had not yet been paid off, the document as a whole is clearly the work of the trustee committee and particularly of Mrs. Swan and her mentor, Professor Kilpatrick. Indeed the first half of the text might well have been based on Kilpatrick's lecture notes.

The brochure begins by stating that the goal of all education is to "raise an individual human being to his highest possible effectiveness as a unit in society." To that end attention must be centered on the student, and instruction based on his "natural interest"; that learning be pursued by living, not merely listening; and that objectives include the development of independent reasoning, a sound body, emotional balance, character, skills and abilities of lifelong value, a social sense and ways to employ leisure constructively. The system itself must be dynamic and lead the way to "new advances in human thought and discovery." Then comes a section designed to emphasize the need for another women's college. The thrust of the argument was that existing colleges could not modernize their methods and curricula, even when they tried, primarily because of resistance by the faculty. Therefore there was need for a new college which could take account of the student's interests and needs in its curriculum and approach.

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

The final section on Bennington College is based in large part on Kilpatrick's form letter of 1926 and Leigh's statement prepared for the trustees on the eve of his appointment. The future Bennington College is therefore present in spirit and to some extent in its eventual bony structure. In selecting its students, Bennington would have no list of required entrance subjects, but would admit a student on the basis of her aptitudes and achievement "in and out of the classroom," and her "potentialities and personality" as revealed in interviews with the candidate, her parents and some of her teachers. In keeping with Kilpatrick's insistence that a student's most profitable course of study must be determined by her own interests and ambitions, the two pages on curriculum fail to say what would be taught. The implication, not very pleasing to the president-elect, was that no faculty would be appointed until student interests had been assessed, or that everyone appointed must be a general practitioner.

Bennington would have an opportunity to apply wholeheartedly the "methods and practices which have produced such remarkable results in experimental schools...Informal discussion, individual guidance, independent thinking and purposeful student activity rather than formal lectures, mass instruction and the mere accumulation of facts." Bennington will begin with the present interests of students and provide "the severe and lasting discipline of self-directed activity" rather than emphasize traditional subjects supposed to train the mind; and will help the students "to live a life of rich and broadening experience rather than teaching lessons which have only an abstract and remote reference to a life beginning with graduation."

The faculty will have to have "something more than scholarship, experience and professional standing." A determined effort will be made to obtain teachers "with the progressive zeal of whole-hearted believers in the standards and methods of modern education." It is probably fortunate for Bennington that its first president was more eager to search out good teachers than true believers and was himself totally lacking in zealotry.

Under the heading "Expected Results" the prospectus stated that the trustees hope that the graduates of Bennington will "be equipped to play loyally and effectively a woman's part in the home, in the community, and in the general work of society"; and that the thorough-going program at Bennington "will be of value to American colleges as a proving-ground for the underlying theories upon which it will organize its curriculum, method, faculty-student relations, and finance."

As the long-awaited prospectus of Bennington College, this trustee production had much to commend it, but neither it nor its sequel survived thoughtful scrutiny. The first half was excessively didactic in setting forth the precepts of progressive education without mentioning Bennington

College; and the second half revealed the college only dimly, as through a warm haze. On the last page the reader was promised another publication, "embodying the results of studies now being carried on," which would contain more detail on organization and curriculum and would state "definitely the sum which will be needed to establish the college..." That is, at the end of this expensive brochure, if not before, it becomes clear that the trustees were not yet sure precisely what they were proposing or how much it would cost.

The promised sequel, *Bennington College, a New College of Liberal Arts for Women*, appeared in March, 1929, and this too was the work of the trustee committee rather than the new president. Tinctured by euphoria appropriate to the times, this prospectus confidently promised that Bennington College would open in September, 1930; and gave plausibility to that assertion by devoting seven of its 20 pages to sketches and plans of the proposed buildings and to a photograph of the Old Bennington campus site with Booth's church in the background. In the sketches, provided by the architects, Ames and Dodge, handsome three-story brick dwelling halls, shaded by century-old elms, face each other across a broad green dominated from the west by an enormous "Educational Building" whose impressive central tower suggests that of a state capital building. A feature of the library is a high-ceilinged reading room in which pillars, singly, in pairs and in clusters of three, support a catwalk up a story and a vaulting arch far above. In the reading room there are chairs for ten students and one is actually reading.

Again the future Bennington College is pleasantly but only vaguely discernible in the three pages of text given to the educational "Plan and Program." The brochure was primarily promotional, with price tags on everything that a donor might choose to immortalize his name and assurance that gifts could be paid in installments. Ultimately \$4,000,000 would be needed, but \$2,500,000 must be in hand by May 1. Since \$850,000 was now pledged, the sum of \$1,650,000 in new gifts was urgently needed. That is, twice as much must be raised in two months than had been pledged in the preceding four years. Unfortunately, Bennington's stock failed to rise during the great bull market, even with the long-awaited brochures. One day before the May 1 deadline Mrs. Swan informed the trustees that the pledges then in hand were almost \$1,500,000 short of the \$2,500,000 goal, and on Leigh's recommendation the trustees then voted to postpone the opening until September, 1931.

From the time he took office Leigh should have been given full responsibility for preparing a definitive prospectus, but it is possible that Mrs. Swan and Kilpatrick rushed into print to provide the new president with sound guidelines. The fact is that they did not know him very well as yet, and further, considered themselves better qualified than he to draft a

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

Utopian model. Not yet established with the trustees, Leigh had failed in his first attempt to assert educational leadership. At a trustee meeting in November, 1928, he had proposed that Bennington College admit students after two years of high school and graduate them six years later after three years of orientation and three years of honors work. Unimpressed, and perhaps alarmed, the trustees referred Leigh's proposal to their Committee on Educational Plans, in whose charge it was genteelly forgotten. For many months following this setback Leigh appeared to have no function beyond explaining Bennington to likely donors, and with less mercenary intent addressing educational gatherings.

CHAPTER 5

THE PRESIDENT'S TURN

By the time it was clear that the definitive Bennington prospectus had still to be written, the trustees were ready to entrust Leigh with the task. And so, after the abortive attempts of Booth and the trustee committee, the new president was finally allowed to present his version of Bennington College. His prospectus, "The Educational Plan for Bennington College," published in December, 1929, purported to be a revision of the March brochure but had little in common with it. There were no pictures and no appeal for gifts beyond the statement that \$1,450,000 was "now needed" if the college was to open in September, 1931.

Leigh stated his plans and hopes for the college in 18 "Essential Features of the Bennington Program." These were listed at the beginning, then amplified and rationalized; and, unlike the earlier attempts, they were specific, unambiguous and proved to be a remarkable forecast of the college that was to open in September, 1932.

While Leigh's prospectus superseded the trustee publications, it did develop Kilpatrick's thesis that it was in fact the progressive education movement that was bringing the college into existence. The primary demand "for a thoroughgoing experiment in higher education along modern lines" came from the progressive schools, which constitute "one of the most formidable movements in our educational system." These schools have proved their worth, but they are constrained by college entrance requirements to be merely preparatory. There is need, therefore, for at least one college whose entrance requirements "will leave the

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

schools free to teach what they think best," and which, like them, will emphasize "individuality, direct experience, serious interest, initiative, creative and independent work, and self-dependence as educational aims." Of course this did not mean any discrimination against able graduates of the traditional schools.

To realize these aims Bennington would first seek and admit young women "of serious interest and of unusual promise in one or more of the four major fields...literature, the fine arts, the natural sciences and the social studies." Creditable completion of high school would not guarantee admission if interest and promise were lacking, but failure in single subjects, "such as Mathematics, Latin, or French," would be more than offset by outstanding success in other subjects.

Once in college the student would normally spend two years in the Junior Division, then two in the Senior Division. In her first two years she was to be offered "a two-year sequence of introductory courses" in each of the four major fields as well as "a trial major conference" in one of them. These beginning courses were not "required," for it was "a first principle of the College" that students differ and the differences should be reflected in their program of studies. But the student was not herself to decide what she would take. Bennington did not believe in the "free elective system." The program of studies for each student would be "individually prescribed by deliberate conference" between her and college officers in accord with "her present needs, aptitudes, and interests." Evidently in 1929 there was no thought of subjecting students to amateur "counseling" by the faculty; every student on arrival and thereafter would have the benefit of "expert staff guidance" for the solution of her "physical, mental, emotional and vocational problems." It was hoped that the "college officers" could enlist the faculty in their "personnel work" to the end of discovering what the modern young woman is really like.

During these first years the primary aim for the student and the college would be to discover the locale of her serious interest and the degree of her promise in it. Her work as a "trial major" would soon indicate whether she had chosen well or should transfer to a different trial major conference. If at the end of two years the student had given "clear evidence of distinct ability" in one of the four fields, she would be promoted to the Senior Division. Here for two years every student's program would be comparable to "the honors work now arranged for selected students in some of our better colleges." Her major would be broader than any academic department, and might even be organized around a future adult activity or vocation. Typically the student would be engaged "in projects involving continuous periods in the laboratory, library, or field," under the supervision of her major professor. (Leigh added "the studio" in later writing.)

If the student wished, she could pursue interests entirely outside her major, but more informally than by taking courses which would interrupt the continuity of advanced work. If the college lacked facilities essential to a major plan, the student would be encouraged to spend a term or a year in another institution that could meet her needs, though always under Bennington's "general supervision." The degree would be given on the basis of examinations, theses, or "other objective tests designed to reveal" accomplishment in the major field.

Under the heading "Community Life" the prospectus affirmed that the residential college, unlike the city university, has responsibilities beyond the scholastic; and what follows suggests that Leigh was very eager to create an optimum environment for what Kilpatrick had called "growth-living" in his form letter. Like hostels at the newer English universities, each student house would have its own dining hall and be in many respects self-governing. Every student would have an opportunity not only to practice citizenship, but to learn about "group budgeting, household management, hygiene, and other problems..." One or more faculty families would have apartments in each student house, other faculty members would be associated with it, and together students and faculty would make their house a cultural center with its own bill-of-fare, conversational style, entertainment, and in time traditions.

This ideal student house of 1929 never came into existence, but Leigh had better luck with his proposal on student activities. Too often, the prospectus stated, there is a deep gulf between student and faculty purposes on campus. In the classroom the professor is the interested, concerned performer, his students often no more than passive spectators. Outside the classroom the students create their own absorbing extracurricular activities in which their teachers have little or no part. Accordingly the solution is to incorporate the traditional enterprises of undergraduate life "in the main intellectual and artistic program sponsored by the faculty." If "trivial, imitative student organizations" spring up, "they can be effectively discouraged before they become fatally imbedded in institutional tradition."

What was to develop into Bennington's Non-Resident Term was described in the "Essential Features" as "a long winter recess giving students and faculty opportunity for travel, field work, and [the] educational advantages of metropolitan life." The idea of a two-month winter recess, compensated by a shortened summer vacation, had been approved by the trustees on the recommendation of the Committee on Educational Plans earlier in the year. Neither Leigh nor the trustees made a case for the innovation or stressed the educational possibilities in a long recess, but both agreed that Vermont was no place to spend the winter.

Leigh accepted Kilpatrick's law that institutions tend to become

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

"stupidly complacent," but he thought that Bennington could escape this dismal fate by limiting the terms of trustees and president and selecting the faculty with great care. To guard against the possibility of mistakes, not even full professors would receive permanent tenure until they had proved themselves in a three-year trial run. During this time they would perform under "the careful scrutiny" of a "capable faculty committee" and the president. From this summary it is clear that Leigh disregarded Kilpatrick's proposal that Bennington operate under the surveillance of some school of education; and that he then took for granted the conventional faculty ranks and eventual permanent tenure. Faculty ranks he was soon to discard, and in 1935 the trustees would accept a faculty recommendation that there be no permanent tenure at Bennington for anyone.

Nothing in the prospectus suggests that the bull market had ended with three days of panic in Wall Street two months before, or that anyone need doubt that affluence would continue. The total to be raised to build and finance Bennington College "for more than a generation" was stated to be \$4,000,000. The faculty would be paid ample salaries with upward adjustments to meet family needs; and the administration would include a large staff of experts for purposes of guidance and counsel. Scholarships and loans would be available to all those "who need and deserve such pecuniary aid." In addition, the country would be divided into twelve regions, in each of which a scholarship of \$1,000 to cover tuition and travel would be awarded annually to an outstanding student on the nomination of regional committees of laymen and educators. Soon numbering 48, these regional scholars would give the college "something of the valuable diversity of the large university"; and going farther afield, Bennington hoped to have six or more scholarships of \$1,600 for foreign students. The total scholarship endowment aimed at, according to the March brochure, was \$1,350,000.

The stockmarket crash and subsequent Depression scuttled some of these grandiose plans, but they gave the Bennington financial plan new significance. Tuition would be determined by the cost of instruction and so Bennington, unlike other colleges, would not subsidize students who could well afford to pay for their education in full. Mr. and Mrs. McCullough had advocated this plan even before they learned that Dr. Trevor Arnett of the Rockefeller Foundation was actively promoting it. They also charged that frequently the difference between tuition and the actual cost of instruction was made up not only by endowment but by "inadequate faculty salaries." The trustees had agreed and the Bennington financial plan was initially announced in the first Swan-Kilpatrick prospectus.

Whether Bennington could afford to charge the highest tuition in the country, then estimated at \$850 to \$875, would depend on its educational appeal; but Leigh had no doubts on this score and he assured donors that

once the college was built and a scholarship fund endowed, they need not fear further appeals for gifts (an assurance that later donors have graciously overlooked). Increased costs would be met by simply raising the tuition, and the college could give its "undivided attention to its primary educational work." The necessary corollary to this Utopian plan, of course, was scholarships on the basis of need for at least a quarter of the student body.

Leigh's prospectus stated that the Bennington program had taken shape as a result of six years of interviews, conferences, public meetings and surveys; but this statement is misleading. It is true that Leigh had at hand Miss Kelly's curricular proposals, the Wilkins plan, Kilpatrick's form letter and speeches, three discredited Bennington brochures, and various other recommendations and speculative predictions as to the nature of the projected college. But the six years had been characterized by fumbling and false starts rather than cumulative wisdom.

The college previewed in this booklet was clearly the overdue product of the potent progressive education movement which had notable schools to its credit in most large cities. Though its leaders including Professor Kilpatrick had said little about higher education, the 1920s and the 1930s were marked by soul-searching as to aims, by educational experiment, and by reform of the curriculum in many colleges.

Leigh's plan owed much to his own experience. He once remarked that he had learned what to do at Reed from 1915 to 1918 and what not to do at Williams from 1922 to 1928. He owed much also to his discussions with Mrs. Leigh. According to the Leighs' daughter Helen, it was Mrs. Leigh in fact who had "the truly original and innovative ideas" that went into the Bennington program. Leigh himself claimed no great originality for Bennington's 18 "Essential Features" most of which he said had been suggested by some specific school or college experience. But he did insist that Bennington alone could carry out the program as a whole, unlike existing colleges, for it would begin its life free of commitments, traditions and the "vested interests and conflicting aims of their faculty groups."

Had he been in fact "free of commitments" as he took over the Bennington presidency, Leigh might well have insisted on coeducation. It was Booth who had made the choice of a women's college in the beginning and the decision stood. Although coeducation was the rule in most progressive schools, Kilpatrick graciously concurred with the Booth preference and at the Bennington conference in 1924 he stressed the importance of educating women since, being recently enfranchised, they would now have a major role in public affairs. In contrast Leigh favored coeducation and he saw to it that his two daughters had a year of it before graduating from Bennington. Nevertheless he agreed with the trustees that the young men who might come to Bennington would not compare

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

with the young women since parents would be less willing to take risks with their sons' educations than with their daughters'. A survey of Bennington parents some time after the opening suggests another explanation. Some 80 percent of the mothers had never gone to college and so no college had any claim on them or their daughters. In contrast three-fourths of the fathers were college graduates who tended to expect their sons to follow in their footsteps even if they did not say, "Son, you can go wherever you wish but I'll pay your way through Yale." Coeducation was discussed from time to time, but the decision against it was not seriously challenged until the 1960s.

Copies of the brochure were widely distributed in the educational world, and comments and criticism were solicited. By the end of January, 1930, there were enough enthusiastic replies to warrant their publication. The educational crusader Edward Yeomans, whose *Shackled Youth* had impressed the McCulloughs, wrote from his Ojai School that he was refreshed by Bennington's educational plan and "encouraged to believe that we are emerging definitely and beautifully from traditions which bound the human spirit without cutting any ties which serve as roots." Heads of other progressive schools agreed that Bennington would fill an urgent need; one of them was "most enthusiastic about its promise as a step toward the more liberal, yet sound, type of education for women"; another thought the statement one of "the most important educational announcements made in the United States in this century"; another was pleased "that at last we are to have a thorough experiment in progressive college work"; a fourth felt that much thought and courage were evident in the proposals and concluded that Bennington had attacked "all the major sins of the present college world."

The other 20 whose commendatory letters were quoted from included Frederick P. Keppel, president of the Carnegie Corporation, professors and state commissioners of education, university deans, and three men who had had a chance to become Bennington's first president — Robert Hutchins, Samuel Capen and Ernest H. Wilkins.

Also included in the leaflet was an article by Ralph Barton Perry, professor of philosophy at Harvard, which appeared in the *Harvard Alumni Bulletin*. Perry remarked on "a certain quality of imaginative idealism" that pervaded the Bennington plan, and asserted that Bennington "can be experimental through and through," unlike existing institutions which are constrained by "tradition, customs, personnel, plant, and divided opinion." Having no existence "save in the creative imagination of its founders," Bennington was free to try experiments which were "elsewhere piecemeal and scattered."

Over the winter of 1929-1930 Leigh further raised Bennington's visibility by addressing some 42 groups of educators, whom he found to be

uniformly enthusiastic about the projected college. He reported to the trustees in May that he was more convinced than before that "Bennington was distinctly within the swing of tendency in American education....The task of founding it does not require blind faith and quixotic courage so much as patient resolution and continuing application of intelligence to our specific problems."

CHAPTER 6

DISMAL OPTIONS AND A HAPPY ENDING

Unfortunately the hearty acclaim of the educational community was not legal tender, and the financial outlook became increasingly bleak following the stock market crash. The nation's collapsing economy not only dimmed the prospect of finding new donors but raised doubts that present supporters would be able to fulfill their pledges. Appeals to the foundations brought in \$25,000 from the Carnegie Corporation for the library, but the Rockefeller Foundation, the Julius Rosenwald Fund, and the Commonwealth Fund politely declined to help.

In dismay the trustees put their building plans in abeyance in December, 1929, then instructed Leigh to seek economies to reduce the interim goal of \$2,500,000, and postponed the opening of college to September, 1932. Returning to the thought that a professional fund raiser would help, they hired Frederick Kent, who had been with the firm of Tamblyn and Brown, at the same salary as the president. Then, for lack of a better idea, the trustees voted to convene another educational conference to find out if Bennington College was still needed.

The conference was held in the Governor McCullough mansion in North Bennington on June 20 and 21, 1930. Among the educators present and denominated "advisors" were John Gaus from the Experimental College at the University of Wisconsin, later a Bennington trustee; Robert Lynd of Columbia and Helen Lynd from Sarah Lawrence College, which had just opened; and the heads of progressive schools. Under the guidance of Kilpatrick the conferees heartily endorsed almost every feature of the Bennington plan. Less heartily they voted 19 to 5 for a woman's rather than a coeducational college, and then divided almost equally on whether

it should be located in Bennington as planned or closer to some metropolitan center. They then urged that the college open in 1931, and suggested that to offset Bennington's high tuition, the schools provide scholarships for their most promising students and that Bennington raise its tuition 1 or 2 percent to provide an ample scholarship fund.

These financial suggestions were not helpful and the trustees immediately reiterated their intention of opening the college in 1932. Moreover, the educators' doubt that Bennington was the ideal location for a women's college seemed outright unfriendly, though the doubt was by no means new. In 1924, President Angell of Yale had written McCullough with his typically ungracious candor that he thought it "a somewhat grave blunder" to proceed with the college at Bennington "without due knowledge of the possible advantages of other locations."

An officer of the Carnegie Corporation had questioned the wisdom of locating in Bennington "without some prospect of a peculiar and distinct service to education, a prospect which does not as yet appear." And Leopold Stokowski had advised the trustees to move to California where they could find a perfect setting for a modern college.

Booth's successful solicitation in the Bennington area in 1925 had seemed to rule out the idea of locating elsewhere, but the Wall Street collapse gave rise to doubt that sufficient funds could be raised for a college in Bennington. This doubt led the trustees to consider some specific proposals for pooling resources with other institutions and leaving location open to negotiation. In the spring of 1930, President J. L. Meader of Russell Sage College in Troy suggested a merger, and several conferences were held in May and June before the idea was abandoned.

According to Mrs. McCullough, Miss Mary Woolley, president of Mount Holyoke, invited Bennington to locate nearby as a sister college, presumably to take in Mount Holyoke's bright students who could not master mathematics; a similar invitation came from the president of Wells College; and an Episcopalian bishop offered a block of building in Kansas City. The trustees turned down a gift of \$750,000 contingent on building in Peekskill and declined the offer of a private school in Tarrytown after learning that Bennington would have to pay debts of \$150,000 and handsome annuities to the headmistress and her family.

During 1930, two proposals were made for an arrangement with Sarah Lawrence, which had opened in Bronxville as a junior college in 1928. Leigh's discouragement led him to the bizarre proposal that Sarah Lawrence become a four-year college, and that Bennington, Russell Sage and Skidmore federate as junior colleges and send their graduates to Sarah Lawrence to enjoy the advantages of metropolitan resources after two years in the country. He thought that the plan might be funded by Rockefeller money, and noted that no president would have to be

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

decapitated.

Late in 1930, President Neilson of Smith urged Leigh to consider Bennington's amalgamation with Sarah Lawrence if the financial outlook remained unfavorable. Though he had been one of Bennington's staunchest sponsors, he admitted that he was "doubtful of the appropriateness of Bennington as a site for a college laying stress on music and the fine arts. You will be at a great disadvantage for concerts and galleries...Sarah Lawrence has many of the same ideals and derives great advantages from its proximity to New York."

Leigh took this advice seriously and early in 1931 went to see Dr. Henry N. McCracken, president of Vassar who was chairman of the Sarah Lawrence trustees, and Miss Constance Warren, president of Sarah Lawrence. This led to the appointment of a committee of Bennington trustees to confer with Sarah Lawrence trustees, but that summer building began on the Bennington campus, Sarah Lawrence had decided to become a four-year-college, and the thought of amalgamation or even cooperation faded from view.

A simple alternative to merging with another institution was giving up the ghost. During the summer of 1930 the trustees decided that the time had come to face the fact that Bennington College might have to be written off as a lost cause. The crucial meeting was held on Sept. 3 in the Old Academy Library in Old Bennington with Professor Kilpatrick presiding. Leigh had provided the trustees with copies of a drastically revised financial plan already approved by the Executive Committee. By reducing the number of students from 325 to 240, eliminating the gymnasium, changing from brick to wood in the student dwellings, and risking some temporary buildings, Leigh was able to lower the immediate financial goal from \$2,500,00 to about \$1,250,000. With all students but those on scholarship paying the full cost of instruction, Leigh looked ahead to a surplus of \$14,328 at the end of 10 years, and he strongly urged that they proceed. "If our own efforts and expenditures come to nought," he said, "our only consolation will be that others will reap where we have sown."

However attractive Leigh's economy plan might have appeared in 1928, the trustees who gathered in the Old Bennington library were obliged to examine it against the backdrop of the worsening Depression. Even before the Wall Street crash Booth's earliest backer, Colgate, had indicated his doubts about the direction the college was moving by failing to attend trustee meetings after June, 1928, and two months after the crash he submitted his resignation as treasurer. In the summer of 1930 he notified the trustees that he would not renew his offer of a campus site on Mount Anthony. This he was free to do since his offer had been conditional on \$2,500,000 being raised by that fall. He said further that he could not take responsibility for going ahead with the college even under the revised

plan. By the time the trustees met on Sept. 3, the loss of the 45 acre site in Old Bennington had been more than compensated by the offer of 140 acres of the Frederic B. Jennings estate in North Bennington. How the shift in locale might affect local donors was problematical, though no one was surprised when Henry W. Putnam withdrew his pledge of \$100,000. On the other hand, it had been known for almost two years that Old Bennington's water supply, unlike North Bennington's, was inadequate and that it might cost as much as \$100,000 to provide water for a college on the Colgate site.

At their afternoon session the trustees discussed Bennington's prospects inconclusively and gloomily. As they adjourned for dinner it was clear that even the stalwarts had their doubts, and that the decision could go either way. Mrs. Swan was an ardent supporter, but she had with her a letter from Dr. Abraham Flexner of the General Education Board warning that under the circumstances Bennington College had no chance. McCullough recalled that at one point Hull, who had pledged \$100,000, remarked to him privately, "Maybe we best let the old cat die."

After dinner and further indecisive talk, McCullough proposed that each trustee state his position informally. Kilpatrick agreed and at once asked McCullough to begin. Though taken by surprise, McCullough realized that the chairman wanted an initial statement in strong support of going ahead rather than discouraging remarks from trustees of little faith. McCullough admitted that the chances of succeeding were not bright but said he was convinced that they should "carry on and if necessary go down with all flags flying." If they quit or held the plan in abeyance, they could never hope to resurrect it and they would be setting back the liberalizing of education for years. The chairman then called on trustees on McCullough's left, who favored proceeding, rather than the doubters on his right. Leigh's secretary, Polly Bullard Holden, the only survivor from that meeting, clearly recalls "Mrs. McCullough's spirited and courageous fight talk that won the day." Before the pessimists had their turn the waverers had joined the stalwarts and the vote was 8 to 3 for proceeding on the basis of Leigh's revised plan. McCullough was convinced that the vote might have gone the other way had it not been for what he called Kilpatrick's quick thinking.

The decision to proceed was gratifying to the faithful but there was no elation. Not unexpectedly, two trustees who had spoken and voted against continuing resigned. Vernon Munroe had been the trustee treasurer and Arthur Ballantine had been chairman of a fund drive so that both had prior reason to believe that Bennington's cause was hopeless. Colgate could no longer be counted on as a backer or major donor though he remained a trustee to the end of his term in 1932.

The economy gave no sign of revival and the trustees prudently agreed

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

that building should begin in the spring only if validated pledges and new contributions came to \$1,250,000 by April 1, 1931. The elaborate architectural plans of Ames and Dodge had to be scrapped and more modest buildings designed to fit into the Leigh economy package. No one knew whether penny-pinching would deprive the college of some of the enthusiastic support it had enjoyed.

In the local community the shift to North Bennington cost the college some of its friends and \$155,000 in pledges, according to Leigh, though the Depression may have brought about some of the cancellations. The losses were compensated by increased commitment of the McCullough and Jennings families and by a slowly broadening base of sponsors elsewhere. Though less interested and supportive, Old Bennington continued to be represented on the board by Booth and Mrs. Arthur Holden. James S. Dennis, a Colgate son-in-law, was made a trustee in 1932 soon after moving to Old Bennington and his serving had a heroic quality. At least he once told Mrs. Julian DeGray that he considered Kilpatrick, board chairman, "the most dangerous radical he had ever met." Kilpatrick's opinion of his Bennington colleagues may soon be revealed since his voluminous diaries are to be unsealed in 1984.

The Colgates maintained pleasant relations with the college and when it opened entertained students and faculty at formal dinners and responded to appeals for gifts in 1936 and 1938. In 1933 Leigh was given an honorary degree by Colgate University at the prompting of Mr. Colgate, chairman of its board; and later three Colgate granddaughters attended Bennington. On its part the college devised an ingenious explanation of the campus shift from Old Bennington to North Bennington which concealed the fact that Colgate had decided against renewing his offer of a campus on Mt. Anthony. Leigh wrote prospective donors that "the site pledged by Mr. James C. Colgate is to be released, Mr. Colgate having cordially approved the larger site."

Booth was hardest hit by the Colgate defection and the shift to North Bennington. He could no longer hope that Old Bennington would be revitalized by a college in its midst, and he could no longer count on improvement in church attendance over the long winters. But the president's house was to remain in Old Bennington until 1941 and it was generally assumed that faculty families would settle in Old Bennington when they had had their fill of life on the campus. In fact some 15 faculty and administrators lived in Old Bennington at one time or another during the 1930s. In recent years the number has not been more than three or four.

If the faculty were to live in Old Bennington, Booth could look forward to a type of association he had missed as well as to the possibility of lecturing at the college and conducting student tours of Old Bennington and the Bennington battlefield.

Following the crucial decision of Sept. 3, Booth was given the familiar task of renewing Bennington pledges, and the New York trustees returned to their tactic of inviting prospective donors to lunch or dinner. The results were disappointing and Leigh wrote Mrs. McCullough in November, 1930, that going ahead with the college was no longer a strong probability but a "more or less remote possibility." He wished the trustees to know that he would resign as president in January if prospects had not materially improved. At that time the trustees should decide whether to liquidate the Bennington project and "throw such of our resources as can be transferred into the best available going concern." In a letter of Dec. 5 Professor Coss, Leigh's one-time colleague at Columbia and then a Bennington trustee, argued strongly against a crucial decision before the April deadline and against abandoning the original concept of a college in Bennington:

"As I view the circumstances round about us, the people who have been interested, the bonds of interest and the feeling of loyalty which have grown up to an idea, to a place, and to a four-year college with Robert Leigh as President, I cannot believe that we should be wise in doing anything but follow through to the best of our strength and ability until the last curtain be rung down."

The decision was put off until April while fund-raising efforts continued. Mrs. McCullough recalled that she narrowed the gap substantially by pledging the income on some stocks her uncle had just willed her but felt guilty because he had warned her against involvement with the college. Henry Wells, he had kept telling her, died in the poorhouse after founding Wells College. She added that the more respectable of her uncle's investments proved worthless while his shares of Chiclets Chewing Gum and American Cigar and Snuff helped Bennington survive its latest crisis.

As the deadline approached several \$5,000 checks arrived in response to urgent telegrams, but the trustees had not met the stipulation of \$1,250,000 when they convened in the first week of April, 1931. There were only seven trustees in attendance, and it seemed a suitable occasion to throw in the sponge. But of the five ladies present, four had daughters who were looking forward to attending Bennington, and Kilpatrick and McCullough were both determined to keep the enterprise alive. Predictably they decided to put off the final vote to April 29.

When that day came the goal had apparently been reached and there was an air of jubilation in Bennington's New York office until someone noticed that Hull's pledge of \$100,000 had not been renewed. Before the trustees arrived Leigh telephoned Hull in San Francisco, but found him deeply depressed over the economy and unwilling to renew his commitment. If pressed for an immediate answer he would have to say no but he

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

would be willing to talk it over when he arrived in New York. Consequently the trustees were obliged to set another deadline and vote to proceed with building, selection of faculty, and admission of students only if the Hull pledge stood. In New York two weeks later Hull remained skeptical, felt that the world was "sliding out from under us"; yet finally said, "You people seem to want it so, I'll go with the ship."

CHAPTER 7

CELEBRATION: BUILDING, RECRUITING

With the last obstacle removed in mid-May, 1931, the trustees looked forward to the opening of the college in September, 1932. They authorized Leigh to begin selecting a faculty; confirmed the appointment of Mrs. Mabel Barbee-Lee, former dean of women at Colorado College, as director of admissions; told Ames and Dodge to rush the revised plans to completion so that building and remodeling could begin; and chose Sunday, August 16, Bennington Battle Day, for a victory celebration in the guise of a ground breaking on the campus given by Mrs. Jennings.

The ceremony was held at 5 p.m. in the quadrangle of the sturdily built dairy barn that was soon to be transformed into classrooms, laboratories, library and offices. The Bennington community had been invited through the press and local pulpits and assured that no speech would last longer than five minutes; individual invitations, written and phoned, had gone out to 231 donors, hundreds of educators and parents, and selected notables. The response was a colorful audience of more than a thousand men, women and children from far and near who joined in the celebration seated, standing or in motion.

Into the masonry structure that had been a silo base was fitted a circular platform from which musicians directed by Franz Lorenz opened and closed the program, and the speakers addressed their audience. Leigh presided and introduced the speakers after his own brief statement of college aims. He assured his audience that Bennington would not forget the past in its study of the contemporary, but asserted that emphasis would be on "the actual, the changing world which our students are living in, its

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

art, its literature, its science, its social organization and its other features which have not yet been caught up and organized into academic subjects."

Gov. Stanley C. Wilson brought greetings on behalf of the state of Vermont and remarked that it was fitting that they were speaking from a silo base since "both silos and colleges are supposed to take green things and through great fermentation mature them." He referred to Bennington's founders as modern pioneers endowed with great courage and persistence, and thought it highly appropriate that they should establish in Vermont a college which placed a higher value on freedom than on rules and regulations.

Bringing greetings from the women of Vermont, writer Dorothy Canfield Fisher compared the ceremony to the launching of a ship of exploration. Just elected a trustee of the College, Mrs. Fisher assured her listeners that Bennington's educational exploration would not be left to chance, but would be directed "by wisdom and inventiveness, and characterized by proportion and balance as well as by enthusiasm and courage."

In spite of his recent advice that Bennington College should move to an urban site, President Neilson of Smith brought congratulations and the assurance of warm sympathy from the older women's colleges and said they expected to learn valuable lessons from Bennington. He felt that the main obstacle to the higher education of women in the United States was the lack of funds and he urged Bennington to join the other women's colleges in persuading the public to value the education of its daughters equally with that of its sons. He illustrated the magnitude of that task by noting that gifts to Harvard during the past year equalled the sum of all the gifts Smith had received over the past 60 years.

Neilson was followed by Professor William E. Rappard, the Swiss scholar and jurist, later director of the Institute of International Studies in Geneva, who was then attending the Institute of Politics in Williamstown. Dr. Rappard said he brought greetings from Europe to America and from Geneva to Bennington; and he expressed the hope that Bennington College would contribute to international peace by developing the habit of intellectual impartiality in its students.

The emotional climax came when Booth stood up to begin the materialization of Bennington College by lifting the first spadeful of earth. At that instant, in Mrs. McCullough's words, "the one thousand people present rose in a body and gave him a standing ovation. It was a great moment as his dream of eight years had finally been realized." Before turning the sod, Booth recalled a saying in the Near East that no structure would stand for long if it had not been dedicated by human sacrifice, and asserted that sacrifice had given Bennington College its chance. Time and again in the long arduous uphill struggle the task had seemed hopeless,

but "each time defeat was turned into victory by the spirit of sacrifice." He said that many had "sacrificed to the limit," and prophesied that the college would stand as long as its friends continued to be moved by that same spirit.

Robert Frost, who lived nearby, had been invited to attend and contribute a poem but he did neither. Bennington College was honored by a poem by William Travers Jerome, a Colgate son-in-law, that appeared in the *Bennington Banner* the day of the ceremony. This victory celebration brought the college its first mention in *Time* which said that Bennington's promising young women would be released "from strict curricular bondage."

Between the ground breaking and the opening of college a year later, the farm buildings had to be remodeled for their educational function and new structures built and furnished. A faculty and administrative staff had to be found and engaged; students had to be attracted and, if enough applied, selected; and more money had to be raised to complete the building program.

The Building Committee now came into its own after years of frustration and diminishing prospects. Under the able chairmanship of Mrs. George S. Franklin the committee had invited contractors to bid on the revised plans and shortly before the ground breaking a \$600,000 contract was signed with E. J. Pinney of Springfield, Mass., and excavation began. Eight weeks after the ceremony the *Banner* reported that grading had been completed and grass sown, rapid progress had been made on the foundations of the Commons building and on the four student houses, and all buildings would be roofed over before snowfall. More than a hundred men were at work, most of them local carpenters, electricians, plumbers, drivers of trucks and tractors and day laborers who had known little employment since 1929.

The construction and remodeling planned for the first year approached completion by early August of 1932. The red barn which had once housed cows, pigs and sheep was reconstituted and extended to become the center of instruction and administration. The farmhouse known as Cricket Hill and the brooder were transformed into apartments and the chicken house where the president had his first office on campus, was turned into a music building.

The lower level of the campus was dominated by the imposing new Commons building, which was not unlike that originally designed by Ames and Dodge. On the west side were four neat white student dwellings, each with a faculty apartment and an elegantly furnished living room. These were to be matched by four houses on the east side in another year, and later by two on either side at the south. The terracing and first plantings were planned by Mrs. Martha Brooks Hutchison, a landscape

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

architect, who contributed her services; but the plans were modified in the direction of economy by Miss Louise De Wilde, household manager for Mrs. Jennings as well as her friend and companion, who was herself an experienced horticulturist. Under Miss De Wilde's direction the nakedness of the brand-new buildings was rapidly countered by what she intended to be temporary planting. This included conifers, apple trees and native shrubs such as lilac, honeysuckle and viburnum. The magnificent elms on the campus (most of which have now succumbed to Dutch elm disease) date back to 1932-1933 when 30-foot trees were moved onto the campus from the Jennings and McCullough estates. This remarkable feat required careful trenching and root-pruning in the fall and transplantation in the dead of winter when the trees were dormant. Like the other planting this operation was carried out by the Jennings groundsmen and neighboring townsmen whom the Depression had put out of work.

Leigh began pondering the faculty and staff he would need from the moment he became president in 1928, and he had an impressive list of interested possibilities by May, 1931, when the last doubts were laid to rest. Names had come to him from trustees, from his Columbia connections, and from applicants who had been impressed by the Bennington educational plan. He was careful to check the references in every case, but he had great faith in the interview for choosing faculty, and whenever possible he asked Mrs. Leigh to be present. The widespread belief that a candidate could relax if and when Mrs. Leigh smiled was by no means groundless.

In his search for a teaching faculty, Leigh was looking for young men and women who had an "understanding of and enthusiastic interest in" their own fields, undergraduate students and "the principles and problems of modern education." Earlier he had predicted difficulty in recruiting a faculty, but he was pleasantly surprised to find himself in a buyers' market in 1931-32. Owing to the Depression, the attractive tone and provisions of the Bennington educational plan, and the salaries Leigh was prepared to offer, there was no dearth of promising candidates, and Leigh wrote Mrs. McCullough in February, 1932, that "we have an almost bewildering array of riches for the faculty." As early as April he was able to announce key faculty appointments and by early summer the roster was complete.

Leigh had once assumed that Bennington faculty would be conventionally titled instructor, assistant professor or full professor and that the last of these would enjoy permanent tenure. In 1931 he drew up an elaborate plan which provided that he share the thankless task of promoting from one rank to the next with a Faculty Council. Paul Garrett was appointed "assistant professor of physics," but no mention of professorial rank was made again. While Leigh's own experience convinced him that the

institution of promotion gave rise to campus intrigue and ill will, it is possible that he came to his decision as he puzzled over the rank of an instructor in art or music who had never attended college. At any rate he saved himself and his successors an invidious task.

More dissonant in the Bennington scheme of things than professorial ranks were two titles that Leigh invented in his first round of appointments. Since Bennington was to have neither departments nor department heads, it is curious that Leigh appointed Kurt Schindler Director of Music and Edwin A. Park Director of Art. The explanation may be that Leigh was uncertain how music and art should be incorporated in the liberal arts curriculum, sought out men he hoped could do what he could not do, and gave them and their fields whatever prestige the title might confer. With the college in operation it soon became evident that prestige had other sources, and the titles were excised from the catalogue after two years.

A month before college opened, members of the faculty arrived for their introduction to each other and to the administration and for the meetings Leigh had planned to prepare them to function knowledgeably in the Bennington mode. They had presumably studied the Educational Plan of 1929; they were now brought up to date both by Leigh and by the Bennington College catalogue, entitled simply "Announcement for the First Year," which had just come from the printer. Bennington's 18 "Essential Features" were not listed and it was no longer thought necessary to devote two pages to Bennington's distinguished sponsors. Yet the earlier publication was followed in theory and spirit and in its description of a two-year Junior Division for exploration, the selection of a field for concentration by means of a "trial major," and promotion to the Senior Division of students judged capable of advanced and independent work. Each division was to offer an introductory course, which was not "an encyclopedic survey," but rather a sampling of what was "most significant, vital and representative in the field"; each was to plan its trial major and workshops to teach techniques as they were needed. To offset the centrifugal consequences of individual programs and pursuits, Leigh asked that the introductory courses concern themselves with "modern western civilization," and particularly with contemporary American culture.

Here in the catalogue Leigh for the first time listed 10 aims or articles of faith which he felt underlay the whole Bennington program, included brief biographies of the faculty, assigned the faculty counseling responsibilities beyond their teaching duties, and, ignoring Kilpatrick's apprehension about curriculum, indicated fairly clearly what would be taught in the four divisions.

Leigh's statement on aims began with the assertion that education continues through life and is most rewarding if it is self-initiated and

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

independently pursued. The college can develop the capacity for such educational self-dependence if each student works at her own pace at tasks which have meaning for her, and if she acquires mastery in one or more fields of enduring interest. Mastery may be facilitated by such direct experiences as planning, manipulating and constructing along with reading. It is not facilitated by such external disciplines as compulsory class attendance, grades and prizes, "periodic examinations on formalized blocks of knowledge," and the mere accumulation of credits, which may seriously interfere with the development of "real incentives and internal disciplines." Such tools of learning as statistics should be mastered as needed and in conjunction with the purpose for which they are needed rather than as separate disciplines.

Since intellectual development cannot be isolated from the development of the whole personality, general college arrangements, and particularly individual guidance, should "give proper weight to physical, emotional, moral, and esthetic as well as to intellectual factors in personal growth." Finally, the college should cultivate in its students "attitudes of social cooperation, participation and responsibility rather than aloofness"; a "sympathetic, but objective and realistic understanding of the world of our own day as well as a sense of perspective derived from an understanding of the past; an attitude of suspended judgment towards the strange and the new, and tolerance towards people and customs alien to the student's own experience."

At the first briefing session the faculty questioned Leigh about his unkind remarks on "external disciplines." Some who had taught before considered class attendance, examinations and grades integral to the learning process, and they wanted to know how one would teach a class if no one turned up, judge a student without exams, or communicate the judgment without grades. Here the president as theoretician was challenged by the faculty as practitioners, and the equivocal decisions that emerged from the discussion suggest that Leigh was well aware of the political value of compromise.

First, it was agreed that "no official record of attendance" would be kept. While this ruled out reporting absences to the office, it by no means inhibited a faculty member from keeping a record of absences and dealing with them as he saw fit. Leigh conceded that examinations might prove useful on occasion and agreed that their use should be optional with the teacher, whatever the students might make of the catalogue statement. Finally it was agreed that students should be evaluated in writing each term and told that they had passed or failed a course but given no grades. A "confidential rating" of each student would be kept by the faculty and the administration. In practice what was kept was not a rating but only the faculty's written comments, and whenever grades were required on a

transcript a staff member nervously deduced them from the comments. Such guesswork in the office continued until the faculty began turning in confidential grades for transcript purposes during the administration of President Burkhardt.

The faculty's counseling duties, of which they were only now made fully aware, can be charged to the Depression. In the *Educational Plan of 1929* the task of guidance and advice was assigned to a battery of experts, and even program planning involved "college officers" rather than faculty. With the advent of hard times, however, Leigh eliminated most of the experts, and gradually convinced himself that his carefully selected faculty might be entrusted with the crucial function of counseling. In 1932, he declared that the student-counselor relationship occupied "a strategic place in the college plan." This assumed, however, that faculty members would resort to the college psychiatrist or the Committee on Student Personnel in matters beyond their own competence. Nevertheless, the faculty member was expected to take on responsibilities that went beyond teaching and for which he might have little liking or capability; and weekly conferences with six to 10 counselees were often to fill more hours in faculty schedules than class-room teaching. Perhaps unexpectedly, the counseling system was rated high among Bennington's features by both faculty and students at the end of the Leigh era.

During these last days before students arrived, Leigh completed the organization of faculty and staff. Instead of the usual departments there were to be four divisions of the arts, literature, science and social studies, each empowered to "decide upon policies and other matters within its jurisdiction," and choose its own chairman. The president was ex officio member of all divisions with a voice and vote at their meetings, and he appointed the division's administrative officer, often the chairman, who controlled the divisional budget and served on the faculty executive committee.

The faculty as a whole was to meet from time to time to discuss "major problems of College policy," and to hear committee reports. The executive committee would deal with "the usual business and budgetary matters affecting the faculty," though its decisions could be overruled by the faculty or ignored by the president. The important Student Personnel Committee included the director of admissions as chairman, the president, the director of records, the college psychiatrist and a single faculty member. Other faculty members would attend when the committee reviewed their own students' programs and progress. The committee had a decisive role in judgments affecting Junior Division students, but yielded to the major faculty in the case of Senior Division students. Other faculty-staff committees dealt with publications, buildings and grounds, and entertainment.

CHAPTER 8

LURING STUDENTS; THE TRUSTEES' ROLE

Hard times facilitated the recruitment of faculty and staff but not of students. The Bennington financial plan required parents who were not given financial aid to pay the full cost of their daughters' education, and this meant a tuition fee finally set at \$975 at the bottom of the Depression. In contrast, the tuition at colleges whose endowments covered a substantial part of their costs ranged between \$200 and \$450. With room and board at \$675 and a health fee of \$25, Bennington's total charges came to \$1,675. Leigh had informed the trustees that the Ivy League women's colleges' total charges came to about \$1,000, and that Bennington could be considered a bargain only in comparison to Sarah Lawrence whose fees totalled \$1,710. The Bennington fees appear even more formidable when compared with the disposable income per capita of about \$300. (That is, Bennington's total charges would now come to approximately \$16,750 if the initial ratio to disposable income had been maintained.)

The choice of Mabel Barbee-Lee to lure the first students to Bennington was one of Leigh's best appointments. Mrs. Barbee-Lee had read enough about Bennington to wish to contribute to its realization. She was well qualified educationally but she had been dean of women at Colorado College and assistant dean at Radcliffe and she knew that Bennington's president was dubious about deans and deaning. Fortunately, she had recently written an article in the *Atlantic Monthly* titled "Censoring the Conduct of College Women." In it she made it clear that she was no conventional dean and believed as did Leigh that college women should be treated as adults and given "browsing privileges in the field of

experience."

When Mrs. Barbee-Lee was called to Leigh's attention it was this article which persuaded him that as director of admissions she would be an admirable exponent of the Bennington approach to education. She arrived on the campus in the late summer of 1931. Her daughter Barbara writes that the college then "consisted of one old, dilapidated red barn, a few stacks of fresh lumber and bags of cement lying in a field. But a totally new and dizzying conception of a college for exceptional young women illuminated the air."

Mrs. Barbee-Lee was in full agreement with the admissions plan devised by Leigh and the trustees. Customary requirements in units and subjects were to be relaxed, and there was no entrance examination, but the quality of the school record and recommendations of principals and teachers were of vital importance. Blind spots in certain subjects would be overlooked provided they were offset by excellence elsewhere. This principle was not a Bennington monopoly. The Wellesley catalogue of 1932 stated that the Admissions Board might accept unusual excellence in one area as offsetting even failure in another; and it is probable that the principle was practised more widely than it was professed.

In September, 1931, Mrs. Barbee-Lee began visiting schools less as an interviewer than as a recruiter. Her aim was to persuade anyone who would listen that the Bennington offering would be well worth the extra cost, that the high tuition would be reduced in case of need, and that poor grades in mathematics or languages would not bar a student with ability and promise in other fields. Her problem, she later wrote, was to "find somewhere in the panic-stricken nation a freshman class of eighty girls whose parents didn't mind having them experimented on and who could somehow scrape up the tuition fee."

On the eve of his appointment, Leigh had told the trustees that he doubted the value of the interview in the process of selection but he must have conceded its worth in the art of persuasion. Mrs. Barbee-Lee enjoyed talking with students and there is little doubt that her early enthusiasm for Bennington made her an effective propagandist.

It is evident also that it was often the interview rather than the school record that apprised Mrs. Barbee-Lee of some skill or talent or quality that she thought would be appreciated and nourished at Bennington. When she herself was interviewed by a journalist late in 1931, she spoke rhapsodically of extraordinary young women whom she had picked less on their scholastic standing than on their apparent "intellectual vigor" and on a variety of extracurricular accomplishments including bell ringing and cabinet making.

About the same time she was telling her daughter "excitedly of the young women she had found, 'all brilliant, beautiful and individual!' She

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

was laughing and added slyly 'I've almost filled my quota, and Barbara-darling, I simply must find a few dull, homely girls for balance.' Barbara remembers thinking "not a chance...for she would never regard those girls as anything but rare and beautiful."

At various times Leigh had assured the trustees that there would be no difficulty in finding students, and Mrs. McCullough was under the impression that applications outnumbered possible openings by three to one as early as November, 1931. Actually the young women who made up the first class were chosen from a much smaller number. Early in June, 1932, Leigh told the trustees that 73 students had been admitted and that seven more would be chosen from the 31 applicants who awaited a decision. This was an ingenious way of saying that none of the 31 could be admitted without misgivings and that the seven openings were being held for better qualified applicants who might turn up. Furthermore there was no assurance that the students who had been admitted would come unless more scholarship aid was provided for even the habitually affluent were in financial straits. Leigh warned the trustees that additional funds for reduced tuition were "an absolute necessity" if they were to get a class by September. The trustees agreed and scholarships ranging between \$200 and \$1,000, and averaging \$541, were given to nearly 40 percent of the first class.

Eighty-seven students were finally chosen from 132 completed applications, a lower ratio of choice than the college had in any later year. That ratio may be not particularly significant. More than later, Bennington's first students and their families had a spirit of adventure, if not a positive fondness for risk taking, in addition to a preference for the kind of education Leigh promised to provide. Press releases went out as faculty members were appointed but the first catalogue did not appear until a month before the opening, a fact that reinforces the thought that applying to Bennington in those days was little less than an act of faith. That there were no vacancies at the opening was due in large part to Mrs. Barbee-Lee's tireless school visiting and her colorful description of a college that was not yet in existence.

One other administrative officer, a librarian, had to be functioning for a year before the opening. Leigh's ability to choose well and to delegate authority is illustrated by his appointment of Gladys Y. (Gyl) Leslie and his reliance on her as Bennington's first librarian. Mrs. Leslie grew up in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and worked in the town library there before moving to New York and graduating from what became Columbia's library school. She entered the New York public library system in 1913 and was supervisor of training in it when she was warmly recommended to Leigh with the prediction that he would not be interested because she had no college degree and no academic experience. Regarding these lacks on the

credit side, Leigh appointed her librarian in October, 1931, and told her to bring a library into being by September, 1932. With no further guidance Mrs. Leslie began ordering the books she was certain would be used and those asked for by faculty as they were appointed. By the opening some 2,500 books had been catalogued and shelved in the extended southeast wing of the Barn.

During the year that students and faculty were being recruited and a library stocked the trustees took full responsibility for the building program, the selection of furnishings and money raising. They also completed their own organization, made a momentous decision on their re-election, and chose a new chairman. To the original executive committee which had functioned before there was a charter, and the building, educational policies, and ways and means committees dating from 1928, the trustees added a budget committee, a finance committee and a nominating committee to recruit new trustees.

In the fall of 1931, the trustees noted that the seven-year terms of Mrs. McCullough, Booth and Colgate would end in the following year. The Bennington charter specified the length of term but said nothing about re-election. If a trustee were routinely re-elected every seven years, he might develop the somnolency which McCullough had warned against and then only death would provide a vacancy. Leigh reminded the trustees that two of Bennington's ill-fated brochures had stated that in the interest of rotation a trustee should not be immediately re-elected at the end of his term. The colleges he had written to were unanimously opposed both to life membership and to any rigid system of rotation. He added that "the problems of alumnae or faculty representation are not before us yet." (The age of student power was some decades ahead.) After discussion the trustees formulated a rule, later enacted as a bylaw, that no trustee who had served a seven-year term should, "save in exceptional cases," be considered for re-election without an interval of at least a year.

With this decided it was possible to allow Colgate's membership to end without affront to him while considering Mrs. McCullough and Booth as "exceptional cases" and immediately re-electing them. Actually all three left the board together. Mrs. McCullough was strongly urged to continue, but she insisted that it was unwise for two members of the same family to be on the board now that the college was assured, and she firmly declined to accept a second term of office.

No one had done more to bring Bennington College into being than Mrs. McCullough. As Booth once said, she had "worked on this project by day and by night, subordinating her rest, recreation, social engagements — everything — to the interests of Bennington College." In her *Recollections* Mrs. McCullough recounted the involvement of herself and her husband in the long struggle and noted that their son and

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

daughters were not untouched by the educational discussions that went on in their New York apartment:

"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 methods that were under criticism."

Though Mrs. McCullough was no longer a trustee, she set a useful precedent in consenting to serve as chairman of the nominating committee; and the trustees later decided that any committee might co-opt trustees who were "on sabbatical," as well as others who were not trustees.

In June, 1932, the nominating committee recommended that Booth be immediately re-elected because of his "intimate connection with the college as original planner [and] unwavering friend," and because he was "uniquely suited to represent Bennington on the board." But Booth himself insisted on abiding by the rule, and two years elapsed before he returned to the board. In his honor one of the first four student houses was named *Booth*, and the trustees later paid for a plaque in Booth's church which designated him the founder of Bennington College.

Before the trustee sabbatical rule hardened into a bylaw it was waived for Kilpatrick so that he might succeed Mrs. McCullough as president of the corporation and chairman of the board. In her memoirs, Mrs. McCullough recalled that Colgate once assured her that "a great leader would turn up" to relieve her of her duties. She felt that Kilpatrick's acceptance of the chairmanship fulfilled that prophecy though Colgate and Booth would certainly have demurred. A professor of educational theory seldom becomes chairman of the board of a college even when it is solidly founded, and the choice of Kilpatrick suggests that the trustees were not averse to risk taking and that they had achieved a working consensus on the nature of the college they were founding. Booth was no longer propounding Amy Kelly's six orientation courses, and was more or less resigned to what he considered domination by Teachers College. Kilpatrick's ideas on such specific matters as curriculum might continue to be puzzling, but he had made it clear that the president and faculty must finally decide what should be taught. Leigh was now in full command in this area and consequently disagreements were settled in his favor. A striking example was his refusal to include a Department of Education in the Bennington Plan though Kilpatrick had urged it.

If there were risks in giving a philosopher the chair, there may have been risks for Kilpatrick in identifying himself so conspicuously with the first college to put into effect much of his educational theories. Those risks,

however, were doubtless mitigated by the distance that separated the experiment from his professional base and source of income. As a member of the board in the 1920s, Kilpatrick had actively sought to shape the college along progressive lines; as chairman he now acted on his view that the role of the trustees was supportive rather than directive, a theoretical preference that was undoubtedly buttressed by his heavy schedule of lecturing, teaching and writing. Following Kilpatrick's retirement from the board, Leigh wrote that he more than anyone else had given "the college its educational form and direction," and, setting aside Leigh's own major role, no one need quarrel with that judgment.

By the opening the trustees included four of the original board, Mrs. Franklin, Kilpatrick, Hull and McCullough, and six others who had stayed with the ship through its worst perils, Mrs. J. Gardner Bradley, Mrs. Arthur Holden, Mrs. Irving Warner, Mrs. Clarence Woolley, Lindsay Bradford and Professor John J. Coss. Mrs. Swan and Booth were temporarily off the board though Mrs. Swan, like Mrs. McCullough, continued to be active on committees. These were the men and women who had kept the enterprise alive against all odds and sometimes against their own sober judgment. Year after year it had been almost impossible to fill vacancies as terms expired and resignations occurred. Yet even in the darkest days new recruits were eventually found, thanks in great part, Leigh once said, to the "quiet faith, solidity and enthusiasm" of Mr. and Mrs. McCullough. When the college was finally assured in 1931, trustee John J. Coss sent Mrs. McCullough his "enthusiastic congratulations" for having saved the college "for it is your sticking that did it more than anything else."

Among the steadfast during those precarious years were trustees whose daughters were eagerly counting on attending Bennington: Mrs. Franklin, Mrs. Poole, Mrs. Swan, Mrs. Warner and Mrs. Woolley. Arthur Page and Walter Stewart, who joined the board in the early 1930s, had daughters in the first class; and from that time on Bennington mothers and fathers promoted and protected the college as trustees until alumnae could take on the function. Incidentally, parents of students in college depended less on the president for an appraisal of life and learning on the campus, for they had their own naturally unimpeachable sources of information. Though parents chaired most of the committees and commanded an understandable deference, they were outnumbered by equally devoted trustees whose enthusiasm for Bennington owed nothing to the educational plans of a teen-age daughter. By the opening, Leigh wrote in 1952, the trustees had "become a unified, enthusiastic, extremely able group, deeply committed to the college objectives and program." In its entire history Bennington College has given only seven honorary degrees. Five of them went to trustees who had stood by the college when it seemed doomed.

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

and brought it into being against great odds. They were Professor Kilpatrick, Mr. and Mrs. McCullough, Mrs. Swan and Mrs. Franklin. Another score of trustees were active in publicizing the college and raising funds by begging and benefits — functions that are now shared with the alumni.

The composition of the trustees in 1932 and thereafter supports the truism that institutional patterns have a degree of indelibility. Most of the time over some 50 years the chairman has been a woman, and this could be stated in answer to feminists who protested the choice of a man to be president. At the opening there were seven women and eight men on the board and virtual equality between the sexes has persisted until recently. For the first time retirements and new appointments have given the women numerical superiority but as coeducation produces qualified alumni as well as alumnae the balance is likely to be restored.

At the beginning there was a concentration of trustees living in New York City, and this has continued. In 1980, 15 of the 35 trustees were New Yorkers. Bennington was better represented on the board as college opened than at any time since; the country as a whole is now better represented than at any time in the past.

As the opening day approached, the trustees decided that the men and women who had made the college possible deserved to see what their labors and gifts had wrought. The ground-breaking ceremonies had been a thinly disguised victory celebration a year before; now Sept. 3, 1932, was chosen for a second victory celebration in the guise of a house warming. Some 200 special friends of the college were given a buffet luncheon at the McCullough residence. This was followed by a tour of the campus to which the general public had been invited and at which Mrs. Leigh made her debut as the president's wife. Named tour chairman, she happily took charge, inveigled a score of young men and women from the town to act as guides, and assigned faculty and staff members to precise stations in the new and reconstituted buildings to answer questions and be an essential part of the exhibit.

Visitors were received by the Leighs and Booth on the first floor of the Commons building, were then led upstairs to the dining rooms, theater and studios; then guided through the four student houses and "the education building," called then and ever since The Barn, and finally given refreshment at the farmhouse known as Cricket Hill. The *New York Times* reported that 2,000 visitors made the tour; the *Bennington Banner*, with more feeling for the importance of the occasion, raised the attendance to 3,000. Whatever the number, Mrs. McCullough recalled that "everyone was in a state of happiness," though some predicted ruefully that the college would never be so spick and span again once the students arrived and "tousled it up."

By the time the students came, Bennington College had been painfully and fitfully shaped over a period of nine years — a time of “fumbling and searching” as Leigh described it. The decision to found a college in Bennington survived the proposals of other sites, though in the end it was located in North Bennington several miles from Booth’s church. That it should be a women’s college was taken for granted. A two-month winter recess had been agreed upon less for educational reasons than to save students, faculty and administration the rigors of a Vermont winter. The financial plan of covering instructional costs by tuition, first advanced on theoretical grounds, became a necessity when the Depression killed any hope of endowment.

Agreement on the nature of the college had been approached by trial and error as the trustees rejected in turn the Colgate-Booth brochure and the Swan-Kilpatrick publications, and at length agreed on Leigh’s definitive Educational Plan of December, 1929. By the opening the trustees were committed to an educational program that was generally and in those days not disdainfully termed “progressive.” What this would mean in practice was only vaguely foreshadowed by the decisions that had been made, and individual trustees undoubtedly had their own private views of the college and its future role. In her promotion of the college, Mrs. McCullough identified Bennington with all the other causes she espoused and once startled an early faculty member by informing a visitor that Bennington College “stood for the League of Nations, the New Deal and psychoanalysis.” But she and Kilpatrick, her successor as chairman of the board, realized that the president, the faculty and the students would now assume a decisive role in the continuing process of creation.

CHAPTER 9

PIONEERING BEGINS

The arrival of students in September, 1932, moved Bennington College from the Robert D. Leigh blueprint into uncharted actuality. No one knew whether a viable institution could be built on the ideas and program the president had propounded in 1929, how 87 freshmen would take to freedom, whether Bennington graduates would differ much or little from the alumnae of other colleges.

The Leigh regime would begin to answer these questions as Bennington's basic configuration developed and its values and procedures approached the status of tradition. The college was designed to facilitate change, and change has occurred, but many of the ways of doing things that were worked out in the beginning have persisted with remarkable tenacity, from admissions procedures to the unique graduation ceremony, and the underlying philosophy has survived.

Bennington's first students arrived by train, bus, taxi or family car. A leaflet, "Information for Entering Students," made it clear that Bennington in the '30s was counting heavily on the Boston & Maine and Rutland railways to validate its somewhat dubious claim of accessibility. Students coming from Boston were told to detrain at North Adams and take a bus to Bennington; those coming from the south or west should board the Green Mountain Flyer in New York or Albany, and at North Bennington taxis would be waiting to transport them to the campus. But as Mrs. Hall Park McCullough recalled the opening day, most students arrived "in cars packed with luggage" accompanied by fathers, mothers, sisters and brothers.

Once settled in their new dwellings — four white houses on the west side

— the students took note of their situation. Their rooms were furnished with sturdy chairs, dressers and beds, all made of birch with maple finish, manufactured in North Bennington as “Cushman’s Colonial Creations;” mattresses, pillows and two blankets were supplied. Each of the houses had two stories with an attic for trunks and suitcases. On the second floor were 12 student rooms, bathrooms, a kitchenette, washtub and ironing board; on the ground floor were eight student rooms, bathrooms, a large living room elegantly furnished with antiques and a faculty suite with its own outside entrance. Though each room was intended for a single student, two students were assigned to some of the larger rooms, to bring in a few more paying guests, a practice carried much farther during later regimes.

Since everyone was a “freshman” there was no hierarchy to decipher and there were few surprises as students made the acquaintance of their 20 or so housemates: all were white, most had come from New England or New York, had attended private schools and were Protestants — of whom the Episcopalians outnumbered any other denomination three to one. Before the stock market crash of 1929, their families could have been described as well-to-do or better; as it was 40 percent had requested and been granted financial aid. But even they were distinctly upper middle class, and almost everyone was conventionally attired. Hair was nicely coiffeured, skirts came to the mid-calf, and all wore stockings and shoes.

As time went on comfort and informality set less conventional patterns, whatever the president’s wife might think or prefer. Mrs. Leigh succeeded in getting most of the community to dress up for concerts, but at other times gray flannel slacks were seen less than blue jeans, blouses yielded to shirts with free-flying tails, and sneakers had to be spotted and streaked with paint. There was little the Community Council could do or wished to do to combat “the cult of informality,” a phenomenon Professor Fred Rudolph of Williams considered “a fixture of progressive education.” The Community Council soon ruled against shorts or “other scanty apparel” being worn either in town or in “other conspicuous places.”

Unique among college women of the 1930s, Bennington students were remarkably free to come and go and live their own lives. Before a Community Council began functioning the administration had posted a single rule: Any student expecting to be off campus after 11 p.m. or leaving for the weekend must fill out a slip stating where she could be reached.

Students from boarding schools had never known such freedom; students who had lived at home may have enjoyed considerable independence but accountability was seldom absent. In contrast, there was no dean of women at Bennington, there were no house mothers, and the faculty living in apartments in the student houses had no “custodial or disciplinary duties,” though they were expected to attend house meetings.

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

The absence of regulations and surveillance reflected Leigh's conviction that there was little risk but great educational gain in treating college women as adults, and he once chided parents who tried to "keep their daughters in infancy long after the age when intelligent, independent decisions should be permitted."

Eight more student houses would be built by 1937, but otherwise the physical plant was considered adequate for everyone except the music faculty and their students. They were cooped up in a one-time chicken house which stubbornly resisted soundproofing and were to remain there until the college took over the Jennings mansion in 1939.

The dominating Commons building had the same function it has today except that a snack bar has been added and the college store has been moved to the Barn. Dining rooms and kitchen filled the second floor; then as now the visual and performing arts claimed the third floor though their main work goes on in the new arts center.

Bennington's founders considered the college architecture and layout pleasantly reminiscent of a New England village, and this euphoric conceit survived the typically iconoclastic comments of an early visitor, Frank Lloyd Wright. Guided about the campus, he expressed shock that a new and innovative college had employed such a conservative architectural firm as Ames and Dodge. He branded the imposing Commons and the planned symmetry of the student houses meretricious and declared that in such surroundings students could not be expected to believe anything their teachers said. He was particularly irritated by the wagon wheels suspended horizontally as light fixtures in the store and called them "the apotheosis of sentimentality." (They came down in the 1950s.) Edwin Park and later teachers of architecture did not propagate the values of Ames and Dodge, and the work of their students might have persuaded Frank Lloyd Wright that innovation was possible even in the Commons building.

The Barn, once the home of sheep and Jersey cows, now held the library, laboratories, classrooms and faculty and administrative offices. The comfortable farmhouse known as Cricket Hill had several small apartments and surrendered its first floor to a nursery school in 1933; and near the musicians' "coop" the Brooder would soon be ready to house a succession of faculty members. An eager tennis player, Leigh saw to it that four tennis courts were already completed on the west side, as well as a playing field. Off to the east Shingle Cottage, from which Eleazer Edgerton went forth to fight in the Battle of Bennington in 1777, and later the residence of Robert Frost, was already occupied by several faculty members.

Beyond the 140-acre campus the neighboring Bennington villages were not lacking in modest resources, including churches to which each

Sunday the college bus took students who wished to attend. North Bennington nearby had three churches, a store or two, the McCullough Bank and the railway station; and with Shaftsbury provided the college with its remarkably devoted buildings and grounds staff.

Old Bennington had Booth's Congregational church, soon to be restored as "the Westminster of Vermont," John Spargo's historical museum, the battle monument and lesser reminders of local prowess, and the president's house on the edge of the original campus site on the slopes of Mt. Anthony.

Downtown, the village of Bennington had churches, shops, a moving-picture theatre and a hospital; and the town had a country club of which for a few years every student became a member when Leigh chose to pay it a blanket fee. There were no college men nearer than Williams, 16 miles to the south; otherwise the ideal of self-sufficiency was approached, and the absence of urban attractions and limited social opportunities might be overcome during the long winter recess.

While the process of getting acquainted with each other and their surroundings continued, all students were plunged into a five-day round of meetings and conferences with the college physician, the director of sports (that year only), the librarian, and all 16 members of the teaching faculty. During this week of registration Leigh addressed the community, as he would at the beginning of every semester, and began discussion of the formal organization of the college.

The Rev. Vincent Ravi Booth, who had first dreamed of a college in Bennington, had his moment as he lectured on the history of the college (a freshman diarist wrote that he "was feeling very thrilled and emotional about addressing us *at last*") and conducted a tour of the Bennington battlefield over in New York state and of his beloved historic monuments in Old Bennington.

Mrs. Mabel Barbee-Lee, director of admissions, reported that Williams boys began arriving "on bicycles, in jalopies and fancy sports cars" and this continued. On Sept. 7 Gov. Franklin D. Roosevelt, campaigning for the presidency, decided to have a look at the new campus on his way to speak in Bennington. Finding a Jennings gate padlocked, New York state troopers shot the lock to pieces and, as Hall Park McCullough wrote, the future president "with his predilection for breaking precedents had inaugurated a new way of entering college."

What Leigh sought in his Utopian college was not the immediate regeneration of society but the education of individuals who upon graduation could be commended to their communities as worthy and possessing purposes, energy and skills, "qualities needed for the improvement of our culture." While at Bennington, students should acquire not only knowledge and skills but "attitudes, appreciations and ideals." To

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

this end, educational influences would be pervasive and unremitting; education must proceed not only in the classroom, the laboratory, the library and the studio, but in the student houses, at committee and community meetings, evening lectures, concerts and plays, in recreation and social activities. Even leisure should be devoted to “enlightening and ennobling pursuits.” In his talk to the college community in September, 1933, Leigh was apparently unhappy with the way students and faculty spent their free time and he contrasted what went on with his ideal:

“Leisure may be spent in fast driving, gossiping, playing cards, watching ball games, or organizing pointless clubs; or for really recreative, enlightening and ennobling pursuits, even for priceless social contributions in the fields of social or mechanical invention, astronomy, mathematics, art, poetry, religion and music.”

While Bennington had no monopoly on the aim of an encompassing education, many of the ways and procedures by which it was approached were unique. Even registration had a peculiar rationale for it was meant not only to help students make wise choices but to help instructors plan their introductory courses. Filling out program cards at colleges where freshmen had few choices was a simple matter and registration could be handled administratively. At Bennington there were no required courses and the college insisted that program planning could not be left to the student’s “unaided choice.” The college must assure itself that the student was meeting the expectation of exploration and that she had chosen a trial major field and program of work that accorded with her interests and needs. If this requirement were met, one could expect the greatest possible commitment to learning.

A faculty member’s objectivity might be put to the test as he helped a bright, attractive freshman choose between his introductory course and someone else’s; and students being also human, it is not surprising that young Julian DeGray was soon overburdened with 31 piano students. Thus began DeGray’s colloquies with five Bennington presidents over the precise meaning of part-time teaching.

In preparation for this initial encounter with students, the faculty had been provided with summaries of every student’s school record, professed interests, characteristics and hobbies. Barbara Jones, the English wife of Lewis Jones, facing her first teaching in the United States, imagined that these students would be “smooth and sophisticated” but found them “young and eager and intelligent — and reassuringly and normally ignorant.”

Before the encounter the faculty had been warned against announcing what they planned to teach; the title and content of courses must evolve in

the light of student aptitudes, interests and needs. This early nervousness about announcing courses was later recalled by Wallace Fowle who arrived to teach French in the fall of 1935. Students were planning their programs and the faculty sat in their offices in the Barn prepared to sign class cards. As an hour went by and no one knocked at his door, Fowle brooded over Bennington's "appalling doctrine" that he must not offer or even suggest a course: "the idea and the desire for the course must come from the student." In spite of his apprehension, the students who finally came in all wanted to study the subject he had come to teach, and he was soon discoursing happily on modern French literature before a class of 12 freshmen.

As this suggests, the "appalling doctrine" was not a universal favorite and it did not keep faculty from teaching what they were most able to teach and what indeed they had been hired to teach. The students soon insisted that their interest could be taken for granted and lists of courses began to circulate clandestinely, then openly, and finally appeared in the catalogue under Leigh's successor.

Frequently, however, a student's interest led her counselor into unfamiliar territory and together they devised a plan for its exploration and mastery. Tutorials, individual or group, covered subjects that were never listed in the catalogue.

During the first registration a considerable number of students ignored the expectation of exploration by concentrating in one or two of the four divisions, perhaps most commonly in literature and social studies or in the performing and visual arts, which then constituted a single division. One student chose only art, dance and drama; another dance, drama and music; a third art, dance, drama and music. The virtue of exploration was called to their attention in time and two of the three added courses in literature and social studies in their second year. The third continued her all-arts program until her junior year when she passed a course in literature, failed one in social studies, and then concentrated as before in art, drama and music. The unbalanced program became less common but students continued to be drawn to Bennington by the opportunity to follow their own interests. In 1940, 91 percent of the students then in college placed that opportunity at the top of the reasons they had applied to Bennington. In spite of individually contrived programs the Eurich evaluation (1939-1941) showed that in most fields, Bennington students scored higher on subject matter tests than college students generally.

Following the week of registration, classes began and certain unique features of the Bennington plan were put to the test. As Leigh had proposed, most classes met once a week for one and a half or two hours in contrast to the usual three 50-minute classes or Bennington's later two sessions a week. This left blocks of free time for projects and the paper-

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

writing which soon became and remained endemic. (A recent student who saved her papers discovered that she had written 45 in her first year.)

The faculty agreed to consider survey courses taboo though Jean Guiton felt obliged to begin his course on 20th century French literature with Corneille (1606-1684). The taboo has been more or less observed ever since. Leigh's emphasis on the contemporary was meant to offset the centrifugal effects of individual programs and projects, but no one objected to the musicians' teaching Beethoven and even Bach. Still modernism was in the air and contemporary poetry and politics received more attention than Chaucer and Aristotle.

* * * * *

During the week of registration Leigh turned his attention to the organization of the college community. As paterfamilias he might have shaped it to give effect to his ideal of "total education" and then governed it as a firm if kindly despot. There can be little doubt that the community was in fact organized as he wished it to be, but he saved himself the onus of dictatorship and the cost of deans and house mothers by involving the entire community in decisions affecting life and learning on the campus.

Upon arrival the students were instructed to elect house chairmen to represent them in a temporary governing board. Soon the four house chairmen met with the president and the Student Personnel Committee made up of faculty and staff, and together they began formulating a plan for governing the college community. By Nov. 1 their proposals had been circulated, discussed in house meetings, and adopted at a community meeting. Each house was to be free to manage its own affairs under its chairman and a house council; general legislative, executive and judicial functions were vested in a Community Council.

The council was to be made up of the house chairmen, three faculty or staff members and the president, and so reflected Leigh's preference for "community government" over "student government," which he felt was mere make-believe on most campuses. Furthermore he was convinced that in its judicial functions a mixed body would exhibit more understanding and compassion than a student council; but he was content that the four elders would be heavily outnumbered by the 12 house chairmen by the time four classes had been admitted and that the council's officers would always be students. While subsequent record provides no evidence of a generation gap in voting, the students eventually reduced the representation of the faculty in judicial matters to a single member elected by the community.

The Community Council's main function was "to make decisions and rules and to define the standards in all matters concerning the welfare of the community." Within two weeks the council had prepared an impressive statement which was adopted at a community meeting on Nov.

14. After insisting on the importance of the quality of Bennington's community life, the preamble argues that "we must govern ourselves by reliance mainly on constructive cooperation."

"A series of 'thou shalt nots,' while they might protect us from unsympathetic outside criticism, would probably be evaded, leading perhaps to hypocrisy or childish rebellion against imposed authority. Specific prohibitions would therefore defeat our fundamental purpose, which is to govern ourselves as mature, responsible human beings... We propose to state in general terms the standards of good taste and civilized conduct we mean to uphold... Inevitably the standards will be violated. We do not wish to set up penalties in advance. Every case of violation will be dealt with individually. The circumstances and interests of the offender will be considered as well as the protection of the Community. In extreme cases it may be necessary to expel a member whose continued presence will seriously jeopardize our essential purposes."

The two standards required members of the community to conduct themselves "in an orderly and considerate manner, respecting the regulations of any community in which they may be," and to act as responsible citizens "in constructive cooperation with the college and its aims." (Critics beware.) The standards were followed by specific campus rules. At first there were only three: The sign-out requirement already in effect, a rule against driving a car on the roadway between the student houses after 10 p.m. and a ban on noise in the library at all times and elsewhere after 10 p.m.

* * * * *

The need for a rule against pets soon became obvious as students began importing puppies, kittens, white mice and even infant lambs. Pets were happily present in the tradition of progressive education from nursery school on, but they were less happily present on the campus. Everywhere they were underfoot and their presence was evident to eye, ear and nose and clearly recorded on rugs and furniture. The Community Council was reluctant to act and Leigh was urged to end the nuisance by ukase. He felt, however, that the decision was one the community should make and warned his administrative officers to resist the temptation to intervene in such cases. Eventually the community decided that enough was enough — there should be no more pets, and as Harold Gray in the literature faculty wrote, "the houses were given back to human beings and an experience in democracy had been lived through."

The private comfort and public nuisance of pets would not be a major issue again for nearly 40 years, but Leigh was never wholly free of the problem. When he learned that some of his faculty required a pet or two

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

for their happiness he reluctantly agreed that adults living on the campus might have a well-behaved dog or cat. A pet census in the spring of 1939 brought to light two dogs which had occasioned complaints, and their owners, Arch Lauterer in drama and Frank Coleman in science, were told to get them off the campus. A year later Leigh gave the college physicist, Thomas Perry, permission to have a dog on probation but wrote that "we have never had a dog on campus that has not caused considerable trouble and criticism." One of Leigh's compensations as he left in 1941 was that he would never again be wasting his time dealing with pets and pet owners.

During the year the Community Council remained alert to violations of standards and rules and in the spring term gave serious thought to the Bennington image and the Bennington-Williams problem. By that time it had become clear that outsiders had formed unfavorable impressions of the college. Since visitors frequently wandered through the library, then situated in the Barn, the council requested that students not sit on the high window sills or lie on the library floor. The council repeated its warning against wearing "scandalizing attire in town," and perhaps to head off local gossip reproved two students for going out with a young businessman whose avid participation in college dramatics was thought to have an ulterior motive.

Bennington and Williams began to feel the impact of the other's more carefree and adventurous students soon after the opening, although official communication on the subject awaited the spring term. On March 20 the Community Council sent a letter to two Williams students who had recently disturbed the Bennington College community after midnight. They were warned that any repetition of their "offensive behavior" would be reported to Williams officials. A similar episode in the early morning of April 1 resulted in a sharp letter to the Williams Student Council. In reply, the Williams council offered apologies for the men's "ungentlemanly conduct of a decidedly disrespectful nature," commented that Williams men were "not to be wholly blamed if your standards are not shown due consideration — whatever these 'standards' may be," put the culprits on probation and requested that the Community Council reciprocate by penalizing the Bennington girls who late at night had driven their cars back and forth blowing their horns in front of Williams fraternities.

What the "standards" meant in practice was puzzling at home as abroad, and during the spring term the Community Council decreed that "excessive drinking on the campus or any other place" would be subject to investigation and action in this last year of prohibition, urged students to refrain from going to speakeasies "because of the college reputation," and proposed as a rule that "no Bennington girl go upstairs in a Williams fraternity or dormitory after dinner."

Year after year the council minutes record the unseemly aspects of

Bennington-Williams relationships, never the serious courtships that culminated in marriage (there were two in June, 1933), or the occasional occurrence of a planned social event, a coeducational Spanish table or the sharing of dramatic or musical talent. Neither then nor later was anyone planning or encouraging social or cultural interchange. The result was that it was generally the roisterers, male and female, who defined the relationship and gave it a bad name.

During the first year the Community Council as a whole dealt with infractions of rule or standard, but when it was joined by the chairmen of four new houses in the second year this function was turned over to the Central Committee, later titled the Judicial Committee. This was made up of four students and two faculty or staff whom the council chose from its own members.

In her book on Bennington College, Barbara Jones, faculty member and the second president's wife, remarked that there was little law enforcement at the college. The aim of the Central Committee was to educate and to gain compliance with community standards by frank discussion with transgressors. In the beginning students on the committee wanted to inform the community who had been haled into court on what charge and what came of it. They finally agreed with their elders that they were not conducting trials and that their aims could best be realized if privacy prevailed over publicity. In the early years the Central Committee dealt with infractions by faculty and staff but humanely avoided confrontation by sending out letters of reproof. Eventually the committee merely forwarded the facts to the president.

During the Burkhardt years (1947-57) the committee resorted to such penalties as campusing or social probation; but during the Leigh and Jones eras the Central Committee did what it could with persuasion and then in extreme cases of anti-social behavior sent the president a recommendation of expulsion. In the first 12 years four students were sent home solely for a violation of rules and standards, but from time to time a record of bad citizenship turned the scales against a student whose academic record was borderline.

In the fall of 1936 the Community Council, dissatisfied with the performance of one of its creatures, appointed a new Recreation Council whose subcommittees on athletics, entertainment and "intellectual recreation" scheduled hockey games with Amherst, Skidmore and Williams, and put on an election-night party, two informal dances, two formal dances, a Tyrolean party, a scavenger hunt, a weekend party for Bard students, and concerts with tea. The Community Council cooperated by decreeing that beer and light wines might be served "on certain occasions."

* * * * *

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

Among the committees appointed by the Community Council, that on educational policies came to enjoy the greatest prestige. Made up of majors from each division, the committee met from time to time with comparable faculty and trustee committees to discuss policy, curriculum and personnel. Each semester the committee let every faculty member know what his students thought of his performance and the same information went to the president. As Margaret Dudley, EPC chairman, wrote in 1941, membership on the committee was "a delicate responsibility calling for diplomacy and tact, and some instructors have yet to learn to accept the EPC as a valuable and serious-minded group." After observing the operations of the committee for a dozen years, Barbara Jones wrote that its members had shown a maturity of judgment for the most part as well as "a kind of wisdom and imaginative grasp of educational purposes which has made their participation of great value."

As the first students arrived, a college store on the ground floor of the Commons building was ready for business. Its manager, Elizabeth Hall, had stocked it with everything she thought students would need and let it be known that customers were expected to help themselves and list their purchases under their names in a black book. This informal enterprise was soon to become a cooperative. Early in the year a commission made up of six students studied the cooperative movement with the help of Lewis Jones, college economist, and eventually drew up a scheme of organization and bylaws for a college cooperative store.

Adopted by the college community in November, 1934, the bylaws offered membership to students, faculty, employees and trustees. A membership payment of \$10 provided capital which was refunded when a member left the community. At the annual meeting the members chose a board of directors made up of two faculty or staff members, one or two students from each class, and one employee. The board determined policies, hired the manager and declared dividends. Gladys Steven succeeded "Shibby" Hall in 1935 and continued as manager for 10 years.

After two years of operation the store paid a dividend of 11 percent on members' purchases and boasted that 82 percent of the students and a similar proportion of faculty had joined. At the same time, cooperative grocery buying was added and the installation of a gas pump in 1938 increased the enrollment of employees. The educational value of the store was considerable for the directors, minimal for those members who took the store for granted and avoided the annual meetings. The required attendance for a quorum was soon reduced from one-half to one-third. The co-op surrendered to private enterprise in the 1970s.

CHAPTER 10

EDUCATION WITH NO BREAKS; RELIGION, POLITICS

In pursuit of his ideal of total education, Leigh looked forward not only to the students' involvement in their studies and in community government but to acculturation within the student houses, to afternoons filled with a planned program of sports, in the English fashion, and to evenings devoted to lectures, music, plays or deliberation in the mode of a town meeting.

Leigh's high hopes for the educational contribution of the student houses was based on his expectation that within each house, students and faculty (resident and co-opted as honorary members) would engage in spontaneous intellectual exchange and get up impromptu plays, concerts and debates. The expectation was never realized, possibly because students and faculty saw enough of each other as it was, student actors and musicians were deeply involved on a larger stage, and students, like faculty, found conversation with their peers endlessly absorbing.

The students were well satisfied with their houses as living quarters and house meetings were occasionally devoted to matters relating to the creation of a college. But as time went on the great issues were discussed elsewhere and the meetings descended to inquiries about housekeeping matters, such as who left her dirty dishes in the kitchenette. Two members of the first class recall the routine gatherings without nostalgia. Edith Noyes Muma describes them as "dull, childish student government sort of meetings," and Asho Ingersoll Craine suggests that house meetings were a bore because such problems as unemployment were not discussed there.

(Coeducation and a college economy may have raised the prestige of house meetings. A first-year student recently told me that she eagerly looks

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

forward to the Sunday evening meetings where there is good conversation but also good food. Since the college now serves only two meals on Sunday everyone is hungry by evening and there is competition between the sexes to see who can provide the most satisfying refreshments.)

* * * * *

In the light of Bennington's relative indifference to athletics, it is surprising to discover that the college had a Director of Sports in its first year. When Martha Hill declined appointment as Director of Physical Education and agreed instead to teach dance two days a week, Leigh appointed Grace King to plan and carry out a sports program. Miss King had directed athletics in summer camps and had just received a master's degree in hygiene and physical education from Wellesley. During registration she interviewed students "in order to arrange for the type of physical recreation suited to individual needs and interest." Plans for a gymnasium had collapsed with the stock market, but there were tennis courts, a playing field for hockey, courts for outdoor basketball and volleyball, and neighboring mountains to scale.

Miss King immediately launched an ambitious program of sports and hikes and before the first term was over students had climbed Mt. Anthony, Bald Mountain and Greylock, a tennis tournament had been held and a tennis ladder maintained, the houses had competed in volleyball, and the students had beaten the faculty in field hockey. That game was remembered by Jean Guiton, who taught French. Recently he wrote about "*les jeunes filles en fleurs* of 1932" and recalled that "one of them socked me in the eye with her hockey stick when I was rash enough to play left wing for the faculty." When the weather threatened outdoor activities Miss King had classes in tap dancing, tumbling and pyramid building.

This program appealed to some students, but others felt that they had paid their debt to exercise in secondary school and questioned the value of organized athletics. Near the end of the fall term a student diarist referred to "great discussion" about a winter sports weekend to follow the winter recess and reported that "lots of us, against it, are campaigning to defeat it." It was defeated.

If the program encountered student indifference and even hostility, Miss King had a rival in Martha Hill whose dance classes had growing appeal for both serious dancers and students who had no objection to physical exercise that was not required and might even be classed as art. Miss King was not reappointed and, with his eye on the budget, Leigh told the Community Council that athletics should be supervised by students and faculty, not by a paid director. He said special instructors might be brought in for short periods, but in fact most of the money saved went to

pay a second instructor in dance. As the college approached full enrollment in 1935-36, \$775 was budgeted for athletic instruction.

For a few years a hockey coach came in briefly, and a Bennington team lost to Williams 3 to 1 in a swinging game. In the fall of 1936, Polly Ingraham coached hockey during her brief stint with the science faculty. It was then that the Bennington girls threw a scare into an Amherst team before losing by a close score. One year Hazel Hotchkiss Wightman volunteered her services at a tennis clinic; but Frank Tschorn, superintendent of buildings and grounds, had played tennis for Columbia and so he was Bennington's unpaid and underworked tennis coach from 1934 to 1948.

The demand for coaching was sporadic and what was done about sports tended to be makeshift and short-term and hardly supported the catalogue's description of a lively athletic program: Facilities were available "for regular participation in golf, riding, tennis, hockey, swimming, skating, skiing, tobogganing and minor indoor and outdoor sports."

Students initiative, however, brought about bursts of activity from time to time. In the second class Nancy Reynolds finally proved to be our athlete laureate, and as a student spurred interest in golf, tennis and skiing. When Leigh paid the Mt. Anthony Country Club a blanket fee for all students, Nancy got membership stretched to include free golf lessons. She organized tennis tournaments, got Bob Billings, president of the Brattleboro Outing Club, to coach skiing at Woodford, raised gas money for trips to Mt. Washington for late spring skiing, and became a champion skier herself. In women's competition she was the United States slalom champion in 1940, first in downhill and combined in 1941, and a member of the Olympic team. Nancy Reynolds Cooke was elected to the Ski Hall of Fame in 1972.

In her annual report on the community's health in 1935, Dr. Wilmoth Osborne put adequate facilities for indoor sport "ahead of infirmary requirements as a health issue for the entire community." At the end of the Leigh era the Eurich evaluation brought out the fact that one-third of the students and faculty thought there should be more emphasis on sports and recreation.

The prospect for indoor sports brightened when the college acquired the Jennings mansion and satellite structures, for the carriage barn was initially known as the Recreation Building. The lower floor was lined and fitted out for badminton, basketball and volleyball; pool and pingpong were played in the attic. The building was not used much during World War II when the winter recess was lengthened to three months, but in the 1950s a snack bar was added and there was a brief obsession with pingpong. The finals of the student-faculty tournaments were staged in the carriage barn pit amid cheering along the packed catwalk. One year

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

both finalists were faculty: Lionel Nowak won the champagne, Francis Golffing the bubblegum. Eventually the building was claimed for other uses with no concerted outcry from the community; no one offered to build a gymnasium, and no president accorded priority to any physical activity except dance.

What Pioneer could have foreseen that a Bennington College soccer team, all male, uniformed and coached, would finish the season with six wins, two losses and a tie? Incredible. But it happened in the fall of 1978. The team did less well in 1979 and 1980 but the soccer squad has grown each year and soccer could be Bennington's first serious intercollegiate sport. An athletic coordinator was appointed in 1979 but at the end of 1980 it was not clear how much the college would do either to promote intercollegiate competition in sports or to involve all students in some type of physical activity on the model of Reed College.

* * * * *

Three or four times a week everyone climbed the Commons stairs to the theatre to hear a lecture or to find out what the dancers, actors or musicians had been up to. Workshops and formal productions acquainted the college community with its most talented students, male and female (the "drama boys" came in 1936), as they appeared in the classics in drama; in music composed by the old masters, the faculty and students; and in dances choreographed within the month. In the early years before the music faculty agreed to perform regularly, the concert program included Efrem Zimbalist, Egon Petri, Felix Salmond, William Primrose and Paul Hindemith, the Don Cossack chorus and the Budapest Quartet.

There was no difficulty in finding speakers in those depressed times because almost anyone would come for \$25 or simply out of curiosity. The 24 speakers who came in the first year ranged from obscure friends of the faculty to e. e. cummings, Buckminster Fuller and Frank Lloyd Wright.

Margot Suter Rood '36 has unearthed essays she wrote on some of the speakers. Each she described, not always flatteringly, before recounting his message and making her comment, and it is clear that for her the evening meetings were stimulating and challenging. She thought John Strachey was scintillating but when he asserted that Roosevelt's New Deal would fail and make way for communism she began to doubt his wisdom and then wondered if there could be a happy combination of great wisdom with strong purpose.

In her junior year she wrote essays on Padraic Colum, who talked on Irish verse and lore ("certainly the most charming person I have ever heard"); John Dewey, who discoursed on liberalism; and Morris Ernst ("hardboiled and brilliant to a degree") whose subject was censorship. In

contrast to Strachey, Ernst felt that because of the scarcity of "leadership in the left wing...the country would go still more conservative!" Margot's essays refer to serious discussions with other students including one who was "hugely enthusiastic about Mr. Ernst" but could hardly remember anything he said.

Students had a voice in choosing subjects and speakers, there was a strong communal sense, and no one wanted to be left out of the lively postmortems that went on afterwards in the student houses. The result was that the meetings were attended by virtually the entire college community including in the beginning some of the kitchen help. Firmly established in the first year, the custom of attending evening meetings, whatever the subject, whoever the speaker, continued into the 1940s.

* * * * *

This was not true of the Sunday evening meetings arranged by the Rev. Vincent Ravi Booth. When Booth conceived the idea of a college in Old Bennington in the early 1920s and the college was offered a campus on the slopes of Mt. Anthony, its proximity to Dr. Booth's church and his dominant role in its genesis eliminated any need or thought of a chapel or chaplain. Booth at least expected his church to be well attended even after the summer folk had boarded up their houses and returned to Troy, Cleveland and Chicago.

When the college was given a campus in North Bennington there was no church in sight, Booth was no longer in command, and Leigh was asked what he planned to do about religion. As Barbara Jones once remarked, liberal education had long since become a preponderantly secular concern without religious affiliation, and Leigh had no intention of instituting religious services on the campus. But he did turn for advice to Father James Whitcomb, headmaster of the nearby Hoosac School. Whitcomb suggested that the question be discussed with Dr. Frank Gavin, eminent scholar at the General Theological Seminary, who was familiar with the topic of compulsory chapel at American colleges. In the early summer of 1932, Whitcomb and Gavin met with Leigh in the new library wing of the Barn and went over the alternatives. In the end they agreed that the college should not sponsor services on the campus but should provide transportation for students who wished to attend services in the several villages.

Booth could not hope that this arrangement would swell attendance at the Old First Church since there were few Congregationalists in the first class. But he thought that something might be promoted on the campus in spite of the president's opposition to worship sponsored by the college; and so he proposed a Sunday evening series which would include secular

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

songs as well as hymns, brief prayers and no sermon but a scholarly talk on his own deeply religious subject, Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

Leigh agreed so long as the "services" were considered an experiment, and Booth signed up Prof. Charles Safford, head of music at Williams, to lead the singing, with his wife to play the piano. Unfortunately for the experiment attendance fell off and the series faded away. A member of the first class recalls Booth as "an earnest, slightly Messianic figure, an evangelist from an antique mold...(who) seemed to be out-of-tune with what we had come to Bennington to find."

Booth might have had better luck if he had waited a few years until those brash freshmen were seniors or even a few weeks until the excitement of their arrival and shared dominion over the new college had abated. After the first months Booth was seldom seen on the campus and he could count few students in his Sunday morning congregations, but once a year the Old First Church was filled by town *and* gown when college singers and strings players performed at his Christmas candlelight service.

In spite of the demise of the Booth series, Sunday evenings were reserved for talks on religion, and Leigh budgeted for an occasional outside speaker. In that first year those pioneer freshmen were not easily satisfied. When the Rev. Arthur Lee Kinsolving of Boston's Trinity Church spoke, an alumna recalls that they liked what he said, but were "a bit suspicious of him because he was so handsome, smooth and articulate." On another Sunday Margot Suter wrote in her diary that Gardner Day "spoke to us about our duty as Christians to lower tariffs, cancel debts, recognize Russia, etc. etc." Her lack of comment was expressive.

Notable in later Leigh years were talks on the religions of the East by Prof. James B. Pratt of Williams College and a series on religion in the poetry of Villon, Racine and Baudelaire by Wallace Fowlie of the Bennington faculty.

Leigh felt that religion would be adequately dealt with through courses in history, literature, philosophy and psychology and had no intention of appointing a professor of religion. But he changed his mind when Laurens Seelye offered his services. Seelye was on furlough from American University in Beirut where he was professor of religion. When Leigh found that he was willing to teach religion part time at a salary of \$900 he appointed Seelye for the year 1934-35. His course in religious values and his numerous tutorials soon made it clear that there was student interest in religion and he was offered reappointment at a more respectable salary. Instead of continuing at Bennington or returning to Beirut, Seelye became president of St. Lawrence University, but he was here again to witness the graduation of his daughters in 1940 and 1947. From 1936 on, Margaret Patterson (later Mrs. DeGray), appointed to teach philosophy, was happy to meet the student demand for courses and tutorials in religious values

and comparative religion.

Leigh's policy on religion was not seriously challenged though it failed to satisfy everyone. He once said he had turned down several offers of a chapel and in his last year a trustee tried to institute religion on the campus. As she retired from the board in 1941, Frances Perkins, Roosevelt's Secretary of Labor, startled her fellow trustees by moving that the college forthwith appoint a man of learning and piety who as chaplain would "foster the knowledge and practice of the Christian religion in the total college community — students, faculty, trustees, laborers, technicians, etc." Instead of putting the motion to a vote, the chairman appointed a committee which eventually reported negatively on Miss Perkins' proposal.

And so the Leigh approach lived on. There were evening meetings devoted to religious subjects, there was serious discussion of religion in class and out, but the college bus transported few students to local churches. A member of the first class, Elsa Voorhees Hauschka has explained why this was so:

"To most of us traditional religion was too formalized, too full of postulates we were unwilling to accept. Faith? We were so brimming over with faith there was hardly time to express it; we lived it in our creative educational experiences, in the positive, hopeful, mind-exploding challenges of our stormy transit from adolescence to (we were confident) mature adults."

* * * * *

For the United States the 1930s were marked by the Depression and a slow upward trend; for the rest of the world much of Asia yielded to the power of Japan, and Europe was clearly on the road to war from the moment of Hitler's rise to power. At the college these events were chronicled and considered by visiting speakers, by the faculty and by the students in class and out, in term papers and theses.

The college was remarkably free to invite speakers of every persuasion and the faculty itself was far from united in politics, although most of them voted for Roosevelt. During the Leigh era students tended to move toward the left but few of them advocated anything more revolutionary than the New Deal, and student leaders took on themselves the duty of protecting the college from organizers and agitators. Herbert Shaw, a drama fellow, recalls being mistaken for a ringleader in a campaign to organize a chapter of the Young Communist League on the campus. He was invited to dinner by two members of the Community Council who quietly but firmly let him know that Bennington did not want or need the YCL. The warning was unnecessary for Shaw had already decided that he could not go along with the league's aims and disruptive tactics. Politics

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

concerned him less and less as he became enmeshed in dramatics and this was true of other students as they found their studies demanding and absorbing.

Zealous students did keep great issues alive on the campus. In the third year of the college, they ignored Leigh's preference that all student activities be incorporated in the curriculum and organized a Bennington United Front. Exasperated by competing national organizations that spent their time denouncing each other, the Bennington activists formed a single organization to work for a brave new world. A year later the national organizations came together to form the American Student Union and the BUF gave way to the ASU. Activities ranged from staging benefits for Vermont's striking marble workers to sending telegrams to influence United States policy on the Spanish civil war.

CHAPTER 11

COUNSELING, WINTER RECESS, EIGHT-YEAR PLAN

As we have noted, the task of guidance and advice was assigned to a battery of experts in Leigh's Educational Plan of 1929. When it appeared that the college would never open for lack of funds, the elimination of the experts was one of the president's first economies. Consequently when the college finally opened in 1932, every faculty member found himself responsible for five to 10 counselees, each of whom he was to meet for an hour each week. The purpose of the meeting was not immediately clear but Leigh insisted that the student-counselor relationship was to occupy "a strategic place in the college plan."

This was particularly true in program planning because Leigh was equally opposed to required courses and to free electives and the counselor's duty was to make certain that the student's choice of courses accorded with her needs as well as her interests. The counselor's advice was not always heeded by strong-willed students, but his judgment was crucial at two times in his counselee's Bennington career. Toward the end of her second year she was promoted to the Senior Division if her counselor could certify that she was capable of "sustained and independent work" in her major. Without the counselor's endorsement she was likely to be "counseled out." Again in her fourth year as her graduation was being considered, the counselor was the key witness both on her total record and the quality of her senior project.

A curious duty of the counselor was the guarded transmission of instructors' reports to his counselees. Twice each term these reports were sent to the counselors who were to let their counselees know what they had done in each course without directly quoting from the instructor. The

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

theory was that the instructor would write a more candid report if he knew the student would never see it or hear it read verbatim. Besides, the counselor presumably knew the student better and might indulge in some judicious editing. But the counselors never enjoyed this function and counselees wondered what was being omitted and why, and from what they were being protected. The custom was gradually eroded, students were allowed to see and copy their reports in the 1940s, and given copies in the 1950s and afterwards.

A counselor was expected to refer his students to the college psychiatrist if they had emotional problems, but a few instructors chose to share their psychiatric lore with their counselees. Mabel Barbee-Lee, Bennington's first director of admissions and chairman of the Student Personnel Committee, had doubts about counseling as practiced. Many years later she questioned "the efficacy of the counseling system where a young, inexperienced instructor was responsible for his counselee's emotional well-being as well as for her intellectual development."

The students had no objection to young, inexperienced counselors but complained bitterly when they were shortchanged. On Nov. 11, 1937, the Student Educational Policies Committee discussed counseling on the basis of a survey done by its social studies representative. The committee then informed the president that some counselors were over-indulgent and let their students "slide through;" some were overly severe; some didn't meet with their counselees for weeks on end; and some failed to help a counselee who was not doing well but simply pushed her into another division.

Nevertheless, the president remained enthusiastic about the educational value of the counseling system. In addressing a convention of school heads in February, 1938, he said that in his teaching elsewhere he rarely had one or two students in any year whose "work and progress I followed as closely, whose methods I could know and criticize so directly, whose real objectives I knew so intimately, as every member of our faculty does in relation to five to 10 students."

Barbara Jones taught and counseled at Bennington College from 1932 to 1941 and then for another six years followed its progress as the president's wife. In her book on the college, published in 1946, she wrote that "The ideal counselor must be ready to accept the student's dependence on him, and still try to help her stand on her own feet. He must know when to encourage, when to criticize, so that she will get some accurate understanding of what and where she is in her college life and work with relation to her plans and purposes."

Mrs. Jones went on to say that "such an ideal counselor is rarely found...(and) the policy of giving every teacher counselor responsibilities, however sound in conception, has encountered difficulties. It has always

been apparent that some excellent teachers were not good counselors." To a degree, students solved this problem by shunning reputedly indifferent counselors, but a first-year student was likely to accept the fate the office had devised, and apathetic counseling no doubt contributed to the decision of some freshmen to leave during or at the end of the year.

Still, the counseling system was generally applauded at the end of the Leigh era. In the fall of 1940 the students rated it fifth in 41 features of the college which had contributed to their development. From then to now the faculty has continued to counsel and the latest catalogue insists that counseling is "an integral part of the Bennington education."

* * * * *

Bennington's Non-Resident Term began as a winter recess between Christmas and Washington's birthday. Neither the president nor the trustees considered the recess to be of academic value and so the summer and other vacations were shortened to compensate for the "time lost" in January and February; both agreed that Vermont was no place to spend the winter. Leigh told Mrs. Barbee-Lee that the idea of a prolonged winter recess had occurred to him because "he had never liked cold, snowy weather." When the trustees discussed the innovation the decisive argument seemed to be that the recess would provide a "desirable break in the Vermont winter."

Early in the first fall term, Leigh, in accord with his abhorrence of wasted time, specifically assigned to each student and her counselor the task of planning "effective use of the recess in line with her college objectives." The result was that many students were merely given reading and writing assignments. But at home students found it difficult to concentrate "amid the distractions of family life," and it was soon agreed that in the future no one should undertake a task which might better be carried out at college. In that first year six students made their debut and though one wrote a 36-page paper comparing the custom with coming of age in Samoa (which Margaret Mead had just described), Leigh wryly remarked that "concentration on social life may yield values which escape the observation of a college faculty but it contributes very little to academic progress."

On the positive side there was generally satisfaction with the results of volunteer work. Conspicuously absent from announcements about the winter recess between 1929 and 1932 was any mention of the jobs that were to become the common fare of later winter terms. Whether or not the genteel tradition can be blamed for this omission, Bennington students were not likely to find paid jobs while a fourth of the nation's labor force had none. But there was no dearth of volunteer jobs in every city and

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

students soon found that even mundane tasks in a settlement house might be more rewarding than routine academic projects. The faculty judgment was that fairly humdrum experience in a new social environment often resulted in a marked increase in maturity and sense of direction.

Unlike the students, faculty members were under no compulsion to accomplish anything at all during the winter, but it might have been otherwise had the president had his way. Late in the first term Leigh proposed that he and the entire faculty spend the winter in Bermuda poring over student folders and so discover how well students had been advised, whether they had chosen the right trial major, how much work they had done and what should be recommended for the spring term. One may suspect that Leigh had in mind an opportunity both to further the faculty's education in the Bennington way (he was constantly worried about backsliding) and to give himself a more active role in the discussion of the students' progress and problems which the faculty had found so fascinating.

Attractive as a winter in Bermuda might appear, several of the faculty were appalled at the idea of devoting their first break to re-living the term that had exhausted them, and they were joined by others who also looked forward to a quiet winter of recuperation wholly free of students or talk of students. In the end Leigh withdrew his proposal but he could not conceal his disappointment that his faculty's dedication must be accepted as finite. As it turned out the Leighs wintered year after year in Sarasota, Florida, while less affluent members of the faculty discovered that they could survive the Vermont winters.

The first trial of Leigh's ploy went far toward establishing the long recess as a fixture in the Bennington calendar. At the end of the Leigh years, both students and faculty rated the Winter Field and Reading Period third in a list of features of the Bennington program. Perhaps more important for the continuation of the scheme was the satisfaction of the students' employers and supervisors. Their appraisals of student performance in 1941 contained 455 complimentary and 22 critical comments, with the implication that the arrangement would continue.

Among the adverse comments, two students were considered immature, two had "annoying personalities," two were irresponsible, three followed instructions but took no initiative, and one was "precocious without enough emotional stability to balance." Most commonly the Bennington students were commended for their adaptability, initiative, dependability, aptitude, intelligence and ability to take criticism — qualities that had not in every case been detected by the faculty.

* * * * *

With no more than modest notice in the press, periodicals and educational journals, Bennington College gathered momentum as the trustees, still on the trail of potential donors, arranged luncheons and dinners at which faculty members spoke; Leigh addressed meetings of headmistresses and secondary school educators; Mrs. Barbee-Lee energetically visited the best schools in search of young talent; and students and parents joined in propagating the faith in their own communities. These efforts would have failed, however, without the happy realization within a limited but influential circle that Bennington offered young women a new and attractive type of educational experience.

For lack of diaries and letters home the students' view of the college that year must be left to surmise. Alumnae have frequently referred to the first year as exceedingly stimulating and there is some evidence that at the time student criticism of the college was confined to the campus while students at home or visiting their old schools tended to dwell on Bennington's merits.

Possibly the harshest criticism ever made of the college community was that of Asho Ingersoll and Janet Summers near the end of Year One. In an attempt to arouse the privileged college community to the suffering and injustice in the depressed outer world, these two freshmen posted a notice on the bulletin board condemning the community's self-satisfaction and demanding controversy on the great issues. They then sent the Community Council a statement which was read to the entire college on June 7. The theme was that "we as a community are complacent, passive, indifferent, and small-minded, as is evident in evening, community and house meetings, as well as in classes." Instant rejection of the indictment suggests that there may have been some basis for the charge of complacency. A very different view of the college was expressed by Margot Suter, another member of the first class, as she addressed a friendly audience in Boston. She declared flatly that it seemed hard to believe "unless you can see it that a program so flawless in theory could even approach perfection in practice."

* * * * *

As the first year ended Bennington College promised not only to survive but to witness the adoption of one or more of its "essential features" by other colleges. Leigh had been active in the Progressive Education Association and was a member of its commission on school-college relations. From its studies the commission had concluded that secondary schools, in order to meet college requirements, were teaching "a hodge-podge of lifeless material unrelated to the real concerns of young people." If other colleges were to follow Bennington's example and waive specific

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

subject requirements, the schools would be freed to work out programs of study of value in themselves. In July, 1933, representatives of 30 leading public and private schools generally described as "progressive" met with the commission on the Bennington campus and enthusiastically agreed to take part in an ambitious eight-year experiment. The schools would gladly re-fashion their courses of study if the colleges would admit the students they recommended without regard to specific subjects and would then compare their performance in college with that of other students. The experiment was launched when 300 colleges agreed to participate and the Carnegie Foundation offered to finance the comparison of paired students.

While the experiment had less long-term effect on college entrance requirements or on school curricula than had been confidently anticipated, its results were highly gratifying to the participating progressive schools. By the end of eight years their 1,475 graduates had better college records and had shown more curiosity and drive and greater objectivity in thinking than their paired counterparts. The experiment itself was a bold and imaginative attempt at educational reform and Leigh deserves more credit for his part in its initiation since he was in effect offering to give up Bennington's near-monopoly on gifted students who failed to meet one or more conventional requirements.

CHAPTER 12

SALARY, TENURE, DEGREES

In his statement to the trustees on the eve of his election as president in 1928, Leigh proposed that he be appointed for a definite term and then reappointed only after careful evaluation. But as late as 1932 he clung to the convention of permanent tenure for the faculty. Soon after college opened he appointed Lewis Jones, Genevieve Taggard and Paul Garrett to draw up a definitive salary and tenure plan. With the president's concurrence the committee finally rejected the system of permanent tenure and the faculty and trustees agreed. Instead, the plan provided for periodic evaluation of each faculty member before a reappointment to a limited term. Initial appointments would be for one year "regardless of age or previous experience," to be followed by a second one-year, a three-year and thereafter five-year appointments. A favorable evaluation of past performance was a prerequisite to each subsequent five-year appointment of both the faculty and the president.

In departing from the almost universal practice of granting permanent tenure to faculty who survived a trial period, the committee had in mind the stultifying effects of professorial deadwood. In theory, limiting the term of appointment to five years gave the president an opportunity to save the college the educational cost of faculty of any age whose interests or powers were waning. In practice, however, very few faculty members have been refused reappointment after five or 10 years of service. After the brashness of their first year or two in office Bennington's presidents have hesitated to "fire" socially entrenched, possibly engaging and cooperative faculty members whose performance in class was deteriorating or was undistinguished. Instead the president might not increase such teachers'

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

salaries, but that was not an effective signal when no one was given a raise.

In the 1950s the trustees recognized that Bennington had a sort of de facto permanent tenure when they agreed that reappointment after five years carried with it the "presumption" of tenure. That is, at the end of 10 years' service a faculty member can count on reappointment unless his or her contribution to the college "has markedly deteriorated or that he has substantially failed to perform the terms of his contract, or unless financial exigency or a change of educational policy requires the elimination of his teaching position." In the 1960s the college terminated the alumnae rating of faculty and so deprived itself of statistical evidence of faculty performance that earlier presidents had found invaluable as they confronted questions of salary and tenure.

The plan as adopted in 1935 reaffirmed Leigh's practice of conferring no ranks on the ground that "the usual academic hierarchy of professor, associate professor, assistant professor and instructor, is not appropriate in the informal Bennington College community." Retirement was set at 65 at the choice of either the college or the faculty member and made compulsory at 70. Faculty were required to provide for their retirement by purchasing an annuity with 5 percent of their salary, a sum to be matched by the college.

Instead of providing for a year's leave on pay after seven years, the Bennington "sabbatical" was set at one term after five years. By the time the first faculty members began to claim their free terms, Leigh had begun announcing that the budget was frozen, and at his suggestion the plan was amended in 1940 by the statement that "normally" the teaching load of the person on sabbatical would be carried by other members of his division.

* * * * *

Before proposing a scale of salaries, the faculty committee listed the disadvantages of teaching at Bennington College. The average teaching time of well above 20 hours a week was at least double that at other colleges, and "moreover the individual nature of the teaching and counseling and the intimacy of the life in the small community put a decidedly heavier nervous and mental strain on the Bennington faculty than the formal, organized teaching in other colleges." There was therefore an imperative need to get away weekends, and during the winter recess and summer vacation. Obviously no one at Bennington could get along without a car. A faculty family not housed on the campus would have difficulty finding anything nearby at modest rental. Adequate school facilities were lacking. Teaching at Bennington entailed the sacrifice "of opportunities for professional advancement" and greatly reduced opportunities for writing or lecturing and there was no security of tenure.

Finally, after conceding that the cost of living at Bennington was about the same as at other colleges, the committee concluded its report with a remarkable statement: "We feel that we speak for the entire faculty in saying that the opportunities for creative teaching and effective living offered by Bennington College far outweigh any of our difficulties."

In recommending a scale of salaries the committee had the warning of President James R. Angell of Yale, given to Hall Park McCullough in 1924, that Bennington might have to pay as much as \$5,000 for a full professor. The plan as finally adopted provided for a basic salary ranging between \$2,000 and \$5,000 with a family allotment of \$500 for a spouse, a child or a fully dependent parent. Faculty were not encouraged to replenish the earth since the total family allotment was to be limited to \$1,500. Furthermore, a clause made it clear that nothing was promised for dependents beyond what the college could pay, a prudent provision which the president customarily read to expectant parents who went in to claim their bounty.

The salaries actually paid in the Leigh decade, ranging between \$1,000 for part-time teaching to \$6,000 but averaging no more than \$3,000, appear wretchedly inadequate. Viewed in the context of the Depression years, however, they had the amplitude promised in the Educational Plan of 1929. Logan Wilson's *The Academic Man*, written as Bennington opened, stated that the average professor's salary in northern and western colleges was less than \$5,000 — and assistant professors' salaries less than \$3,000. Since most of Leigh's youthful faculty came in at the instructor or assistant professor level it is understandable that Bennington was able to compete successfully for faculty in the 1930s.

The primary pattern of faculty appointments has persisted with little change. In his Educational Plan, Leigh had promised (or threatened) that Bennington would have an unorthodox faculty: in quest of "really gifted teachers" he would willingly sacrifice "traditional requirements regarding academic training, experience and research." Faculty would be sought among younger college teachers, some would be recruited from outside the academic compound, and the Ph.D., which had proved "to be an irrelevant standard for determining teaching effectiveness," would not influence appointments.

In the first year the average age of the faculty was just over 30 years and ranged from some in their early 20s to Kurt Schindler who at 50 seemed positively aged. Leigh's emphasis on youth could be defended on grounds of economy, often a decisive consideration with him; but also he felt that younger teachers would have escaped long habituation to customary college practices and would arrive at Bennington with little academic conditioning and no dog-eared lecture notes. For the same reason Leigh had no hesitation in appointing a considerable number of faculty who had

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

neither attended nor taught in college. Also it was clear that Leigh applied no doctrinal test (as Dr. Kilpatrick might have preferred), for John Dewey was unknown to many of his faculty and looked upon with profound skepticism by such outstanding teachers as Francis Fergusson and Wallace Fowlie.

Leigh was fairly even-handed in his appointment of men and women and he had a particular tenderness for husband-wife combinations. With the faculty completed in 1935-36 there were 24 men and 19 women and these included seven married couples. Indeed, no one could reconstruct the divisional history of the Leigh regime without due regard to the Fergussons, Joneses, Lauterers, Luenings, McCamys, Moselsios and Troy-Adamses; and Jean Brockway, Jeanne Butler and Elsa Hirsch taught for one year or more. Several of the teaching couples were childless but four found it possible to combine their faculty duties with a limited parenthood. None had more than two children and these were entered in the college Nursery School at the earliest moment.

None of Leigh's successors appointed as many women as he, relatively, and the husband-wife teams have all but disappeared. The proportion of women on the faculty began to decline before Leigh left. The women were down from 45 percent in 1935-1936 to 30 percent in 1940-1941, and recently the figure has varied between 20 and 25 percent. The preponderance of male faculty members, never protested by the students, clearly distinguished Bennington from the women's colleges in which a male instructor was something of a cherished if closely chaperoned curiosity. It may be that the change in favor of men reflected the declining authority of the Leighs as the divisions assumed power; it is more probable that the explanation was a scarcity of female applicants for faculty positions in the later '30s. It is understandable that some qualified women would hesitate to isolate themselves at a rural women's college if single, or to commute if married. In this respect Sarah Lawrence has had a distinct advantage in its proximity to New York City.

The husband-wife appointments were undoubtedly easier to make in the beginning because there were more slots to fill as the college expanded to its full size. Mrs. Leigh favored husband-wife appointments and Leigh had two special reasons for finding work for faculty wives. First, he was convinced that the educated but unemployed faculty wife was likely to become neurotic and be generally troublesome. Curious about the wife of one of his first appointees, Leigh made inquiries about her and was warned by the Bureau of Educational Service at Columbia that she "might be a really dangerous influence if left idle in the community." Though other respondents were reassuring, Leigh managed to find her a succession of assignments to counter the risk.

Second, he knew that he could pay the wife substantially less than the

husband. If the husband was given a salary of \$3,000 his wife, on indeterminate part-time, was generally paid \$1,000; in the case of two fulltime members of the Social Studies Division the husband's salary was \$4,500, the wife's \$3,000. But any sense of inequity was offset by the relatively handsome family income.

During his presidency Leigh managed to occupy fully half of the faculty wives in teaching, administration, research or secretarial work, and from time to time he tried to find something for his wife to do that would not occasion the charge of nepotism. For one term only she was acting director of admissions, but through his employment of other men's wives he helped to balance the budget and he left the wives little time, as he thought, to make trouble or develop neuroses or both. Unfortunately this practice did not go unchallenged by the Student Educational Policies Committee which asserted that the appointment of faculty wives as teachers and counselors had been "a mistaken policy" which in a number of cases had been "eminently unsuccessful." Whether this student judgment of 1937 had any influence or not, there were in fact three fewer faculty wives teaching by the end of Leigh's administration.

No more than four of the first 16 faculty members had doctorates, three in art and music had no bachelor's degree, Irving Fineman had taught engineering but not literature, and Ralph Jester, Lewis and Barbara Jones, Jane Ogborn, Ursula Rossmann, Kurt Schindler and Louise Steger had never taught before. By 1940-41, Leigh's last year, no more than 10 of the 45 instructors had Ph.D.s, 13 had not attended college, and 18 had done no college teaching before. The persistence of this pattern is evident some 40 years later. There were then 78 faculty members of whom no more than 23 had doctorates, 14 had no college degree and 24 had not taught in college.

The low ratio of doctorates has a simple explanation but it has given rise to the notion that Bennington's presidents have been hostile to the Ph.D. on principle. In 1963 a writer in the *Saturday Review* declared approvingly that Bennington "remains disdainful of the Ph.D. The college likes to feel that it is still holding the line in its gallant resistance to the Ph.D." In his book on the American college and university, Professor Fred Rudolph of Williams College spoke of "Bennington's bias against the university-trained specialist with a Ph.D."

Actually, both the scarcity of doctorates and the lack of academic experience among the faculty have been the direct consequence of the subjects included in the Bennington curriculum, and the decision to staff the Literature Division in the main with writers.

From the beginning the most promising candidates in the natural and social sciences have had their doctorates or were on their way to them. In contrast, Bennington's teachers of literature have seldom had advanced

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

degrees although in recent years a few Ph.D.s have appeared. In the main the college has appointed novelists, poets and critics without regard to degrees and some have been what Robert Frost once called himself, "imperfectly academic." Shortly after the Leigh decade, Kenneth Burke, one of the most scholarly, actually had no degree at all until Bennington made him an honorary doctor. He had dropped out of Columbia on the eve of graduation when Professor John Erskine asked him to be his graduate assistant the following year. In a state of shock Burke concluded that the surest way to avoid the assembly line to an M.A. and a Ph.D. was to escape to The Village without his B.A. and begin his career as a writer.

Leigh also set a lasting pattern in his choice of language teachers. Convinced that a foreign language and literature could be best taught by someone brought up and educated in it, his appointment of Jean Guiton to teach French and Ursula Rossmann to teach German established a precedent which still commands respect. Wallace Fowlie can hardly be classed as an exception since in cultural terms he was a fully naturalized Frenchman in spite of his proper Boston background.

The doctorate has been totally lacking in the field of visual and performing arts, since from Leigh's time on the college has sought musicians and artists rather than historians of art and musicologists. The irrelevancy of any academic degree in music and the arts, in fact, is suggested by the effective teachers of the Leigh era whose training lay completely outside the university. Among them were Margaret Aue, Paul Feeley, Marion Fergusson, Stefan Hirsch, Arch Lauterer, Helen Lauterer, Mariana Lowell, Otto Luening, Simon Moselsio, Gregory Tucker and Lila Ulrich. Again the pattern has persisted. The 1980-81 catalogue lists 36 faculty in dance, drama, music, and the visual arts. None had a doctorate, 10 master's degrees, 13 bachelor's degrees, and 13 had no degree at all. Were a table of educational equivalencies at hand, however, Bennington's artists and musicians might easily outpoint many of their more academic colleagues.

CHAPTER 13

TRADITIONS: COMMENCEMENT

From the beginning Bennington College considered itself exempt from the dictates of academic tradition. Customarily, college faculty are arranged hierarchically from instructor to full professor. As already noted, President Leigh appointed a scientist with the rank of assistant professor before realizing that the politics and pain of faculty promotions might be avoided by ignoring traditional classification. From that time on, no faculty member has been given a professorial rank or title. This has caused no appreciable faculty discontent though prestige had to be earned on more relevant grounds than elevation in the hierarchy. For the sake of an instructor applying for a grant or seeking employment elsewhere, Bennington presidents have been willing to state what his rank might be in another institution.

Practices which persisted became the Bennington tradition while others changed with the times or the administration. Customarily, college presidents are inaugurated but Leigh and his successor assumed office with no ceremony. The precedent was shortlived. Inaugurations in full regalia came in with the third president and went into lower key when Gail Parker's installation was quietly inserted in the commencement ceremony.

The graduation ceremony designed for the first class has persisted with slight change. Leigh had a hand in its shaping but the key decisions were made by a committee of faculty and seniors on which the students generally prevailed. For this task the seniors chose Ruth Bailey, Louisa Richardson and Margot Suter; Leigh appointed Helen Lauterer who taught costume design, and Lewis Jones and me, graduates of Reed

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

College where Leigh had begun teaching.

At its first meeting on September 26, 1935, the committee was in full agreement with Leigh's dictum that the commencement program should not involve parents or the college "in any considerable extra expense" and that in addition to limiting official expenditures "there should be an effective prevention of the growth of any such customs as giving of presents, flowers, etc."

But soon basic differences emerged over the type of graduation exercises that would be appropriate. The faculty members noted that Bennington felt no pain in ignoring tradition and one rashly proposed that there be no ceremonial of any kind. The students were aghast at the thought and insisted that they could not be decently graduated without caps and gowns, a procession, and formal award of degrees.

The faculty countered by suggesting that the seniors be given their diplomas after demonstrating their skills and knowledge during a week of art and science exhibits, performing arts workshops and the reading of poetry and theses. The seniors were cool to the idea. Forty-three years later Margot Suter Rood recalled suggesting celebration as the theme. "We wanted to emphasize the feelings of triumph and joy more than honor or achievement." And so the seniors kept alive visions of a ceremony, and in time there was general agreement that the degree might be awarded in a simple exercise at the silo base in the Barn quadrangle. No one wanted a commencement speaker and the outdoor ceremony must "not be hot or tiresome" or last more than half an hour.

Surprisingly the committee then hit upon the basic characteristic of the ceremony which has lasted to the present: The presentation of candidates by the divisions, a vote by the faculty and the award of degrees by the trustees. But there must not be "any sort of individual singling out of students which would lead to competitive applause." Diplomas need not be given out on that occasion but merely put in the mail boxes.

The committee was sharply divided over costuming and a procession. The faculty showed no eagerness to put on the traditional cap and gown, pointed out that most of the faculty in music and the arts had no degrees, and reminded the seniors that black was probably not their best color. The seniors agreed that there must be "no lugubrious black gowns and mortarboards." At this point Mrs. Lauterer offered to design a graduation gown and hood the seniors would be happy to wear. With this settled no one was interested in what the faculty would wear or whether they would join the procession.

The next question: Would student attendance at the ceremony be compulsory? Some felt that it could be voluntary; others insisted on "universal participation" since so little cooperation was required by the college. In the end the committee voted to consult the senior class and the

faculty before deciding anything whatever.

Summarizing developments on Nov. 11, Leigh reported that the seniors were unanimous in desiring a procession with music and costume and a simple ceremony at the silo base, but were not enthusiastic about a series of meetings or performances to demonstrate their prowess and accomplishment. The faculty favored the meetings, were evenly divided on a ceremony and opposed to any procession or costuming, "especially the academic costume for themselves." Taking these contrary views in stride the committee agreed on costumes for the seniors but none for the faculty, a short procession within the Barn quadrangle and a simple ceremony with music. No decision was reached on exhibits or evening meetings, but the committee made its greatest mistake in light-heartedly voting to schedule commencement two weeks from the end of term "to avoid the very hot weather and the great fatigue at the end of the year."

In the meantime, Leigh had set in motion inquiries about graduation ceremonies elsewhere. With the thought that Bennington might borrow from others, appeals were sent to Oxford, Cambridge, the University of Edinburgh, Harvard, Yale and Princeton. Soon a folder was bulging with elegant instructions, some in Latin, to everyone from the chancellor to the humblest candidate who might conceivably derange a graduation ceremonial.

Another folder was filled with correspondence with firms which sold rings and pins, furnished academic costumes, or engraved invitations and diplomas. When the topic of class rings and pins came up and a secretary asked Leigh "shall I squelch it without consulting the students?" the answer was yes, the students would not be interested. The Collegiate Cap and Gown Company was finally given an order for 60 caps, gowns and hoods on the Lauterer pattern.

Competing printers won an order for invitations but lost out on diplomas. One of the commencement's happiest economies occurred when Charles Smith, newly arrived instructor in graphic arts, designed a diploma which was then printed by his students. Economy indeed was a recurring theme. The committee agreed that "a band was essential to a good procession," but the cost was thought too great and eventually student and faculty musicians were conscripted. When the college chorus asked for gowns, Leigh urged the commencement committee to "get a costume which will serve the needs of both commencement and the chorus."

Various means of offsetting the cost of commencement were suggested. Someone thought that admission might be charged at one of the evening performances, but there was no second. If the college store, then a cooperative, bought the caps and gowns they might be rented or even sold to the seniors. As it was the college bought the gowns and stored them for

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

the chorus and later commencements; but three days after commencement Myra Jones, the comptroller, billed the graduates \$1 each for pressing the gowns. The fee was reduced to 50 cents the following year when the second class protested that that was the current rate.

By the end of May everything had been decided and all was in readiness for June 5 and 6. The week of meetings and exhibits favored by the faculty had shrunk to a single evening of drama and a single morning, Saturday from 9 to 11:30, for the inspection of senior work in the art studios, the science laboratories and the library. A song "with only a subtle hint of Alma Mater" had been written by Louisa Richardson and set to English folk music turned up by Hannah Coffin. Strings players were rehearsing a march and the song, and others were mastering a set of Swiss bells loaned and later given the college by the family of the senior, Elizabeth Shurcliff. Ida Mae Hait, director of the dining halls, was preparing for 683 students and visitors at the Saturday lunch; and that number of folding chairs would soon fill the Barn quadrangle.

Commencement began Friday, June 5, with teas on the lawn on either side of the campus. (In a postmortem on the weekend Margot Suter reported that at the teas "people looked slightly miserable.") In the evening there were scenes from Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* and a Turgenev play in the theatre. Parents were on their own for dinner and some took their daughters' favorite teachers to the Monument Inn, later to become a Catholic novitiate.

The degree-conferring ceremony in the Barn quadrangle began Saturday morning at 11:50 with 10 minutes of bell-ringing as trustees, faculty, students and guests were guided to their assigned sections. At precisely 12 the orchestra began playing and Leigh and William Heard Kilpatrick, chairman of the board, led the seniors in pairs from the southwest door of the Barn to the silo base as it has been done ever since. The two men were in full academic regalia; the 53 seniors wore silk gowns of navy blue, navy blue hoods with white velvet bands and white satin lining, and navy blue skullcaps or beanies. Already seated, the faculty and trustees were unimpressive in their everyday dress.

When the music stopped and all were seated, Leigh rose and in seven or eight minutes stated what the degree signified, assured the seniors' communities that their presence would give "a modest increment of youthful purpose, energy and skill where these qualities are needed for the improvement of our culture;" conceded that our pride in the graduates must be shared with school, family and contemporary environment; and insisted that graduation is not a culmination. "It has been our fundamental objective so to arrange the work here that purpose, interest and acquired skill will naturally result in its continuance even though the environment inevitably be more resistant."

"We shall follow these first graduates with interest and affection, proud of their accomplishment, disappointed at their failures. We would not spurn, but we would not build our hopes, nor theirs, upon the accident of falling under the restless, capricious glare of the spotlight called popular success. Rather we shall watch and weigh future achievement in terms of honest, often unobtrusive work, adaptability, the facing of realities with humor and sense, the acceptance of responsibility, above all the maintenance of integrity. These are the continuing bonds between us."

At the end of his remarks the president asked the chairmen of the several divisions to read the names of students recommended for the degree. Leigh then called on the faculty as a whole "for a rising vote of nomination for the candidates named." At that point and every year since a few seniors have doubtless held their breath until their teachers were all standing. What is certain is that when the faculty were all standing there has often been a collective sigh of mock relief. The chairman of the board next asked the trustees for a rising vote, and addressing the seniors was happy to inform them that they had just been awarded the bachelor's degree and were to be congratulated.

The orchestra then played the opening chord of a song of which everyone had a copy and when it was more or less sung the bells joined in and the same music served for the recessional. The graduates were given their diplomas in the president's office, and this event continued to be withheld from public view until the Fels era. A buffet luncheon was then served from the four east and west dining rooms, and students, faculty, trustees and guests were invited to eat in the center dining room, on the porch, in the downstairs lounge, or on the lawn.

The ceremony itself was so satisfying that it has persisted with no basic change. No one has protested the total lack of honors and prizes. As one might have predicted, however, every Bennington president has felt free to improve upon the text of his own or his predecessor's remarks. In consequence only two sentences from the first commencement have survived in what President Murphy called "the traditional statement."

Coeducation seems to have required no change in the commencement costuming, but over the years the seniors have scrapped the beanies, generally left off the hood, and some have even declined to wear the gown. But Helen Lauterer's graduation creation continues to be worn with pride by alumnae representing the college at presidential inaugurations across the country. At one, Ceci Drinker Saltonstall '39 was asked if she represented an English university and "several said the gown was very beautiful." Betty Uptegrove Mathews '44 reported that "the Bennington outfit certainly caused comment. I was something just short of a sensation."

Scheduling commencement two weeks from the end of term was

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

considered "very inefficient" and was not repeated. Most of the graduates opted to hang around, and some found socializing and partying congenial while other students were trying to finish term papers and projects. The 1936 ceremony was an all-college affair for it was witnessed by the entire student body, and that never happened again. Soon the college began encouraging students not graduating to leave before commencement and so Bennington's only ceremonial was more or less reserved for the senior class.

The following year Leigh and the class committee initiated the custom of having a commencement speaker, but the graduation ceremony continued unchanged since the speaker was scheduled at another time. In theory he or she was chosen by the senior class but Leigh had no hesitation in vetoing what he considered inappropriate choices, and later presidents have had to disregard the nomination of heroes no more attainable than Gandhi.

* * * * *

Two decisions had to be made before the first commencement: Would any honorary degrees be awarded on the occasion and how should the graduates be organized as alumnae? Among the collegiate evils Leigh hoped to avoid at Bennington was the self-serving distribution of honorary degrees. In a report to the trustees in October, 1935, he said that wealthy donors "run from college to college at commencement time accumulating hoods enough to keep them warm at the North Pole." What was needed was a clear-cut, honest policy on the practice. He thought the evil might be avoided if all nominations for honorary degrees originated with the faculty. No more than one or two should be awarded each year and each division in turn might nominate a candidate.

The trustees exhibited no enthusiasm for giving the faculty such a function and voted to confer no honorary degrees. This remained college policy until Professor Kilpatrick was honored at the time of his retirement as a trustee. In June, 1938, Hall Park McCullough, trustee and principal founder, wrote Leigh that "it would be a very graceful thing if the first honorary degree conferred by Bennington could be on one without whose advice, assistance and untiring interest the college could hardly have been started." In accord with his defunct proposal Leigh got the social studies faculty to recommend a doctorate for Kilpatrick, a formality which was omitted when in time doctorates were given other founders. Granting a total of no more than seven honorary degrees since 1936 thus accords well with Leigh's position. Bennington tradition has severely limited the bestowal of this type of recognition.

* * * * *

During his years at Bowdoin and Williams, Leigh developed a distaste for class reunions marked by nostalgia and alcoholic conviviality. This sort of thing he felt Bennington might avoid if the alumnae were organized not by class but by major. This would merely carry on the college practice of ignoring class lines and discouraging the emergence of class consciousness. Entering students were scattered through the several houses, they had no class organization, and if they met together for orientation in the beginning they were seniors before they assembled again to nominate a commencement speaker.

Shortly before the first class was graduated, Leigh appealed to Edith Noyes, a trusted senior, to draw up a plan for the organization of Bennington alumnae on the basis of their major fields. Approved by the trustees on June 5, 1936, the plan provided for associations of the several divisions and one on educational policy. Membership in one or more of the associations was open to seniors, alumnae and present and former faculty.

This imaginative innovation was short-lived. Several of the associations met once or twice at commencement time but their success was doomed by the lack of leadership and support from either the college or the graduates. Meeting in April, 1942, alumnae decided to replace the seven associations representing major fields with a single association dedicated to the interests of the college as a whole.

In spite of his mistrust of class reunions Leigh made a second proposal concerning alumnae which in fact depended on class spirit for its success. He proposed that over a period of 20 years each class repay the college whatever its members had received through reduced tuition. The idea he said came from a parent who planned to repay what his daughter had received. Leigh thought the graduates would have no difficulty in interesting "friends and relatives in gifts of varying sizes," and he hoped they would begin paying off their "debt" soon since faculty salaries must be raised to compete with offers "six of our most valuable faculty have received."

Over the next years contributions from each class to the Reduced Tuition Fund, announced as percentages of the class debt, came in slowly. In December, 1943, the executive committee of the Alumnae Association reported that the class which had given most would wipe out its debt in 40 years, that which had given least in 133 years. The Reduced Tuition Fund was then renamed the Alumnae Scholarship Fund and appeals no longer mentioned "debt" but resorted to other rationales. Early recognition of the importance of alumnae to the college brought about the creation of a Graduates Office in 1937. Its staff: Polly Swan '37.

CHAPTER 14

ADMINISTRATORS AND OTHERS

The institutional shaping of Bennington College doubtless owed something to every student, teacher, administrator and lesser employee who was at the college in its first decade. We meet the faculty and an occasional student in later chapters on the several divisions. Here we are concerned with the president and his wife, his administrative officers and other employees who altogether outnumbered the teaching staff two to one.

In the complicated process of instituting a new college, Leigh made most of the major decisions. He himself considered the first four years decisive in shaping Bennington's educational patterns and practices and during those years he was totally immersed in college affairs. The college was his life, the subject of his thinking, his satisfactions and his disappointments, and to the annoyance of his former Williams colleagues, his conversation.

Leigh's part in launching the college was noted in an article by Hubert Herring, a Bennington parent, in *Harpers* in September, 1940:

"From the turning of the first furrow to the laying of the latest brick it has been Leigh who has vicariously weighed each load of sand and lime, measured each length of sewerpipe, chosen each student, picked each member of the faculty, and given direction to the institution."

Leigh protested the publication of the article saying it was ridiculous to make him "the hero of the play," yet Herring was right. It was the president who decreed that Bennington would have no house mothers or

dean or chaplain, who decided what subjects would be taught and gave the arts most-favored treatment, chose faculty and staff, appointed the faculty's executive committee, raised salaries or declined to raise them, instituted the long winter recess, and on and on.

In making these choices and decisions Leigh had virtually absolute power so long as he enjoyed the confidence of the trustees. His insistence on his own ultimate authority was firmly based on his conviction that Bennington College was founded to carry out the education program he had devised in 1929 and he considered it his responsibility to keep the train on track.

At the beginning of the third year Leigh's unlimited power was questioned at a faculty meeting and he was invited to share his control over appointments with a faculty council. The invitation was declined on the ground that "experience proves that a concentration of power in the president" makes for more effective policy.

In a 1934 bulletin on College Organization, however, Leigh pictured himself "in the mesh of the various agencies of deliberation and consultation" which provided for "a widely distributed and continuous initiative and group judgment." These agencies were purely advisory, as the president reminded them on occasion, but they were consulted. On reappointments of faculty the president studied evaluations by the Student Educational Policy Committee, ratings by the alumnae, and the advice of colleagues. His door was open to all and he listened to complaints and criticism. Until the end there was in fact no serious challenge to the president's mild and reasonable dictatorship.

* * * * *

Less known is Mrs. Leigh's role in college administration. Except for a semester as acting director of admissions she had no title, but with her master's degree from Teachers College she knew more about progressive education than her husband and in her own mind she was virtually co-president with him. In this role she had been supportive during the precarious years the college was in limbo and she now had ample opportunity to influence decisions affecting the college in being. On his part Leigh treated her as a partner in his work. When a female trustee offered to interview an applicant for an administrative post in 1931 Leigh wrote her that her services would not be needed since Mrs. Leigh performed that function. Her judgment, he said, was better than his and "many candidates have been turned down on her advice." How he viewed her role is suggested in a letter to his successor in which he referred to Lewis and Barbara Jones as "the titular and real heads of the little Bennington flock."

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

Mrs. Leigh's untitled role in college affairs was not warmly appreciated by the faculty or the trustees. She got no thanks for her assignment of the limited supply of faculty housing; faculty wives with babies felt injured by her edict against drying diapers in public view; faculty bachelors suspected her of match-making as she dictated seating arrangements; and most of us were aware of her part in appointments and dis-appointments. The trustees complained that Mrs. Leigh had a virtual veto on board actions for the president always consulted his wife before committing himself. Arthur Page, chairman of the board in 1940, once remarked to Hall Park McCullough, "I hate to feel that we do all this work and make these decisions only to have them taken home to a higher authority."

At the top of the administrative structure the president had no second-in-command unless it was Mrs. Leigh, and until late in his administration he had no assistant. But he had two secretaries, one permanent and one transient, and they met his needs from stenography to public relations. In 1928 before he finished teaching at Williams, Leigh engaged Marjorie Beebe, a Williamstown girl, to take dictation and type his letters. When the Leighs moved to Bennington the arrangement continued though it cost Miss Beebe a daily round-trip from Williamstown. After Leigh's retirement and her marriage to Brent Fisk, she served as secretary to three more Bennington presidents, never missed a day in 34 years and drove some 200,000 miles without an accident. A Williamstown friend once said that during those years Bennington College was her life. Her value to the college was recognized in 1948 when she was given the title Executive Secretary to the College. Following Marjorie's death of cancer in 1961 Charlotte Bowman, administrative assistant to President Burkhardt, wrote that in her relationship with the college, "she perfectly balanced involvement and detachment and did so with humor and appreciation."

In contrast to Marjorie Fisk's "permanence" were the president's secretaries who lasted no longer than a year or two. For that Leigh was to blame for he chose highly nubile young women who soon decided that they had turned down offers of marriage long enough. The series began with Polly Bullard who left during the second year to marry A. John Holden, son of the local trustee, Mrs. Arthur Holden, and later Vermont's state commissioner of education. Curiously, Polly and her successors were all graduates of Smith: Margaret Hankins, Catharine Jones, Dorothea Hendricks and Jacquelin Griffiths.

In all financial matters relating to the college Leigh depended on his comptroller, Myra Jones. Miss Jones grew up in nearby Hoosick Falls, N.Y., but like her brothers preferred Bennington and was more of a Vermonter than any other member of the staff. With a bachelor's degree from Syracuse, she had a government job in Washington from 1912 to 1925 and was chief financial officer of the Pittsburgh YWCA when she learned

of plans for a college in Bennington and offered her services. Correspondence and interview led to her appointment as comptroller in 1931, a position she held until her retirement in 1951.

In her first year Miss Jones set up the procedures for carrying out and recording financial transactions which continued with little change under her successor, Stanley Pike. She and Leigh concurred in the need for balancing expenditures with income as they worked out the annual budget. According to Bennington's original financial plan, tuition would be raised whenever outlay increased, but like his successors Leigh hesitated to raise fees that were already alarmingly high and by 1936 he was telling faculty who wanted raises that the budget was frozen. In their collaboration Leigh sought out economies so diligently that Miss Jones was spared the customary negativism of her office and sought ways to pay for what was needed rather than reasons for saying no. In a tribute to Miss Jones on her retirement, Leigh wrote of her expertness and integrity, and made a particular point of her refusal to confuse financial means with educational aims.

Incidentally, there was a warm relationship between the college and the North Bennington Bank not only because the McCulloughs, founders of the college, were interested in both, but also because Myra Jones managed finances at the college and her brother, Ralph Jones, ran the bank. We all had checking accounts at the bank, and at a price that included little homilies on thrift, Ralph Jones enabled us to have cars and buy houses. When Miss Jones sent our monthly check to her brother he deducted whatever we had agreed to pay on our debts. (The bank and I were so habituated to this comfortable arrangement that deductions went on for two years after I had paid off our mortgage. When I finally called the bank's attention to its oversight, the substantial refund was such a welcome windfall it never occurred to me to demand interest on it.)

Gladys Leslie, the librarian, has already been described. At her insistence the library was wide open for reading, browsing and research and there was no surveillance at the charge-out desk or system of fines. Both students and faculty responded well to the spirit of trust and though library books were found in student rooms at a term's end, actual theft was rare.

Mrs. Leslie responded affirmatively to faculty requests for purchases and inter-library loans but when a new instructor gave her a list of 500 books to order she decided that megalomania should be dealt with by the instructor's division, and it was. As the library grew Mrs. Leslie took pains to head off sclerosis by discarding books no longer needed and by politely declining gifts, however valuable, that had no conceivable utility in the Bennington scheme of things. The result was a high usage rate compared with libraries that were noted for their heirlooms.

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

In a statement of warm appreciation in the *Alumnae Quarterly*, Leigh stressed Mrs. Leslie's "imaginative grasp of the essential nature and peculiar needs of the college." On the eve of her retirement Mrs. Leslie had a major role in planning the Edward Clark Crossett Library which was built in 1959. She was succeeded by Mary (Polly) Hopkins who had worked with her as assistant librarian since 1935 and who ably carried on the procedures, principles and spirit instituted by Mrs. Leslie.

Mary Garrett was signed up to be manager of the college store when her husband was appointed to the science faculty in the spring of 1932. Her first step upward came before the opening when the store went to Elizabeth Hall and Mrs. Garrett became director of records. In that position her training, capabilities, warmth and equable temperament were at once evident. She was a graduate of DePauw University and like Mrs. Leigh had a master's degree in education from Columbia. She had had teaching experience and for two years was assistant to Ben Wood, director of the Cooperative Test Service at Columbia. In her second year at Bennington she was appointed to three committees, in 1936 the responsibility of admissions was added to her duties, and in 1940, still in charge of records, she was made director of admissions and student personnel. She was in short one of Leigh's greatest economies for when her responsibility was doubled her salary was not.

In other colleges most of Mrs. Garrett's duties would have been performed by a registrar, director of admissions and dean. She was like a dean of women in that any student could go to her for advice or for a different counselor. Beyond that, her Student Personnel Committee passed on student programs, promotion and graduation. From 1936, the year of her divorce, to her departure as Mrs. John Woodburn in 1947, Mary Garrett gave the committee direction and continuity while crediting Dr. Wilmoth Osborne with having given it its distinctive approach to the judgment of students. Mrs. Garrett continued to handle admissions until her last year when Mary Josephine Shelly returned from training WAVES and took over that responsibility. After Mrs. Garrett's departure her duties were performed by Miss Shelly and Violet Boynton.

Listed in the catalogue as a secretary, Margaret A. Griswold was assigned the delicate task of translating instructors' comments into grades for transcripts. For some 20 years she had a key role in records and committee meetings.

* * * * *

Mabel Barbee-Lee, first of Leigh's appointments, was first to leave after recruiting four classes of Bennington's pioneers, presiding over the Student Personnel Committee, and earning Bennington's first sabbatical.

Though she took great satisfaction in her work as director of admissions, she had two antagonists whose influence she resented.

One was Mrs. Leigh who sometimes over ruled both her husband and Mrs. Barbee-Lee on an admissions decision even after a letter had gone out. Years later Mrs. Barbee-Lee voiced her opinion of Mrs. Leigh in her book *It's Later than You Think*. She wrote that "a faculty wife" returned from analysis in New York and "was the same meddlesome woman who now knew what ailed all the rest of us." In 1970 she wrote me that the wife was Mildred Leigh.

The other was Dr. Wilmoth Osborne, director of health, who played a dominant role in Barbee-Lee's Student Personnel Committee, and whose judgments she often questioned. The discussion of students at the committee lunches she felt was "extremely helpful until it seemed as if the faculty counselors began to lose confidence in their own judgment and relied too much on Wilmoth who, after all, was not yet an accredited psychoanalyst."

Against this background Barbee-Lee resigned as she left for her sabbatical in December, 1935. She was interested in an opening at Scripps College whose president she knew, but the salary did not tempt her and she wrote Leigh in August, 1936, that she would be happy to return to Bennington. By that time her duties were being successfully performed by Mary Garrett and Leigh wrote her that there was no longer an opening. He said he was not influenced by any difficulties she may have been having when she resigned but that combining records and admissions had been a necessary economy.

Since her salary had been more than twice that of her successor it is conceivable that the president had received her resignation with considerable fiscal relief. But he must have been grateful to her for her resounding success in luring students to Bennington in the beginning, to say nothing of her legacy of enduring admissions forms and procedures.

During the next years she held administrative positions at other colleges and her daughter recalled that she represented the American Association of University Women and the National Education Association at international conferences. Finally at the age of 75 she embarked on the career that had been in her dreams since childhood. Her first book, *Cripple Creek Days*, published in 1958, became a best seller, won the Golden Spur award from the Western Writers of America and brought her a doctorate from her alma mater, Colorado College. She had finished her third book when the first class paid her way to its twenty-fifth reunion. Her fifth book, *The Gardens in My Life*, was published in 1970. In the next year she wrote me that she had always been grateful for her years at Bennington. "They were among the most rewarding of my life. The disappointments and disillusionments seem minor compared with the joy of helping make the

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

Bennington dream a reality."

At a time when other colleges were beginning warily to mention mental hygiene in their catalogues, Leigh blithely chose a psychiatrist to be director of health. On the eve of his appointment as president in 1928, Leigh had told the trustees that Bennington might avoid "the fumbling and inept efforts of the traditional dean" by appointing an expert in mental hygiene who could educate faculty as well as students. Three years later with this in mind he was delighted to find a Reed College graduate he and Mrs. Leigh had known when he taught there whose training and experience in both medicine and psychiatry fitted her to combine the roles of college doctor and psychotherapist. Dr. Wilmoth Osborne was a graduate of the University of Oregon Medical School, had had internships in medicine and psychiatry in New York, and in 1931-32 was Fellow in Psychiatry at Yale.

During her six years at the college Dr. Osborne gave physical examinations routinely to first and fourth-year students and to others as necessary and was on constant duty as college physician. She and the college nurse, Helena Baer, competently dealt with the overload when students returned from the winter recess with a variety of home-grown ills.

In 1934, Dr. Osborne came across a physical survey of American College women which had overlooked Bennington. On it Smith girls were heaviest, Stanford girls tallest. Dr. Osborne took great pride in informing the trustees that Bennington students were $4\frac{1}{2}$ pounds heavier than the Smith girls and 1 inch taller than the Stanford girls. This has given statistical support to those who view the early years as Bennington's golden age.

Beyond the physical, Dr. Osborne made psychotherapy a normal function of the health service while insisting that students in need of analysis take a leave of absence. As a member of the Committee on Student Personnel she performed the dual function of introducing psychological considerations in judging students and of educating the faculty whose students were being discussed.

Dr. Osborne doubtless contemplated an eventual shift to private practice when she went on sabbatical leave in the fall of 1937 and began her psychoanalysis with Dr. Clara Thompson in New York. To be acting director of health that term the president appointed Mrs. Leigh's brother-in-law, Dr. Joseph Chassell, who was trained in medicine and experienced in psychiatry. For seven years he had been senior physician and psychoanalyst at Sheppard and Enoch Pratt Hospital, Towson, Md.

Upon her return to college Dr. Osborne found that Dr. Chassell had been psychoanalyzing two or three students, a practice of which she disapproved. Furthermore, she found herself at odds with both Leighs who did not conceal their opinion that Dr. Chassell's success with students

had been greater than hers. Her work continued to be increasingly demanding and exhausting and it was not surprising that she soon resigned to take up private practice in New York.

Dr. Osborne left with a sense of relief but she wrote Leigh that her time at Bennington had been "the most fruitful, stimulating and satisfying years" of her life. "I leave with strong emotional attachments and a belief in the educational principles and aims which guide the college."

In New York Dr. Osborne rapidly built up a practice but died of cancer in September, 1940. At Bennington she had been the acknowledged counselor of counselors as well as the confidant of faculty in quandaries, marital or otherwise. To some students she appeared formidable and she was not known to suffer fools gladly; but she willingly went out of her way when she could help another human being and she had great directness and loyalty. Mary Woodburn writes that she "was everyone's tower of strength." At a community meeting Leigh paid tribute to her for her major contributions "to the structure, the life, the work and the spirit of this college." In her memory students, colleagues and friends established a rotating fund to provide loans to students in need.

Although both Leighs welcomed the prospect of Dr. Chassell's arrival, his appointment had an unfortunate fiscal consequence. Dr. Osborne had warned Leigh against Dr. Chassell's appointment not only because he was a relative but because he was "too engrossed in psychiatry." It was true that Dr. Chassell's recent practice had been limited to psychiatry and that for the first time the college would require the services of a second physician.

Leigh was then trying his best to keep costs from rising as the Depression lifted and he was particularly hesitant to add to the budget as he appointed Mrs. Leigh's brother-in-law. He attempted to escape from this dilemma by an ingenious arrangement that was doomed to fail: Dr. Chassell could count on 25 hours a week for his psychoanalytical practice on campus and in town, and during term time his fees would be used to pay his medical associate, Dr. Elizabeth McCullough, graduate of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, Columbia. Unfortunately there were then few townsmen who felt that their quirks and ailments required Dr. Chassell's ministrations and he had no more than three students in analysis. The result was that the health budget had to be increased to provide a regular salary for the second physician. This inflation of health costs was substantially corrected when Lewis Jones succeeded Leigh and utilized Dr. Chassell more as a teacher than as a therapist.

Frank Tschorn had a Columbia degree in engineering and he was maintenance supervisor at Columbia before coming to Bennington in 1934 as superintendent of buildings and grounds. Like Robert Woodworth of the science faculty, Tschorn commanded all the skills necessary to build his own house and he was an outstanding tennis player. Under

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

him were 20 employees including an engineer, an electrician, a carpenter, a plumber and others without any one of whom the operation and maintenance of the educational plant would have been disrupted.

Some 50 college employees took orders from Ida Mae Hait, director of dining halls and student houses. Miss Hait was a graduate of the Philadelphia Domestic Science School and had received training at Schraffts. She had organized and run cafeterias for the War Department and more recently had been in charge of the Lake Placid Club's restaurant. At Bennington she had charge of student "board and room" not only in term-time but also in the summer while the Bennington School of the Dance was in session. Among those on her staff were the chef, William Petersen; an assistant chef, Michael O'Brien who later had a long run as chef; a baker, Ralph Morrison; 14 kitchen helpers; a head waitress, Mrs. Margaret Hill; 10 waitresses in addition to student waitresses; and 15 maids.

One year one of the waitresses was Catherine Corcoran, a recent graduate of the University of Vermont who could not find a teaching job. Much later she became superintendent of schools in Bennington and then represented all Vermont superintendents in liaison with the commissioner of education.

One of the maids was assigned to each student house and she was responsible for its appearance at all times against unannounced visits from Mrs. George Franklin and her trustee building committee. Several of the maids took a motherly interest in "their" students, listened to tales of woe, gave counsel on demand.

In 1935-36 when a fourth freshman class brought enrollment up to the planned 250, there were 42 men and women on the teaching staff and 87 other employees ranging from the president to the part-time cleaning woman. There was a substantial salary spread between Leigh's \$10,000 and residence and a maid's \$500 and a meal or two. The salaries paid Mrs. Barbee-Lee (\$5,500) and Dr. Osborne (\$5,000) compared favorably with the highest salaries paid faculty; other administrative officers were paid less than faculty of equal experience. In the fourth year Mrs. Leslie and Miss Jones were each paid \$3,500; Frank Tschorn \$3,000, Mary Garrett \$2,750, and Miss Hait \$2,500 "& living." In each case their top assistants were paid about half as much and farther down came the janitors and finally the maids.

These salaries and wages of the 1930s were not out of line with salaries at other colleges and with wages elsewhere in Bennington. Whenever Leigh planned to appoint someone he found out what his or her present salary was and then offered two or three hundred dollars more. At the lower levels the college gave employment to men and women in North Bennington and Shaftsbury many of whom had been out of work since the onset of the

Depression. Employees at the college might be dismissed but there were no layoffs and a working couple had no difficulty in giving their children a better education than they had had.

In addition, furnishing offices and student rooms kept a local factory busy and contributed substantially to the revival of industry and employment in North Bennington. Needless to say the salaries and wages paid by the college were mostly spent in Bennington and were a dependable and welcome contribution to the local economy. The total payroll in 1935-36 was somewhere around \$250,000; it is at present about \$4,500,000.

In the 1935-36 budget were listed the devoted employees who were to stay on to retirement whether or not they rose in rank. Adolph Balmer had come from Switzerland to be head gardener for Frederick B. Jennings and he became the college gardener when part of the Jennings estate became the college campus. Wesley Green began as "outdoor man" in 1932 and retired as head plumber in 1978. In 1933 he was a ringer on the faculty softball team that was roundly beaten by the Williams faculty in spite of his home runs. He recalls that Tschorn finally yielded to the Vermont custom of granting an undeclared holiday in deer season. Wesley's wife was for a time in the alumni office as records clerk and his brother, Fred, was once tree man for Adolph Balmer. Fred's daughter, Carolyn Hess, has been a secretary at the college since 1972 and two of her daughters and a son have carried on the tradition in varying degrees.

From the first, Ed Nash was the Commons janitor. Son of the village blacksmith, Nash was happiest when playing the trombone and he was in demand in North Bennington to serenade newlyweds and at the college every four years for election night processions. For some 30 years he was the faithful caretaker of the polished Commons floors. Mrs. Nash was a maid from time to time. One of their sons became a teacher, the other a doctor.

Winnie Knapp began as a maid in 1932 and for some 20 years was housekeeper-in-chief. Her husband Fred was on Balmer's crew for a time. Connie Vince began as a waiter and rose to be overseer of the dining halls. Stephen Vince held various jobs from 1935 to retirement. Marjorie Healy began in 1939 as assistant to the director of residence and continued until the late 1970s.

Peter Nelson began and retired as the shipping clerk whose services were freely given students and faculty as well as the college. At commencement, dressed in his Sunday suit, he guarded the Barn door where the seniors began and ended their commencement procession. His wife Kathleen (Kay) was a maid or worked in the dining halls and elsewhere during the same 40 years.

Murray McGuire came in the second year as a night janitor and retired

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

42 years later as superintendent of buildings and grounds. From the first he was the mainstay of the maintenance force and responded cheerfully to calls for help at any time of day or night. His wife Margaret worked in the Cooperative Store from 1941 to 1951. Their daughters have found careers as teacher and medical secretary compatible with marriage. Following Murray's death in 1976 the trustees expressed their appreciation of his services in an eloquent Memorial Minute and the music faculty gave a concert in his memory. Murray's brother, George, began as a janitor and when he retired was night officer on guard at the college gate.

These were a few of the men and women who kept the college functioning with little recognition beyond a modest gift a Community Chest provided at Christmas time, a purse to mark 25 years of service and for a select few a farewell party upon retirement. But they are warmly remembered by faculty and generations of students.

CHAPTER 15

VISUAL ARTS: LEARNING BY DOING

Dr. Leigh had no doubt that the visual arts should be accorded full equality in the curriculum, but he was not certain what that would mean in practice. He was therefore eager to find someone experienced both in art and academia who could fit the arts into the Bennington structure without unduly damaging either. Edwin (Billy) Park seemed the perfect candidate for he was not only an architect, a watercolorist and writer on contemporary trends in art, but he had taught at Columbia, the New School of Social Research, Princeton and Yale. Six months before college opened in 1932 Leigh offered Park Bennington's top faculty salary and named him "director of art," a title which barely survived the first year.

In addition, Park was made chairman of the division which included not only the visual arts but music, dance and, in another year, drama. Combining the visual and performing arts appeared logical but the difficulties in the way of their integration or even confederation proved insurmountable. Billy Park convened the omnibus division from time to time, but it soon became evident that dance, drama and music would rather go their separate ways. Park deplored the division's breakup, thought it meant that an opportunity had been lost and puzzled over the subsequent expansion of two of the departing. Drama, once liberated, began to grow although it was "no more significant as an art form than painting;" and music, "no more of a subject than architecture, now has a separate building and a large faculty."

But could the visual arts themselves be brought into a coherent program? The first question was what subjects should be taught. At the

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

opening in 1932 no one could have foretold what would go into the eventual curriculum for it grew as much by chance as by design. Earlier, Leigh had imagined that the arts could be adequately taught by a painter and a sculptor, but Park persuaded him that architecture (which he taught), design and graphic arts were also essential. Then more subjects were added without premeditation.

Painting was taught by Park until the arrival of Stefan Hirsch in 1934. With his European background and training, Hirsch was an experienced painter in oils and fresco. He resigned after teaching five years but his painting continued and a memorial exhibition of his works was held at the Phillips Gallery, Washington, in 1977.

Hirsch was succeeded by Paul Feeley who then taught continuously (except for three years with the Marine Corps in World War II) until his death in 1966. Feeley had been teaching at Cooper Union and there had learned about Bennington from two art majors of 1937, Ernestine Cohen and Helen Webster. The latter returned to Bennington with him in 1939 as his wife.

Sculpture was taught the first year by Ralph Jester who had studied several media here and abroad. According to Jean Guiton who taught French, Jester and Park "were having a cold war like any tandem of artists" and Jester was not reappointed but went on to a successful career in motion pictures. He was succeeded by Simon Moselsio.

Trained and recognized as a sculptor in Germany, Moselsio had been teaching life drawing and painting in New York and came to Park's attention at a New York exhibition of his work. Although the Moselsios thought of returning to New York after a year at Bennington, Moselsio was to enjoy the longest continuous tenure of any Bennington art teacher and as "Mr. Mo" built up a remarkable store of affection among the students he had taught before his retirement in 1960.

Arch Lauterer, appointed in 1933, achieved fame through his scene design and stagecraft but before drama and dance claimed him fulltime he taught trial majors and majors in art, and his mastery of diverse arts and crafts made him the ideal general practitioner. Design began formally in 1935 with the appointment of Lila Ulrich who had studied at the Bauhaus in Germany. She was succeeded in 1937 by Russell Krob, a versatile artist whose training had been in architecture.

Serious instruction in the graphic arts began in 1936 with the advent of Charles Smith, a Virginian who had studied at Yale and the Corcoran School of Art and had published *Old Virginia in Block Prints* and *Old Charleston*. Though he referred to himself as a wood cutter, he was the serene master of a variety of techniques and moods.

Another half of the art offering was neither planned nor foreseen but came about fortuitously. In fact architecture was not preordained. Park

was appointed for his teaching experience, his skill in watercolors and his knowledge of art history and theory, and it is doubtful that architecture would have become firmly lodged in the Bennington curriculum had he not been also a licensed architect. (Park agreed with this conjecture in a letter of March 20, 1972.) Photography was added because there were serious students of the art and Park, Smith, Ulrich and later Moselsio were happy to teach it. Mrs. Percy Jackson, a trustee, contributed a fine camera and Carolyn Crossett's father equipped the first darkroom under the eaves above the architecture studio. By her senior year Carolyn was teaching photography to a dozen students.

Several faculty wives completed the unplanned half of the art curriculum. Herta Moselsio gave ceramics a secure place in the program. Though she was highly trained and had won honors in her field, she remained a part-time "assistant in art" until the trustees voted her faculty status on Jan. 7, 1941 though "ceramics majors" had to wait another 15 years. Helen Lauterer added weaving and dress design which the division classed with ceramics as crafts and recommended as recreational. Jean Brockway was brought in to arrange exhibits and teach art history on demand; and Elsa Hirsch offered instruction over a varied expanse including fresco painting, primitive art, art criticism and contemporary critics.

The art offering was broadened still further by the instructors' willingness to teach subjects on the periphery of their specialties. In consequence the college appeared to be competing with art schools when the later Leigh catalogues announced that instruction was offered in "exterior and interior architecture," housing, design (including book, dress, furniture and textile design), shop work, easel and mural painting in several media, sculpture (including casting), lithography, etching, ceramics, drawing, weaving, photography, optics, anatomy, chemistry of color and industrial design, to say nothing of the analysis, criticism and history of art from cave painting to Kandinsky. This astonishing curriculum suffered a notable deflation in the 1940s.

From the beginning it was uncertain whether there would be consensus on either the art program or its philosophy, and Park thought one reason was "a pervading fog of vagueness" concerning progressive education. In his typed "History of the Art Division" (1941), Park noted agreement on many points but difficulty in finding a rallying theme. He himself had no interest in setting up another art school, and he and his colleagues, all practicing artists, were in wholehearted accord with Leigh's emphasis on "creation and expression." Moreover, they had no difficulty in accepting the maxim of progressive education that one learns by doing. But, Park said, they were determined to avoid the "ravages of self-expression" which they associated with some early attempts at progressive education.

In the search for a coherent program, Park's *New Backgrounds for a*

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

New Age, published in 1926, was not particularly helpful since it dealt with architecture and the industrial arts but not with such arts as painting and sculpture. He felt that the Bauhaus in Germany had a message for Bennington and he was delighted when in 1933 Moholy-Nagy's *The New Vision* made the Bauhaus philosophy available in English. Agreeing enthusiastically that the key to modern art and the experience of art was to be found not in history but in present exploration and discovery, Park announced in the 1933-34 catalogue that the art division's introductory course would seek understanding through "actual experiment with a variety of materials revealing the potentialities for expression of form, color, space, sound, movement, texture, weight, etc., and the enlargement of sensory and emotional experience."

Unfortunately, Park's zeal was only mildly contagious and he got limited support from his colleagues because of their "natural skepticism." Park's major attempt to propagate the faith by experiment failed utterly. He invited all interested students, whether enrolled in art or not, to see what they could make with paper, wood, bark, wire, string or broken glass, and bring the resulting objects to a weekly forum for analysis and criticism. This daring venture collapsed, Park explained, for lack of "a sure methodic control" and some of its bizarre artifacts "drove the young college to the brink of schism."

Park was serious about the Bauhaus approach and tried to enlist one of the Bauhaus founders, Josef Albers. Herta Moselsio recalled writing the letter that was meant to interest Albers in Bennington but by that time he had already accepted an appointment to Black Mountain College. Nevertheless teaching in the Bauhaus mode began at Bennington in February, 1935, with the arrival of Lila Ulrich who had studied with Albers, Mies van der Rohe and Kandinsky, and by the end of the Leigh era Park was convinced that art teaching at Bennington accepted the Bauhaus dictum that form in the modern world emerges from "material and function rather than from a borrowed historical source."

Whether or not the young painter derived much guidance from mulling over material and function, studio work was clearly pre-eminent in the Bennington art program while art history was relatively neglected; and in each medium students worked with the materials that were, in the instructor's view, appropriate to it. This approach was congenial both to faculty and students whether or not they had read Moholy-Nagy.

* * * * *

For lack of a unifying theme the Art Division was a confederation of more or less autonomous studios in which the instructor and his students could work out their way of life without interference. This was most

apparent in the introductory courses. In the first and second years each member of the division gave his own course for beginners. In the third year an attempt to join forces and give a single divisional introduction to art was judged to be more educational for the faculty than for the students and thereafter every instructor in art gave his own introduction to art. This meant a great variety of introductions, each based on studio work with unknown proportions of theory and history.

In these introductions and thereafter the greatest experimentation went on in the design and graphic arts studios where nonobjective art proliferated. The most traditional and orderly training went on in sculpture where senior projects were sober heads or figures, planned over a two-year period, and painstakingly and flawlessly carved in wood or stone. Painting under Park's direction tended to be landscapes and there was no taboo on covered bridges though he professed contempt for "art confections." Social significance made its appearance with Stefan Hirsch and student painting began to carry out the themes of man's fate and man's hope. Already abstract painting was beginning to dominate the studios and Frederick Lewis Allen, editor of *Harpers*, thought it prudent to conceal the fact that he had come to a trustees' meeting early so that he would have time to paint a covered bridge.

Following Hirsch, Paul Feeley directed attention to a series of styles in his own painting which had no space for landscapes nor debt to social conscience.

Park felt the division lacked unity because the geographical spread of the studios made communication difficult. Architecture and painting were taught on the third floor of Commons but they could not communicate when the theater was in use. In the Moselsio enclave, 300 yards to the east, sculpture was taught in a former chicken house, remodeled to Moselsio's specifications in the summer of 1933; and ceramics was taught in a nearby shed. Graphic arts went on in the basement of Bingham; design was taught in a studio in Commons and after 1939 practiced in a workshop in the Barn; weaving went on behind the stage and shop on the third floor of Commons.

Nevertheless, from time to time during the Leigh years the art faculty emerged from their studios to hold division meetings, to enlighten the community, to join in interdivisional instruction or to volunteer the skills of their students for the public good.

Current trends in art were discussed and illustrated in symposiums held in the first, fourth and sixth years of the college; classical and contemporary art works, borrowed from museums, collectors or artists, were occasionally exhibited. Fifteen paintings of Carl Ruggles were brought together and shown the public for the first time in April, 1936. In that year Park and two social scientists gave a course in city planning centered on a

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

housing problem in Troy, N.Y.; and architecture students designed the four houses in Faculty Row. The Art Division cannot claim credit for Isabella Lee's pen-and-ink sketches of college buildings which brightened Bennington's first catalogues since they were drawn before college opened; but her stone squirrels at the north entrance of the Barn, begun under Moselsio's guidance, attest her skill as a sculptor though she finally chose to major in music.

(Isabella Lee Livingston never abandoned the piano, but it was her ice sculpture that got her on the television show "What's My Line?" For every winter, she has created a gigantic creature in her yard at Wellesley to the astonishment of passersby and the delight of her seven grandchildren.)

Other students painted panels to be hung in the dining rooms and lounge and provided a downtown union hall with appropriate murals; and in their senior year the students of photography and design, Ernestine Cohen and Carolyn Crossett, produced a fascinating booklet on the college between 1932 and 1937 as an exercise in photomontage and public relations. Carolyn Crossett Rowland recalls the contributions of Charles Smith and Lila Ulrich to the success of the book. By then the photographers worked in a darkroom in the basement of Bingham which Carolyn had designed.

Charles Smith designed a handsome cover for the college catalogue which was used between 1938 and 1965, devised a block-print method of economically producing arresting posters for evening meetings, and designed (and his graphic arts students printed) the first Bennington diplomas.

In division meetings the art faculty discussed such housekeeping problems as space and budget, considered student requests and complaints, worked out a *modus vivendi* when customarily they failed to agree on a coherent program, and decided whether trial majors in art should be promoted to the Senior Division and majors in art graduated. The crucial decisions on promotion and graduation forced the division to consider standards and requirements. From the first it was evident that many art students would be happy upon arrival to settle down as painters or sculptors, but several considerations led the division to require them to work for at least one semester in each of three different studios before promotion.

Any of the art studios would serve this distributional aim, but the major must concentrate in painting, sculpture, graphic arts, architecture or design, and not in such crafts (or hobbies) as ceramics and weaving. Photography was not on the preferred list but the division was not inflexible and Marion Lambert and Carolyn Crossett in the first and second classes did their senior projects in it after having proved themselves capable in other areas.

The three-studio requirement seemed to accord with the college's expectation of exploration in the Junior Division, supported the theory that this was in fact an Art Division and not a half dozen independent departments, and tended to equalize teaching loads. A good many students were able to meet this requirement without lessening their commitment to painting or sculpture to which most art majors were drawn. Besides the three-studio requirement, the division agreed that for several semesters every art student should enter one of the drawing classes taught by most of the faculty and known as tool courses. This label did nothing for the prestige of drawing with either faculty or students and graduates sometimes complained that they had suffered from too little training in it, and particularly that there had been no nude models. From time to time students requested survey courses in art history, but survey courses were not in favor at Bennington and the division responded somewhat evasively by distributing reading lists and inviting students to read one book a month and discuss it with their counselors.

When the trial major in art requested promotion to the Senior Division she was told when and where the art faculty would be happy to examine any art she had produced and ask a few questions on the theory and history of art. Understandably known as "The Inquisition," this ritual caused foreboding among the trial majors but sometimes gave them their one chance to witness faculty wrangling over the great issues in art. For the decision on promotion the art faculty met with the Student Personnel Committee.

The crucial question was whether the student was capable of "sustained and independent work" in the field. The division finally interpreted this to mean that a student might be promoted and later graduated on her seriousness of purpose and her productivity even though she lacked any divine spark. The rationale was that it was quite as important to turn out educated consumers of art as Georgia O'Keefes.

Since each student's work was on display before her promotion and again at commencement, faculty members were reluctant to sponsor obvious incompetents however industrious or personable. Unlike the mammoth senior art shows of later years, the senior projects of the 1930s were quietly exhibited at commencement time in the studios where they were fabricated and parents viewed them with varying degrees of pride or puzzlement.

For most art students these procedures and practices resulted in a more or less ineradicable commitment to one or more of the arts and a stroking acquaintance with two or three others, a vague or spotty knowledge of the history of art and some feeling for contemporary art. In term time the students had close association with thoroughly dedicated teachers who were also practicing artists and they had a wide range of choice between

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

traditional and avant garde. Then during the long winter recesses, 85 per cent of the art majors managed to broaden their experience in art by taking jobs, usually volunteer, in museums, teaching art, joining New York art classes, or working in architectural offices or commercial art firms.

But whether the student was graduated with a satisfactory general education in art as well as skill and experience in one or more fields of art depended very much on her own purposes and decisions. Stefan Hirsch was convinced that too much was left to student choices. When he succeeded Park as chairman in 1936 he called several meetings to discuss policies and to try to bring some order into the program he felt had developed haphazardly. By then it was clear that there was no progression and considerable repetition in the several introductory courses that the art majors were obliged to take, that classes ranged in size from two to 33 and some faculty were teaching 11 classes, six more than the average. In November, Hirsch gave Leigh a report entitled "General Problems in the Art Major" in which he argued for "a rational curriculum." This would mean a planned progression of courses for all art students, a more equitable division of labor for the faculty and more clearly defined standards for promotion and graduation. Hirsch realized that requiring courses would violate the local mores, but he insisted that the student, having freely chosen her doctor, should honor his prescription.

The Hirsch plan was never adopted but the division concurred to the extent of requiring all art majors in art to take a course entitled "Drawing and Materials." The Student Educational Policies Committee protested but appeared satisfied when an emissary of the Art Division explained the value of the course and added that there was in all divisions "a present trend toward a more standardized curriculum." Without benefit of the Hirsch plan or divisional prescriptions, each member of the art faculty was free to advise or even tell his counselees what to take in art and in other divisions. But art students who were not interested in a guided tour made their own choices, switched from one counselor to another, or left the division entirely.

In contrast to the student at an art school, a Bennington art major functioned in the context of a liberal education. This meant that about half of her schedule was given to courses outside of art and for most of them she must have skills in reading and writing. Some of the art faculty felt that the student should be judged on her ability to communicate through art and resented "distinctions which place artistic work at a disadvantage when compared to material requiring the technique of written expression." The argument was that if the arts were indeed equal to the conventional subjects then a sculptor should not be tested for literacy any more than a chemist or a poet should be judged by what he or she could fashion with a mallet and chisel. This notion was thought to carry

egalitarianism too far and in practice the average art major in the Leigh era managed courses in literature for two years and in the social sciences for three without conspicuous handicap.

The art major who was borderline in paper-writing, or who had no real interest outside of art, might better have chosen to attend an art school. Bennington was an attractive alternative since the art major might choose a series of introductory courses outside of art and so avoid any real challenge outside of her major or any "general education" beyond the elementary level. A graduate of 1942 has described her education outside of her major in art as "diverse, unstructured and undirected," and excused her failure to work out a rewarding program on her own by saying that at Bennington she was not interested in books.

On the other hand, art majors occasionally deepened old interests and found new ones which gave them extra strings for the bow. Marion Lambert's skill in photography got her a place on Harvard archeological expeditions to New Mexico and Mexico, but it was anthropology, discovered at Bennington, that led her on to a master's degree at Radcliffe. After that she was a teaching fellow at Bennington in both art and anthropology and did research and photography for the Yale Institute of Human Relations before settling in on a career with Skidmore, Owings and Merrill.

Edwin (Billy) Park had mixed feelings about the art record he left (and later). He was confident that in giving art full educational equality the college had demolished "an ancient stricture" against work done with the hands and had freed the artists from "academic demi-mondism." No one will dispute the rising status of the artist in academe in recent decades and though it is conjectural how much Bennington influenced the trend, Bennington made the break and withstood the initial shock. Park was less satisfied with the continuing lack of communication among members of the art faculty, he confessed that at the end of the Leigh era there were still shreds of the original fog that had obscured ends and means, and he was puzzled by sporadic outcroppings of student unrest.

The idea of student discontent is not borne out by increasing enrollment in art during the Leigh decade or art's rising share of majors between 1935-36 and 1940-41. Art also lost some of its most gifted students in the Leigh era and alumnae have offered retrospective criticism as well as warm appreciation of the art program of the 1930s.

Betty Wheeler LoMele wrote that her two years at Bennington between 1938 and 1940 were *exhilarating*. She valued the instruction of Hirsch and Moselsio and profited most from the teaching of Charles Smith. But she was penalized for her interest in illustration and she received no counseling of any value. Still, art has never ceased to be an essential part of her life, she said.

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

Elizabeth Beebe entered Bennington with the second class and chose art as her trial major. In her first semester she studied life drawing with Arch Lauterer, and impressed by his imaginative approach to both the plastic and performing arts she changed her field to drama. Majoring in drama as a virtual apprentice to Lauterer met her expectations in art and proved wholly compatible with a successful New York career as a sculptor under her married name of Klavun.

Another careerist in art, Anne Poor, chose to leave Bennington without graduating. Entering in 1935, Anne had already been taught to paint by her stepfather, Henry Varnum Poor. At Bennington she was taught and counseled for a year by Stefan Hirsch and then given a leave to study art in Paris. There she worked with Fernand Leger and Jean Lurcat and at Hirsch's suggestion wrote a paper on Rembrandt's etchings, then being exhibited in Paris. Back in Bennington for the spring term of 1937-38, she was promoted to the Senior Division but given no encouragement to expect graduation in another year as she had hoped. Feeling adequately "educated" she left and began what has been a continuous career of painting and teaching art. She views her time at Bennington as "a most important event" in her life and singled out Hirsch for his "professionalism and high teaching standards." But she thought that Bennington should have concentrated on drawing, painting and sculpture and left "design courses and such" to the art schools; and she was not happy at Bennington's turn to avant-gardism after her time.

A later art major who gave the college no credit for her eventual success as an artist wrote in 1972 of her experience at Bennington and later. Harriet Grannis entered in 1938 and concentrated on sculpture almost continuously until her graduation in 1942. Although she recalled "the marvelous zest and appetite for learning" at the college, she severely criticized the art faculty for a lack of imagination and sensitivity to different periods of art history and to different styles of individual students. She said that too little emphasis on drawing crippled her for years and she was taught that "art began with Cezanne leading up to Picasso." Like Anne Poor she deplored Bennington's later addiction to non-objective art which she considered "barren, sterile and empty."

Conflicting evidence is provided by Diana Allyn, a graduate of 1941, who also worked almost continuously with Simon Moselsio as a "sculpture major." She did not seclude herself in the sculpture studio and she could not complain about a lack of art history or drawing. Drawing was included in her program every semester and art history four out of eight semesters. She spent two years on her senior project in sculpture, a figure in mahogany, but in contrast to the art majors who depended on a single instructor for their inspiration and security, Diana worked with and appreciated virtually every member of the art faculty and so became

acquainted with diverse methods and points of view. Architecture became a second interest and after graduating she taught sculpture at the Cambridge School before entering the Graduate School of Design at Harvard, marrying an architect, raising a family and practicing architectural design.

In the search for any evaluative judgment on the art program in the 1930s a serious problem is presented not only by the contradictory testimony of two or more graduates but by puzzling tricks of memory in the witnesses. Harriet Grannis Moore is certain that she was taught little or no drawing at Bennington; actually she was enrolled in drawing classes every year, though this proves not that she learned to draw while at Bennington but that she might have learned. An art major who graduated in 1938 complained in the evaluation questionnaire of 1941 that she had graduated "totally without background of any kind — not only history of art but knowledge of contemporary painting." More recently she looked back appreciatively on Hirsch's emphasis on correlating studio work with the art of the past and doubted that any art major could graduate without a knowledge of art history.

Can any viable conclusion be drawn from the record and conflicting evidence? One is that the experience of each Bennington student was in some degree unique and that generalizing from it, whether by herself or a chronicler, is therefore hazardous. Another is that in the Bennington scheme of things an art major was free to put long hours into the mastery of what was important to her at the time even though this meant slighting other subjects and leaving gaps she might later bemoan. If Bennington had succeeded she had learned how to educate herself to meet new demands and situations. Alice Otis Potter graduated in art in the late 1930s without much history of art but she had learned how to learn and she educated herself on the way to becoming supervisor of educational services at the Museum of Modern Art in 1944.

One might judge Bennington's visual arts program by what art has meant to graduates and former students. Among the art majors several patterns recur. A few went to work at once in their own studios, among them sculptors Ellen Knapp, 1936, and Anne Bretzfelder, 1938. Anne had a piece in the contemporary American art exhibition at the World's Fair the year she graduated, has never stopped producing and exhibiting, and her sculptures are widely distributed in museum and private collections.

More commonly the graduates taught art for a livelihood and kept their own painting or sculpture alive in their free time. Quite early the Cambridge School began looking over Bennington art students during the Non-Resident Term and then appointed the best of them to teach art when they graduated. Among them were Mary (Molly) Gregory and Ruth Bailey, 1936; Anne Gardiner, 1937, and Constance Wigglesworth, 1938

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

(who later taught at Browne and Nichols). Others who began teaching at once were Ruth Magnusson, 1937, in Washington; Georgianna Greene, 1938, in New York; and Ruth Cleveland, 1939, in Connecticut.

If the Bennington graduate solved the problem of livelihood by marriage, she often found that raising a family offered no summer vacations or free weekends as did teaching, but that eventually there was time for art again. One maintained that art was not ignored during the child-rearing period because she had raised three artists. A number of art majors who specialized in architecture went on to architectural school and left with a degree, a husband, or both. Suzanne Stockard earned a master's degree in architecture at Harvard, married an architect, raised a family and has had an almost continuous career in architecture and landscape design.

Others have been successful in commercial art. Helen Watkins, 1936, discovered a market for window sculptures in New York department stores; Jane Pitts, 1940, has been a graphic designer for 40 years. Photography has been pursued as a serious hobby by several; it has given Mary-Lowber Tiers, 1938, a livelihood as well as renown. She gives Bennington credit for starting her on her career when photography was a rare profession for a woman.

The clearest message on a questionnaire sent out in 1973 was that there is a widespread devotion to the arts among old grads and non-grads of the 1930s, whatever their major. Leigh liked the idea of educating students to be consumers of art. Most of the respondents have been also promoters of art in their communities and a surprising number are in fact producers of art. The conclusion that Bennington did something for art should be very gratifying to the surviving art faculty of the Leigh era.

CHAPTER 16

DANCE: MARTHA HILL'S TRIUMPH

President Leigh made no mention of dance in the Bennington Educational Plan of 1929 but a dance instructor was present when the college opened three years later. In 1928 the Leighs entered their daughter Helen in the Edgewood School where dance was taught by an adopted daughter of Isadora Duncan and the piano was played by Gregory Tucker who would join the Bennington music faculty in 1933. Helen thinks that she told her parents how superior dance was to the usual forms of physical education. Then the Leighs learned about modern dance in New York City before the president's house was ready for occupancy in Bennington. While living in the spacious Jennings residence on East 73rd street, the Leighs at least once attended a dance symposium at Barnard at which several women's colleges were represented. At some point Leigh decided that Bennington must include dance in its curriculum and asked Martha Graham who might teach it. She warmly recommended Martha Hill who had been in her dance group for two years. John Martin, dance critic of the *New York Times*, also nominated Miss Hill and said "Get her if you can."

Martha Hill arrived at modern dance by way of ballet, Dalcroze Eurhythmics and physical education. Born in East Palestine, Ohio, in 1900, she grew up with the dream of studying ballet in New York but her father insisted that the East was no place for a decent young woman and he prevailed on her to remain for a time in what she laughingly calls the Bible Belt. She studied ballet along with gymnastics at the Kellogg School of Physical Education in Battle Creek, Mich., and then taught physical education at Kansas State Teachers College without deserting ballet.

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

Finally risking New York, she enrolled at Teachers College in 1926, studied ballet and eurhythmics but soon turned to modern dance with Martha Graham. Short of money, she taught dance for a year at the University of Oregon but returned to New York in 1929, took her degree at Teachers College and joined the Graham Concert Group. In 1930 she began teaching dance in the physical education department of New York University.

In his first overture, Leigh offered Miss Hill appointment as director of physical education with the rank of full professor (Leigh had not yet decided to dispense with faculty ranks). Miss Hill declined on the ground of her commitment to NYU and her wish to be in New York City where modern dance flourished. This was fortunate, for otherwise dance at Bennington would have been a mere branch of physical education as it was everywhere else.

Leigh was not easily defeated and persuaded Martha to visit the college, then in its early building and remodeling stage. She was impressed by Leigh himself, his educational ideas, and the pastoral setting in sight of the Green Mountains and Mt. Anthony. The outcome was a part-time appointment which brought on some 700 more round trips on the Green Mountain Flyer. While continuing her teaching at NYU and remaining in touch with the evolving art of modern dance, Martha Hill agreed to teach at Bennington Friday afternoons and Saturdays, and two years later added Thursdays.

When the college opened with 87 freshmen in September, Miss Hill found herself in competition with Grace King, director of sports. The college catalogue announced a recreation program under Miss King but added that dance would have an important place among indoor activities. Miss Hill was not constrained by the adjective "indoor" and whenever the weather was friendly held her dance classes on the Commons lawn. There in another year or two faculty 3 year-olds happily aped the tall figures in leotards as Martha beat the drum. Toward the end of the first term Miss Hill assembled the college community to advance its education in modern dance. When she had suggested a dance demonstration, one of her students, a sophisticate from New York, said it was ridiculous to think they were ready to do anything worth witnessing, and argued with Miss Hill when she disagreed. Finally Virginia Keene, one of the three local students, silenced the critic by asking, "Who do you think you are, Martha Graham?" And so the all-freshman demonstration was scheduled and Miss Hill had her opportunity to laud modern dance at the expense of ballet. In her diary for Dec. 10, 1932, Margot Suter wrote that "the more advanced dancers gave an exhibition or 'open class' which was marvelous. Miss Hill explained how modern dance was different from the ballet or 'esthetic dancing.' It is a form of *natural* expression through

movement — not necessarily narrative, and certainly not artificial like ballet.”

In the spring term Miss Hill added a faculty class for which Leigh was the most enthusiastic recruiter, alarming new faculty members who had never heard of modern dance, by insisting that they sign up with Martha. Toward the end of the term two events enhanced the prestige of dance at the college and introduced townspeople to the art. One was a dance recital in which Martha Hill's seasoned dancers from New York University and Bennington's most promising freshmen took part; the other was a dance concert given by Martha Graham and company. In each case the town-gown audience filled the Commons theatre and responded enthusiastically. By the end of the year the total enrollment in dance, counting classes avowedly recreational, was more than a third of the students. In striking contrast to the lively year of modern dance, Miss King's sports program had had a limited appeal and she was not reappointed.

* * * * *

From the first, Martha Hill confidently expected dance to be a major at Bennington although there was no precedent for a bachelor of arts degree in dance. Dancers who needed academic certification could earn a B.S. in physical education with emphasis on dance but no one had created a dance major in a liberal arts context. When Leigh discovered that Miss Hill was not interested in being director of physical education he placed her in the Arts and Music Division and apparently thought of dance as a segment of an art major since the first catalogue announced trial majors in art and music but none in dance. Martha soon made her point and a trial major in dance was announced in the second catalogue. Along with drama and music, dance seceded from the omnibus art division in 1936 and Bennington's four divisions became seven.

By that time the dance major had taken form and three members of the first class graduated in dance. All students of dance, whether trial majors or not, began with the Introduction to Dance which included history, theory and techniques taught by Hill and rhythms taught by Gregory Tucker who had been lured from Edgewood. Trial majors in dance added individual and group work in choreography and instruction in lighting and stage design.

Beginning students were taught the gospel and cured of any ambition to be “Isadorables.” Entering in 1938, Gloria Eksbergian had been a star soloist with a professional dance group in Philadelphia and expected dance at Bennington to be amateurish. Martha gave her credit for technique but quickly convicted her of bad taste and deflated her artistic pretensions. Gloria gradually absorbed the iconoclastic concepts: Don't be

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

"pretty;" don't use music "bigger" than your work; don't be literal, tell a story or ride on a cliché. Marriage claimed her after two years but she writes that "dance never lets go of its footmaiden" and at Middlebury, Vt., she continues to teach dance, is in demand to choreograph musicals, and was co-founder of the Vermont Dance Company which for a time toured schools with dance demonstrations.

Before being accepted as majors at the end of their second year the trial majors had to demonstrate their physical fitness, mastery of basic elements of bodily movement, potential in dance composition, and the ability to profit from "reading and writing courses." Before being graduated they must "develop skill and understanding as choreographer, performer and critic."

To give her majors the widest possible experience in dance Miss Hill supplemented her own instruction in three ways. First, she brought a succession of promising young dancers to Bennington to teach the first of each week while she was still in New York; second, she arranged for her most gifted students to study in New York in their winter recesses and for a full term or year; and finally, she initiated the Bennington School of the Dance which gave her serious students an opportunity for intensive study with leading American dancers and choreographers each summer.

The initial success of dance at Bennington persuaded Leigh that a second instructor was justified as the college admitted another class. He was not worried about the budget since he was no longer paying for a director of sports and spent little for a part-time hockey coach. Furthermore, Miss Hill promised that able young dancers would come to Bennington for board, room, a modest stipend and valuable experience. The first of these, Bessie Schonberg, was enrolled as a student and earned a Bennington B.A. in two years while carrying a heavy load of instruction in dance from 1933 to 1935. Her senior project did not set a precedent since it was a translation from the German of Curt Sachs' history of dance and it was published in 1937. Like Martha Hill, Bessie had been in the Graham concert group and was soon to become director of dance at Sarah Lawrence, a position she only recently relinquished.

Then in succession came Katharine Manning, member of Doris Humphrey's concert group; Lucretia Barzun, member of Hanya Holm's company; Dorothy Bird from Martha Graham's concert group; Jose Limon from the Humphrey-Weidman group whose first workouts caused an epidemic of aching thighs; Mildred Wile, dance major in Bennington's first class who studied with Graham before and after graduation; Limon again for a semester, and then William Bales who began his long association with dance at Bennington in September, 1940. In spite of Bales' broad training (including tap dancing), performance with the Humphrey-Weidman company and varied teaching experience, his

beginning title was "assistant in drama-dance-design" and Miss Hill had to pull out all the stops to get Leigh to give him faculty status as one of his last acts as president.

Martha Hill's dancers had no problem of decision about their non-resident terms. If they were really serious about dance Miss Hill found them a room in New York and they spent the two months in one or more of the studios of Martha Graham, Hanya Holm, Doris Humphrey, Helen Tamiris or Charles Weidman; they associated with dancers and followers of dance, attended dance concerts and dance symposia at Barnard, and taught dance at the Chapin School or elsewhere.

In addition, most of Miss Hill's majors pursued dance during an entire non-resident year. The second college catalogue stated that during their last two years students of art and music would be encouraged to go to leading centers for their major work. Under this provision Miss Hill began sending her majors to New York for their junior year in 1934 and the pattern was established. Being at New York University, Hill was able to continue counseling her majors whenever they were in the city.

Bennington dancers studied with the leading exponents of modern dance not only in New York but for several summers they were able to study with Graham, Humphrey, Holm and Weidman in Bennington. A summer dance school was suggested by Martha Hill when in June 1933 Leigh happened to tell her that he was looking for a way to utilize the college plant in July and August. Leigh liked the idea and went ahead with it in spite of Martha's warning that they would be gambling on the number of students.

To share in organizing the Bennington School of the Dance, Martha Hill chose her friend Mary Josephine Shelly to be administrative director, and Shelly's 20-year association with the college began.

The School of the Dance convened for six weeks each summer beginning in 1934, moved to Mills College in 1939 and then returned to Bennington to join with drama and music in the Bennington School of the Arts which became a war casualty after two summers. For Martha the summer school was the realization of a dream to draw together rival artists and propagate the message of modern dance through the training of dancers and teachers of dance. The first year, with great tact, she scheduled Graham and her rivals so that they would not meet but thereafter this precaution was scrubbed with no resulting turbulence.

Designed primarily for school and college teachers of dance, the summer school welcomed students at every level in its general program and admitted experienced dancers to its workshop and program in choreography. From the beginning the gamble paid off: The first year when 43 students were needed to break even 103 were enrolled; three years later the number was up to 159.

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

For the town the summer school made Bennington momentarily the country's dance center and its performances at the state armory brought in hundreds of visitors who thought more of modern dance than the Bennington Banner which wondered whether "the new art would grow into a disciplined form that holds the interest of the average intelligent concert-goer."

Dedicated students of dance at the college were now able to devote virtually 12 months to intensive study, and upon graduation were qualified to continue advanced work in the New York studios if they were not at once admitted to a New York concert group.

By these means Martha Hill's ardent students soon became accomplished dancers known to the college community by their enrichment of dramatic productions and their performance in dance at the end of each semester. In the formal workshops were presented the dances, choreographed, amended and rehearsed during the term, that survived the scrutiny of the dance cognoscenti, students and faculty. Many of the dances had the benefit of costumes designed and created by students of Helen Lauterer, though it was Martha Hill who told Helen Watkins to cut the fabric in such a way that the fabric and the body moved well together. Music was taken from the stockpile or composed by Esther Williamson and other music majors. Many of the male students, imported for the sake of drama, became excellent dancers and in 1935 the programs ceased to be all-girl performances. The workshops were memorable events and the dances that passed the test of public performance at home often went on to larger audiences at the 92nd Street Y in New York or were taken on tour during the Non-Resident Term.

* * * * *

We may now look at the programs of a few committed dancers, whether majors or not, and add their comments on their experience. In the first class Prudence Bredt was devoted to dance as she entered, but since no trial major in dance had been announced she turned to social studies while attending all of Miss Hill's classes. Her greatest success was in dance, she became a trial major in dance her second year and spent the six-week winter recess of 1934 in New York studying with Helen Tamiris and Martha Graham. Accepted as a dance major in May, she attended the Bennington School of the Dance in the summer, and then spent her entire junior year in New York studying with Graham and Weidman and teaching dance successfully at the Chapin School.

In June, 1935, Prudence returned to Bennington to show what she had learned in New York and disappointed Miss Hill in a dance that was "little more than improvisation" though so charming that "everyone was

delighted." Prudence attended the summer school again and after her graduation Miss Hill had no hesitation in recommending her as "well-equipped as a teacher of modern dance with fine technical skill." Prudence was soon in Boston teaching adults in a private class and students at the Winslow School of the Dance and at Boston University.

Like some others who found dance and the related arts wholly satisfying, Prudence Bredt had avoided science entirely and contented herself with a few introductory courses in literature and social studies. If she had continued to dance, teach dance and socialize with dancers she might have had no complaints about her Bennington education. But she married a Foreign Service officer, and writing from Vienna in 1941 she said that her education had been limited for she had concentrated too much on her major. Leigh might have commented that it was his hope that at Bennington students would acquire the habit of educating themselves and as adults would soon make up what they had missed if and when it became important to them. And this for all we know is what Prudence did.

Her classmate Mildred Wile found the choice of a major more difficult, for on arrival she professed interest in writing, art, dance, drama and music. At the end of three terms of exploration she settled on dance and for the next 10 years dance was her life. Like Bredt she spent her junior year in New York studying with Martha Graham and Louis Horst. Back in Bennington her program was dominated by modern dance and related training in lighting, costume and stage design. She assisted Miss Hill in teaching choreography, accompanied dance and wrote music for it, and taught a class for adults in town. She was graduated in June, 1936, and spent the next year studying ballet at the Metropolitan Opera School, techniques with Graham and choreography with Horst. She married the pianist Albert Hirsh in May, 1937, and returned to Bennington in July on the staff of the School of the Dance. She taught dance at the college as a teaching fellow in 1937-38 and the following year as a part-time faculty member. That year, like Martha Hill, she shuttled between Bennington and New York where she had her own dance group.

Writing in 1941, Mildred Wile Hirsh admitted that her program was not well balanced but defended concentrating in the arts: They are "all I have any ability in or interest for and the only thing my life revolved about." But a doubt, recently expressed, was that she had not been pushed to realize her full potential in dance. She thought of Martha Hill as a great teacher who expressed "a kind of universal love and acceptance for every student which created an atmosphere conducive to growth" and "she brought forward those with little interest and small capacity and helped them reach their maximum potential." But the dance classes were made up of students who came primarily for exercise and recreation and this, she thought, held

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

back the serious students.

Still she did not blame her "limited career in dance" on Bennington's deficiencies: "I plainly lacked discipline and motivation, and also was not really *built* to be a fine dancer." She added that 40 years later it was difficult to say what one was "really ready or willing to do" and she might have turned to another major if Martha had "pushed harder." Actually Mildred dropped dance completely after 10 years, taught in a nursery school in downtown Bennington and became director of the college nursery school in 1944.

Betty Lindeman graduated as a dance major in 1938. In her winter recesses and her entire sophomore year she was totally absorbed in dance in New York and in the summers of 1934 and 1935 she attended the Bennington School of the Dance. Each winter she studied with Hanya Holm, found a dance group to join and a teaching job — one time at a women's reform school. During her full year in New York she studied with Graham and Louis Horst, enrolled at the American School for the Ballet, joined the New Dance League and danced in its concerts "totally unaware that it was a Communist-Front organization." She was not even suspicious when she marched in the May Day parade, "leaping into the street every now and then shouting 'We want a Farmer-Labor party.'" She also took courses at the New School for Social Research, taught at the Chapin School, attended "every dance recital for ten miles around" and saw her counselor, Martha Hill, at NYU.

In her view she had "a marvelous experience" in dance at Bennington and thought highly of the major which had clear standards and "you had to be accountable. Then of course Martha Hill was so terrific." After graduation and marriage, Betty continued with dance in New York, studying and performing, teaching at Ethical Culture in Riverdale and the West Side YWCA.

Although Betty had courses in science, social science and literature and felt that after Hill, Lewis Jones in economics and Theodore Newcomb in psychology had made the greatest contribution to her education, she was not satisfied with her "general education." In 1941 she regretted that she had been "allowed to escape political science and history — now I feel terribly ignorant and uninformed and not capable of making judgments along political, social and economic lines."

When she moved to Minnesota and then to Oregon she continued teaching and performing, and in Portland helped form a dance events committee to bring modern dancers to town. During World War II she shifted to social work when it appeared she might have to support herself and child and became a professor at Portland State University School of Social Work and Oregon's coordinator of continuing education for social work. Nevertheless she has gone on with dance "for exercise and self-

Faith Reyher entered Bennington in 1935, signed up for dance but *tr*ial majored in literature with dreams of authorship. She transferred to dance after three terms and graduated as a dance major in 1939. She later had doubts about her training "for professional use" and about the rest of her haphazard program. She wished that she had had more guidance at Bennington and that someone "had pulled me out of my constant dreaming. I am glad that those who came after me seem to be on a much more positive footing."

She was "completely and uninhibitedly happy" to have been one of Martha Hill's students and she had vivid memories of her in class:

"She would fly in with her papers, her drum — I see her with her arms very full. If her hair was down she wore a narrow ribbon. If up it was put up with two or three very large bone pins...the effect being fabulous...She did not have an extra ounce on her; she wore a silky, usually gray or pale green, long-to-ankle dress with a slit up one side...When she was wearing a suit on her back-to-the-city days we absorbed every detail — the Saks suede shoes with the scallops and wedge heels before anyone else; the general chic of her. We marveled."

Miss Hill's assumption that what she suggested would be done "was a valuable technique to help overcome reticence and the extreme self-consciousness which goes with having to put yourself out front as your own artistic instrument, separate from you the person." Faith Reyher Jackson thought of Martha Hill as "a crusader for American dance, with a vision as big as Whitman's or Martin Luther King's."

Faith studied stage design with Arch Lauterer whose "zest and joy in his work were infectious. Half the time we did not know what he was talking about but we loved him and we learned. His teaching was cumulative and became part of your fiber." She studied rhythms with Gregory Tucker whose classes she considers "absolutely fantastic" as he switched intricate split rhythms around "in endless complicated variations."

Upon graduating in 1939 she was highly recommended for her dance composition and her ability to teach dance and to direct, and she soon had her own studio and performing group in Louisville, Ky. Uninterrupted by marriage and the rearing of three sons, her impressive career has alternated between writing and dance-related activities. For the past dozen years she has been headmistress and teacher of mime, dance composition and history of dance at the Academy of the Washington Ballet.

Among the dance majors of the 1930s Dorothea Smith carried the message farthest. She had grown up in China among missionaries and her interest in dance led her to Bennington in 1935. She concentrated on dance at college and spent winter recesses and three semesters studying with Hanya Holm. As she began her junior year in New York she married a

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

graduate student at Columbia who hoped to teach international relations at a Chinese university. Appropriately, Dorothea supplemented her study of dance by cooking lessons and a course at the New School on "The Far East in World Politics."

Upon graduating in 1939 she returned to China with her husband and though Peking was then occupied by the Japanese, she was more alarmed to learn that her mother had signed her up for a dance recital under auspices of the Peking Institute of Fine Arts. No one could have devised a more searching test of her education as the institute urged the public to come out to see the hometown girl perform in a new form of art.

For her recital Dorothea invented new dances and resurrected dances from the past among which fortunately was a group of dances, choreographed at Bennington, in which she intoned Chinese nursery rhymes and tongue-twisters she had learned as a child. No one at Bennington could know that her dancing bore out the theme of the rhymes, but in China it was different and her audience, according to the Peking Chronicle, was delighted. From this success she began teaching coeds at Yenching University and soon had a company for recitals there and after Pearl Harbor at the internment camp. Dorothea also studied Chinese dance forms with the idea of producing a Chinese type of contemporary dance. After a recital the Peking Chronicle reported that her "experiments with authentic Chinese material, using Chinese folk music, and adapting Chinese stylized movement to western choreography, were very successful and received enthusiastic applause." This chapter ended in 1943 when the Japanese repatriated Americans in China in an exchange of prisoners, and the chance that modern dance in Chinese dress might sweep the country was lost forever.

Some of Martha's most accomplished dancers majored in other fields but found dance important to them. Molly Howe majored in the visual arts but studied dance every year and attended the Bennington School of the Dance at Mills in 1939. Upon graduating in 1940 she abandoned painting and sculpture, attended the Bennington summer school and in October entered Hanya Holm's School of Dance in New York. Molly Howe Lynn taught dance at Bennington as a faculty member from 1954 to 1958 and recently wrote that "dance at Bennington as I experienced it was one of the most significant influences on my life."

From early childhood Vida Ginsberg was deeply involved in dance as spectator and performer and she came to Bennington in 1937 because "it cherished the performing arts." Although she majored in drama she is remembered by Martha Hill as an outstanding dancer, and Vida remembers Martha "briskly arriving from New York, moving with such style and energy and organization:"

"She was an inconceivable and improbable combination of a Geisha and a Grant Wood with an aura of glamor. I remember her classes where we could see the strenuous discipline taking hold...We were eager limp creatures learning what it meant to create an instrument of oneself, learn to speak with it, move with it, mean with it. I still haven't discovered the source of Martha's tolerant and loving equanimity as she 'shaped us up' on the one hand and presented us with the glamorous adventure of dance on the other."

Vida remembered classes with Limon and when Bill Bales came for a year and then stayed on "what patience and ardor and tenderness he brought to us pilgrims in the dance." She recalled exciting sessions with Hill and Gregory Tucker "thrusting us into the world of TIME — wild unexplored kinetic jokes to rhythms we hadn't even sensed before;" Arch Lauterer "opening the realities of space and light" and "far on another side Francis Fergusson opening the texts of theatre, the whole world of the human animal in history, ritual, feeling and thought." She recalled "the genuine ferment when Martha and Ben Belitt and Lauterer and some of us would argue and philosophize about the merits and possibilities of combining words with dance. It was new, a departure; we were in at the beginning."

In retrospect Vida Ginsberg Deming looked back on the collaboration of dance and drama as "an excitement and education." As a matter of course Martha Hill and her students provided ballet interludes for Moliere plays and dances for Lorca's *Blood Wedding*. Vida recalls Andre Obey's *Noah* as a "tensely joint project, Fergusson directing the play and the family and Hill riding herd on the animals; Martha and Fergusson huddling together to get the right springing squat for the Monkey (Adele Bookman), the jointed languor for the Cow (Mary-Averett Seelye) and the perfect nodding for the Sheep (Faith Richardson)." Then "integrally Martha choreographed the dances on deck that underlined the story."

Ten years later Vida and Bessie Schonberg brought about the first collaboration of dance and drama at Sarah Lawrence and again it was *Noah*. Twenty years later Vida was on the faculty at Juilliard and Martha Hill, also at Juilliard, sent dancers to her to study dramatic literature:

"Martha still electrified her dancers so that they were eager and open to learning. She was still endowing her students with the respect for discipline and dedication and the love of an art that she had given us."

Martha Hill's welcome went out to everyone and for many dance became a continuing interest. Polly Childs graduated as a literature major in 1939 and now as Mrs. H. P. Hill has been occupied with the "Children's Environments Advisory Service" in Ottawa. But she wrote that her dance experience at Bennington was very important to her though she insisted

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

she was not built to execute gazelle-like leaps. One NRT she studied with Martha Graham who eyed her critically at the first session and then remarked "it's too bad your bottom half doesn't dance as well as your top — leap girl, leap or you'll never make a dancer." It was different at Bennington because of Martha Hill's "remarkable ability to understand and bring out what small talents were presented to her."

Soon after graduating, Polly moved to Canada and there "searched out and found people who could teach modern dance and organized groups of housewives to limber up and enjoy themselves at the same time." Now in her early 60s she finds modern dance a way of communicating with her grandchildren.

Martha Hill lost two students who entered in 1938, Nancy Fahnestock and Carol Channing. Nancy could have majored in dance for Miss Hill considered her one of her most gifted students. But Nancy chose literature and said in her third year interview that she thought the literature major provided "a better basis for living after college." In her senior thesis one would like to imagine that her emphasis on sprung rhythm in Hopkins' poetry owed something to the rhythmic tricks every dance student learned from Gregory Tucker.

In San Francisco, Carol Channing learned about Bennington from her dance teacher who had attended the Bennington School of the Dance. Carol began as a trial major in dance and impressed her counselor, Miss Hill, as very rhythmic and totally convincing in movement. During the winter recess in New York, Carol worked with Martha Graham and found great satisfaction attending Broadway plays. These she discussed with her new counselor, Marion Fergusson, when she changed from dance to drama in February. In her second Non-Resident Term she successfully auditioned for a Marc Blitstein opera and left Bennington when it went into production. But she returned to Bennington as the commencement speaker in 1975 and regaled her audience with vignettes taken from her dazzling career on the stage. She said she was still enjoying her Non-Resident Term "gleaning experience" in her chosen field. When the Pioneers foregathered in 1979 Carol Channing received an award for distinguished performance, and a heart-felt tribute from Ben Belitt.

Louise Stockard Vick who graduated in "human development" in 1936 recently expressed warm feelings about Martha Hill because she let her dance:

"No one insisted that you be a dancer to dance, and the recognition that anyone who really enjoyed dancing got something out of it was appreciated by us who were not born dancers. My appreciation of dance as an art form stems from my participation in the dance program while I was at college. I was never any good at it but it was good for me."

From the following decade Geraldine Babcock Boone, graduate in political economy, wrote that dance at Bennington gave her "a life-long appreciation of the human body and a love of modern dance and ballet;" and Cecily Henderson Pennoyer who would have graduated in 1949 added her tribute. She wrote that she was not ready for most of Bennington's offerings but risked classes with Martha and Bill Bales: "They instilled a feeling in me of what I should be able to do but could not show them because of shyness and inhibitions. They didn't give up and told me something was there." The result was that 25 years and five children later Cecily is suddenly deep in ballet, dancing for her own pleasure and promoting the City Center Ballet. In her view the moral is that a teacher like Martha may not always see the results but she gives her students an enthusiasm for dance that endures and pays off in many ways.

* * * * *

After teaching 19 years at Bennington, Martha Hill was invited to organize a dance department at Juilliard. Devotion to modern dance and to Thurston Davies whom she was about to marry made her acceptance inevitable. She had no doubt that dance at Bennington would continue to flourish under Bill Bales' direction — but the break hurt:

"You must know what a wrench it is for me to leave. Quite truly Bennington College is the only place I have ever believed in completely, its educational plan, the faculty, the students and the accomplishment over the years."

Martha's impact on Bennington College was by no means limited to the handful of majors who met her standards of technical skill, imagination, understanding and responsibility. More students joined her classes each year: they numbered 58 when the college reached its full size, passed 90 two years later and with a class in folk dancing reached 145 in 1940-41. A later questionnaire to the students who had taken dance seriously, whatever their major, showed that most of them were still involved in dance. Beyond the students who actually danced and the faculty who were involved (Belitt, Lauterer, Luening, Tucker), the entire college community saw enough of modern dance to become both appreciative and critical as an audience.

Between the early 1930s and the present, Martha Hill has had extraordinary influence on modern dance far beyond Bennington through her teaching, her promotion of dance education and her organization of dance festivals in the U.S. and overseas. The broadening of her influence on the nature and acceptance of modern dance began with the Bennington School of the Dance from which hundreds of dancers and teachers of dance

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

carried the word to every part of the country. In 1934 John Martin, writing in the New York Times, called the school a milepost of progress in the arts and five years later he asserted that the school had set in motion "a national overturning of opinion" about modern dance.

Bennington's homage to Martha Hill was expressed in 1969 when she was awarded its sixth honorary degree and in 1976 when the Martha Hill Workshop in the new college Visual and Performing Arts Center was dedicated with fitting ceremony. The First Lady came from Washington to pay tribute to modern dance and to Martha Hill Davies. Forty years before, Mrs. Gerald E. Ford, then known as Betty Bloomer, was a teacher in the Calla Travis School of Dance in Grand Rapids, Mich., and she attended the Bennington summer school in 1936 and 1937. Mrs. Ford said that she felt about Bennington the way Hemingway felt about Paris: it is a moveable feast that stays with you wherever you go for the rest of your life. Martha Graham was unable to attend but sent her felicitations to the college and to Martha Hill:

"They are bestowing on you an honor you so richly deserve. You have been a key person in all that we have been able to do in dance and I feel that Bennington and your dream are largely responsible for the recognition and success that modern American dance has had today."

CHAPTER 17

DRAMA: RIVAL APPROACHES

Ten months before Bennington College opened, Leigh began his search for someone to teach drama. He turned to George Baker, renowned head of drama at Yale, who warmly recommended Jane Ogborn, candidate for an M.F.A. She was appointed and for one year was listed with the literature faculty, then moved to the Division of Arts and Music, but for three years she taught dramatics and put on plays as if she were running an independent department.

Miss Ogborn was prepared to teach dramatic literature but her heart and her special skills were in play production and this pleased Leigh since he viewed dramatics as a major cultural link with the surrounding community. He knew that there was a local tradition of play reading and amateur theatricals and that there would be eager response to an opportunity to act in and attend plays at the college. Early in the term he called a meeting of interested townspeople, students and faculty. More than a hundred met in the Commons theatre and enthusiastically formed the Bennington Theatre Guild with bylaws, dues, officers, and Miss Ogborn as director.

Thanks to the Theatre Guild, casting presented no problems. Town members of the guild included women who could play roles college freshmen were too young for and a dozen eager male actors who competed with men on the faculty for leading parts. Though a committee helped her choose the plays, Miss Ogborn picked, trained, directed and made up the actors and that first year oversaw the designing of costumes and stage sets.

The first play, put on with little time for costuming or scenery, was Shaw's *Pygmalion* with a cast of six students, one faculty member (Ralph Jester) and four men from town. Eliza Doolittle, the heroine, was played

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

by Fletcher Wardwell, fresh from high school triumphs. Margot Suter wrote in her diary that she was "marvelous — so vivacious." Fletcher came to Bennington to find out if she was "really any good as an actress;" but during a winter recess Helen Hayes told her her voice was "dull-dull" and she was soon majoring in Human Development. *Pygmalion* was followed by town and gown collaboration in a finished production of the Pulitzer Prize play *Craig's Wife* by George Kelly, to the apparent satisfaction of everyone on both sides of the footlights.

This success was capped in the spring by the Broadway sensation, Karel Capek's *R.U.R.* In it mankind is destroyed by robots, the crowning product of man's brilliant technology. In the cast were 17 students, Leigh and three of his faculty, two women and seven men from town; and on the crew were seven students, six women and two men from town. Miss Ogborn was assisted by Martha Hill and Kurt Schindler, director of music, but otherwise it was her show from the casting to makeup, costuming, stunning stage sets and direction. *R.U.R.* played twice to a crowded theatre of town and gown and received what was perhaps the most enthusiastic review the Bennington Banner ever gave a college performance.

Drama students of that first year recall Miss Ogborn's achievement with admiration. Jill Anderson MacKnight who played the lead in at least one Theatre Guild performance described her as "a hard-working, imaginative director who really got a lot out of rank amateurs." Grace Sullivan Scanlan wrote that Miss Ogborn was "highly personable, extremely energetic, very capable. She taught us everything — acting, directing, scene design and construction, costuming — the works...She was a marvel at organizing and distributing the jobs so that everyone got a crack at every phase of production...I never remember seeing her put out, upset, angry or sharp with anyone; and believe me, she had cause to be all of these things that first year...We were a handful of teenagers with plenty of enthusiasm but varying degrees of maturity and competence."

Grace recalled working long hours on sets which sought "the now rather outdated three-sided room effect." In the evenings male members of the Theatre Guild came out from town to help, and the students, observing their sensible attire, found a store that sold denim pants held together with copper rivets. And so, Grace imagines, that is how blue jeans became a Bennington fashion and later swept the country.

During those first weeks the College Community Council watched this intermingling of town and gown with apprehension and reproved two students for going out with a young man who was thought to have an ulterior motive for his avid interest in college dramatics.

While putting on a steady succession of plays, Miss Ogborn gave drama a respectable place in the curriculum as she met 31 students in four

sections of an introductory course, taught acting to 11 trial majors and conducted a speech workshop for them and 11 others. It was obvious that she would need help when a second class arrived in 1933, as would the visual arts faculty. The need in the two fields was neatly met by the appointment of the Lauterers who had been brought to Leigh's attention by an editor of *Theatre Arts Monthly*.

Partly for economic reasons, of course, Leigh liked the idea of husband-wife appointments and he was not concerned that Helen Lauterer had no degree or that Arch Lauterer had been obliged to drop out of high school to become a wage earner. Before finding his metier, Lauterer was a printer's devil and then drove a grocery truck, but by 1933 he had exhibited scene designs in the Architectural League Show, taught stagecraft and stage design at the Traphagen School and Western Reserve University, and had been for six years scene director at the Cleveland Play House. Arch was less qualified to teach art but he once had been apprenticed to a commercial artist and he assured Leigh in July that he was then studying graphic techniques including etching, aquatint and wood block printing.

Helen Lauterer had been an actor for five years, was an accomplished weaver, taught costume history and design at the Chicago Art Institute and elsewhere and was costume director first at Carnegie Institute of Technology, then at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago and more recently at the Cleveland Play House.

During Bennington's second and third years the Theatre Guild continued to put on plays with town-gown collaboration, casting and direction by Miss Ogborn, and the priceless bonus of stage sets by Lauterer and costuming under the direction of his wife. Among the plays were Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*, Quintero's *The Women Have Their Way*, Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine*, and Shaw's *Major Barbara*. Needless to say the Lauterers' teaching of color, lighting, scene design and costume freed Miss Ogborn to teach a second level of acting and courses on modern drama, directing and pantomime, and she and Lauterer found time for a discussion group on the movies.

This situation might have continued for some time since the Theatre Guild was flourishing and Leigh was prepared to reappoint the Lauterers and Miss Ogborn. In 1935, however, Miss Ogborn left for marriage and involvement in dramatics in Indianapolis where she had been executive secretary of a civic theatre before going to Yale; and thus the Fergusson chapter began.

Early in 1933, Francis Fergusson was brought to Leigh's attention by Alvin Johnson, head of the New School for Social Research where Fergusson taught a course in drama. There was then no opening in drama but Fergusson was soon appointed to teach literature and came in February, 1934. The range of his interests, informed and deepened at

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

Harvard and Oxford, is suggested by the courses he taught before succeeding Miss Ogborn: Dante, ethics, modern biography, modern novel, modern poetry, psychological novels, Spanish grammar and Spanish reading, to say nothing of tutorials in Aristotle, dramatic form and playwrighting. For pleasure he joined a tutorial in Latin which Grace Sullivan was taking with Jean Guiton. Grace recalls Fergusson and Guiton discussing the text "in two or three languages with dozens of literary allusions. What riches we had and how dimly I realized it then."

When Miss Ogborn resigned Arch Lauterer might well have expected to succeed her in view of his background in theatre and in teaching. But Lauterer was not in the running if Otto Luening is right in reporting that Leigh began "frantically looking for a successor" to Ogborn. Luening had met Fergusson in New York four years before, knew of his theatre experience and told Leigh he need look no farther. And so Fergusson was appointed to head drama and his wife Marion to teach acting. Both were remarkably qualified. They had met at the American Laboratory Theatre in New York which was run by Richard Boleslavsky and Maria Ouspenskaya, both products of the Moscow Art Theatre. Francis was Boleslavsky's assistant or *regisseur* and Marion was for several years assistant to Ouspenskaya in the acting classes. As the American Laboratory Theatre fashioned itself on the Moscow Art Theatre with its own school of acting, drama at Bennington was now fashioned on the model of the American Laboratory Theatre in New York.

For three terms Fergusson had observed the Theatre Guild productions in which townsmen and faculty had the male roles and he himself courted Major Barbara in the Shaw play. Fergusson was not impressed by Miss Ogborn's directing and what he saw sharpened his conviction that utilizing untrained actors produces "the irresponsible atmosphere of amateur theatricals...with the sloppy work and unproductive excitements that go with it." For this reason, before assuming charge of drama, Fergusson asked Leigh for permission to recruit young men to be trained in acting and then cast in college plays. In January, 1936, the trustees agreed to a theatre studio for men, apparently somewhat nervously, for the studio "would have no direct connection with the college."

The Theatre Guild persisted and productions were now of two sorts: Broadway plays with casts largely made up of townspeople, and drama classics with casts of students and drama fellows directed by Fergusson. The Broadway plays were directed by Georgiana Philips of Old Bennington who was known through her talented acting with the Dorset Players, or on occasion by Mrs. Arthur Elliot who had been a professional actress. These plays were rehearsed during the summer or the winter recess and a few students remained in residence and participated. Rhoda Scranton was stage manager for an old-fashioned melodrama *Small Miracle* in 1936;

Honora Kammerer was prompter and Constance Ernst, Lydia Vaill and two drama men acted in *Nine Pine Street* in 1937; Edward Thommen directed Chodorov's *Kind Lady* in which Mrs. Philips played the lead. These plays were staged in the Commons theatre at the beginning of term and one suspects that the drama majors felt somewhat superior if they attended. One wrote home of *Nine Pine Street* that it was "surprisingly quite a success. It's a poor play but rather well done and had just enough sentiment and horror to arouse the Bennington village audience."

The Theatre Guild evaporated with the approach of war but not before a considerable number of prominent townsmen had had their moments of glory on the college stage. Among them were Hall Cushman, James Dennis, Alexander Drysdale, Fred Grant, Stewart Graham, C. Q. Graves, Luther Graves, Walton Harwood, Waldo Holden, Carleton Howe, Goodall Hutton, Clarence Kastenbein, Louis Levin, George Plumb, Leon Robare, Ronald Sinclair, Chester Wadsworth and Fred Welling. One might conjecture that Bennington College never stood higher in local esteem than during the few years in which the community was delighted and thrilled by Broadway plays in which townsmen had major roles.

The other type of play, directed by Fergusson, had no townsmen and no faculty members except Wallace Fowlie who was occasionally inveigled into taking a small part by Fergusson's saying "Wallace, I have a perfect little gem for you." Most of us accepted our rejection with equanimity and Fowlie could not complain since he had only to put on a play in French to be cast in any role he wished.

Finding drama fellows was no problem because the training and experience which cost Bennington students \$1,675 each year was offered them with no charge for tuition and whatever they could afford to pay for room and board — which for some was nothing. In the summer of 1936, Bennington students serving as apprentices at the Peterborough Playhouse where Mme. Ouspenskaya taught acting had no trouble in recruiting three of the male apprentices. One of them was Edward Thommen who became "the one indispensable element in the division," Elisabeth Zimmerman James writes. The Fergussons found a few more and the experiment began with some doubts. A community meeting was called to discuss "the drama boys." They lived off campus that first term and were seen lounging about in the college store. What was their game? Was this the beginning of creeping co-education? Marcia Ward wrote home that they "are not great social lights nor do all of them have the money to dress in the best of taste;" but she was happy to report that within 10 weeks of their arrival they proved their worth. Their performance in Chekhov's *Three Sisters* showed "how badly they were needed and also that they have talent."

Herbert Shaw was a drama fellow from 1938 until the Army tapped him

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

in 1940. His greatest problem, he writes, was fatigue for he was going from 8 in the morning to 11 at night six or seven days a week. In addition to his studies and chores for drama he worked in the college garage for spending money. He was required to take all the drama courses, act in countless workshop scenes and in the fully mounted productions, build and move scenery, sweep the stage before and after rehearsals. His comment: "I loved every minute of it."

Some of the drama men were not given a second year but most justified their appointment and Thommen, Edward Glass and David Crowell of the early years went on to or returned to faculty status. Thommen's study at Peterborough paid off for he was soon assisting Marion Fergusson as she once assisted Ouspenskaya. When he went off to military training camp in 1941 Crowell took his place until he joined the Marines. Being a drama student at Bennington, Crowell writes, was "one of the best experiences of my life. I had already had tries at the Yale School of Drama and the Northwestern School of Speech and was very disappointed in both. Francis and Marion Fergusson were a revelation to me and inspired me tremendously." He liked the way drama was taught and noted that the fellows, unlike the students, could give their entire time to drama: "it was saturation and couldn't have been better." After Crowell's tour with the Marines he taught drama at Bard and this carried the Moscow-New York-Bennington series a step farther for he patterned his teaching on Bennington's, using "Marion's acting exercises and Francis's jargon and gestures."

The drama fellows solved the problem of trained male actors but Fergusson and Lauterer, agreeing for once, both felt the need of an adequate theatre. Fergusson described the Commons theatre as the building's "scandalously inadequate attic... with its tiny inconvenient stage and its pit where the sets were built." (He might have added that the audience also had grounds for complaint.) Lauterer must have begun dreaming of a new structure soon after arriving. During 1933-34 his students were making sketches, and models of a theatre and his own design for a Bennington theatre appeared in *Theatre Art Monthly* in December, 1935. With it was a statement that implied Lauterer's displacement of Fergusson as chairman: "This is the first time that the man who will direct the work in drama at an American college has had the opportunity to design with entire freedom the theatre he is to use."

Leigh himself was in a state of euphoria about the projected theatre and got the trustees to vote the Lauterers a semester's leave on pay so that Arch could study theatres in Europe. The college then engaged van der Gracht and Kilham, New York architects, to make technical plans for the theatre which Leigh described as "one of the best educational theatres in the world...It provides the flexibility for a variety of uses a college theatre

needs. Here is a most attractive opportunity for another donor."

Yet the opportunity proved to be insufficiently attractive and so Lauterer, dreaming more realistically, proposed the addition of a theatre-auditorium to the Jennings mansion which the college acquired in 1939. This mansion with its lobby, library, 38 rooms and the proposed theatre now promised to become Bennington's performing arts center at the cost of a mere \$90,000. It was soon soundproofed and commandeered by the musicians but there were no funds for a theatre, now priced at \$150,000; and all drama bagged was the Chicken Coop, vacated by the musicians but soon claimed by the nursery school. And so plays were still being staged in what Vida Ginsberg Deming called "that poor excuse for a theatre" when Arch left in 1942 and Francis in 1948.

* * * * *

What drama trial majors and majors studied varied with their choice of emphasis within the division. There were three main types of the drama major: one emphasized acting, one directing, and one design. The Fergussons were authorities in acting and directing, the Lauterers in the design of stage sets and costumes. There was a tacit understanding that "Fergusson majors" would do some work with one of the Lauterers and vice versa and that neither party would blackball the other's majors for graduation. Lauterer got written into the division minutes the statement that "there should be no requirements (for drama majors) as long as the creative side of their work is satisfactory."

Most trial majors in drama began with Marion Fergusson's course in acting and here they became familiar with the Moscow Art Theatre technique which Francis Fergusson had found to his satisfaction was compatible with Aristotle's insistence that drama is "the imitation of action." In his talk at the dedication of the art center in 1976 Fergusson said that action in drama might be best defined as "the movement of spirit" which could be "a conscious, rationalized purpose at one extreme or an irrational movement of spirit at the other, like that of anger or lust or terror. In the acting classes we practised action where the point in lots of ingenious exercises was to control one's own spirit so that it would 'move' as one wished."

Mary-Averett Seelye wrote that the acting class was noted for its "improvisations to lay ground work for characterization, dramatic action and awareness of the psychologic of human behaviors...under a vast variety of situations. Marion was a warmly expressive person with a ready sense of humor and a delightfully raucous laugh. She expended tremendous energy projecting herself into where we were coming from in our acting exercises and giving us criticism...The discipline of concentration

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

to bring about a strong and integrated impact in what one was doing proved to be invaluable far beyond the art of theatre itself."

June Parker Wilson recalled that "threading the invisible needle was the personal torture Marion Fergusson put all acting students through once a week. We did all kind of things without props to indicate weight, size, effort, etc." She believed that in conference she made life miserable for Mrs. Fergusson who "was determined to make me produce real tears and I would sit in her airless office trying to force them out of my arid eyes."

Edna Edison, 1938-1940, wrote of an opposite experience. "My relationship to Mrs. Fergusson was a total failure...She consistently broke me down into tears." But after leaving Bennington she found satisfaction in acting, even to experiencing "moments of elation on stage" especially when she had the lead in *Born Yesterday*.

Emily Sweetser Alford remembered that "no one ever left one of Mrs. Fergusson's classes "without realizing that a life time would not suffice to master expressive means." Both Mr. and Mrs. Fergusson "were always a hundred jumps ahead of us. They studied us carefully, knew us better than we knew ourselves and led us to do more than we might have thought we could. For their classes they were better prepared than any teachers I have ever known."

The oversized quarter for beginners generally included instruction in acting and speech, Gregory Tucker's rhythms class, dance techniques and the weekly workshop. Trial majors were given additional assignments by their counselors. A similar program at more advanced level was followed in the sophomore year. Francis Fergusson taught no beginners in drama but they soon made his acquaintance at the weekly workshops and after promotion took his basic course in Drama Forms. Emily sent this tribute: "I never left Mr. Fergusson's class without having some aspect of the text revealed to me so simply I immediately caught it and I determined to try harder to earn such textual insights myself."

Drama students primarily interested in stage sets and costumes took courses with one or both Lauterers, and an occasional trial major in art who was unhappy with her instruction found asylum in drama as protegee of Arch Lauterer. (Betty Beebe was one of the "design majors" who began in art.) In small groups and tutorials Lauterer taught the theory and practice of theatre design, scene design, stagecraft, lighting and color; Helen Lauterer taught the history of theatre costume, costume design and fabrication.

Fergusson wrote in 1940 that the most distinctive educational tool of the division, comparable to the scientist's laboratory, was the college theatre. Here occurred not only the finished scenes and full-length plays but also the weekly workshops attended by all drama students and faculty. Excluded from the major productions, freshmen and sophomores were

free to show a workshop audience what they could do in scenes directed by older students and then criticized by the faculty. Vida Deming wrote that every faculty member made comments but Lauterer once complained that the scenes were put on with no time for stage sets or costuming. It is therefore not strange that alumnae often describe the workshops as if there were no other critic than Fergusson. Marcia Behr remembered that his "uncanny analysis of the performances urged us all on to do even better next time. When he said 'good' as I finished a scene it set me up for a long time. He would then quickly mention a few places for improvement and state precisely how to go about making the changes."

Mary-Averett Seelye pictured him as "quiet, precise, mysterious. His slightly hunched, wiry body would rise from the chair every now and then to stress a point, going into a marvelously grotesque movement, a large hand opening up and out and then moving in caricature back, flat on his chest or closing around his chin, accompanied by overly clear remarks interspersed with shy chuckles. All this with an inexpressive face had its own fascination. Although I respected his direction I was not often successful in producing the results he was seeking — a frustrating predicament."

In a letter home Marcia Ward said she had been working on actors' beats, rhythm and mood in *Much Ado about Nothing*. In conference, "Mr. Fergusson said I had been making it too hard for myself; i.e. approaching it too intellectually. Instead I should just slide right into the play and the characters and ride along with them...Then all would unfold more easily and I wouldn't have to wrack my brains so much about it. I don't see how people can say he is difficult to get started talking...If you are enough interested in your work he responds with even more interest...and each conference is better than the last."

From the weekly workshops certain scenes were chosen "to be formally presented in properly costumed and lit productions." Marcia Ward wrote home that "it's only a few scenes from *Three Sisters*... yet it fills me with as much excitement and apprehension as an opening night on Broadway must make any star tingle with nervousness and hope of success."

The decision to put on no more than a single major performance each semester was later criticized by a graduate in drama who did not wish to be identified; "The training was thorough and each large production was worked on for a long time with perfection as a goal. But the chance to perform many times for different audiences was missing...The absence of that vital dimension for actors to grow and develop, that is playing before audiences constantly, was a most serious flaw in the drama program at Bennington."

The scenes selected from the weekly workshops and the major productions gave the Lauterers their innings. The extreme view of Fergusson

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

disciples was that Lauterer's stage sets were designed without regard for the play. This was stated most strongly by David Crowell; "His design concepts tended to ignore the literature of the drama for the design sensation or effect."

In discussing Lauterer's contribution to dance, his admirer Ben Belitt admits at least that Arch was sometimes guilty of "pedantic concern for the *total* utility of a space-area, regardless of the subjective urgency of the choreographer" (playwright) and of "implied insistence on the priority of the *place* over the *dancer*" (actor).

Those who worked with Lauterer were and are unstinted in their praise of him and his work. Nika Pleshkoff Thayer thought he "did not denigrate the written work but saw it as part of the total picture to be clarified and heightened by the use of movement, design and music." Dorothy McWilliams Cousins said that for a Turgenev play "he made that limited proscenium opening and shallow stage look like the grandest and loftiest of Russians' mansions. We learned how he did it because under his direction we constructed the sets, hung the lights and learned how to work with that peculiar switchboard."

Lauterer, according to Virginia Todahl Davis, was free of "commitment to the ideas of any school though he greatly admired Robert Edmond Jones and Gordon Craig. He thought of theatrical creation as an act of the dramatic imagination, well trained in the necessary disciplines and unhampered by preconceptions."

Mary-Averett Seelye wrote that Lauterer began by asking "What are the characters trying to do?" and "How can you arrange the space and the lighting to enable the characters to make clear those intentions? Everything on the stage had to enhance the intention of the play...Arch was formulating his philosophy during this period so that what we did with his theories seemed to contribute to his perceptions which in turn he shared back with us."

Mary Perrine recalled that Arch "was a great joy to be with...His feeling for the inter-relationship of light, movement and structure was something I had to sense rather than comprehend intellectually but the balance this gave to the rest of the work in drama was invaluable."

Merrell Hopkins Hambleton wrote that "Arch was an incredible man. I worshipped him. His excitement about theatre and about life was irrepressible. He was always seeing with new eyes and so his students did too. With Arch I discovered Gordon Craig, Adolph Appia, the drama of space and light and mass...To him light was a constantly changing element which enhanced, heightened, accompanied what was happening on stage."

Helen Lauterer's appointment was labelled part-time more because of what she was paid than of the hours she put into her work. Dort Cousins

recalled that "she was a lovely woman who knew costume design inside out, enjoyed her craft and taught it well." Marcia Ward wrote home about elegant costumes for scenes from *Othello* which must be credited to Mrs. Lauterer. "You should see the costumes Mary Parker and I wear. Mary playing Desdemona has a beautiful salmon pink velvet gown, long sleeves, square-necked bodice, full skirt with train; a little jacket of same velvet dyed a little darker with full puff sleeves goes over dress. During the scene I remove this jacket and bring her her night attire which is a heavenly almost turquoise blue georgette with a design of gold throughout, soft folds of puffed sleeves, almost as long as her dress. It is the kind of thing I used to imagine fairy queens wearing when I read about princesses and dragons." More lasting were the attractive blue gowns and caps Mrs. Lauterer designed for Bennington's first and every subsequent graduation ceremony.

The Lauterers broke up when Arch became interested in Myra Rush, a junior majoring in drama who had been his counselee for three terms. In consequence Helen Lauterer went on leave in the spring of 1938 and then resigned. For some 20 years she was at the University of Oklahoma teaching acting, costume design and history and designing costumes for all productions in drama and dance. During this time and after retirement she traveled and taught and designed at summer schools at the universities of Iowa and Michigan and elsewhere.

Mrs. Lauterer was succeeded by Mildred Moore, New York costume and dress designer, who had assisted her at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago. Miss Moore was succeeded in 1941 by Helen Bottomly, Bennington graduate of 1939, once Mrs. Lauterer's prize student. (Lauterer and Mickie Rush were married in June, 1939.)

Freshmen as well as their betters were able to continue their training during the winter recess by signing on with the Neighborhood Playhouse in New York (run by the mother of Jean Morgenthau, class of 1938), or the Cleveland Play House (thanks to the Lauterers); and recommendations from the Fergussons opened up a summer at the Cape Playhouse or the Peterborough Playhouse. No pay was involved and the lucky ones were given a room by friends or relatives; the others gathered in low-cost rooming houses.

* * * * *

Bennington's drama majors remember best the plays themselves, for the few they were in were thoroughly mastered and rehearsed. Though the college then seemed committed to modernism, Fergusson was convinced that students derive the greatest benefit from plays that were or soon would be classics. This meant that students had to go elsewhere to see the

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

propagandist plays of the 1930s though Lydia Vaill Hewat, graduate of 1938, recalls a visiting company putting on Odets' *Waiting for Lefty*. "We all found that pretty stirring."

In spite of his preference for the classics Fergusson decided in the election year of 1936 to put on the rollicking musicale *Of Thee I Sing*. When Connie Ernst, then a sophomore, suggested substituting a strip tease for two Polish wrestlers she was sent to New York to study the art. There she attended burlesque shows with John Held Jr., who had written for Gypsy Rose Lee, returned with copious notes, and was given the part. To this day, she writes laughingly, "I meet aged Williams men who suddenly light up in memory of our splendid production!" Had this type of play continued at Bennington, Connie might not have yielded to the lure of stage and radio in the other world after three years.

The authors of typical Fergusson productions were Sophocles, Shakespeare, Moliere, Turgenev or Ibsen or such contemporary playwrights as Lorca and Pirandello. The texts he chose, wrote Elizabeth James, "were rich and nourishing alike to students who came in via the literature route and those who were — at first, at least — more narrowly concerned with performing. We gradually learned an interdependence and a mutual respect that still survives."

Fergusson's own translation of Sophocles' *Electra* was the major production in the spring of 1937. A triumph of collaboration, Fergusson directed, Lauterer made the sets, Gregory Tucker composed the music and Martha Hill did the choreography. Hallie Flanagan, head of the Federal Theatre Project, attended, was impressed, and at her request a special performance was arranged for the project directors.

The following winter recess *Electra* was taken on tour along with the early American comedy *The Contrast* by the Vermont judge Royall Tyler. The troupe played at schools and colleges in New England and northern New York and turned down repeat engagements only because two of the cast were getting married. Marcia Ward Behr wrote that it "was a great experience for us all." Eleanor Mindling Hirschberg remembers no odd-sized stages or low-grade lighting but only her joy in being the first actress to play *Electra* in Fergusson's translation. The tour broke even financially but no more were undertaken. The work of preparation and problems of logistics were too great.

When Fergusson went on sabbatical the fall term of 1939-40, Lauterer was made drama chairman and proceeded to his greatest Bennington triumph, Hart Crane's *The Bridge*. Ben Belitt was in at its "orphanic and innocent origin...We talked of Crane...partly because the most extravagant and passionate scheme of his lifetime was taking shape in his thoughts: a dance-drama, bringing nothing less than the whole text of *The Bridge* to the Bennington College stage."

Vida Deming vividly remembers "this dream of Arch Lauterer...In intense collaboration those poems, those spaces, those figures, those voices were woven together by Martha Hill and Lauterer into a performance; Ben Belitt ardently mid-wifing the play. Wallace Fowlie's voice still resonates for me...and the shaping of the patterns on that stage was theatrical magic. The making of a play from scratch."

In spite of this success Lauterer was not content. When Fergusson returned from his sabbatical Arch requested that Leigh relieve him of the chairmanship: "Since I more or less read the minority report in the Division now I believe I can serve more actively as part of it than as its chairman." In an interview in 1941 he complained that the drama majors who were considered most adequate were "literature students who had almost no artistic ability;" that neither he nor his students had much opportunity as stage designers since there were only two major plays a year; and that for some years drama at Bennington had been "in the throes of Stanislavsky and the Greeks." His great disappointment, however, may have been the failure of the college to build either of his theatres. At any rate he resigned in 1942 and went to Colorado College where Martha Hill's friend and later husband, Thurston Davies, was president; then to Sarah Lawrence; and finally to Mills, where he was director of drama without peer or rival.

Fergusson also had his discontent. From the first he had in mind the creation of a permanent theatre group for, he said, "the need for a real theatre is bound to make itself felt in serious work in drama." An acting group took form in 1938 when Eleanor Mindling, Emily Sweetser and Elisabeth Zimmerman, drama majors graduating that year, formed a stock company and were joined by several drama fellows and Lydia Vaill who postponed her marriage three months. Taking over the abandoned county courthouse they removed the judge's bench and sawed it in two to make a box office and a lemonade stand, built a stage and proscenium arch, and sewed up 60 yards of purple plush, donated by the Zimmerman Upholstery Company, for a curtain. Bezie wrote that "we did some dreadful plays that summer but in the second year pulled off a couple of promising productions: *School for Wives* and *East Lynne* for which Liz Reittel designed the scenery...It had real style."

The third summer the group joined the drama section of the Bennington School of the Arts as actors and teachers. With Fergusson directing, half a dozen plays and operas were put on the summers of 1940 and 1941 as part of the Bennington Festival. One of the best was Fergusson's *The King and the Duke*, a drama based on *Huckleberry Finn*. A repertory theatre was in the making with casts of graduates in drama and experienced drama fellows. But by this time the draft was claiming the men and the stock company dissolved along with the School of the Arts.

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

Paul Rockwell recalled a final effort to organize a continuing company of actors. After the war Leigh's successor, Lewis Jones, began promoting a million-dollar art center in town, and to be ready for it Rockwell, Thommen, Ray Malon and Ben Tone formed an Actors' Cooperative. Nothing came of the art center and though four plays were put on with Fergusson's help the enterprise was abandoned after one season. The men had to earn a living and Dort Cousins suggests that there were too many cooks. It was then that Francis Fergusson resigned:

"We had come to realize that a permanent theatre group was not possible at Bennington...and that, if we were to continue, we should have to repeat the struggle every year for a trained group only to see it disappear as the students graduated and the men left in search of paying jobs."

This, Fergusson felt, was "the ultimate frustration." But also he wanted to write. His book *The Idea of a Theatre*, he said, was the outgrowth of his work at the Laboratory Theatre "and, more directly, of the twelve years at Bennington."

Actually, emphasis on a repertory company made up of graduates, drama fellows and faculty led the drama majors to protest that they were being neglected. One term no full-length play was scheduled and the majors complained that the acting experience they derived from "little dabs of theatre" was not enough. When they learned that *Macbeth* had been chosen as the next production with no roles for students except for the three witches, they brought about a confrontation and three one-act plays were substituted.

Expressions of student discontent in 1941 and 1942 coincided with something of a schism between the disciples of Fergusson and of Lauterer. Katherine Henry Hellman says that the students "felt the Fergusson-Lauterer tension very deeply" and Elizabeth James describes the division as split in two by 1941. "Apparently what Leigh had tolerated in the name of creative conflict turned very destructive indeed for the students had either taken cover in one camp or the other or were drifting in the vacuum between."

After graduating Bezie James was a teaching fellow from 1939 to 1942 and she would have known of in-fighting of which students in general were only vaguely conscious. From the beginning drama students were fully aware of the differences between Fergusson and Lauterer (someone said one was cerebral, the other visceral) but scarcely of tension and many would agree with Vida Deming that their contrasting approaches were "useful and exciting." Drama majors in every class from 1936 to 1943 have expressed sentiments similar to Florence Lovell Nielsen's: "I liked and esteemed them both and considered myself fortunate to be able to work

with each closely." A graduate of 1943, Merrell Hopkins Hambleton, suggests that the Fergusson-Lauterer tension "had a positive effect on students and pushed us to work at peak levels."

What came of those drama majors? Elizabeth James recalls that "prospects after graduation were grim and unremunerative — teaching in some girls school or at a settlement house or haunting the casting offices to break into the road show of something like *Junior Miss*. The prospect for dropouts was no better except for Carol Channing. Otto Luening recalls her at a party brilliantly impersonating her Bennington teachers. Wallace Fowle once told her that she would certainly succeed in the theatre but he doubted that her script-writer would be Moliere.

That the drama experience at Bennington had long-term effects is suggested by Mary-Averett's winning fame if not fortune with her unique blend of poetry, dance and drama — like Channing she won the Bennington award for achievement in 1979; Vida directing, teaching at Bard, the New School, Sarah Lawrence and Juilliard, and lecturing at Salzburg; Merrell working with Hallie Flanagan at Smith, earning an M.A. while teaching everything Arch taught her, her special relation to the Phoenix Theatre; Honora's three weeks acting on Broadway and longer in Williamstown; Shirley Stanwood teaching and writing radio scripts; Dort's work with Menotti's *The Medium* and *The Telephone*; Eleanor's long years of teaching and directing; Mary Perrine acting and teaching dramatics and rhythms; Nika's award for her work on Radio Liberty; Rhoda's involvement in assorted Little Theatres; Virginia making a living as a posh dress designer; Lydia acting in Williamstown; or Marcia's varied career of acting, teaching, writing.

Did absorption in dramatics rule out a general education? June Parker Wilson discovered the depth of her ignorance when she married a Harvard man who seemed to know everything. But he acknowledged "I had gotten something out of my education that was totally lacking in his: a sense of experiencing the thing we were doing with our bodies and souls as well as our brains. As a result he comes to Bennington as if to a magic fountain." Rhoda Scranton Sloan admits that her education was lopsided but feels that at Bennington she "was given the tools and confidence to continue in any direction that I choose." Dr. Leigh would have applauded.

CHAPTER 18

MUSIC: SUCCESS STORY

The music program at Bennington College took shape slowly. President Leigh knew of no acceptable model for incorporating music and music-making in the curriculum. College music departments emphasized theory and history, gave little credit for "practical music," charged stiff fees for piano and violin lessons, and often required a fifth year to carry their majors beyond "appreciation." Musical life on the American campus was generally extracurricular.

Leigh wanted students to make music and not merely talk about it, he favored including every form of musical activity in the curriculum, and he refused to distinguish music by charging extra for instruction. But he had no program in mind and he decided to appoint someone with experience and reputation as director of music to formulate objectives and begin their realization.

Before choosing Kurt Schindler for this key post, Leigh decided against Carl Ruggles, Otto Luening, and possibly Edgar Varese. Luening, who succeeded Schindler in 1934, said that Leopold Stokowski had proposed Varese but that the female trustees thought him too rough and he thought them too refined. The rumor is plausible but Varese is not mentioned in the Leigh files.

In November, 1930, novelist Dorothy Canfield Fisher wrote Leigh that composer Carl Ruggles, her neighbor in Arlington, Vt., was interested in the Bennington post and she glowingly described him as a vital personality and gifted musician who with his talented wife would bring acclaim to the college as a center for fine music.

Leigh replied that he was delighted to know that Ruggles might

consider the position and said he would at once put him "first on my list of possibilities." Seven months later he wrote Mrs. Fisher on another subject and added that he had "certainly not forgotten about Mr. and Mrs. Ruggles for the music." What terminated the Ruggles candidacy must be conjectured. Certainly Leigh would have been offended by Ruggles' routine profanity and his taste in limericks, and dubious about his imperious, generally contemptuous judgment of conductors who included no modern music in their programs. Whatever the reason, Bennington lost an opportunity for an exciting, perhaps turbulent, musical scene with Ruggles at the storm center. For some years Ruggles eagerly shared his disdainful opinion of the Bennington president with anyone who would listen, though Luening was able to lure him to the college from time to time during the Leigh years.

Perhaps the most puzzling of Leigh's decisions was the appointment of Schindler as director of music instead of Luening, who had been recommended by Thomas Surette, head of the Concord School of Music and a leading authority on musical education. What seems to have favored Schindler in 1932 was the afterglow of the chorus he had ceased to conduct five years before, plus the backing of the New York ladies who had helped keep the Bennington idea alive for eight years. Ruth Carter '38 suggests that her aunt, Dorothea Draper Blagden, who first suggested Schindler, "could be a mighty strong and forceful person. Leigh wouldn't have had a chance." It is possible also that Leigh did not wish to be beholden to Surette, a somewhat formidable personality. On grapevine evidence Luening himself believes that he lost out when someone told the trustees that he and his wife had been "notorious troublemakers at Vassar" though neither had ever been there.

Schindler had a fine musical background and training in Germany, and was known as a founder and for some years director of the Schola Cantorum in New York. When Leigh approached him he had a three-year grant to record Spanish folk music and he planned to spend several months each year in Spain. He therefore proposed that his friend Paul Stassevitch, a musician of great virtuosity, be appointed to teach both piano and violin and to administer the division during Schindler's absence each year.

Nothing came of Schindler's proposal and when Bennington College opened with 87 freshmen in September, 1932, the director of music was recording folk songs in Spain and music instruction was begun by Julian DeGray and Mariana Lowell, both in their 20s. Schindler had recommended DeGray to teach piano when the Stassevitch gambit failed. DeGray had studied with Tobias Matthay and taught at the Matthay School and the University of Miami, and he now began a teaching career at Bennington that lasted nearly 40 years.

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

Surette nominated Miss Lowell to teach violin. She had studied with Nadia Boulanger, Stassevitch and others, and had taught at the Diller-Quaile School of Music. She and DeGray had both won awards in music and now independently they fashioned introductory work around instruction in their own instruments.

Leigh put a high value on choral singing and in Schindler's absence arranged with Professor Charles Safford, director of music at Williams, to lead a chorus, and employed Mrs. Safford to give lessons in voice. Late in the fall term Safford brought the Williams glee club up for a joint concert with the Bennington chorus.

Schindler arrived for the spring term with totally unrealistic expectations. Having in mind his famed chorus in New York, he was disappointed and depressed by the quality of the voices of the Bennington students, all freshmen; and with Safford's cooperation brought in tenors and basses from Williams. Unfortunately what had begun in the previous term as a symbiotic relationship in music came to an abrupt end when Schindler informed the president's office that he did not want any more Williams boys around because he did not like their attitude toward the Bennington girls.

What he expected from Bennington's 18-year-olds is dramatically revealed by an incident that occurred in the fall of 1933, a few months before his resignation. Shortly before her death Esther Williamson Ballou wrote that Schindler agreed to teach composition to her and Harriet Stern soon after they arrived as freshmen. When he looked at their first efforts, simple piano pieces, one titled "Butterflies," "he went into a towering rage and proceeded to play some pieces by Schubert for us, saying that was what he wanted. He then dismissed us for the rest of the year."

Harriet Stern Strongin recalls the incident but suggests that they had several sessions before they were dismissed and that Schindler's rage was brought on less by the simplicity of their compositions than by their temerity in "begging for a bit of creative leeway." Whether or not the two young ladies were that brash, one is tempted to imagine a terminal dialogue in which they protest that they are only 18 and the maestro dismisses them with the chilling remark that Schubert was younger than that when he wrote his first symphony.

Schindler found enjoyment in his course in music appreciation, which had a heavy enrollment, and he could expect some improvement in the chorus as the college grew to full size and students matured. But his developing illness and depression caused him to resign in December, 1933, and he died of cancer two years later.

A man of great culture and charm and, as Leigh wrote his sponsor, Mrs. Blagden, "much beloved," Schindler had not been able to function as "director of music" and his enduring contribution to Bennington turned

out to be his musical library and the appointment of DeGray. Schindler was not only an accomplished musician; he was a superb photographer and like DeGray a remarkable linguist. He knew Greek and Latin, Russian and Spanish; in his last term at Bennington he was teaching Spanish and Italian to small groups; in his last days in New York he was studying Rumanian. During his lifetime and later his collections of Russian and Spanish folk songs brought him recognition as a gifted ethnomusicologist.

Upon receiving Schindler's resignation, Leigh remarked to Mariana Lowell that he was "certainly in Mr. Surette's hands now," and appealed to him for suggestions. Surette repeated his recommendation of Otto Luening, who was then teaching at the University of Arizona. On a western trip Dr. and Mrs. Leigh met Otto and Ethel Luening, and their appointment followed. Mrs. Luening was to succeed Lyda Neebson as teacher of voice; Luening was to succeed Schindler but without the title of director of music.

* * * * *

Nevertheless, Leigh treated Luening as if he were the director of music and counted on him to work out a program and solve all of music's problems. Luening came from a richly musical Wisconsin family of German origin, and had grown up making music. In his teens, between 1914 and 1920, he studied flute, conducting and composing in Munich and Zurich; in Chicago at 21 he conducted the first All-American opera performance; between 1925 and 1928 he directed the opera department of the Eastman School of Music, and he had two Guggenheim fellowships for composition before going to the University of Arizona in 1932 to head the department of composition and theory. Delighted to learn of Luening's appointment, Surette wrote Leigh that he was "admirably fitted for an institution like yours because of a certain openness and freedom in dealing with all sorts of persons. He is modern but does not belong to the group whose motto is 'dissonance or die...'"

Luening's thoughts about music at Bennington, communicated to Leigh by interview and letter, appeared in the *Announcement for the Third Year*. The major aim was the development of "musical taste and understanding not through mere listening and reading, but through a rich experience of participation and study." Luening liked, in other words, the college's emphasis on learning by doing, and he also accepted the college premise that students differ: their programs would be planned to accord with their various backgrounds and aims. Every major, however, would be required to meet high standards of performance and she was expected to become familiar "not only with the field as a whole, but in its relation to

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

the culture of our own and other times." The catalogue promised a seminar to carry out this last broad expectation but the promise was neither acted upon nor repeated. A more modest aim had a better chance of fulfillment: "Whenever possible the work in music will be related to other fields of study, such as the dance and drama."

Upon arriving at Bennington in the fall of 1934, Luening was taken aback by the inadequacy of the one-time henhouse, always known as The Coop, as a place for music instruction and practice (it noisily resisted soundproofing) and the lack of consensus among the music faculty on aims and program. As Miss Lowell wrote, none of them had known what to do to get the "department moving on *any* line." Nevertheless, Luening recognized the musical excellence of his new colleagues and he was optimistic about the future of music at Bennington if the division could work out a philosophy and curriculum and give itself greater visibility and audibility on the campus and beyond.

Whether Luening could carry out these aims, develop a satisfying curriculum and make the division known beyond Bennington would depend on the music faculty and might require the appointment of more members than Leigh anticipated. In their meeting in San Francisco, Leigh said that student demands for more individual instruction had been met by adding faculty members. In 1933, two part-time piano teachers came to share DeGray's burden: Rudolph Pittaway, an Englishman who had also studied with Tobias Matthay, and Gregory Tucker, pianist and composer, who had studied with Leo Ornstein and had been teaching at the Edgewood School which one of the Leigh daughters attended. Both Pittaway and Tucker were given full-time appointment in the third year but Leigh was reluctant to continue hiring more piano teachers and he liked Luening's proposal that no instrument instruction be given to students who could not pass a test in the elements of music.

The third catalogue announced that to qualify for instruction in voice or on an instrument, a student must demonstrate her ability "to distinguish aurally major and minor intervals, chords and scales; to write all key signatures and scales; to sing (or whistle) at sight a simple tune; (and) to demonstrate a practical knowledge of the rhythmic elements of music."

In spite of this presumed deterrent, enrollment in music steadily increased and with it student pressure for still more teachers. In addition, the music faculty itself favored broadening the scope of instruction. Schindler had insisted on a voice teacher for the sake of his chorus. Then Miss Lowell asked for a teacher of 'cello for the sake of ensemble playing, and a gifted pupil of Felix Salmond, Margaret Aue, joined the faculty in February, 1934. Now Luening stressed the importance of an orchestra in any self-respecting music program, and two of his graduate students at the

University of Arizona, Robert McBride in 1935 and Henry Johnson in 1937, were lured east to share the growing teaching load but also particularly to teach woodwinds, brass and composition and to conduct an orchestra. In contrast to music faculty who were academically untainted, both had not only B.A.s but M.A.s from the University of Arizona to which they eventually returned as faculty members.

As might be expected, more students were attracted as the scope of instruction was broadened and an orchestra took shape. Students graduating in music rose from three in the first class to an average of six in the following five years; overlapping enrollment in courses, chorus and orchestra increased from 246 to an average of 348 in the same period. The need for more teachers became urgent as faculty members began claiming their sabbatical leaves after five years of teaching.

A solution with which Luening had been familiar at the University of Arizona, the appointment of teaching fellows, appealed to Leigh for its low cost but it did not appeal to the music students and was a limited success. Some teaching continued to be done by qualified students, but faculty members were obliged to resort to group instruction when they ran out of time for "private lessons;" part-time instructors were raised from a presumed half-time to two-thirds in 1940, and the music staff as Leigh left was somewhat larger than any other division's faculty. There were eight members in the division when the college reached its full size in 1935-1936. Before Leigh resigned in 1941 one had left, three had been added. Not yet noted were Hope Miller Kirkpatrick, who shared the teaching of voice with Ethel Luening, and Carlos Buhler, a European-trained concert pianist who succeeded Pittaway in 1937. Serving briefly as sabbatical replacement were Arlie Furman, violin, Ralph Kirkpatrick, harpsichord, and Dorothy Westra, voice.

Designing a music curriculum was complicated by certain college expectations and requirements. Introductory courses must meet the needs not only of prospective music majors, but also of students from other fields; and a student should be able to major in music even though she had but modest talent and no desire to become a concert artist or to follow a less alluring musical vocation. Finally, the most talented student would devote less time to music than the conservatory would expect since she was obliged to give half of her program to other studies for at least three years.

The music faculty came to accept these constraints, and with little thought of turning out prima donnas developed a program which met the needs of a wide range of students, not excluding the so-called tone deaf. During the first two years of the college, introductory work in music was made up of instruction in piano, violin or voice and a class in theory taught by Schindler, Lowell or Pittaway. From the third year on, the emphasis on performance continued, while theory became the province of

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

Luening, later assisted by McBride and Johnson.

Luening began at once teaching "History and Analysis of Music" as an introductory course in which others of the music faculty took part and performed from time to time. With 48 students, the course belied Bennington's boast of small classes but differed from the conventional course in musical appreciation in several respects. In it, students became familiar not only with the classics but also with contemporary works on records or live. Discussion groups were organized on the basis of previous experience and ability so that every student could be appropriately challenged. Finally everyone in the course, however strange to music, was expected to produce music in the chorus, orchestra, or an instrument class. These expectations reappeared the following year in "History and Analysis II," and the pattern has persisted.

In those days freshmen and sophomores were "trial majors" in the field of their choice and then either promoted to the Senior Division as full-fledged majors or "counselled out." In the Junior Division they divided their half in music between introductory courses and instruction in voice or on an instrument. Gregory Tucker's rhythms course, designed for dance students, and described as "fabulous" by a music graduate, was added to the program of all music trial majors in 1937. The trial majors also attended weekly workshops, then elegantly called seminars, and performed in them on occasion.

Promotion to the Senior Division was decided by the music faculty meeting with the Student Personnel Committee. The catalogue explained that "owing to the specialized and technical nature of musical training" no one would be promoted without "a knowledge of keyboard harmony, an understanding of musical forms, and most important of all a good 'musical ear.' " But performance remained basic and the weekly workshops gave every faculty member an opportunity to judge how well an applicant could sing or play. For a time the division took the word of the student's principal instructors for her knowledge of fundamentals, but in 1939 began meeting with second-year students before their promotion. The student was usually asked to identify intervals and chords, play sequences of chords in various keys, answer questions on theory and history and listen to records and identify the period, composition and composer. On the campus the Music Division's standards were considered to be shockingly professional, but the music faculty once seriously pondered Carlos Buhler's report that outside opinion considered their standards to be deplorably low. Some years later the perfectionist Paul Boepple felt that more could be expected of the music majors if entering students were better prepared, and he proposed the establishment of a high school nearby in which music training would be emphasized.

Once arrived in the Senior Division, every music major continued with

her "rich experience" of music-making. The "non-professionals" were offered a choice between work in musicology or more advanced work in "the history and analysis of music, harmony, composition or allied subjects." Those aiming at a vocation in music would study "composition, counterpoint, orchestration, conducting, advanced form and analysis and history of music," and might do some practice teaching. For both types progress in the art of making music was the primary aim and basis for faculty judgment.

Composition was not taught in the freshman and sophomore years except in tutorials, but it was practiced and taught by several faculty members, it was in demand for dance and drama, and it became a unique feature of the Bennington music program. Memorable music was written by Luening for Lorca's *Blood Wedding*, and by Tucker for the play based on Hart Crane's *The Bridge* and for Francis Fergusson's play *The King and the Duke*.

Tucker himself credited modern dance with much of the vitality of composition during his 15 years on the Bennington music faculty. Under Martha Hill's dynamic propulsion, this new art required new music which student and faculty musicians willingly provided. Esther Williamson was a facile pianist upon arrival in 1933, and to earn money she accompanied dance classes. Her skill in improvisation was at once recognized and she was soon composing music for the dancers, often under great pressure of time. She "learned by doing" and recalled little formal instruction. But she profited from the classes of Louis Horst and Norman Lloyd in the summer Bennington School of the Dance and from the warm interest Luening "gave in full measure." She became an accomplished composer and won national recognition before her death.

Given the example and interest of faculty composers, the opportunity to hear their work performed and commented on in weekly workshops, and the demands for new music for dance and drama, it is not surprising that many students took composition seriously and included something of their own devising in their senior projects. It was not until the 1960s that composition was made an integral part of the instruction of all music students from the moment of their arrival, whatever their previous experience or major interest; but composition had become a dynamic element in the Bennington music program in the Leigh era.

By the time a music major approached graduation she had supplemented her work at college by four winter recesses which almost invariably advanced her musical education. Most students returned to homes in metropolitan centers which offered a wide choice of musical events and instruction and opportunities to teach as apprentices. Students from small towns managed sooner or later to spend the recess in Boston or New York. Esther Williamson came from upstate New York and found a

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

way to be in New York City for all four of her field projects. Part of the time she lived with the families of classmates Lillias Dulles, Galen Winter and Maria Zimbalist; part of the time she had her own apartment and paid the rent with earnings from accompanying dance classes at New York University where Martha Hill taught dance as well as at Bennington. Each winter she attended innumerable concerts and continued to study piano with Julian DeGray, who maintained a studio in New York the year round.

A senior in good standing with the music faculty was likely to be graduated but she could not take it for granted. In her application for promotion she had said what she intended her senior project to be. In later years the project was almost invariably a concert. In the 1930s the project often included an essay. In the class of 1938, Isabel Emery conducted a survey of music in 37 Vermont communities and Mary Jane Sheerin outlined a plan of study for Bennington music majors who had no professional aspirations. In the following year Marion Warner wrote on the history of music in Wilmington, Del., and Cecilia Drinker began compiling a catalogue, which was later published, of music for the small orchestra.

Seniors had also to prove themselves musically. This might mean at least satisfactory performance in ensemble, at most a full-length recital, and in between a concerto by Beethoven or Mozart with the college orchestra. The senior project might also include the orchestration of folk songs, conducting the orchestra, accompanying a soloist, or writing compositions to be played by themselves or others. Her commitments fulfilled, the senior met with the entire music faculty for an hour of questions, a confrontation known as the Senior Inquisition.

While the music program took shape the Bennington musicians, student and faculty, were becoming known not only locally but far afield. From the first, Leigh had counted on a chorus and the music faculty to perform for townspeople as well as for the college community. Soon six to eight concerts by faculty, students and guest artists were being scheduled each semester. Among the visitors heard during the Leigh years were Efrem Zimbalist, Egon Petri, Felix Salmond, William Primrose, Paul Hindemith, the Don Cossacks chorus and the Budapest Quartet; and lecture-demonstrations in modernism were given by Aaron Copland and Henry Cowell.

The faculty performed as soloists and in a variety of combinations, and acquainted town and gown with a wide range of music from the earliest to their own. In the first year DeGray gave concerts of Bach and of Beethoven, and in a symposium on modernism played from Bartok, Stravinsky and Schoenberg. After Luening's arrival, new works by American composers were frequently heard. At first, student performances consisted of piano

and violin sonatas of the old masters; later the 'cello, flute, clarinet and French horn came in and student compositions were interspersed among the classics. In 1940 and 1941 the concert season was extended through the summer when the Bennington School of the Dance was expanded to include drama and music and Bennington was added to the towns which boasted of summer opera. This promising collaboration of the performing arts was one of the casualties of World War II.

In addition to performances at the college, the Bennington chorus sang in candlelight services at Dr. Booth's church in Old Bennington and twice gave concerts of sacred music at the local Episcopal church. Its most ambitious concert featured Schubert's Mass in C Major with Paul Boepple the guest conductor. Boepple had just become conductor of the Dessoff Choirs in New York, and was to join the college faculty in 1944. For a time the college chorus joined forces with the Roaring Branch Choral Society, a community enterprise conducted by Henry Johnson or Robert McBride.

Cordial relations between Luening and Franz Lorenz produced another town-gown link. With WPA funds Lorenz had put together a remarkable children's orchestra which performed at the college and combined with the college orchestra to give joint concerts, and several of his pupils became music majors at the college. Beyond Bennington, McBride played oboe in the Vermont Symphony Orchestra and conducted it on occasion and DeGray played a Grieg concerto with it. Luening was active on the advisory board of the Vermont State WPA.

* * * * *

Luening's ambition extended beyond Bennington and Vermont, for he wanted the division to be known in the great world of music. Every summer Bennington's composers and performers were heard at the Yaddo Festival at Saratoga Springs; each winter recess one or more of the music faculty went on tours arranged by the Association of American Colleges, played with symphony orchestras or gave recitals in New York and New England. Works by Luening, McBride and Tucker were played by symphony orchestras in major cities and recorded by RCA, Yaddo and New Musical Quarterly Recordings.

The college sponsorship of musical events in New York had already begun thanks to trustees whose interest was musical, mercenary or both. Early in 1935 at John McCullough's urging, the college took the risk of sponsoring Artur Schnabel's first concert in the United States. To everyone's surprise Town Hall was packed and the college scholarship fund received more than \$4,000.

Hoping for further successes, the college sponsored two series of concerts by the Philharmonic Symphony Chamber Orchestra under Hans

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

Lange between 1935 and 1937. These concerts introduced New York audiences to several centuries of music, much of it seldom performed, and under pressure from Luening concluded with contemporary works. In spite of the intense promotional activities of trustee Mrs. Clarence M. Woolley and her committee, the concerts failed as benefits but brought the college recognition in musical circles, and the second series gave college musicians a role.

When he learned that there were no plans for a third series, Luening conceived of a Bennington Guild which would support musical and other events in New York and elsewhere. In December, 1936, he addressed the college community and proposed that the guild be organized during the winter recess to sponsor a third Philharmonic concert series in 1937-38. He said that Lange and his musicians had asked him to become their leader and conductor, and he had accepted. All that was needed now was an organization to guarantee the concert series against deficits. A membership of 1,400 would completely fill Town Hall and Luening was confident that there were that many persons in New York "in sympathy with our ideas and interested in this form of musical presentation."

The proposal of a guild was clearly appealing, for more than 60 percent of the students and half the faculty at once signified their intention of joining, and most of them agreed to enlist a second member. How it would have worked will never be known. Although his signature headed the list of sponsors, Leigh wrote Luening a few days later that "we had done loose and incorrect thinking about the whole thing" and then vetoed the enterprise just as students were leaving for the winter recess.

Some time later the president told Luening that the other faculties might feel that music was too far out in front and he wished to forestall imbalance between divisions. But this can hardly be the whole explanation. On second thought Leigh may have doubted that a newly formed guild would succeed in filling Town Hall to hear five concerts of little known music, old or new. Luening had counted on the New York ladies to serve again, but Leigh knew that they were unwilling to take on a third series and he may have foreseen sizable deficits that the college would have to meet. He rejected economic determinism in theory yet his decisions were often colored by his determination to balance the college budget.

Luening was deeply disappointed and at the end of the Leigh era judged that the music division was "no longer as influential a factor as formerly in the forward-looking movements of the musical world." On the other hand the termination of ambitious sponsorship in New York had slight effect on the music program at the college, the music faculty continued to make itself known through composition and performance, and Bennington music students began to be heard and to assert themselves.

Cecilia Drinker Saltonstall recalls playing concerts that included

student compositions at Middlebury and Sarah Lawrence and in Little Carnegie Hall in New York. In November, 1936, a Bennington program on the Columbia Broadcasting System featured music written by students and played by students and faculty. The composers were Barbara Coffin, Elizabeth Ketchum, Reba Marcus, Harriet Stern, Elsa Voorhees and Esther Williamson. During 1938-39, Bennington music students were founding members of the Intercollegiate Music Guild of America whose purpose was to stimulate composition and performance among college students. At the guild's first festival 10 Bennington students performed, and the music of five student composers was played. Bennington College was host for the guild's second festival in 1940 and the following year Bennington was strongly represented at the festival at Bard. Theodore Strongin, then president of the guild and later a music teacher at Bennington, reported that Mimi Wallner '40 offered a spectacular work "scored for stepladder and various cleaning tools that made appropriate noises. We at Bard were most impressed."

In 1939 the Music Division leaped from rags to riches when it vacated the chicken coop and moved into the 40-room Jennings mansion, then known as Fairview half a mile north of the original college buildings. For a time music's sole possession of the building was challenged by dance and drama, for if a theatre were built on to the west end of Fairview, as proposed and designed by Arch Lauterer, the mansion was to be Bennington's Performing Arts Center. The project collapsed for lack of funds and aside from a few faculty apartments Fairview, renamed Jennings Hall, has belonged to music and provided studios, practice rooms, a small concert hall and space for record and score libraries.

In addition, the nearby carriage barn turned out to be ideal for concerts. At first the music faculty felt that playing in a hall with no stage in what was then known as the Recreation Building would lack an appropriate formality. Fortunately, the hall's remarkable acoustical properties were soon discovered and its use for concerts continued in spite of its limited seating capacity.

In retrospect, the Bennington music program in the 1930s had its deficiencies as well as strengths. Some music majors failed to develop any lasting interests outside of music, some lacked a broad general education, and some may have been relatively ignorant of theory, as Esther Williamson said of herself. The division received favorable student reports in May, 1938, but a year later the Student Educational Policies Committee reported "a general failure of the music faculty to keep appointments" and complained of workshops with no faculty present to lead discussion or offer criticism. That some students were untouched by the new currents in music which the faculty had been at pains to introduce is suggested by DeGray's last words to one of his graduating counselees:

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

"Your playing several instruments appears to be broadening, but the music you play is all monodic. What you need is not more knowledge but a different approach...which will make it possible for you to reconcile other points of view without relinquishing your own."

Still the music program fulfilled Leigh's hope that the college would develop skills and interests which would persist through life. Whether music majors or not, alumnae reporting their activities often mentioned further study of music, joining a chorus or orchestra, supporting community music, or making music with their children. For the majors an attractive mode of continuation was marriage to a music teacher. Upon graduating Elizabeth Ketchum married Gregory Tucker, Carol Haines married Robert McBride, and in the Jones era Marianne Wilson married George Finckel. Since such marriages were only beginning to occur in other divisions, it was prematurely concluded that the academic relationship simply called counseling had emotional overtones only in music.

Random items from the lives and letters of graduates bear out the theme of addiction to music whatever the distractions of marriage and motherhood. Upon graduating in 1940, Mimi Wallner was for a time secretary to Virgil Thomson, the composer, then music critic on the New York Herald-Tribune. She was deep in music during her marriage to Robert Bloom, the clarinetist, and has been fully occupied teaching music in recent years. Upon graduation in 1936, Hannah Coffin taught music, played with an orchestra and a Bach Cantata Club, and then before her marriage, with great foresight, guaranteed herself eight days of uninterrupted chamber music every fall by helping to found a musical houseparty which continues to flourish.

Shortly before her death in 1973, Esther Williamson Ballou distilled from her 40 years of study, teaching, performance and composition articles and a book on the teaching of music and music theory in which she advocated the present Bennington practice of introducing composition at the very beginning of study. In her memory the Bennington music faculty played a concert of her works, and DeGray returned to speak of her career and rich contribution to music.

Reba Marcus came to Bennington in 1934 intending to major in English, but talks with the music faculty during registration changed her plans and she majored in music with emphasis on singing and then composition. After graduating, she married Leonard Gillman, a pianist, continued voice lessons and studied composition with Wallingford Riegger. Years later, helping to organize a nursery school for her son led her professionally into child development. For some years she taught "Music for Children" at Purdue University without sacrificing music for herself; e.g. starring in Gilbert and Sullivan and Menotti's "The Me-

dium." She wrote:

"I wonder if I can convey the excitement and joy with which I learned from my association with Otto Luening what it was to be a musician, to be a professional, to work for the love of the subject, and to accept the disciplines imposed by it. In regard to learning and work I grew up then, and what I learned I have applied to all my work and learning ever since."

Cecelia Drinker Saltonstall wrote that her education will never end thanks to Bennington and her genes. After a traumatic beginning and two unsuitable music counselors she finally came into her own studying piano with Julian DeGray who "was by far the best adviser for me...very human, witty, sensible and amusing." She studied violin and ensemble with Mariana Lowell who "was hardboiled and a fine teacher." (Another member of the class of 1939 wrote that Miss Lowell "always made her think of a Greek statue — cool, calm and truly beautiful.") Luening, with whom Cecilia studied flute and composition, was "kind, mild and he believed in my ability as a flute player — which my father did not." Recently she published a second much-expanded edition of the catalogue of music for small orchestra which she began as a senior in 1939.

Ruth Ives came to Bennington in 1935 to study singing and that was just about all she did "for four blissful years." Still, "the related studies a music major had to take gave me the principles and tools I've been using ever since even though I lost my voice and haven't been able to sing at all for the last 25 years." In her career as a singer, teacher and director she was deeply involved in opera workshops at Converse College, Syracuse and Columbia. Shortly before her death she recalled the music faculty with affection and gratitude.

Isabella Perrotta grew up in Bennington and came to college with the thought of some day teaching foreign languages. She had studied piano for nine years with Catholic sisters, so the Bennington music faculty welcomed her as a major. Summer school courses gave her certification, and marriage to Virgil Erickson did not interrupt her teaching in Vermont public schools from her graduation in 1940 to the present. She has taught at every level, conducted orchestras, bands and choruses, instructed in strings and winds, been a music supervisor, become an authority on primary music education, and in 1964 was elected president of the Vermont Music Educators' Association. Recently she wrote that Bennington gave her what she needed and remarked that an idea stressed at Bennington, that everyone is responsible for his or her own decisions, has begun to infiltrate the primary grades.

Former faculty members look back on the 1930s with a touch of nostalgia. Henry Johnson taught from 1937 until he went off to war, and

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

he recalled his Bennington experience with gratitude. He was impressed by the great musicality of his colleagues and the quality and seriousness of the students “which was part of the joy of teaching at Bennington — one didn’t get stale...A class with those gals took everything you had or else it just didn’t make it.” He thought the emphasis on performance one of the program’s great strengths; there “was never any degrading of music-making. Even those who emphasized theory were excellent performers.”

Otto Luening likes to recall that Surette on more than one occasion ranked Bennington College best in the country for undergraduate music instruction. The music faculty, much closer to what went on than Surette, was often critical, but it finally pronounced the program good. On April 9, 1941, its members agreed that they knew what they were doing and what they wanted students to get out of it and they were satisfied that “the division now really adheres in practice to what it only talked about earlier.”

When Leigh resigned in 1941 the music program had proved expensive in terms of graduates because the music faculty was larger than faculties which had twice as many majors. The music program was highly educational, however, not only for the majors but also for students in other fields, for the faculty and staff, and for devoted townspeople. Concerts, workshops, orchestra and chorus had something for everyone as performer, as composer, as listener, and many heard contemporary music for the first time. Both town and gown had reason to be grateful to the college for its faith and investment in music in the Leigh years and beyond.

CHAPTER 19

LITERATURE: A TROJAN VICTORY

In literature as in the arts and music, Robert D. Leigh was breaking new ground. Elsewhere in the 1930s instruction in literature, always referred to as "English," began with a required freshman course which featured weekly themes, typically continued with factual survey courses culminating in Victorian prose, and offered a few lucky majors a seminar in Old English. Twentieth-century authors were generally neglected or taught as at Wellesley, where in 1932 a course in English poetry since 1900 could not be counted toward the literature major.

Leigh was dubious about this approach and thought something better could be worked out if poets, prose writers and critics were included in the literature faculty and if more attention were paid to contemporary writing. And so while other colleges were relying heavily on Ph.D.s in the history of literature, and occasionally risking a poet in residence, Bennington reversed the order and set a pattern which has persisted: the division was not rich in doctorates but it always included a poet, a novelist and a critic, none of whom had ceased writing. That faculty had no difficulty in accepting Leigh's dictum that introductory courses should deal with the modern world.

Leigh also set a pattern in his choice of the language instructors. He was convinced that a foreign language could be best taught by someone brought up and educated in it, and his appointment of Jean Guiton to teach French and Ursula Rossmann to teach German established a precedent which still commands respect. Wallace Fowlie can hardly be classed as an exception since in cultural terms he was a fully naturalized Frenchman in spite of his Boston background.

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

As Bennington opened its doors to 87 freshmen in 1932 the exuberant star of the Literature Division was Genevieve Taggard, poet, biographer, inspiring teacher and the only member of the Leigh faculty to be included in Daniel Aaron's *Writers on the Left*. She had been recommended to Leigh by Robert Frost, then living nearby, as a better poet than Frances Frost, a Vermonter unrelated to Robert who was also being considered. Miss Taggard had a B.A. from the University of California in 1919, was a Guggenheim Fellow in Poetry in 1931, and had taught at Mt. Holyoke.

In her introductory courses students read, wrote and discussed poetry; she organized a trip to Cambridge to hear T.S. Eliot lecture at Harvard; she brightened the evening meetings program with fellow poets; and she herself read poetry one evening a week for the college community. Visiting poets included Frances Frost, Arthur Guiterman, Chard Powers Smith and e. e. cummings in the fall and more in the spring including Robert Frost himself.

The cummings evening at Bennington had been well publicized and townsmen were interspersed with students and faculty in the theatre. In anticipation of the event Miss Taggard's students had been memorizing cummings' poetry; and as he entered the theatre, by superb timing, their chanting of "Buffalo Bill's defunct" had come to the line "Jesus, he was a handsome man." Cummings was said to have been delighted. At any rate he was less embarrassed than some of the guests from town for whom more was in store as he read his often unchaste verse. Later at a party at Miss Taggard's he met all the freshman poets and was impressed. In a letter to Ezra Pound he expressed his admiration for the Bennington students in his own way: "Que les demoiselles — of all dimensions and costumes (who) sit around in each other's room quaffing applejack neat."

To teach prose Frances Frost suggested Irving Fineman whom she had met at the MacDowell Colony and who by a startling *volte-face* had gone from engineering and teaching engineers to writing prize-winning novels. In his introductory courses he aimed to open the door to literature as widely as possible. Consequently his students read the classics as well as the writing of Dreiser and Sinclair Lewis which was later excluded from the standard introduction.

In the following year a second class was admitted and the literature faculty was joined by Harold Gray in September and Francis Fergusson in February. Gray was an old friend of Leigh who would have come the first year had he not wished to take advantage of his sabbatical leave from Bowdoin. They had known each other in high school in Seattle, they both taught at Reed College and both had doctorates from Columbia.

Leigh offered Gray the appointment not only because of his feeling for literature, nurtured at Oxford, and his 16 years of teaching at Reed, Columbia, Adelphi, St. John's and Bowdoin, but for his friendship and

counsel. Upon arrival Gray was appointed chairman of the division, he served on the executive committee and the advisory council, and in the spring of 1934-35 he was acting president during Leigh's first sabbatical.

Though soon identified with drama at Bennington, Francis Fergusson came to teach literature. He had been a student at Harvard until he won a Rhodes scholarship and he had an Oxford degree in Modern Greats. After becoming chairman of the Drama Division in 1936 Fergusson continued to attend meetings of the literature faculty and influenced division policy, as will be evident.

Catharine Osgood came in the third year. She had been a student and friend of Miss Taggard at Mt. Holyoke where she earned a B.A. and M.A. before teaching three years at Sophie Newcomb College in New Orleans. Fortunately her marriage in 1937, unlike Miss Taggard's, did not deprive Bennington of her valued services, for her husband, Thomas Foster, was a Benningtonian. "Kit" Foster continued teaching for some 30 years as others came and went. She was almost always chairman of a faculty committee on student writing and willingly took on the burden of helping the illiterates; she responded gladly to student requests for a course or tutorial in any English classic and she was the first to promote the serious study of James Joyce at Bennington.

These appointments should have ended the search for literature teachers but the death of Miss Rossmann and the resignations of Guiton and Miss Taggard in 1935 reopened the search. Miss Eva Wunderlich, who came to teach German, had a doctorate from the University of Halle and had trained and examined teachers in Berlin from 1925 to 1933. Upon Hitler's accession she came to New York and taught at the New School for a year before coming to Bennington. Her studies and scholarly writing gave her mastery over a remarkable range of literature from the Greeks to contemporary German writers, and she constituted Bennington's classics department for anyone requesting a tutorial in Greek or Latin. Every year, beyond the call of duty, she arranged an elaborate Christmas party for the faculty children. A "drama boy," often Eddie Thommen, was Santa Claus and each child's present was withheld until he or she sang a song, told a story or burst into tears.

Guiton was claimed by the French Department at Bryn Mawr after three years at Bennington. He returned to France at the beginning of World War II, survived Dunkerque, and joined the staff of UNESCO after the war. In two pages of recollections, Guiton credited Bennington with teaching him everything he ever knew about education. Mainly he said he owed his new knowledge to "the first class, 'les jeunes filles en fleurs,' dashing, challenging, questioning, eager to play at this new game of education." He trusted that the Bennington College community was still educating its faculty members.

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

Wallace Fowlie, who succeeded Guiton, was graduated from Harvard in 1930 and taught there on his way to an M.A. and Ph.D. He had studied at the Sorbonne, his poems had appeared in several French publications under the pseudonym Michel Wallace, and he came to Bennington highly recommended by Professor Andre Morize, then at Harvard. Each year his bibliography of reviews, articles, poems and books lengthened in consequence of his habit of writing a few pages early each morning. He taught at Bennington from 1935 to 1941 and returned in 1950 after nine years at Yale and Chicago.

By then it appeared that Bennington was his true parish but he left in the early 1960s and went to Duke. Throughout his time at Bennington Fowlie gave his students the rare experience of listening to formal lectures and taking examinations. At the end of his first year Leigh told him that he would succeed at Bennington because of his devotion to French literature and in spite of his professorial manner and method.

Virginia Donovan '40 recalled an incident which improves the image of "a too academic professor." In class he gave her credit for writing an interpretation of a Valery poem which was totally different from his interpretation but held up on close examination as well as his. He confessed his astonishment that the poem could be "legitimately understood so differently." Edna Edison, 1938-1940, wrote that Fowlie who "with affection permitted us to address him as 'Michel', had a genius's command of the French language which his students learned to savor."

In 1935 Bennington lost Genevieve Taggard to Sarah Lawrence when she married Kenneth Durant, United States manager for Tass, the Soviet news agency, and moved to New York. Every summer Miss Taggard came back to her farm, Gilfeather, in East Jamaica, Vt., and she accepted the invitation of the first class to return and read poetry on the eve of its graduation. When she died in 1948 Kit Foster wrote that "her warmth and her joy of living, her gay laugh, her penetrating sense of justice, her clear, hard sense of values, delicately or profoundly touched us all."

To succeed her as poet and teacher of poetry Miss Taggard had suggested Leonie Adams who was receptive when she learned that the college was interested also in her husband, William Troy. Adams, a Barnard graduate, had been a Guggenheim Fellow in Poetry, had published two books of poetry and recalled that in a single year 40 of her poems had appeared in various periodicals. She had also done literary editing and taught English at Washington Square College of New York University and Sarah Lawrence College.

Mildred Hubbard, who entered Bennington as "an aspiring poet," wrote that she could not speak strongly enough of "what Leonie Adams taught me. She established an understanding of what poetry is and how it is written because she herself was a distinguished poet; no fooling around

with adolescent urges."

William Troy graduated from Yale in 1925 after winning the prestigious Yale Essay prize as a freshman, writing and producing two plays, reviewing for the New Haven press, and being offered a graduate fellowship. This he refused for he had then decided on a literary career. He took graduate courses in French and English poetry at Columbia and there was awarded a fellowship for study at the Sorbonne.

Upon his return to New York his articles and reviews appeared in literary journals and he was a regular contributor to *The Nation* and then its film critic. But like his wife and other writers, Troy supported himself in New York by teaching at Washington Square College. He liked the idea of teaching at Bennington where he might influence the fashioning of a literature curriculum, though he regretted forfeiting his job on *The Nation* and his New York connections.

The Troys began teaching in September, 1935, as Bennington's first class entered its senior year. New York continued to be alluring and in the spring of 1937 Troy had reason to expect appointment as literary editor of *The Nation*. He asked Leigh for a leave and when that was refused the Troys resigned, suggested Ben Belitt for the poet's chair, and moved to New York. When Troy's negotiations with *The Nation* collapsed, Leigh reappointed him in 1938, responding to insistent student demand. Miss Adams taught again when Belitt went off to war in 1943.

Belitt had a B.A. and M.A. from the University of Virginia and was nearing a Ph. D. when he became assistant literary editor of *The Nation*. His poems, articles and reviews had given him some reputation, he was awarded the Shelley Memorial Prize in 1936, and his first book of poems, *The Five Fold Mesh*, was published as he arrived in 1938. Bennington soon brought modern dance into his esthetic if not physical life, but his fame as translator of Pablo Neruda was some years away. His gift in characterization was at once evident as when he described a first-year counselee as "undisciplined, in a state of nature, almost continuously vocal...a whirling nebula of self-assertion." A colleague from those days recently recalled his "wonderful courses in poetry" and the great care and attention he lavished on his writing students.

* * * * *

The early catalogues stated that the content of introductory courses would be contemporary prose and poetry "with stress on the reflection of present life and society." This could be variously interpreted, and each instructor was free to decide with his or her students what would be studied; but it seemed to mean extensive reading of current authors, many of whom were Americans. For example in the fall of 1936 Barbara Fuller, a

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

freshman, listed on her work sheets e. e. cummings, John Dos Passos, Max Eastman, T. S. Eliot, Ernest Hemingway, Aldous Huxley, James Joyce, Ludwig Lewisohn, Katherine A. Porter, Erich Remarque and Gertrude Stein.

The first effective attack on this approach to literature came at a division meeting on Oct. 12, 1937. Present were Gray, the chairman, Miss Osgood, Miss Wunderlich, Fergusson and Fowlie. (This was the Troys' year in New York and Belitt would not arrive until the following February.) The literature faculty was painfully aware of diminished enrollment and loss of majors, and in search of the cause found itself deep in self-analysis. Possibly the introductory courses could be improved. Gray called on everyone to say what went on in his or her course and it was soon evident that freshmen were introduced to literature in a great variety of ways and that there was more improvisation than planning.

Fergusson then made a decisive proposal. He said he thought freshmen and sophomores were at sea in literature and he doubted the value of letting them flounder for two years in the name of exploration. One term of floundering might be useful but he strongly recommended the prescription of certain literary landmarks in the introductory courses "against which to compare the modern authors." Recently Fergusson recalled that he and Troy had discussed this idea and were in full agreement, and Fowlie prescribed the close reading of a few masterpieces in his "Introduction to French Literature." Years before, Gray had strongly advocated an introductory course consisting entirely of contemporary works, but in the end the literature faculty adopted the Fergusson-Troy approach and Fergusson wrote the catalogue statement that students would henceforth be introduced to literature through the study of "a few classics of English and foreign literature."

Although the word "classics" was deleted from later catalogues, students were henceforth introduced to literature through the careful study of what would soon be known as "basic texts" to the exclusion of Dreiser and Lewis as second-rate literary artists. Student worksheets for 1939-40 indicate that the faculty had not yet settled on the classics to be taught, but the long run of Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* was about to begin. As will be noted in a moment, Leigh failed in an effort to challenge the Troy-Fergusson approach and the success of the course made it a model for basic courses in other fields in the Jones regime. Unlike many of them, "Langanlit" survived into the 1960s and Bennington faculty with experience elsewhere considered it one of the most effective freshman English courses in the country.

What would be taught after the one-year introduction? Listing courses in the catalogue or elsewhere was taboo in the 1930s on the ground that

what was taught should be influenced if not indeed determined by student interests and needs. The faculty sensed the risks in this approach and found a way of telling students what they would like to teach. The early catalogues stated the expectation that groups would be formed to study "expression in America since Colonial times," prose in 19th-century England, Shakespeare, and English poetry of Elizabethan times, of the age of Milton and of the Romantic period.

Fortunately the students responded affirmatively to this expression of faculty choices, and groups were formed as predicted. In due course other groups bore witness to Fineman's interest in the Bible, Fergusson's interest in Dante and Miss Taggard's interest in the Irish literary renaissance. The number and quality of students who enrolled might determine whether the course would become a perennial or die on the vine.

In addition to this faculty influence on the curriculum, students went to their teachers with specific requests. Kit Foster recalled that students persuaded her to give a course in the proletarian novel and she began teaching Chaucer when students appealed to her for "background." Courses that succeeded tended to be repeated and so between faculty and students a curriculum took shape and attained a degree of constancy. Coverage was never a criterion, survey courses were frowned on, but what was studied was given full measure.

Beyond these fairly regular courses the range of subjects was broadened by individual conferences which occupied a substantial block of the literature faculty's time. The subject of the conference, agreed upon by student and teacher (usually her counselor) might be related to a course, it might open up literary fields that were new to both, it might be the senior division plan, fabricated in the second year, or the climactic project of creative or critical writing upon which graduation depended. Barbara Ramsay Livingston '39 recalled a tutorial on Shakespeare with Harold Gray which was "a solid and literary kind of looking at the plays — relishing the language, exploring the motives, investigating, seeking the various editions."

Literature majors who chose critical writing and who were prepared to sacrifice everything to their senior projects found William Troy an ideal counselor. Brilliant, detached and exacting he sometimes gave his students the impression that they were invisible or even non-existent as he talked, gazing intently out the window; and he had no patience for the student who liked the wrong authors. Antoinette Larrabee '45 once insisted that a counselee would not attract his attention even if she disrobed, walked up the wall and across the ceiling upside down. Barbara Livingston recalled telling Troy of her excitement at having discovered F. Scott Fitzgerald in the summer. Troy said, "Fitzgerald was a fifth-rate writer of no consequence...That was that. I withered."

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

Elsa Voorhees Hauschka, member of the first class, found Troy to be the learned, firm adviser every student needs. She herself had floundered through three years of literature with pleasant but flaccid counseling and as she faced her senior year she had doubts about literature as a major though it was too late to change. She had no ideas for a thesis and she considered herself a failure. But by chance at this point Troy became her tutor and he performed "a truly creative rescue-and-salvage act of counseling." She was deeply interested in music and Troy suggested that she write on the function of music in the works of Joyce, Proust and Thomas Mann. This proved to be a difficult but rewarding task and Elsa concluded that Troy's "remarkable gift" was making his students discipline themselves just by holding up high but reasonable standards and helping them come to grips with their educational problem, whatever it was, by focusing on the material studied..

Creative writing was emphasized in the early years and the literature faculty suffered through reams of uneven poetry and prose before concluding that it was a rare student who could profitably concentrate in authorship. From the third year on, literature majors were warned that permission to specialize in creative writing would be given only to a student with demonstrated aptitude and tenacity and that such writing must be accompanied by other types of study. If she were interested only in creative writing, Bennington was not for her — "she might better devote herself to her writing alone and elsewhere."

Nevertheless, Bennington had enough gifted students to justify an occasional group and numerous tutorials in creative writing and some remarkable poetry and short stories warranted publication as early as the second year. The *Bennington College Publication* dating from June, 1934, was succeeded by *The New Publication* in 1936, and in 1940 by *Silo* which survived literary and financial crises into the 1980s.

The students who wrote for these publications were soon recognizable as a distinct caste. Edith Conklin Weaver '39 recently wrote that when she entered Bennington in 1936 there was a literary pantheon of faculty gods and student goddesses. She felt that such writers as Barbara Deming, Barbara Howes, Elizabeth Mills and Emma Swan, "like all proper deities," were "inaccessible on any human basis." On its side the literary hierarchy welcomed fresh talent but took pains to invite to its annual party no underclassmen who lacked the makings of a goddess.

This was the decade in which most American writers supported the New Deal, denounced fascism and idealized the Soviet Union, and some felt that their writing should be political if not indeed propagandist. There is little evidence of this tendency in the Bennington literary magazines. Kit Foster suggests that literature students were politically concerned but expressed their concern in other ways than writing. For the most part

student writing in the 1930s, aside from critical essays, was made up of poetry and short stories which came out of the students' own experiences and observations.

Where courses and conferences were held and what went on in them varied with instructor and students. They might decide to move out under a blossoming apple tree in the spring or a colorful sugar maple in the fall; they might sit around a table in the Barn. In most classes there was discussion but no lecture, and students were judged by performance in class and by the papers they wrote, not by examinations.

Discussion, as Mrs. Foster recalls it, focused on the education of the critical responses, "maturing, broadening, deepening reactions and sharpening up ways of stating them; on producing evidence to back up statements whether they were hasty, sleazy, romantic, half-baked or at times perceptive, shrewd and well considered."

Like Fowlie, Troy lectured but his pedagogic method was unique because before beginning his discourse he asked a question which involved everyone somewhat fearfully in the subject to be examined. The class met in the living room of a student house. Students arrived in shorts or jeans, with or without shoes, and sat on the floor when the chairs ran out; but that, wrote Virginia Donovan '40, was the end of informality. Troy asked the searching question and waited for an answer. If none was volunteered, he "fixed some student with his piercing blue eyes." If her answer was deemed inadequate she felt condemned by the glacial silence that continued until the next student was transfixed. As soon as someone hit upon an acceptable response, "with no assistance or suggestion from Mr. Troy, he would talk and immeasurably advance our understanding. No one ever taught me more in class."

Troy had followers and even disciples among the more gifted students; and though he did not suffer fools gladly he influenced the whole range of literature students. Mildred Hubbard Cummings '40 wrote that "perhaps only the elite literature majors were capable of understanding him fully... but he created a magic within that class that held us spellbound and sent us away determined to probe the meanings below the surfaces." (The goddesses in her time were Ximena de Angulo, Edith Conklin, Hoima Forbes and Joan Lewisohn.) Peg Stein Frankel '40 remembered that Troy abhorred science and social science majors, but finally agreed to give her a tutorial, and she thought of willing her first printing of *Ulysses* (Joyce's of course) to the college in his memory.

* * * * *

In view of Troy's repute as a teacher and literary critic, his absence in 1937-38 may well have struck the literature majors as symptomatic of a

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

malaise, already evident, that demanded examination. At a meeting of the Student Educational Policies Committee in November, 1937, Marion Hepburn representing literature commented on the decline in enrollment and charged that the division "seemed to have no unified direction...it was indefinite and vague and not tied to anything." Her attempt to find out how literature majors fared after graduation was blocked by President Leigh who said the alumnae worksheets were confidential. On April 4 she told the president that at her suggestion the literature majors were evaluating the division for him and the SEPC.

Dated April 25, 1938, the report was signed by the four literature seniors, three juniors and a sophomore. Their discontents, they said, were "not a sudden eruption but a continuation of a constant sense of frustration." They continued:

"The literature major lacks the vitality of other divisions and fails to accomplish the purpose for which it was designed. To the detached observation of non-major students it has a messy, confused, fragmented appearance. To the students actually working in it it seems to have gone neither far enough nor thoroughly enough."

The division's aims they felt were vague and bewildering, and two years of wandering in the junior division brought students "no coherent view of the field." The faculty should be less afraid of imposing a plan on their students, but the great need was one or two personalities of the sort "who engendered enthusiasm in other divisions."

By this time a meeting of all literature students, instigated by Virginia Donovan, then a sophomore, and others, issued a "manifesto" demanding Troy's return. Leigh's response, according to Miss Donovan, was "both irate and threatening," but the students seemed vindicated when the president announced that Troy would return in the following year.

Though student discontent with the division abated and enrollment increased somewhat by 1940-41, Leigh was kept aware of problems in literature which puzzled and discouraged him and he found a means of obtaining a professional evaluation of the literature program. Henry Simon, Gray's sabbatical replacement in the spring term of 1938-39, was experienced and knowledgeable in the theory and practice of teaching literature and at Leigh's request he wrote a report on the division in the summer of 1939. In it he said dissatisfaction with the work in literature was caused by "bewilderment, an uncertainty as to what is expected, an unsureness about what and how to study."

Simon's main criticism was aimed at the Troy-Fergusson emphasis on the classics. The Literature Division he felt tended "to make itself remote from other fields, to define its own area of study too clearly, and in so doing

to stress the esoterica." He wrote:

"At present the division stresses the more purely literary writers, and even in an introductory course Flaubert and Joyce received extended attention while Dreiser and Lewis do not appear on the reading lists because they are secondary literary artists. Yet it seems arguable that the Americans are more appropriate meat for freshmen. If literature is artistic communication through the printed page, it seems to me more important that the matter communicated should clearly bear a close relationship to the life of the student than that the method should represent the highest art."

Leigh had already made an appointment to combat "esoterica" in the division soon after Fineman yielded to the monetary lure of Hollywood in 1938, and he would make another when Gray resigned to head Bard College. In both appointments Leigh had the support of Frederick Lewis Allen, editor of *Harpers* and chairman of the trustee committee on educational policies, who had concluded that the Literature Division unduly narrowed its concept of literature. In the spring of 1938-39 Allen recommended John Kouwenhoven, his editorial assistant, whose *Adventures of America* was chosen by the Book-of-the-Month Club, and he was appointed.

Kouwenhoven had no doubt that literature should be defined to include its uses in everyday life as well as in the classics then being stressed. Current gossip exaggerated the contrast between his views and those of the "Trojans" in the assertion that "Bill Troy would not recognize anything that sold more than three copies whereas Kouwenhoven valued only the best sellers."

The second appointment followed Gray's departure in January, 1940. In that spring Bradford Smith wrote from Columbia that without a doctorate he had no future there and was available. He had taught in Tokyo at St. Paul's University and the Imperial University, and like Fineman had written three novels. Leigh was satisfied that Smith, like Kouwenhoven, would broaden the division's scope of interest, but Troy who had succeeded Gray as division chairman, was skeptical and urged the president to scrutinize Smith's writing, "in particular in criticism if any." Leigh had been urged by Allen to take matters into his own hands and he informed Troy that he was taking the initiative and appointed Smith.

One might assume that these appointments would correct the imbalance in literature and that Leigh would have no more worries over the division in his last year as president. Soon after Troy became literature chairman, however, Leigh became aware of tensions within the division and he wrote Gray, then at Bard, that in literature "things are running downhill rather badly" and confessed that he could do nothing about it.

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

Leigh felt that Troy was to blame, but Troy carried his colleagues in opposing the reappointment of both Kouwenhoven and Smith. For his part Kouwenhoven saw no future for himself on a faculty dominated by Troy and resigned, although Leigh offered him reappointment. The following year Lewis Jones, then president, declined to give Smith a third year in accord with Troy's recommendation.

By that time, therefore, Troy had defeated the effort of Allen and Leigh to broaden the literature offering, and his insistence that literature is an art "like music, painting and architecture" was firmly established as divisional orthodoxy. This clearcut but limited concept was acceptable to Troy's colleagues and to the literature majors who persisted to graduation. Yet that concept may explain why so few graduated in literature after 1936. During the entire Leigh era one-fourth of the students named literature as their first choice upon entering. In the first years the division lost only a few of them but between 1938 and 1941 only one-tenth of the graduating classes majored in literature.

To this select group should be added others equally committed to literature who found the Drama Division responsive to their purposes. Barbara Livingston '39 intended to major in literature until she felt "withered" by Troy. After classwork and a tutorial with Francis Fergusson she decided on a drama-literature major and did a senior thesis on the staging of *Macbeth* with Arch Lauterer. She thought of Lauterer as "one of the real educational forces at Bennington, one of the innovators, a person who looked with 'a pure and innocent eye' at life, at art, at literature."

Barbara Deming graduated as a drama major in 1938 after being counseled and taught by Taggard and Troy as well as by Fergusson; and writing has been her life's work, whether in criticism, poetry, short stories or polemics in the causes that got her jailed in the South and expelled from Saigon.

Any appraisal of the division in the Leigh years would require the comments of hundreds of students it introduced to literature as well as of the 37 literature majors who were graduated in those years. The meager evidence at hand or gathered by chance or design is inconclusive. When the graduates of 1938 had been out 25 years, Emily Sweetser Alford reported on the basis of questionnaires that most of the class were reading commonplace books picked from the best-seller lists. When the statement appeared in *Quadrille* Barbara Livingston strongly resented the implication that all Bennington graduates are Philistines, and listed books read in the previous month which would pass elitist tests. Her "special authors" were Dickinson, Colette, Woolf, Mansfield, Fitzgerald and Rilke.

Some might agree with Kay McKearin Steele of the first class, now a social worker in Vermont, who wrote: "I think my whole experience as a literature major was a continuing growth and I still love the memory."

Two of her classmates had reservations. Elsa Voorhees Hauschka's sense of failure before being rescued by Troy has been mentioned. She later felt that a student is better off with a structured curriculum than with "too much room to wander and flounder," and regretted the time she wasted. Margot Suter Rood found her first two years extraordinarily stimulating and had in particular a bright memory of Miss Taggard's "subjective, unplanned, informal" course in American poets. But through her junior year and a senior thesis she "plugged on vaguely and halfheartedly," as disappointing to her counselor as he was to her.

In spite of the devastating appraisal of the division written by her fellow majors, Marion Hepburn Grant '39 was happy with all her teachers and counselors and enjoyed working with Troy as well as with his critic, Henry Simon. Mildred Hubbard Cummings, sometime chairman of the SEPC, replied YES to the question: Did you get what you wanted then and needed thereafter? But she felt there was an overemphasis on the contemporary and tremendous gaps in background which only a tutorial with Mrs. Foster helped to narrow.

While few literature majors set out to be scholars, the division can claim some credit for the delayed conversion and achievement of Alison Green Sulloway who graduated in 1939 as a music major. She wrote that she never took a course with Fergusson or Troy but remembered "something important and passionate — intellectually passionate — about them... something important in them as role models for someone who was, unbeknown to herself, an academician, a literary critic and historian, and an aesthete in the making." Reading Troy's critical essays and Fergusson's books and reviews years later turned her from music to literature, and in 1968 her doctoral dissertation at Columbia was awarded the Ansley Publication Prize in competition with candidates in all the departments classed as humanities.

The student literati who wrote for college publications during the Leigh years reached a wider public as their poems and short stories began appearing in such magazines as *Accent*, *Nation*, *New Directions*, *New Yorker*, *Partisan Review*, *Saturday Review* and *Southern Review*. The literary productivity of alumnae tended to decline soon after graduation as earning a living or raising a family preempted their energies and imagination.

Edith Conklin '39 entered Bennington to become a poet and though she felt that Bennington did not do enough to strengthen her craft technically, her senior project consisted of 18 poems and an account of her development as a poet. Some years later she was runner-up in the Yale Series of Young Poets (Auden wrote her that he had chosen the work of another young woman "because she is dead"), but family then claimed her attention. Edith Conklin Weaver had been widowed for some years and

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

occupied with the lives of her seven children when she wrote that she "keeps alive a vision of that leisure and the soul's peace that will enable me to start writing again."

Among the poets from the Leigh decade, possibly Barbara Howes Smith has had the most continuous output in spite of family responsibilities which included the raising of two sons, one of whom attended Bennington for a time. Upon graduation in 1937 Barbara worked for the Southern Tenant Farmers Union in Tennessee and then the Workers' Defense League in New York, she took graduate courses at Columbia, she was editor of *Chimera*, she was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship for travel, and she lives on a Vermont farm. She wrote a novel in 1958, published collections of short stories in 1966 and 1975, published poetry in each decade (with six books to her credit), was a nominee for a National Book Award in 1967, and received a Bennington Award for Achievement in 1980. Poetry has been her way of life.

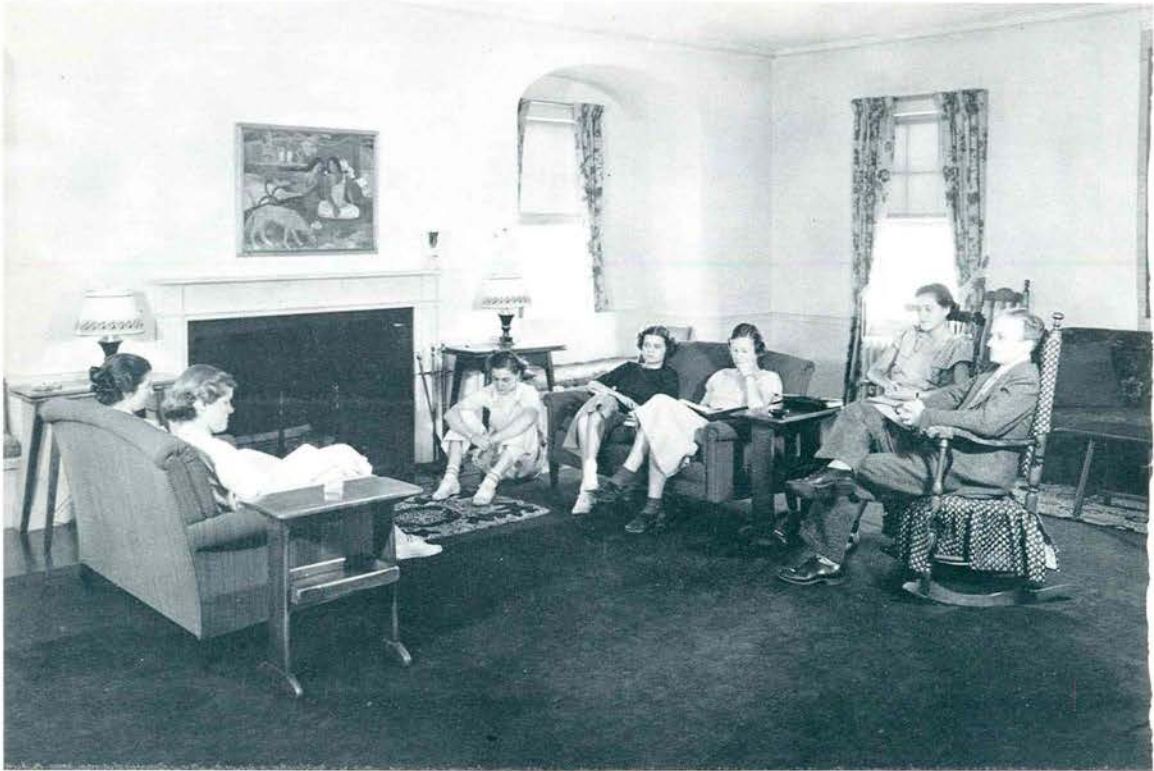
While some may regard the era of Taggard and Troy as literature's Golden Age at Bennington, there may be truth in Lucien Hanks' dictum that every age, however ideal in retrospect, "groaned with its own shortcomings" at the time. There was groaning when Miss Taggard left in 1935, when Troy was absent for a year and left for good in 1943, and when Fowlie left for the first time in 1941. But as faculty left there was never a dearth of worthy candidates to fill the vacancies, and such devoted teachers as Kit Foster and Ben Belitt remained to welcome the newcomers, point out the pitfalls, and acquaint students with the delights of literature. Mrs. Foster, now retired, has fond memories of "the joyous and exuberant class" in *Finnegan's Wake* she once had and the continual "joy and excitement of teaching and studying literature at Bennington." Finally, no student generation lacked its literary goddesses as the patterns and values established in the 1930s faced the critical scrutiny of later decades.



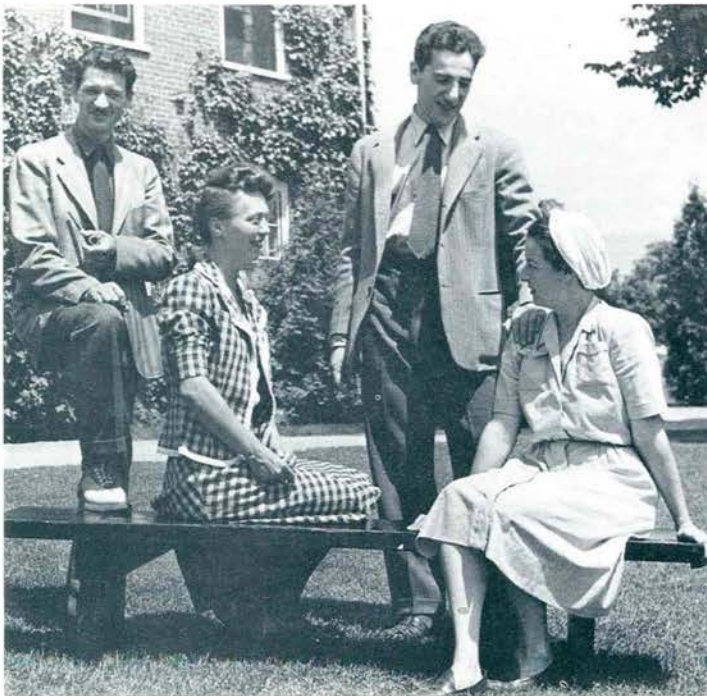
Clockwise, from above: The four faculty musicians, in 1933, Kurt Schindler, Mariana Lowell, Rudolph Pittaway and Julian De-Gray. On their arrival at the college in 1932, Lewis W. and Barbara Jones pose on the

porch of Jennings House (now Leigh) where they lived until the Jones built what became the president's house. Librarian Gladys Y. Leslie with student Harriet Grannis. A view of the library in the east wing of the Barn.





Clockwise, from above: Theodore Newcomb's psychology class in McCullough House living room, 1935. Louise Steger Garrett and pup. Faculty foursome Gregory Tucker, Martha Hill, William Bales, Catharine Osgood.





At top: Arch Lauterer with Lewis W. Jones. At right: Martha Hill, apparently in a dance on the tennis courts. Above: a dance class on Commons lawn.



Above: A faculty party in June, 1938 consisting of Tom Foster (who married Catharine Osgood in June, 1937), Ethel Luening, James McCamy, Harold Gray, Dr. Wilmoth Osborne, and "Kit" Foster; in foreground, Otto Luening, Lenore Gray, and Lewis W. Jones. At left: Jean Guiton with students Ruth Bailey, Isabella Lee and Ann Jones. Below: "Riding" a toboggan on bare ground are Ralph Jester, Irving Fineman, Barbara and Lewis Jones.

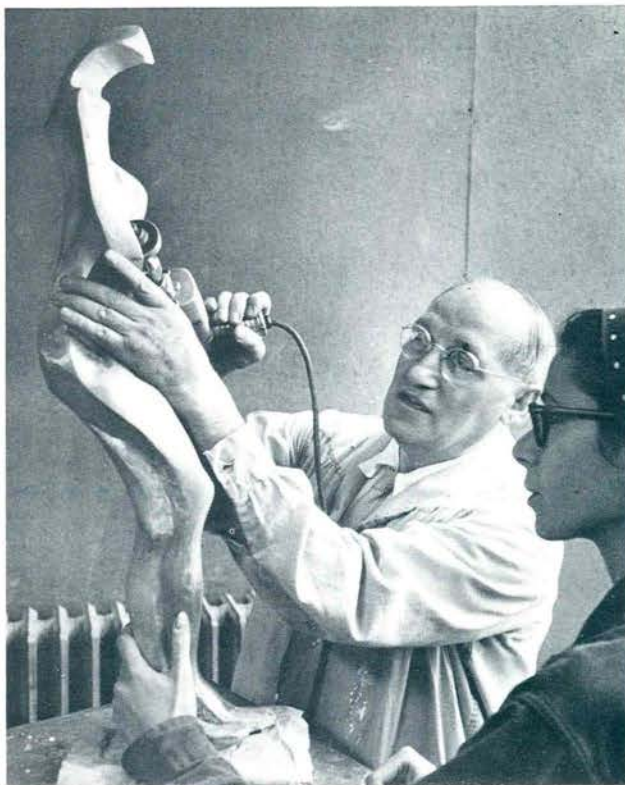




Clockwise, from top: Jean and Tom Brockway about 1936. Julian DeGray, William Troy, George Lundberg.



Clockwise, from top: Robert Woodworth with students in the greenhouse attached to the science wing of the Barn, Otto Luening, Edwin A. Park.



Clockwise, from above: Simon Moselsio: Students Katrina Hartt and Margot Suter in a convertible with a rumbleseat. Dr. and Mrs. Leigh. Poet Genevieve Taggard (left), Dr. Wilmoth Osborne (right) and Elizabeth Hawes.





Clockwise, from top: At the 1963 graduation, those visible in this photo, taken by Carolyn Crossett '37 are, from left, Katrina Hartt, Asho Ingersoll, Louise Stockard, Esther Child and Kathleen Reilly. Leigh and Kilpatrick in

academic regalia at the first commencement. Francis Fergusson, in a photo taken on his return to the campus in the 1970s. Mr. and Mrs. Hall Park McCullough when they received honorary degrees in 1956.

CHAPTER 20

SCIENCE: CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

As Bennington College opened in 1932 Eunice Barnard, education editor of the *New York Herald-Tribune*, described its curriculum as the most revolutionary in the country. She was not thinking of the sciences because President Leigh followed tradition in appointing a biologist, a chemist and a physicist. He rejected, however, the customary valuation of mathematics. After teaching that subject for seven years William H. Kilpatrick, chairman of the Bennington trustees, turned to the subject of education having concluded that there was "no soul growth" in teaching mathematics. Whether or not this influenced Leigh's thinking, mathematics was treated as nothing more than a tool course and Leigh counted on the physicist to teach it if and when it was needed.

Another departure was the organization of the sciences not in the customary departments but in a single division in the hope that an integrated science program would emerge naturally, and students would graduate as science majors rather than as chemists or physicists. At least the divisional structure would tend to save students from the occasional possessiveness of one-man departments and should broaden the education of the science faculty.

When Leigh began selecting a science faculty he first offered appointment to Robert Woodworth who was then teaching at Harvard. Like Leigh, Woodworth had been on the Williams College faculty in the 1920s and Leigh wanted him not only to teach biology but also to formulate and direct a Bennington science program. Woodworth joined the Bennington faculty four years later but in 1931 he chose to continue at Harvard, although he agreed to help plan a science wing in the Jennings all-

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

purpose barn. The plan was carried out under the supervision of John Fitch King, associate professor of chemistry at Williams and a friend of the Leighs. The laboratories and science lecture room (Barn One) were in order when students arrived in September, 1932.

To teach physics Paul Garrett was brought to Leigh's attention and highly recommended by the Columbia professor and Bennington trustee, John Coss, who like Garrett was an alumnus of Wabash College. Coss was equally enthusiastic about Mary Garrett for an administrative position and the Garretts were the first of Leigh's husband-wife appointments. Garrett had taught for eight years and was about to receive his doctorate from Columbia. As already stated, Garrett had the distinction of being the only Bennington faculty member with an academic rank, since immediately after appointing him "assistant professor," Leigh decided against classifying the faculty from instructor to full professor.

Having failed to lure Woodworth, Leigh appointed Louise Steger to teach biology. She had a one-year-old doctorate from Cornell and came to Bennington for her first teaching experience. Dr. Wilmoth Osborne, the health director, was listed as a member of the division and she advised students who contemplated medicine but she did no teaching.

The first-year science roster was completed when Williams Professor King agreed to be a part-time tutor in chemistry. King had a doctorate from Johns Hopkins and taught at Oberlin and Johns Hopkins before joining the Williams faculty. Through his intercession three Williams College scientists, an astronomer, a biologist and a geologist, soon appeared on the evening meetings program, but unfortunately Williams as a neighborly resource was temporarily doomed. King was offered reappointment but before the year was out President Harry A. Garfield discouraged further moonlighting. King did not return, and what proved to be a continuing search for a chemist began. For the next three years students were met by a different chemist every September. The Williams ban on moonlighting was not maintained by later presidents and there has been a sharing of faculty in both directions.

Leigh's ideal for an introduction to science was described in the first Bennington catalogue as a course on scientific method with "significant samples from physics, chemistry, biology and physiology." Unfortunately the survey course devised to carry out the Leigh forecast "died of its own weight within two weeks" according to Garrett and the scientists began teaching separate introductions to their respective disciplines.

From the beginning it was clear that biology had greater drawing power than the physical sciences. Ms. Steger had assumed that Bennington freshmen would be eager for nature walks on which they would enjoy the autumn foliage while making notes on the local fauna and flora. Then she soon discovered that the young ladies were primarily interested in

learning about themselves, and without foregoing an occasional early morning bird walk Ms. Steger inaugurated the long reign of "Human Biology." The second catalogue announced that introductory work in biology would use "the human body as a focal point of interest." Twenty-seven students chose the course and continued through the year. Other introductions were available and two students chose astronomy, 11 chemistry, seven mathematics and four physics.

In accordance with the college emphasis on student interest, science trial majors and majors were free to work out their programs with the help of their counselors. If a student entered with a narrow interest she was allowed to pursue that interest while every effort was made to broaden its scope. In 1933 Elizabeth Alford arrived as a freshman with a flock of turkeys for she had set herself the task of finding a cure for a disease that was fatal to them. According to the legend that has grown up about "the turkey girl" her interest failed to broaden as she raised and dissected turkeys and in her brief venture into sculpture with Simon Moselsio she produced nothing but "a clear and beautiful design for a turkey." The legend omits the fact that Ms. Alford passed courses in all four divisions and was highly praised by Ms. Steger for her NRT performance at the Marine Biology Laboratory in Bermuda with no turkeys in sight: "Her interest, enthusiasm and energy were outstanding." It is true that she withdrew in April of her second year but the cause was not academic; she had given romance and marriage first priority. She married William Mattison, the college employee who had incubated her turkeys during the winter recess.

With the admission of a third class in 1934 and the demands of the short-lived divisional major, Human Development, a second biologist was called for and William B. Tucker, M.D., was appointed. Students in Human Development, looking forward to careers in social work, nursery school teaching or to family life and motherhood, took courses in physiology and genetics as well as psychology and other social sciences.

During the third year the scientists formulated requirements for graduation. A science major had the choice of a broad or a specialized program but in either case no discipline could be shunned. The student working broadly must develop sufficient skill in both the physical and biological sciences "to see man as a biological phenomenon and in relation to his physical environment." The specialist must understand the interdependence "which necessarily exists in the nature of scientific knowledge."

As the fourth class was admitted and the college enrollment reached 250 as planned, the outlook for science was excellent. By that time Leigh had happily persuaded Woodworth to forsake Harvard to teach biology and he succeeded Dr. Tucker. Woodworth had taken his doctorate at Harvard in

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

1928, became curator of the Harvard Botanic Garden in 1930, worked with the Harvard Film Foundation to make motion pictures of plant growth, and had contributed to three science journals. He had taught at Williams before beginning graduate study and taught at Harvard and Radcliffe from 1927 to 1935.

Ms. Steger continued teaching Human Biology but Woodworth collaborated with her in the course that would soon be his own for a 30-year duration. Woodworth also taught the classes in physiology attended by Human Development majors, taught botany in tutorials and began pondering an integrated introduction to the physical and biological sciences.

The demand for physics had not been vociferous but Garrett had classes and tutorials in astronomy and mathematics, and in 1935 he began formal collaboration with Richard Wistar, the new chemist, a first step toward integration of the sciences.

Unfortunately the developing science team fell apart with the involuntary departure of Garrett and Ms. Steger. Their collaboration in designing a science program had led to romance as students looked on with interest and, as one graduate put it, with "non-judging detachment." The seemingly firm marriage of Paul and Mary Garrett ended in divorce, and Garrett and Ms. Steger were married in the summer of 1936.

Leigh prized Mary Garrett as an administrator and Garrett and Ms. Steger as science teachers and he told Woodworth that an enlightened community such as Bennington College would accept the continued presence of all three in their new relationship. It seems probable, however, that the trustees insisted on an administrative rejoinder; Leigh helped Ms. Steger get a fellowship at Cornell for the spring term of 1935-36 and the trustees devised an ingenious means of achieving termination: Garrett and Ms. Steger were voted leaves of absence without pay though Garrett's contract had another year to run.

Betty Evans Munger '37 wrote that Garrett and Steger were exciting teachers and her classmate, Zipporah Shill Fleisher, recalled Garrett's patience in trying to elucidate calculus and his devotion to teaching in driving her and Gertrude Doughty to Manchester one evening a week to use Burr and Burton Seminary's six-inch telescope and drink coffee in an unheated observatory.

Joan May, also '37, came to Bennington to major in science and each week in her first year she spent an hour with Garrett in physics and an hour in mathematics. She remembered tutorials in which Garrett did no more than answer her questions and send her to the library, suffering through books on physics and mathematics and missing the stimulation of other physics students. She wrote that though she progressed little in physics she learned "to attack, any problem and continue against very

discouraging odds." Though she went on to graduate degrees, she worked on radar testing equipment for the Bell Telephone Laboratory, made light test analyses for government missile systems at Johns Hopkins and since 1957 has been on the technical staff of TRW Systems which predicted the accuracy of combat launches of Minuteman II and III. In spite of her record of achievement, Joan wondered wistfully what would have happened if she had had a better undergraduate training and her advance had not been slowed by discrimination against women.

Garrett was not only an able teacher with ideas for integrating the sciences but also he was sometime college fire marshal, played violin in the college orchestra, and was a member of a select but low-stakes poker club, the executive committee and the committee of three which devised the college policy on impermanent tenure. Leigh thanked Garrett and Steger for the "devoted, hard and intelligent work" they have given the college and wrote to 11 college presidents to say that a remarkable physics teacher was available. Garrett went from Bennington to Sarah Lawrence, then to Bard, returned to Bennington in 1950 (Mary Garrett left in 1947) and went to Connecticut College in 1952.

Steger was succeeded by Mary (Polly) Ingraham who arrived in February, 1936. After graduating from Vassar in 1931 she earned a doctorate at Wisconsin in two years and stayed on as a research assistant. Ms. Ingraham came to Bennington on less than a week's notice to teach two courses she had never managed to take. One was genetics, required of Human Development majors, and two of their teachers decided to audit the course. "Imagine my terror when Barbara Jones and Julia McCamy turned up...we spent the first class period thinking about what we already knew...such as that dogs have dogs, bulldogs have bulldogs, etc., etc."

Ms. Ingraham's main thought was that if science is to contribute to a liberal education it "must give students a taste of honest investigation. Learning what scientists have discovered is all very well and part of our heritage. But it does not give the student a feeling for the scientific experience." To give effect to this idea she got all her students started on questions to be answered: What proportion of the freshman class is left-footed? Can spiders hear? What organisms inhabit the lab aquarium? Some of the students, she wrote, "really got hooked. Nearly all of them acquired at least a temporary feeling for what it is like to learn something new directly from nature."

Joan May mentioned Ms. Ingraham's seminar dealing with the behavior of microorganisms in which "scientific methods were learned in a wonderful way." Anne Newhall Hoshor was critical of her Bennington experience but was most grateful to Ingraham:

"She knew what was of value to us as students and as students of scientific

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

endeavor. She was dynamic, independent, enthusiastic — it didn't really matter what she taught. Basic method and thoughts were all-important and she insisted on results. I was probably more helped and influenced by Polly than by anyone else."

Ms. Ingraham's marriage to Henry Bunting caused her to resign after three semesters. Leigh said her leaving was one of the "greatest teaching losses we have had" and in 1940 tried in vain to lure her back. She was missed also on the hockey field for under her coaching the Bennington girls threw a scare into an Amherst team. Upon leaving she wrote Leigh that the experience of Bennington had been no less important to her than to any of her students. Recently, she mentioned the benefits she had in working with Woodworth ("enthusiasm such as his is the priceless ingredient of effective teaching") and in getting "to know a wonderful cross-section of faculty from other disciplines after the narrower focus of graduate study..." Mary Ingraham Bunting went on to be president of Douglass College at Rutgers and then of Radcliffe.

* * * * *

With Garrett's departure in June, 1936, Woodworth, now division chairman, was confronted by continuing change in faculty personnel. Garrett was succeeded by Frank Coleman who taught physics and mathematics for two and a half years and was succeeded by Thomas Perry who left in two years to work on bomb sights for the Armed Forces. When Ingraham left Maurice Whittinghill came as the second biologist and taught for five years. (Jean Wood Runyon '40 stated her appreciation of Whittinghill's support as she did her senior project.) Wistar taught chemistry for three years and was succeeded in 1938 by Courtland Butler who left to go into industrial research in 1942.

In spite of transiency in the science faculty, Woodworth was able to devise an integrated introductory course for students planning to major in science. The first step had been taken by Garrett. Woodworth now designed an introductory course taught by the chemist, the physicist and the two biologists. Known as Science Workshop, the course was meant to acquaint the student with the experimental method and the scientific attitude "through a working understanding of the fundamental concepts of physics, chemistry and biology" which were utilized in an analysis of protoplasmic systems. Topics studied in the workshop were chosen to illustrate the contribution of two or three of the sciences to problem-solving and the understanding of specific phenomena. The course continued through the year and filled half the student's first-year program. In Woodworth's opinion students were better prepared for

research by this mix of chemistry, physics and biology than by introductory courses in only one or two of them.

While this course occupied the science trial majors, Human Biology continued to be the most popular science offering, perhaps less because Leigh thought every student should take it and more because Woodworth taught it. Its heavy enrollment turned it into a one-semester lecture course without laboratory and it continued in that form until Woodworth retired in 1970 (Woodworth's "retirement" never took and he has continued to teach).

Under Woodworth's chairmanship the project method emphasized by Polly Ingraham was given further impetus. While research of varying difficulty was fairly routine, the division decreed in 1937 that promotion to the Senior Division would depend on the completion of a project designed to test the student's "interest and ability in sustained individual work;" and that to graduate a student must satisfactorily complete "a project in original investigation." In 1939 Woodworth listed some forty projects undertaken by sophomores, juniors and seniors of which virtually all depended on the approach and strategies of two or more of the sciences.

Alumnae recalling the science faculty and program exhibit varying degrees of enthusiasm along with an occasional complaint. Most of these witnesses graduated in science or began in science and then changed to another field. Students who entered with science in mind were likely to hang in, but there were exceptions. Frances Trott Robinson, member of the first class, wrote that she came to Bennington to major in science but after sampling biology and chemistry was advised by her counselor, Garrett, to shift to Social Studies since Lewis Jones had found her work satisfactory. Her final choice was the Human Development major which brought her back to science in her last year. And she was surprised to learn that she had come in ahead of most of the science majors in a general science test given all seniors. While she suggested that this may raise doubts about the validity of tests, she valued the science Bennington gave her and believed one would miss "a lot of excitement if he didn't have a little understanding of the marvelous things taking place on the science frontier." She was grateful to Bennington for teaching her "to learn on my own" so that her education continued without the benefit of further academic aid.

Another student, briefly a science major, was Hildegard Peplau who performed the feat of earning her Bennington degree while head nurse and then executive officer of the health department between 1938 and 1943. She found work with Woodworth "tremendously stimulating" and might have continued in science but she turned to psychology when a student under her care had a breakdown she was not prepared to deal with, and she

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

determined to get to the roots of mental illness. After graduating from Bennington in 1943 she joined the Army Nurses Corps, went on to a doctorate at Teachers College, in the 1960s was chairman of the Department of Psychiatric and Nursing at Rutgers, in 1970 was elected president of the American Nurses Association and in 1976 was visiting professor at the University of Louvain.

Among the science graduates not all applauded the early Bennington taboo on examinations and some felt a lack of training in techniques. Louise Friedberg Strouse '36 had a good feeling about the science program but thought it penalized those who went into graduate study with no "techniques of exam studying, writing up research projects, etc." She later believed that she was "woefully unsophisticated in research techniques" as she worked on her senior project on viral diseases. Jean Wood Runyon wrote that she was less prepared than her co-workers in specific techniques but compensated for the lack by her ability to improvise.

Ann Newhall graduated in science in 1938 with no warning that she would fail in medical school. From the fifth grade on she had been thinking of becoming a doctor, and her course of study at Bennington was supplemented by Non-Resident Terms in Boston's Children's Hospital, the Boston Dispensary and Columbia's College of Physicians and Surgeons. Upon graduating she was recommended to the Yale Medical School and admitted. There exams were not given until the end of the second year when she failed them and failed them again a year later after special tutoring.

In a letter, Anne Newhall Hoshor said she had "a lovely education" at Shady Hill and the Cambridge School but was poorly prepared for college and no one called attention to her learning difficulties either in those schools or at Bennington. She went from Bennington to Yale with "pathetic reading skills, miserably limited vocabulary,...exceptionally poor study habits and complete inability to take a test."

Kept on course by her "absolutely blind determination" to be a doctor, she entered the University of Virginia Medical School. There she faced frequent tests, her study habits improved, she made the dean's list twice and graduated in 1943. This story has no happy ending for in spite of the satisfaction of a brief professional career, marriage and family, she has been invalided in recent years. Her conclusion about Bennington was that the science program in her day was very adequate for a liberal arts degree but lacked the basic training for graduate work "as distinct from method and enthusiasm and mental stimulation."

In contrast, two other Bennington alumnae encountered no difficulties at the Yale Medical School but both had readied themselves by a year of science study beyond the B.A. Gretchen Hutchins '36 spent a year in graduate work in science at the University of Wisconsin, and Olive Pitkin

'43 continued at Bennington for a year after graduating.

A graduate of the Bennington high school, Olive Pitkin might have majored in literature or music but Woodworth's "literally inspiring" courses drew her to science and later proved "a more than adequately rich background" for her work in medical school. Yvette Hardman Edmondson, Bennington graduate who joined the science faculty in 1941, not only gave Olive a solid grounding in bacteriology but introduced her to the disciplines of biological research in general:

"Her teaching was quiet and casual, but I think her good guidance probably helped to form my scientific attitudes as much as Mr. Woodworth's more flamboyant lectures. It was she who actually directed me to medical school when I indicated an interest in nursing. I have always thought that I got at Bennington an extremely good preparation for a doctor's life, both in science and in the humanities. I am very grateful."

Dr. Olive Pitkin Tamm went on to the New York City Department of Health, which struggles "to maintain a public health program in a city which is broke in both money and morale. It is at times like these that I'm glad I studied Greek and philosophy and music as well as science; one needs a perspective." Her husband "continues to find viruses the most fascinating thing in the world."

Elizabeth Evans Munger wrote that she entered Bennington in 1933 with medical school a distant goal but when the time came she was obliged to earn a living. She remained well satisfied with the Bennington science program at the time and in retrospect. She not only learned techniques by long hours in the laboratory but "a great deal of theory and philosophy, even some history of science." With eight months of NRT jobs in Boston and New York hospitals she had no trouble finding research openings in medicine first at the Harvard Medical School, and then, after marriage to a doctor, at the Tulane Medical School where she worked with the noted surgeons, Drs. Alton Ochsner and Michael DeBakey. Her appreciation of Ingraham has been mentioned; of Woodworth she wrote that his arrival in 1935 gave vitality to the whole science wing.

From her letter one gathers that the science majors were a closely knit minority, capable of stating their wants firmly and letting a new instructor know when he was straying from the Bennington way of life. In a burst of nostalgia, Mrs. Munger recalled the camaraderie of the young science addicts as they tended their bubbling experiments late at night while harmonizing "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes."

Few Bennington science majors made physics their speciality but one who did helped construct the first atom bomb. Joan Hinton, daughter of the founder and long-time head of the Putney School, Carmelita Hinton,

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

became interested in atomic physics at Putney and upon entering Bennington in 1939 she "ravenously ate up everything and anything" she could find on the subject. "The whole idea of the structure of the atom, the basic structure of the universe, fascinated me. The science faculty did all they could to help me develop this interest. They taught us all to think boldly, creatively. We had the feeling the whole world was there for us to grasp, nothing would be beyond us if we only strove hard to achieve it."

To make up for Bennington's shortcomings in physics equipment, Joan spent two NRT's "working with the cyclotron boys at Cornell" and at Bennington built a cloud chamber "to see the tracks of atoms." Though she considered the cloud chamber "rather much of a flop" she learned to operate a lathe, solder, make patterns for casting and automatic relay circuits for timing and "a host of tricks for high vacuum technique." She concluded that she got a feeling for nuclear physics which it would have been hard to get faster in any other way, and the science faculty backed her for graduation in three years.

Then at the University of Wisconsin she spent "sleepless nights in a mad rush to fill in the gap between high school algebra and the cyclotron." With her master's degree she went "whirling into the much madder rush of the Manhattan project at Los Alamos. I was suddenly thrown among the top physicists of the world. Specifically I worked in Enrico Fermi's special experimental group of about six people. Every Sunday we went skiing on the slopes of the Santa Fe range and on Wednesday evenings we played chamber music with Edward Teller always at the piano; while during the week we were completely immersed in endless experiments penetrating farther and farther into the essence of the atomic nucleus. Life at Los Alamos was like life in some marvelous dream world — that is, until the night the test bomb went off."

The further shock of Hiroshima led her to question her education and ask whether knowledge should be pursued for the sake of knowledge or for the betterment of the human race. She had been taught to be a "pure scientist" and let the engineers and politicians determine how the knowledge was used. She now concluded that no knowledge can be divorced from society: "one works for human progress or against human progress. There is no middle road." From these thoughts she moved toward a Marxist view of history and went to China on the eve of the Communist takeover. There she joined and married her fiancé, Erwin Engst, and together they threw in their lot with the Peoples Republic of China. In a letter of August, 1961, she said, "I shall never forget the training I got at Bennington; I have always been thankful for it, and it has stood me in good stead ever since." Mrs. Engst was visited by members of the Vermont Academy of Arts and Sciences who toured China in April, 1976.

Among the science alumnae who wrote, most expressed gratitude to Woodworth for his devotion as a teacher and his enthusiasm as a scientist. Jean Wood Runyon said that he could make photosynthesis "twice as exciting as *Gone with the Wind*." One of his best students who did not wish to be named said that he expected a lot in lab work and in projects, and was "good at pinpointing our weaknesses and helping us to overcome them." Barbara Heywood Brownell said he was "our ideal, father confessor, friend and catalyst — he really sparked the whole program." Dotha Seaverns Welbourn said his enthusiasm was contagious.

By 1940 Woodworth was satisfied with the science layout and program. Congestion in the science wing had been overcome when the Barn was transformed from a square U to an H. The scientists gained space for storage, a workshop, a greenhouse and another office on the first floor and a study room on the second floor, and the lengthened science wing served until the Elizabeth Harrington Dickinson Science Building was completed in 1970.

Bennington science majors had been accepted by medical schools and Yvette Hardman had just been awarded her doctorate in science at the University of Wisconsin. Beyond this basis for satisfaction, Woodworth might have imagined that the turnover in faculty was coming to an end since 1940-41 was the first year in which there was no new science instructor; but in fact his three colleagues were all replaced in the next two years.

In 1940 Woodworth wrote an article on science at Bennington which was printed in the *Journal of Higher Education* in March, 1941. In it he described the introductory course involving biology, chemistry and physics in the analysis of protoplasm and then stated his guiding principles for science teaching in general. He accepted the Bennington view that instruction should take into account the interests, needs and capacities of the individual student, but insisted that careful planning bring out "the continuous development of power." In agreement with the Bennington sociologist George Lundberg, Woodworth urged the replacement of "what claims to be the absolute by probability" and the devising of means to measure the probability.

Enrollment figures throw light on the status of science at Bennington in the 1930s. Leigh had looked forward to four fairly equal divisions but as Bennington opened it was evident that science had less appeal than the other fields. The visual and performing arts then had 35 percent of the 87 freshmen as trial majors, literature was second with 29 percent, social studies third with 24 percent, and science last with 12. Between 1932 and 1941 science gained few students from other fields but most of the students who entered with science in mind steadfastly continued in science, and the science share remained virtually constant. During that time both literature

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

and social studies lost students to the visual and performing arts, whose share of majors rose to 54 percent.

In contrast to the constancy of the majors, the total registration in science dropped dramatically from 121 in September, 1935, to 77 five years later. Woodworth's sabbatical leave accounts for half the loss, for Human Biology was not taught in his absence. But it was clear that the science faculty was attracting fewer students majoring elsewhere and this was particularly disappointing because in 1939 the introductory courses had been re-designed "especially for non-trial major students."

Leigh wanted to bring science into the mainstream and hoped to do it by finding the right teachers. In 1938 he wrote that he was looking forward to one or more major appointments in science "to promote inventive educational experiment — the primary reason for the college's being." By then he had made 12 appointments to maintain a division of four instructors in science. Omitting Woodworth, who stayed on to retirement, the average tenure was two years and four months. Those who were not reappointed had failed to satisfy Leigh, other members of the division, or the students.

Betty Evans Munger writes that she had a strange sense that new faculty members "were rather baffled — even frightened — by us...We were such an earnest and intense group about our work." Anne Newhall Hoshor suggested that the science division was rather unstructured and that caused uneasiness among new instructors who were personally insecure and could not know what was expected of them. One was considered too rigid because he "couldn't make chemistry blend and interdigitate with physics and biology." Another was "concerned about doing the right thing with students who could lower the boom." Datha Seaverns Welbourn '41, who represented science on the Educational Policies Committee, took note of conscientious science teachers who failed to adapt their ways to local canons.

In spite of the steady turnover, the science faculty, numbering four during the 1930s, made available a wide range of study from astronomy to zoology in small classes and tutorials and the instructors were not averse to learning along with their students. Once the biologist, chemist and physicist broadened their own education by teaching four students elementary geology. Majors from other fields were accommodated when they asked for instruction in the physics of sound or photography, the chemistry of pigments or mathematics for architects.

The winter recess gave science students acquaintance with apparatus lacking at Bennington, and opportunity to foresee what they were in for if they went on in medicine or scientific research. Fully half of the science majors spent the six-week recess as laboratory assistants in hospitals, universities or industry. Joan Hinton learned about the cyclotron at

Cornell; Barbara Heywood spent three non-resident terms with a research group in Worcester, Mass., and did her senior project in biochemistry with it.

Twice instructors took students with them on research junkets. Ms. Steger gave students a taste of oceanography by a winter at the Bermuda Biological Station. In 1939 four students accompanied Woodworth to Barro Colorado Island in the Canal Zone to work on algae, ferns and mosses while their mentor studied parasitic fungi. There Barbara Willis found five mosses overlooked by experts who had recently combed the island, and Dotha Seaverns found ferns that had never been catalogued.

The Bennington science major with NRT experience went on to interesting research jobs. Betty Evans' good fortune has been mentioned. Soon after leaving Bennington Mary Kellett was doing photomicrography at the Cornell Medical Center; Louise Friedberg was assistant in cardiovascular research at a Chicago hospital as she moved toward a master's degree at the university; with a master's degree from Cornell Laura Jennings did bacteriological research in the Boston City Hospital and her name later appeared on research papers from Cold Spring Harbor; and Mary Jones had research assistantships at the College of Physicians and Surgeons and at Bellevue before going on to an M. D. at Johns Hopkins.

In the years since the Leigh decade science at Bennington has had its ups and downs but the good news in recent years was its promotion from the Barn to the magnificent Elizabeth Harrington Dickinson Science Building. The basic disciplines continue to be biology, chemistry and physics with the addition of mathematics which was raised from its status of "tool course" during World War II. The science faculty has doubled in size along with the doubling of student enrollment and this has broadened the scope of instruction in each discipline. Its members continue to come to Bennington with doctorates and further research experience; the chronic turnover of the Leigh years has ended and there is at present a balance between faculty appointed before and after 1970.

Woodworth's integrative course on protoplasm was a war casualty but the degree continues to be in science with emphasis on at least two disciplines, each of the disciplines is involved in the course "Environmental Studies" and senior projects often proclaim that the ideal of integration persists.

A thought on institutional continuity: Robert Woodworth retired some years ago but he has taught whenever called upon as he continues his time-lapse microphotography and for six months in 1976 he was acting president.

CHAPTER 21

SOCIAL STUDIES: ROADS TO KNOWLEDGE

When Bennington College opened in 1932 with 87 freshmen, Lewis and Barbara Jones made up the Social Studies faculty. Pending reinforcements, they were prepared to teach a wide range of subjects. Jones graduated 10 years before from Reed College where he majored in government, a subject President Leigh had taught at Reed a few years earlier. Jones had a Ph.D. in economics from Brookings during the brief period that institution gave degrees; he had studied in London and he had been on the staff of the Foreign Policy Association.

An English woman, Barbara Jones had a degree in economics from London University where Jones met her, had continued study in sociology, was well read in English history, anthropology and psychology and in 1928 won a Rockefeller fellowship to study in the United States. Barbara and Lewis met again in New York and were soon married. Many years later she described Lewis as she first knew him as “marvelously American — idealistic, enthusiastic, optimistic, blithely accepting an uncertain future in which an academic career was only one of many possibilities.”

When Leigh offered them appointment both Joneses were on the research staff of the National Committee on the Costs of Medical Care and with Roger I. Lee were writing the committee’s concluding report. Neither had taught before but by the end of registration they had 65 students in eight introductory groups, of whom 18 were “trial majors;” that is, students who contemplated majoring in Social Studies (trial majors were abolished soon after Jones became president in 1941). Both Joneses concurred in Leigh’s emphasis on the contemporary for first-year

students and their introductory courses began with the consideration of current political events and social trends. There was no dearth of topics as the Depression produced the New Deal, Japan broadened its hold on China, and Hitler seized power in Germany.

The Joneses took advantage of the evening meetings program and brought in speakers who met with their classes before and after addressing the college community. As the 1932 election drew near, four speakers backed as many presidential candidates and established a quadrennial custom. President Hoover's re-election was urged by William H. Wills, a local realtor, later governor of Vermont; the case for Governor Roosevelt was made by Rexford Tugwell, Columbia professor soon to be a New Deal braintruster; a Williamstown clergyman spoke for the Socialists and a labor organizer for the Communists. On election day students paraded through the dining rooms chanting "Fineman for President" (Irving Fineman taught literature); and later there was foregathering to listen to the radio. There was nothing comparable to the organized spectacles of later presidential elections when the rollicking musical "Of Thee I Sing" speeded the waiting hours, but E. Pendleton Herring of the Harvard government department was present to analyze the returns.

Early in the term Roosevelt's election had not been foreseen or desired by the students, who had given Hoover 54 votes, Norman Thomas 19 and Roosevelt 7. This was Roosevelt's only defeat in a Bennington poll, for he won in a second straw vote on election day and every four years thereafter. The shift to Roosevelt over a period of six weeks suggests that the influences later discovered by Theodore Newcomb were already operative at the beginning of Year One.

Refusing to give politics a monopoly in the Social Studies program, Mrs. Jones promoted a trip to an intercollegiate conference at Wesleyan where Margaret Sanger made birth control the most memorable topic, and she planned a series of talks on "Women in the Modern World," the subject one of her introductory groups had chosen. The first talk demonstrated the difficulty of avoiding politics in the 1930s. The journalist and author Ernestine Evans said that the international mood was no longer postwar but had become pre-war and declared that women must organize to head off another and far more destructive conflict.

Asho Ingersoll Craine '36 wrote "that first year was a rather giddy experience for all of us, but for me it was the sudden expansion of the world...Lewis was always eagerly egging me on to wider exploration and yet so warmly understanding of the emotional impact of such agonizing problems as starvation in the midst of plenty. Later it was Barbara Jones who helped me focus down to disciplined reading and writing. Together they made a wonderfully balanced team and were indeed qualified to be the Social Studies faculty."

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

During the first year Lewis and Barbara Jones met with Leigh to plan the succession of appointments in Social Studies in line with the intended curriculum and in step with yearly increments of students. The Joneses would teach economics and social theory among other subjects, and they now agreed with the president on appointments in history, political science, psychology and sociology as well as a nursery school teacher. Leigh later yielded to the division's request for a philosopher, and anthropology was added when it was discovered that the political scientist's wife was qualified to teach it. Few curricular changes have occurred in almost 50 years: for a time sociology yielded to anthropology and social psychology; linguistics had a five-year tenure; the nursery school has become the Early Childhood Center. It may be true that it is more difficult to change a curriculum than to move a cemetery, but some credit can be given Leigh and the early faculty for the choices they made.

At the depth of the Depression finding students who could afford Bennington's high fees required intensive recruitment. In contrast there was no problem in finding faculty, for the universities were retrenching. Having read about Bennington College, I wrote from Yale that I was available to teach history. My academic status had plummeted from associate professor and acting dean at St. John's to assistant professor at Dartmouth to instructor and graduate student at Yale; and furthermore Leigh had reservations about history — he considered it a tool course. He had known me at Reed, however, and he was always happy to appoint Reed graduates. And so I came to Bennington in 1933 with no rank at all. I had a B. Litt. from Oxford, had taught modern European history for eight years and lacked only a dissertation for a Yale Ph.D. which I took in 1937. As it turned out, student demand for background instruction was never clamorous though every year I had small groups in United States or European history and in international affairs. My own interest was focused in the portentous developments in the Far East and in Europe, and this fit in with Bennington's emphasis on contemporary affairs.

To teach political science, Leigh appointed James McCamy in 1934. McCamy was warmly recommended by John Gaus who, like Leigh, was a political scientist. Gaus had known Leigh since the 1920s when he was at Amherst and Leigh was at Williams. McCamy had a B.A. and an M.A. from Texas and was on his way to a doctorate at Chicago where Gaus was a visiting professor on leave from Wisconsin. After teaching at Bennington for five years, McCamy went to Washington as assistant to Henry Wallace, Secretary of Agriculture, and was succeeded by David B. Truman, then four years out of Amherst and author of *The Educational Functions of the Municipal Research Bureaus*.

Julia McCamy also had two degrees from Texas where she was a tutor in anthropology in 1931-1933. At Bennington she began teaching anthro-

pology part-time in 1935. When she left in 1939 no one taught anthropology until the appointment of Lucien M. Hanks in 1942, and Jane Hanks taught it briefly during her husband's war years.

* * * * *

With some help from himself, Leigh felt that Jones, Brockway and McCamy adequately covered the field of public affairs. In a very different segment of Social Studies he counted on a college nursery school and an interdivisional major to satisfy the normal interest of women students in marriage and motherhood. Psychology and physiology were to constitute "the necessary common content" of a Human Development major with a faculty drawn from Science and Social Studies and the nursery school as its laboratory.

The aim was not only to provide an academic matrix for the nursery school but to offer "basic training for professional social work, for guidance and instruction of children either in the home or in nursery school, or for psychological work with children or adults." The 1934-35 catalogue promised a seminar to give unity and direction to the major, but the aim was not realized and for lack of leadership the major itself was abandoned in 1937. Students found later that they could put together the equivalent of a human development program as Social Studies majors, and Leigh appointed a Human Development Committee to watch over the nursery school.

The nursery school survived the demise of the Human Development major, and flourished. Dr. and doubtless Mrs. Leigh felt that the college nursery school would free the mornings of faculty wives with small children and would mingle and socialize the three-year-olds of town and gown, as well as give Bennington students training and insight into the nature of child development. As college opened for its second year, the first floor of Cricket Hill had been turned into a nursery school with a low chicken-wire fence strung around the yard. Here the school continued until 1939 when it moved down into the "Chicken Coop" and the musicians jubilantly took over Jennings Hall.

During the Leigh years there was a rapid turnover of nursery school teachers, rapport between them and the rest of the division was not always apparent, the nursery school had only modest value as a laboratory, and it was rated low by the graduates as a whole. In his last term Leigh wrote me that better use must be made of the school and that Newcomb, who had just resigned, should be succeeded by someone in child or educational psychology.

Nevertheless, the nursery school filled a need in the curriculum and in the larger community. Among the Bennington graduates of the 1930s who

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

began their professional training as teachers in the college nursery school were Alene Potter Widmayer and Louise Stockard Vick, who soon established their own nursery schools, and Mildred Wile Hirsh, Jane Buckley Chapman and Denise Underwood Martin who taught in the college nursery school after graduating. Mrs. Vick's experience eventually led her to continue her nursery school through the first grade so that the children would have the basic skills of reading, writing and math to sustain them as they entered more regimented public schools. She wrote that her ability to make her school "a showcase of innovative teaching" was a direct result of her Bennington experience.

More commonly the students who learned about children in the nursery school salted away knowledge and understanding against later need and were presumably less demoralized by and better able to cope with the assertive imperatives of their own three-year-olds. Students who felt superior to this type of learning may have had second thoughts about the nursery school some time later. As Barbara Jones noted, some of the most loftily "intellectual" mastered the art of motherhood when they came to it.

Whenever the nursery school has been threatened on fiscal grounds, faculty wives and children have been prepared to demonstrate with eager allies from town. For almost 50 years the school has provided an important if little-noticed service in the larger community, and it may be that it was there that progressive education chalked up its greatest triumphs. While its alumni have as yet exhibited no interest in reunions, a playground party would appear to be in order in 1983 when the school completes its first half century and its oldest grads will be all of 53.

* * * * *

Psychology as taught by Theodore Newcomb proved to be the most popular of the division's offerings. After graduating from Oberlin in 1924, Newcomb went to Union Theological Seminary but switched to Columbia when he concluded that psychology threw more light on the human situation than theology. Before coming to Bennington in 1934 he had his doctorate from Columbia and six years of teaching experience. During that time he moved away from "personality and pathology" and became "fascinated by the power of the group over the individual." This fascination led him to his celebrated research on Bennington students, but those students persuaded him to return personality and pathology to front burners. Newcomb's teaching load led to the appointment of a second psychologist, Dwight Chapman, in 1938. Chapman had a doctorate from Harvard and had taught there and at Columbia.

The early appointment of a sociologist was linked with one of Leigh's favorite projects, a Bennington Survey. On the eve of becoming president

in 1928 he told the trustees that social scientists at the University of Chicago were studying that city for the development of "intelligent, realistic, competent and effective social thinking and action." He noted that at Bennington "the region surrounding the College gives opportunity for constructing a similar social laboratory for the field and library study of rural political, economic and social life, and for an understanding of the techniques and dynamics of social change."

To direct such a study, Leigh appointed Andree Emery in 1933. Miss Emery's training in Hungary had been supplemented by graduate study at Bryn Mawr and the Brookings Institution, she was highly recommended to teach sociology and statistics by R. M. MacIver and E. C. Lindeman, and Leigh was himself impressed by her ideas and her exuberance. Unfortunately she misconceived Bennington College and her role in it, staked out vast territorial claims against her colleagues and ordered an enormous map of Bennington, 25 prototype computers and some 500 books for the library. Thwarted both by the comptroller and the librarian, Miss Emery was unable to bring her grand design into scale with the needs or resources of the college and she was not reappointed. One of her students recalls her attempts "to convert us to the 'workers' cause' and a rejection of our middle-class values and background."

Miss Emery was succeeded by George Lundberg, then a lecturer at Columbia and director of research in Columbia's Council for Research in the Social Sciences. Born in 1895, Lundberg grew up on a farm in North Dakota, taught in rural schools until he had saved enough to go to college, and received his doctorate at the University of Minnesota in 1925. By 1934 he had written six books and 14 articles in learned journals and he was chairman of the committee on social research of the American Sociological Society. Such impressive credentials promised him appointment almost anywhere but he wrote Leigh that he was interested in Bennington because he had concluded that university teaching was incompatible with the good life.

Proceeding cautiously, Leigh did not return to the sociologists who had recommended Miss Emery but asked two others for their estimate of Lundberg. Both praised him highly as a scholar but doubted that he would fit in at Bennington. Robert Lynd warned that Lundberg would be supercilious about the college and loathed field work. William Ogburn said he lacked "a sense of esprit de corps, loyalty and graceful personal touches" that Bennington would expect. Fortunately Leigh ignored the warnings and offered Lundberg a top salary, special stenographic services and enough free time to continue conducting a seminar at Columbia one evening a week. In announcing his appointment at a community meeting, Leigh described him as the most distinguished faculty member he had appointed.

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

With the admission of a fourth class in September, 1935, the college reached its planned enrollment of 250 and the Social Studies curriculum was completed with the addition of anthropology taught by Julia McCamy and philosophy taught by Gail Kennedy. At the end of 1935-36 Kennedy returned to Amherst, from which he had been on leave, and was succeeded by Margaret Patterson who had come out of a Southern Methodist background and earned a master's degree at Teachers College. There she was assistant to William Heard Kilpatrick, professor of educational philosophy and chairman of the Bennington trustees. From the beginning Leigh had been urged by Mrs. McCullough and others to include religion in the curriculum if not in a chapel, and he was satisfied that Miss Patterson, in contrast to Kennedy, was prepared to deal sympathetically with the subject. (Miss Patterson married Julian DeGray in 1942.)

* * * * *

Since introductory work was intended to acquaint students with objectives, content and methods, one might have expected the Social Studies faculty to devise a single course to accomplish this purpose. Instead, the division covered a wide range of subjects from child development to philosophy and instructors preferred to teach what they knew best. In consequence, several small one-semester courses introduced students to the field, majors and non-majors alike, by way of one or more of the disciplines. Mary Jones Riley, now an M.D., graduated in 1939 as a science major. She recalled beginning courses in international relations and psychology with particular pleasure, one in sociology without particular pleasure.

One year, as an economy measure, the division got Lundberg to give a lecture course for all 70 trial majors as an introduction to the division, but the students in it later proved to be less prepared for advanced work and the small discussion groups were resumed. Beginning in 1960 the course "From Hobbes to Marx," taught in several small groups, has served admirably as a general introduction without displacing introductory courses in each of the several disciplines.

Within some introductory courses the doctrine of student interest was respected so that they turned out to be "unmanageably diffuse" as Barbara Jones remarked in her book on the college. An example of students galloping off in all directions came in the first year. Five students elected to study international relations with Lewis Jones and they chose as individual projects the Manchurian crisis, communism, pacifism, economic planning and French foreign policy. Something comparable occurred in his other introductory groups and the consequence was that

Jones found himself running hard to keep within shouting distance of his students and to provide guidance over a wide terrain.

For the faculty the experience was exhausting but highly educational; for the students it rapidly developed self-dependence as they became accustomed to initiating and carrying through projects with a minimum of oversight. At the same time it gave them a basis for deciding whether to continue in Social Studies as it gave the faculty grounds for welcoming them as majors or suggesting that they seek refuge elsewhere.

With the project method in full swing, what went on in the group meetings? Leigh had expected that emphasis on the contemporary would diminish the centrifugal consequences of individual programs and term projects. Jones and his class in international relations decided that in addition to hearing reports of progress on individual topics, the class as a whole should undertake a project. Early in the term Jones remarked that World War I and the Depression had shattered the idea of inevitable progress and many of society's surest supports, including wealth, laws and religion, had been crumbling away. Against that dark backdrop the class decided to formulate a code of new values and a new faith which students at least could accept. Although no one recorded the results of this brave group effort, reported in Margot Suter's diary, some may see in it the genesis of a trait often remarked in Bennington alumnae — a willingness to undertake any task or assignment, however difficult or complicated, with no sense of inadequacy.

In their choice of introductory courses and thereafter on their way to a senior project, the Social Studies majors and trial majors divided into two more or less exclusive sets. One set concerned itself with public affairs and counted on economics or political science to provide an understanding of the world's ills and possibly prescribe medication for them, and the other set was primarily concerned with human relationships and social phenomena and majored with Lundberg or Newcomb.

This bifurcation in interest and subject matter was most evident as each candidate for graduation met with the division faculty in what was soon labeled the Senior Inquisition. Gladys Ogden, member of the first class, came up for graduation a year early. She was an outstanding student of political science and her thesis on government by town meeting had just won first prize in a national contest. But Newcomb in his first year, noting that she had neglected his field, got the division to delay her certification until she had read a book on social psychology. In later years no one expected a public affairs major to exhibit much understanding of Freud or a "psych major" to know whether the Monroe Doctrine was still operative. Eventually the division required all majors to take a one-semester course in the shunned area, but the educational value of the stratagem was problematical.

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

The students of public affairs took courses and wrote papers and theses on a variety of subject, but contemporary developments at home and abroad commanded the greatest attention. In introductory courses the freshmen were encouraged to solve the problems that were baffling Washington and after more work in economics and government the seniors wrote remarkably authoritative theses on aspects of the Depression and New Deal, and as World War II drew near on the economics of defense and belligerency.

When the National Labor Relations Act was passed in 1935, Lewis Jones found himself occupied in explaining its provisions to local manufacturers and labor leaders, and it is not surprising that several of his students wrote theses on the act and on the progress and implications of unionization.

Ann Meyer's study of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union became as a thesis a protracted essay on "Industrial Democracy and the Men's Clothing Industry;" Emily Hornblower's sophomore paper on the coal industry and United Mine Workers Union was accepted as her senior thesis and she was graduated in three years.

Some students were able to increase the depth of their understanding and the credibility of their writing by first-hand experience in the long winter recess. In her second winter term, Ruth Dewing spent six weeks as an apprentice weaver in a Fall River textile mill and returned with the revelation that "a worker's point of view as such just did not exist." The next year she helped manage a small water company owned by her father. Recently she wrote that her father had hoped the experience would bring her back to his position on private enterprise, but "actually it did the reverse." For her senior thesis on "The Tennessee Valley Authority as a Means of Regulating Power Rates," she supplemented her research in Washington with material gathered in the valley itself. She wrote that her counselor, McCamy, was "a most effective adviser for independent study." Incidentally, it was doubtless students like Ruth that led McCamy to his subsequent judgment that Bennington graduates in comparison with others "were less informed but better prepared to achieve, they insisted on analysis and they were socially concerned."

In the year before Pearl Harbor, several students foresaw problems the war would bring, and attempted solutions. Georgina Hazeltine wrote on the strategic materials required for national defense; Margaret Jones analyzed price fixing in a war economy; Susan Winter dealt with wages and wartime inflation; and Katrina Voorhees examined resources for expanding production under the title "Guns and Butter." In the following year Elizabeth Walsh wrote on strikes in wartime.

A few theses of historical nature were included in the Bennington Survey. Atossa Herring wrote on the early history of the town; Polly Swan

wrote a social history of education in Bennington. On her way to a career in journalism and authorship Lucy Greenbaum compared Bennington's first newspaper, *The Vermont Gazette*, and its intrepid publisher, Anthony Haswell, with the daily Bennington Banner and its homespun editor, Frank (Ginger) Howe. After noting that Haswell had crusaded for equality and had gone to prison for offending the federal government, Lucy was disappointed to discover that Howe professed no aim as a publisher beyond cleaning up the Walloomsac River for better fishing. It may be noted that neither journalist had much success in achieving his goals though both were honored for their efforts. Lucy Greenbaum Freeman wrote that she got no help for her emotional conflicts at Bennington but was well prepared to carry on the independent research which went into her 45 books. She recalled with gratitude her social studies teachers as well as Irving Fineman and Catharine Osgood Foster in literature.

The other branch of social studies was made up of the followers of Newcomb, "the psych majors," and the disciples of Lundberg who were soon deeply engaged in sociometric research. Confounding his doubting sponsors, Lundberg proved to be a cooperative member of the college community, and indeed found teaching at Bennington compatible with the good life as he turned down university offers for 11 years. He played his violin in the college orchestra and his accordion at the frequent parties to which he invited his colleagues, his students and Leigh's succession of attractive secretaries in spite of whom he remained a bachelor when he left Bennington in 1945. His social life never interfered with his research or undermined his ambition. His bibliography grew each year and his textbook, *Foundations of Sociology*, was published in 1939; he went on the executive committee of the American Sociological Society in 1937 and became its president in 1943.

As director of the Bennington Survey, Lundberg had frequent opportunity to emphasize his faith in quantitative measurement as the only way to social truth and his conviction that most social scientists were rushing "about in the social jungles, each with his own kind of chart and compass, or without either, and leaving a trail too blurred for anyone to follow." He insisted that there "was not a single statement about man or society which can legitimately be made except in terms of an average, a dispersion and a probable error." In spite of his austere scientific stance, Lundberg remained true to his Swedish background in North Dakota, and in the Lindbergh tradition preached isolationism and denounced anyone who thought the spread of fascism was any concern of the United States.

In sending his students into the community to gather data, Lundberg warned them against trying to alter the social conditions they encountered. He was certain that the accumulation of reliable knowledge "about

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

community life is in the end...very likely to be of more permanent value than a local campaign to improve the care of juvenile delinquents."

Within these guidelines Lundberg's students formulated subjects for inquiry, gathered data by a house-to-house canvass, tabulated and analyzed the results and wrote reports which were filed in the college library as senior theses. Among the studies which reached a wider audience were "The Sociography of Some Community Relations" which Margaret Lawsing and Lundberg co-authored and "Social Attraction Patterns in a New England Village" written by Mary Steele and Lundberg. The first appeared in the *American Sociological Review* (June, 1937), the second in *Sociometry* (January-April, 1938). Before she did her thesis with Newcomb, Rowena Wyant, Lundberg's star statistician, had directed the research for a report on what magazines were read in 90 cities. Co-authored by her and Paul Lazarsfeld, the report appeared in *Public Opinion Quarterly* (October, 1937).

When the college admitted its fourth class in 1935, Lundberg and Newcomb were teaching about the same number of students. By the end of the Leigh era in 1941, a considerable shift to Newcomb had occurred and he was teaching 57 students to Lundberg's 14. During this time Newcomb supervised research relating to the nursery school, public opinion and propaganda, education, psychology and psychiatry. Conspicuous among the theses was Rowena Wyant's ambitious inquiry into the attitudes of local townspeople on economic issues, trade unionism and the New Deal. On the basis of questionnaires answered by 385 men and women Ms. Wyant reported that in Bennington men were more liberal than women, Jews more conservative than Protestants, Protestants more conservative than Catholics, Protestant ministers more liberal than their congregations, and doctors more conservative, teachers more liberal, than the community as a whole.

* * * * *

Newcomb's students became involved in a study which opened up a whole field of psychological research and catapulted Newcomb to the presidency of the American Psychological Association. His study of Bennington students revealed a dramatic shift toward liberalism between their freshman and senior years. According to Newcomb the change demonstrated the influence of peer groups and norms, and he felt that the norms were favorable to liberalism because Bennington had an atypical, young faculty. As he put it recently, Leigh, recruiting teachers who would be friendly to educational innovation, "ended up with lots of New Deal types, some even farther left...So while none of us said, 'We have got to make good little liberals out of these gals,' we *did* say, 'By God, they are

going to know how the other half lives.' "

At the time, however, Newcomb seemed more concerned with the menace of fascism and its threat to democracy and to the Soviet Union. He did what he could to encourage unionization in town, and to set a good example organized a teachers' union at the college against Leigh's wishes; and from time to time he attempted to influence United States foreign policy, particularly during the Spanish Civil War. He brought up lecturers and films favorable to the Loyalists and as Newcomb himself wrote later, "the case for the Nationalists was seldom heard." The campaign had no effect in Washington but it was highly successful in making partisans on the campus. Eighty-two percent of Bennington students agreed with the statement "I hope the Loyalists win the war;" while at Catholic University where the opposite propaganda held sway, 76 percent of the students disagreed.

Reviewing Newcomb's second book on Bennington, *Persistence and Change*, in *Quadrille* (October, 1967), Sonya Rudikoff Gutman '48 noted that according to the Newcomb study, students who would not accept the Bennington norms of the 1930s could not flourish and had to leave. She continued:

"This is extremely interesting because it suggests that despite the typical Thirties' norm of community liberalism and social awareness, the actual process of socialization and enforcement of norms at Bennington was in fact more rigid and authoritarian, as in small primitive social groups."

A sampling of Social Studies majors has brought in no evidence to support the Gutman thesis. Gladys Ogden Dimock recalled a few girls who did not thrive and some who left in the first three years, but doubted that deviation "from a largely non-existent norm was the reason." Asho Ingersoll Craine said that the first class prided itself on being "deviant from the world at large" and doubted that pressures to conform amounted to much in the early years. A member of second class, Polly Swan Brown, recalled "the tremendous diversity of social attitudes and also standards of behavior...I remember bitter arguments and discussions but everyone had a sense that her point of view was being listened to and respected." In her view, the thought that ideas and values change was a valuable inlay in the Bennington experience.

Janet Austrian Fisher '39 agreed that the college community was well knit but not that it was closed. Students were free to explore various approaches, and "there was a relatively high tolerance if not in fact encouragement of deviance." Mary Eddison Welch arrived at Bennington in 1936 and as Roosevelt ran for his second term "carried the torch for Landon because no one older than a freshman would be seen dead with it."

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

That sentence suggests a clearly visible norm which at least invited compliance, but Mary never suffered for her conspicuous deviance. She felt free to make her own choices and in Bennington's stimulating atmosphere she became "increasingly liberal or liberated politically. On the other hand...I never recognized the commitment Ted Newcomb had to accelerate social change."

Mary Berna Till '41 wrote that Bennington was for her a "dizzily permissive atmosphere" where she felt no pressure to "agree with anyone about anything." She admitted that some with more settled political views might have "found the college totalitarian" but she was not aware of any punishment for nonconformity. There were doubtless peer group pressures, but "the faculty did all they could to keep opinion free by refusing to serve as polarization points."

What part did the Social Studies faculty have in the leftward trend Newcomb documented? They had much in common in age, university training, and faith in objective research. Once in an extended lecture series entitled "Science and Culture" they formed a united front with the natural scientists and propounded views that were anathema to the literati and profoundly disappointed Leigh, who felt that values should be stressed. Earlier the division had accepted Lundberg's views on the importance of quantitative research when it required all Social Studies majors to take statistics in spite of Leigh's insistence that "tools of learning such as statistics" be mastered when needed rather than required in advance and related "but vaguely to a possible distant use."

In spite of these signs of unity the Social Studies faculty had profound differences of outlook. None felt that the course of events was predestined or hopeless but there was no consensus on ways to cope with the ills of mankind. There was general support for the New Deal and most felt that the Depression could be terminated without basic changes in the country's institutions. On the other hand, a few doubted that capitalism had much future and organizing unions was a useful first step on the way to world revolution. Lundberg had been through a socialist stage and he was not only skeptical of Newcomb's activities in town but he doubted that any political action made much sense unless it rested firmly on quantitative measurement. Lewis Jones thought capitalism would come through and doubted that the women working in a local brush factory would benefit from faculty counseling. In foreign policy a few were early advocates of intervention to stop Hitler, others urged various degrees of isolationism.

Margaret Dudley Thurber '41 recalled variety in the Social Studies faculty, and particularly the contrasting outlooks of Lundberg and Newcomb:

"Both were extreme, hence thought-provoking. I took a delight in the logic of

the Lundberg view yet rejected its mechanistic definition of humankind. My youthful, passionate wish for human perfectibility found Newcomb's activism congenial. But I didn't feel a tug of war was going on for our student loyalties, nor did I feel an irresistible pressure to conform...The exposure to two such strong and different approaches was education at its best."

Margaret Lawsing Magnusson also noted the contrast between Lundberg and Newcomb: the former stressed method without ulterior aim; the latter related inquiry to social action and this, to her, made his "exegesis more useful and realistic."

It is time to remark that Mrs. Gutman's thesis is by no means demolished by the alumnae who wrote in, for all of them flourished while in college and thereafter. Our sampling is conspicuously lacking in testimony from dropouts who might well have opposite views. Newcomb had not seen Sonya Gutman's review until I sent it to him and he replied "I suspect that she is right."

The graduates quoted here were by no means uncritical of the college. Leigh stressed the importance of giving students "a sense of mastery in a few fields rather than smatterings in many fields." Gladys Ogden Dimock, probably our first graduate to make *Who's Who of American Women*, got deep into political science at Bennington but left with a smattering of courses for her "academic program was neither coordinated nor systematized." In her 1941 evaluation of Bennington, Margaret Lawsing Magnusson wrote that Bennington was "not at all effective" in developing mastery in a few fields; and Margaret Dudley Thurber wrote that she never achieved mastery even in political science which was her major interest but approached mastery later "in the rather amorphous field of public relations:"

"I'm a wide-ranging generalist, but I think I would find greater satisfaction in life had I been inspired to flog away at something — a language, an art or craft or a technique that I could excel at."

In short, the college failed to motivate her "to pursue an interest to the point of fullest development."

During the Leigh decade about 17 percent of the students came to Bennington with the intention of majoring in Social Studies; ultimately almost one-fourth did and the other three-fourths, majoring elsewhere, averaged five semester courses in Social Studies. In spite of the division's contribution to a general education, Bennington students, majoring in other fields, did not do well in tests on economics or history but excelled in tests on contemporary affairs.

Social Studies majors who went on to graduate school differed on how well they had been prepared for it. Marian Sieck Dehne '37 found herself

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

ill-prepared for graduate study in history at Columbia. Elizabeth Reed Keller '39 wrote that Bennington gave her "a constructive focus on the problems of the times," but she felt handicapped in the race to a doctorate in economics at Harvard. Her classmate, Janet Austrian Fisher, has no complaints about her preparation at Bennington, earned a doctorate in economics at Columbia, and pursued a scholarly career thereafter. Ruth Dewing Ewing '37 recalled "having a great advantage over graduates of more conventional colleges" in Columbia's economics department. She soon turned to labor mediation in which she earned "considerably more than my male contemporaries." It was then finally that her father felt vindicated in having allowed her to attend "progressive" Bennington.

Mary Berna Till gave the Social Studies faculty credit for contributing to Bennington's atmosphere of creativity, but she remarked that there were instructors who cared and others who were self-absorbed and did not. She offered as an example of caring Lewis Jones who once called her and Katrina Voorhees into his office and asked them to stop competing with each other. The point was that each seemed less interested in digging into the subject under consideration than in scoring on the other. Both Jones and Margaret Patterson told Mary as a freshman that she was writing what she thought the teacher expected and asked her to try again: "I did not have enough sense of self to risk their displeasure until they taught me to."

We may end this chapter with Mary Till's mature judgment that Social Studies majors saw themselves "as perfectly capable of writing, achieving, changing things — no hidens."

CHAPTER 22

LEIGH'S RESIGNATION

When Leigh began to think seriously of resigning is difficult to document. In his final statement to the faculty in 1941 he said he had never thought of the Bennington presidency as a permanent position and that a college such as Bennington should see to it that its presidents left near the end of their highest usefulness "rather than be shackled by executive leadership gradually growing stale, feeble or lacking in initiative." It was not only this sensible line of thought, however, that convinced Leigh that he should look for another position.

In March, 1938, the Leighs called on Lewis and Barbara Jones for "friendly counsel." With great candor he dwelt on his frustrations as president, she admitted her yearning for an administrative post at the college and together they talked of leaving Bennington, though they assured the Joneses that they would not "decide hastily or impulsively to leave in resentment, disappointment or discouragement."

Mrs. Leigh's desire for an administrative position was a recurring topic in her husband's correspondence. In April, 1938, he wrote his wife's brother-in-law, Dr. Joseph Chassell, that "if her future cannot be honestly and soundly established at Bennington I much prefer to switch to some place else." At that time, however, Leigh planned to appoint Dr. Chassell to succeed Dr. Wilmoth Osborne who was about to resign as director of health. Leigh was very eager to appoint Dr. Chassell because he felt that "his peculiar abilities" were essential "to the best development of our educational experiment." But there was a question, Leigh wrote, "whether Bennington will accept Mildred as a professional worker and her brother-in-law in the key psychiatric position."

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

The dilemma was neatly if temporarily solved by giving Mrs. Leigh an administrative fling as acting director of admissions for the fall term of 1938-39 before Dr. Chassell took office in January. For a time Leigh stopped talking about leaving. Mrs. Leigh was happily performing in Mrs. Garrett's office and her husband reported in October that "she was doing a grand job...Everything goes better, visibly so, so that it is quite possible that Mildred's life at the college may straighten out and things be pretty well organized for our next years ahead."

But the euphoria was shortlived and the idea of leaving Bennington returned. When the trustees reappointed him in January, 1939, he warned them that he would feel free to resign at any time during the five-year term. Both Leighs had reasons to desire a change. With the appointment of Dr. Chassell, Mrs. Leigh could no longer count on an administrative role which for a single term had made life better than bearable for her and for her husband. On his part, Leigh had grounds for discouragement beyond the truism suggested by Barbara Jones after her husband had been president of one college and two universities: "Presidents get worn out and moreover they can't do much after the first few years."

Though Leigh had control of the purse and appointments, the divisions were going their own ways which were not always his ways. He once felt at home with the social scientists but they profoundly disappointed him for failing to emphasize values; he was puzzled by James McCamy's "resentments about things;" and he had two grievances against Theodore Newcomb. Against his wishes Newcomb had organized a teachers' union at the college and he had ignored Leigh's remonstrance against publishing a summary of his study which showed that Bennington students moved leftward politically while in college.

In April, 1938, the literature majors sent Leigh a damaging appraisal of their division and from then on he was kept aware of problems in literature which baffled and discouraged him. In science a constant turnover of faculty worried him and he never found the science instructors he said he needed to join Woodworth in promoting "inventive educational experiment." For several years he had enjoyed teaching a course for committee and house chairmen, but he cancelled the course when enrollment fell off in 1938.

The faculty in general seemed to be contributing less to the success of the enterprise than Leigh expected. He was shocked to discover that several had failed to join the Cooperative Store and he sent them stern reproofs. He had thought that student-faculty relations in the student houses would have great educational value, but in 1939 he was dismayed to discover that the resident faculty were avoiding house meetings and he felt obliged to pay them \$5 a month to attend. More serious, the Student Educational Policies Committee informed him in November, 1937, that some faculty

members were not exerting themselves in the counseling which Leigh considered crucial.

Though the college had received a modest amount of recognition it was flatly refused accreditation in 1939 on the ground that it had not yet proved that its graduates were adequately prepared for further schooling (accreditation came during Lewis Jones' first year as president, 1941-1942).

In addition, Leigh became aware that neither he nor the trustees were proving themselves equal to the fund raising that must precede the construction of urgently needed new buildings. In May, 1937, Leigh had listed a music building, a theatre, a library, an infirmary and a recreation building as needed and wrote that donors were needed who would seize the "attractive opportunity" any of these buildings offered. He then pointed out that a million dollars had been raised for buildings before the college existed and during the Depression. He thought that with the college "a visual and working reality" five donors should not be hard to find and he nominated himself "Chairman of a roving committee of all the friends of the College to find them." A year later he was obliged to admit that there were no buildings in prospect and "we may have to wait many more years to find donors for them." Leigh was particularly disappointed that the handsome theatre he had counted on and bragged about never rose from Arch Lauterer's drawing board. His gloomy prophecy about donors was borne out though Jennings Hall enabled the music faculty to abandon the Chicken Coop in 1939.

Before leaving on his sabbatical in September, 1939, Leigh appointed Lewis Jones acting president and wrote eight of his friends in education that he was available for teaching, research or administration. A temporary job was nearer than he knew. The Leighs planned to spend the fall in Europe but the outbreak of World War II headed them off. Instead, unexpectedly, they went to Bard College, then a dependency of Columbia, which though a men's college had recently been modeled on Bennington. Following the sudden death of Bard's head, Dean Harold Mestre, in September, Leigh was asked to come in for one semester as acting dean and "academic doctor" for a college he said was "a very sick institution."

At Bard as he engaged in diagnosis and prescription, the Leighs were treated with deference by a friendly if possibly apprehensive faculty. Their experience there Leigh described as very exhilarating and he said it "confirmed us in the conviction that it was time for us to move. Both of us seemed obviously more effective and more stimulated by a new set of problems."

The Leighs returned to Bennington for the spring term and since none of the eight friends turned up any attractive openings they looked forward without enthusiasm to another year there. Then, during the fall of 1940, Leigh was able to obtain a grant for the spring term at the Institute for

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

Advanced Study at Princeton. His project was to be a study of the teaching of social studies in secondary schools, and the grant provided for visits to representative institutions across the country. This opportunity, he said, he welcomed "with emotion that confirmed our intent (to leave)."

Leigh must have had mixed feelings as he took semester leaves in successive years. As Francis Fergusson surmised, he may have been "fed up with the place and tired of trying to cope with its problems," and he and Mrs. Leigh greatly enjoyed the stimulation of new acquaintances and new challenges. On the other hand, he had no doubt that the college was then in need of steady educational leadership. This was particularly true since Alvin C. Eurich and his staff had just begun a probing evaluation of the college. In a report to the trustees dated March 27, 1940, Leigh observed that with the Eurich evaluation in progress there was evident "an intensive period of questioning, reorganization...and conflict of educational policy." This required "as never before prolonged, thorough analysis, accumulation of reliable evidence, good educational judgment and unifying leadership on the part of the president."

Nine months later, as he was about to take a second leave, he no longer considered himself indispensable because he had persuaded himself that for a single term nothing untoward would happen in his absence. Late in 1940 John Kouwenhoven, then a member of the Literature Division, expressed his concern about Leigh's "walking out on the (literature) problem." Leigh replied that there was always danger of "repeating the naive formula of personal leadership which we have inherited in our mores from priest and king societies and perpetuated in our early family training...It seems to me good that the College find its center in other ways than through my necessary presence...The College should not be too dependent upon the accident of the presidency to have clear purposes and well understood methods of procedure." Then in a postscript he said this was "not a very special time in the life of the College" and the evaluation then in progress could not "in a semester result in any kind of significant change."

He could make that statement since by then he had safeguarded himself against changes that would alter the essential nature of the college he had brought into being. Everyone expected him to appoint Lewis Jones again as acting president, but Jones had acted vigorously during his term in office and he could not now be considered a guardian of the status quo. Instead of appointing Jones or anyone else as acting president, Leigh devised an elaborate administrative structure in which no one had any authority.

He made a list of 13 administrative functions, reserved five for himself and divided eight among his administrative officers, the executive committee and its new subcommittees. The executive committee had been

discussing college policies and proposing changes during the fall term and Leigh must have felt that in his absence some administrative restraint would be desirable. The committee was normally made up of the president and chairmen of the seven divisions. Just before going on leave Leigh informed the committee that he had expanded its membership to include Dr. Chassell, Mary Garrett and Frances Park who that year was serving as assistant to the president.

He also created two subcommittees. One would handle emergencies between meetings of the executive committee and was sometimes referred to as a triumvirate although it had no power. Mrs. Garrett, Mrs. Park and I were its members and I was made chairman of the executive committee. The other subcommittee, chaired by Dr. Chassell, was made up of administrative officers.

In addition to this dispersal of administrative authority, Leigh insisted that no significant change in the educational pattern of the college should be made lightly or without due process. In the fall when he informed the faculty that he would be away in the spring he was asked how proposals for educational change would be handled in his absence. He replied that the primary purpose of the college was to demonstrate the effectiveness of "a consistent educational program" proposed by him and adopted by the trustees in 1929. On the basis of that program funds were raised, trustees and faculty selected, and students and parents identified with the college. Thus much more than with other colleges, Bennington had "a definite responsibility for demonstrating the effectiveness of a particular educational pattern or program."

Minor changes within the general principles had occurred but no major change "has been introduced since the College began its instruction." If a major change is proposed "it is clear that the College should adopt (it) only after the most exhaustive study of present practice and of the effects of the alternative program to be adopted. The responsibility is important enough to require trustee action in each case..." Examples of major changes were the elimination of the trial major, of studio work in the arts, of individual diagnosis; requiring courses on a college rather than divisional basis and the adoption of survey courses.

* * * * *

During the leaderless spring term of 1941 no one was advocating specific changes but concern about the college and its future, puzzlement over Leigh's absences and resentment that salaries remained virtually frozen at Depression levels were topics that came up in faculty gatherings. In 1970 Lewis Jones thought Leigh's loss of interest was what really worried the faculty, and Margaret DeGray had a similar opinion. She recalled that the

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

executive committee had been impressed by Jones' leadership during Leigh's absence in 1939 and "we realized that Leigh had not been giving what we needed." Trustee Frederick Lewis Allen kept close watch on the college, and his letters to John Kouwenhoven between 1939 and 1941 contain frequent speculation that Leigh had lost interest in the college.

The sagacious political scientist Marshall Dimock has suggested an explanation of Leigh's declining interest in the college: When a new enterprise is undertaken, a special type of administrator is needed to organize it and give it momentum. That person must have inventiveness, drive and willingness to take risks. But once the enterprise is well under way such a person is likely to become bored. Once the problems he faces are more or less routine, the challenge is gone and he begins to look around for new worlds to conquer. That is what Leigh had in mind as early as the fall of 1939.

Faculty concern found expression in May, 1941, when some 15 faculty and staff members met in the Parks' home in Faculty Row and went over what seemed to be the deteriorating state of college affairs. Leigh was then on the West Coast and the discussion culminated in a decision to communicate with the trustees. Francis Fergusson and I were asked to go to New York to meet with Arthur Page, chairman of the board, to inform him of faculty and staff uneasiness and seek his counsel.

Upon receiving the message, Page at once said that Leigh should resign and it was apparent that he had his own reasons to feel that it was time for a change. Further, it appeared that he felt he could speak for the board. The trustee minutes are not illuminating, though at a meeting in the spring of 1939 there was discussion of the "inadequacies of the Flexner-Hauck investigation" which had resulted in Leigh's reappointment on the assumption that all was well at the college. What the trustees thought of Leigh in 1941 is not revealed, but his successive leaves must have been viewed as puzzling since he had insisted that this was a time requiring constant executive leadership.

Page saw no problem of succession in Leigh's immediate resignation. The trustees had thought well of Lewis Jones as acting president the year before and Page now mentioned him as the logical successor to Leigh. He then told Fergusson and me to see Leigh as soon as he arrived on the campus and ask him not to make any announcement of future plans before communicating with the trustees. When Leigh returned to the college a few days later we briefed him on campus discontent which had culminated in the decision to go to the trustees and we delivered Page's message. Leigh then met with Page in New York and on June 12 sent him his letter of resignation to take effect on Sept. 1.

Leigh felt aggrieved that the faculty had not communicated with him before going to the trustees, but he recognized a ground for concern at the

college. In his letter of resignation he told the trustees that his time away from college had "already created a justifiable feeling among the students and faculty that at this particular period full time in residence and total energy must be devoted to College problems and leadership."

There can be little doubt that Leigh would have gladly accepted any suitable position his appeals of September, 1939, turned up. For want of such an alternative and lacking resources to sustain themselves without income, the Leighs reluctantly returned to Bennington in June, 1941, expecting to continue for another year. Ironically it was the trustees' action at that moment which solved the Leighs' financial problem. If Leigh had resigned voluntarily he could not expect severance pay from the college. Resigning at a signal from the trustees, however, gave him the year's salary provided for in the Faculty Salary and Tenure Plan.

* * * * *

No announcement of Leigh's resignation was made at the time and he presided over his last commencement as if nothing had changed. The trustees and the faculty who knew kept secret his resignation and when it was announced two months later they continued to say nothing of the part the faculty and the trustees had in bringing it about. On Aug. 10 at a meeting of trustees, faculty and staff, Leigh announced and explained his resignation.

He stated his belief that college presidents should leave before passing the point of their highest usefulness and this was an opportune moment for him to leave because "the exciting task of construction had been completed." He was resigning to finish the research he had begun at the Institute for Advanced Study. He had chosen that course without hesitation rather than "buckle down to all-out application to the work of analysis of Bennington evaluation results and a full-time unifying task following it."

Though his resignation appeared to be voluntary, Leigh involved the faculty in it by indirection as he propounded a theory according to which college presidents customarily lose favor with their faculties:

"The college executive in control of the budget starts with new ideas, new appointees, new enthusiasm. As the years go by he both gives and refuses salary increases, he reappoints and he discharges, he provides places to live for some and none for others, he authorizes and refuses additional equipment. But in the average professorial calculus the negative refusals, though numerically much less, gradually outweigh the positive grants of encouragement and help; the sand in the hour glass runs lower and lower...(and) it seemed to be desirable to turn it before it ran too low."

There may be some truth in the theory that faculty gratitude is ephemeral and faculty resentment cumulative, though it assumes no change in

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

the quality of the president's performance. Whatever its worth the theory might be applied to the acts of Mrs. Leigh. No president's wife could have taken her role more seriously as she expressed her concern for the general welfare, order and tone. Harold Gray once noted her ability to achieve "a gracious and dignified formality at the right moment in spite of the tendency in an isolated group to gravitate toward a slippered blue-jeaned comfiness." In fact, what Gray called "the varied manifestations of her guiding intelligence and taste" were not always appreciated. As noted earlier, her role in college affairs and her allocation of the limited supply of faculty housing had generated little gratitude and some resentment.

According to Dimock, Leigh's loss of interest in the college does not seriously implicate the faculty, nor does it detract from his achievement in bringing the college into being. He was clearly of the creative type. With a distinct image of what he wanted, he set about imaginatively creating an institution many of whose procedures had no precedents. But in time he began to feel that his work was done and by 1939 he was seriously looking for another challenge that would again call on his imagination, energy and devotion. What he called "buckling down" did not appeal to him.

Leigh went on to a succession of posts in government, research and library administration, but it is understandable that he and Mrs. Leigh looked upon Bennington College as their greatest achievement and planned to spend their retirement in a house on the edge of the campus.

Through its faculty, Bennington College has expressed its gratitude to Leigh for his dominant role in shaping the college. In her book, Barbara Jones wrote that everyone associated with Leigh "must feel a deep sense of gratitude for his courageous, inspiring but always unassuming leadership;" and Lewis Jones, his successor, thought of him as "a great teacher of teachers" and said his own education owed more to him than to any other person. Jones continued:

"Those of us who were here in the early years of the college remember with admiration the tolerance and patience with which Dr. Leigh watched and encouraged our efforts. He took all criticism of this new and much-discussed college on his own shoulders, and never allowed us to be disturbed or intimidated by it, as long as he knew that we were doing what appeared to be the sensible thing."

At the ceremonial announcement of Leigh's resignation in August, my statement on behalf of the faculty stressed the central creative role Leigh had unassumingly played in translating Bennington College from idea to actuality:

"The nineteen-thirties were marked by world-wide depression, social frustra-

tion and the ominous preliminaries of universal war. Yet it was in that decade that Bennington College proclaimed that the frontier is never closed and that the pioneer's vision and courage and toil can perform miracles in our day.

"What perhaps struck the educational brahmins as a wildcat venture doomed to perish under its own follies became under President and Mrs. Leigh a flourishing community in which faculty individualism was subjected to the discipline of common purpose and students attained maturity, skills and a sense of direction without loss of youth or weight or joy of life.

"This is the miracle of Bennington and we have seen it happen. But it did not happen without faith and plans and work and tears. And it could not have happened as it did without the vision and the courage, the understanding and human leadership of President Leigh. These personal qualities have been incorporated in the very structure and spirit of the College as a priceless and we may hope permanent endowment. For this we are irretrievably and unashamedly indebted to Dr. Leigh and for this we are deeply grateful...It is our hope today that the College may prove worthy of its beginning and to this end we pledge ourselves as we wish the Leighs happiness in their new adventures in social achievement."

CHAPTER 23

EVALUATION

How should we judge Bennington College during the Leigh years? It is tempting to portray those students as larger than life and their teachers as paragons, unequaled in later decades. In contrast to the beguiling myth of a golden age, one might look back on Bennington's humble beginnings, emphasize weaknesses, note that the college was not yet accredited and insist that the 40 years since Leigh have been marked by educational progress.

The fact is that colleges tend to find themselves praiseworthy in every decade as they appeal for students or money, and Bennington was no exception. While Lewis Jones was acting president in the fall of 1939 he and his staff published a fund-raising booklet in which the flawless college was "firmly established as one of the leading institutions of higher education in the United States." Its students rank "high among the best of American college students...it has attracted an able faculty, each member competent and active in his professional field." It has carried out its educational aims, "derived from the modern progressive movement, with marked success...and aroused an interest and exerted an influence quite out of proportion to its small size and simple facilities."

A copy of the booklet was sent Leigh who was spending his sabbatical as temporary head of Bard College. He wrote Jones that the rather extravagant claims made in it reminded him of similar claims made by other colleges but that in Bennington's case he thought the claims were probably valid.

By that time a more objective appraisal of the college was already in progress. Whether Bennington was an experimental college or was, as

Leigh preferred to think, the demonstration of a particular mode of education, its disinterested evaluation was called for. In the beginning the appointment of a staff for continuous appraisal had been agreed to but scrapped for lack of funds. By May, 1938, Leigh announced that he was seeking foundation funding of a thorough-going examination of the Bennington program and performance. With grants from the Whitney and Rockefeller foundations, a two-year evaluation of the college began in 1939 under the direction of Alvin C. Eurich, an authority on educational values and procedures. By 1941 Eurich's staff had interviewed trustees, faculty, administration, students and alumnae, collected data for 114 tables, and written a 207-page report.

The first tables described the students who entered Bennington between 1932 and 1940 and set forth their readiness for college. Conspicuous is the students' high socio-economic status that might be surmised from the annual charge of \$1,675 when the nation's disposable income per capita was no more than \$300, a ratio that would bring Bennington's present fees to more than \$16,750. Some 70 percent of the students came from private schools, their fathers were professional men or in business or government, nearly half of the students had traveled in Europe, 40 percent were Episcopalian, and in 1940 all but seven students scored higher than "upper middle class" on the Chapin Social Status Scale. In spite of these signs of affluence, hard times persisted and scholarships ranging between \$200 and the full tuition of \$1,000 were given on the basis of need to about one-third of the students.

In the fall of 1940 Eurich asked students then in college what was decisive in their choice of Bennington. The replies not surprisingly identified features of the college which distinguished it from other colleges: 91 percent listed opportunity to follow interests, 62 percent the opportunity for independent study and 51 percent possibilities in the arts. Farther down the list about one-third mentioned the Winter Field and Reading Period.

Almost half of Bennington's freshmen between 1932 and 1940 had been in the top quarter of their class in school, a third in the second quarter, about 15 percent in the third, and 5 percent in the lowest quarter. Eurich stated that a student's rank in school provided a sound basis for predicting success in college but made no attempt to find out if the dictum was applicable to Bennington. Did some of the schools' verbally undistinguished turn out to be Bennington's superior composers, dancers, painters, scientists, violinists?

The scholastic aptitude tests given to entering students in the fall of 1940 placed them at the 60th percentile for national norms and the results were compared with the scores of seven women's and three men's colleges which went unnamed but were described as "highly selected." One men's

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

and three women's colleges scored higher than Bennington, two men's and two women's colleges were at the same national percentile, and two women's colleges scored lower than Bennington.

Eurich's tables make clear the primacy of the performing and visual arts in the Bennington curriculum. Before entrance, 45 percent of the students had said their first choice would be art, dance, drama or music, and in fact about 45 percent majored in those fields during the first half of the Leigh decade. But by Leigh's last year the percentages had risen to 54 at the expense of literature and the social studies while science remained steady at 9 to 12 percent.

In the absence of general college requirements Eurich was curious to learn what sort of study programs would result. Curriculum analysis revealed that virtually every student, whatever her major, had taken work in literature, social studies and one or more of the visual and performing arts. For non-majors the median number of semester courses taken in literature was four, in the arts four and in social studies five. Conspicuous is the relative neglect of science. One fourth of all students in the Leigh era had no science and more than half the majors in dance and drama avoided that field. Eurich remarked that it was "difficult to justify this deficiency" in view of the dominant role of science "in the affairs of men." Yet he noted that in its relative neglect of science, Bennington was not unique among women's colleges. Barbara Jones remarked that Bennington students chose much the same subjects as other college women; that is, Bennington's relative freedom of choice did not result in "any bizarre or wildly unorthodox student behavior."

To answer the question: How much knowledge do Bennington students acquire? Eurich studied tests the college had given sophomores and seniors for six years. In the general culture test taken by sophomores the medians were in the top quarter on the national scale. Eurich remarked that the sophomore showing was so high the seniors could not do much better, but in fact the senior medians were from 4 to 14 percentile points higher. In specific subject matter areas the sophomores excelled in contemporary affairs, foreign literature and fine arts but were no higher than the national average in science, English usage and spelling. As seniors the results were similar with a marked gain on the English test.

Eurich summarized these and other findings in a paragraph. Assuming that there was a typical Bennington student he concluded that upon entering she was "far better equipped than the average to do successful college work." No better than average in science or in grammar and spelling, "she has pronounced cultural interests. For her age she has an unusual degree of maturity, poise and self-assurance..."

Time-study records in the fall terms of 1939 and 1940 showed that Bennington students spent their time much as Vassar students did. In a

typical college week in 1939 Bennington students devoted 42.8 hours to their academic activities, Vassar students 42 hours. Students at both colleges gave about the same time to sleep, relaxation and cultural activities.

In a chapter on "Experiences beyond Courses," Eurich felt that the "direct and concrete experience provided by the Winter Field and Reading Period and the senior project "make valuable contributions to the education of the Bennington student...develop the habit of engaging voluntarily in learning, the habit of educating oneself, permanent interests, mastery in a few fields, and sympathetic but objective understanding of the world of our day."

Upon graduating, Bennington alumnae continued their studies, went to work, married or combined two or three of these options. Eurich found that 61 percent had continued their studies. Of those who went to graduate schools most aimed at a master's degree, fewer at a doctorate; their record there, Eurich concludes, indicated that they were able to compete successfully although their education at Bennington was "not along the traditional pre-graduate study lines."

By 1940, two-thirds of the graduates had been or were employed full time, and two-thirds of the positions held were in the same field as the college major. Median monthly earnings increased from \$88 for the class of 1940 to \$134 for the class of 1936 but the average for all graduates was only \$12 better than the average for dropouts. Modest as it was, such remuneration was welcome as Bennington husbands completed their schooling in law or medicine. Nearly half the graduates were married by 1940 and for most of them employment shifted from the marketplace to the home. Eighty percent of the husbands were college graduates and virtually all were or would be professional men.

When Eurich attempted an answer to the question: How good is Bennington College? he said that "judged by criteria of external success, it has an amazing record." He was deeply impressed by Bennington's opening at the bottom of the Depression when other colleges "were wondering whether they could possibly bring enough money together to pull through the year." He thought it even more remarkable that the college attracted its full quota of students during the depressed '30s though with no endowment it required most students to pay the full cost of their education, "a fantastic notion to most educators." Eurich noted that "to the envy of most colleges" the Bennington budget was always balanced.

Turning from Bennington's feat of opening at the Depression's nadir, Eurich admitted that it was much harder to answer the question: Is the college a good *educational* institution? He found the criteria for judging its performance elusive, and he complained that the objectives of the college were not clearly enough defined as "measurable outcomes" to

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

permit observation and analysis. Furthermore, the studies Eurich was making came to an abrupt end soon after Pearl Harbor when he and members of his staff went off to war.

Before leaving, Eurich's tentative conclusion was that Bennington College was highly successful "in terms of its major objectives" but that weaknesses had come to light. The relative neglect of science has been noted. Eurich suggested that the college do more to promote an understanding of the past, asked whether the college was justified in giving "so little attention to problems of home and family living and vocational adjustment," and doubted that Bennington students got enough exercise for their physical well-being. Finally he observed that Bennington's appraisal of student growth and development was highly subjective, and suggested that the techniques of appraisal be improved.

Eurich's data and conclusions were available to Barbara Jones as she wrote *Bennington College: The Development of an Educational Idea*, published by Harper in 1946. A member of the original Bennington faculty, Mrs. Jones resigned when her husband became president in 1941 but she continued her close association with the college and in her book offered her own evaluation of the college under Leigh.

Mrs. Jones was not interested in contesting Eurich's findings but she had doubts about instituting compulsory physical education or home economics. She might have added that the Non-Resident Term gave students experience in "vocational adjustments" and that the appraisal of students was likely to remain subjective even if grades were substituted for evaluative essays.

Her own criticism of the college under Leigh was directed to "divisionalism" and to that we return in a moment. It is noteworthy, however, that Mrs. Jones enthusiastically endorsed the principles on which Bennington College was founded. In particular she felt that Bennington's experience of "basing an educational program on the recognition of individual differences has amply confirmed the soundness of the principle...Any teacher who has met students face to face, in small classes and individual conferences, will testify that the range of individual variation is far greater than he would have foreseen, far more subtle than can be measured by the differences in intelligence quotients. He will be skeptical about the usefulness of any educational panacea based on uniform requirements, or any system which assumes uniform rates of development. And he will be fully and humbly conscious of the immense complexity of the human being, and therefore of education."

What happens to these individual differences during four years at Bennington? Is there finally a typical Bennington graduate? This we may doubt for the college has been fairly free of homogenizing influences, but that has not deterred critics and partisans from generalizing. Agnes Rogers

Allen insisted that Bennington turned out two types. The wife of Bennington trustee Frederick Lewis Allen, she did not share her husband's admiration for the college. During World War II she was in charge of the Office of War Information in New York and hired a few Bennington graduates. These she told me later were either brainy or arty. The brainy young women quickly completed their assignments and spent the rest of the day working on crossword puzzles or socializing with other employees. The arty ones were put to work filing but they were severely handicapped in the chore since they were, Mrs. Allen insisted, unfamiliar with the alphabet. Without impugning the precision of Mrs. Allen's memory, we may note that she had limited data for judging Bennington graduates, was herself a devout alumna of Vassar, and may have resented sharing her husband with Bennington. Without being chauvinist we can insist at least that all art majors were not illiterate.

Partisan in the opposite direction, Evan Jones, husband of Judith Bailey '45, once made a study of Bennington's earliest students. Relying on abundant data but no statistical tables, he declared flatly that the Bennington degree "has a meaning beyond the standards and demands of the classroom; with it goes a seemingly irrepressible ability to put thought into action at home and abroad."

In the fall of 1937 *Life* magazine made a study of Bennington students as they were photographed by Alfred Eisenstaedt. *Life* was impressed by the long winter recess during which students worked "on newspapers, in laboratories, in theatres, in social-service bureaus" and by the absence of restraints as students pursued their education. They "wear what they please, say what they think, do as they like...That is what gives Bennington an air unlike any other, what marks the Bennington girl with an earnestness and a mature enthusiasm rare in United States colleges."

Generalizations about faculty members are equally risky and Eurich was undoubtedly wise in attempting no evaluation of their performance. Judged by their advanced degrees the Bennington teachers would score low since the training of artists, dancers and musicians owed little to the university, and literature was taught by men and women whose reputation rested on their writings, not their degrees. What can be said with assurance is that the faculty members were young and relatively inexperienced; they put in more hours teaching and counseling than other college teachers; and most of them were active in their fields. Most also would agree that teaching at Bennington was highly educational for them as they associated with colleagues in other disciplines and followed the progress of their counselees outside their own fields.

Eurich had no access to the alumnae appraisal of faculty which every year brought the president evidence of teaching effectiveness. Six months after leaving, graduates and non-graduates were asked to rate the faculty

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

who had taught or counseled them. Faculty were to be given an A if they were so valuable that the college should do everything possible to hold on to them and about a fifth of Leigh's faculty used to receive 80 to 90 percent A's. At the bottom were a few who got no A's, a few B's (adequate) and C's or worse (dispensable) and they had no future at Bennington if improvement was not soon evident. In between, most of us got enough A's and B's to be reappointed, but Leigh and the students knew who the superstars were.

Eurich made no mention of Bennington's trustees but certainly they must be given much of the credit for launching the institution against heavy odds and sustaining it during the Leigh years. The trustees managed to get the college started and then by their money-raising activities — contributing, badgering their friends, organizing benefit luncheons and concerts — enabled Leigh to balance the budget year after year. In spite of the theory that tuition would cover costs, the trustees raised some \$50,000 every year after the last student house was built.

The trustees' commitment to the college was not diminished by the fact that half of them had daughters who would be, were or had been Bennington students. The trustee daughter, Emalea Warner Trentman '36, wrote of her admiration for the early trustees whose "convictions, faith and energies created the brave new world of Bennington College." In Leigh's last year Catherine Davis '39 became a trustee and signalled the eventual displacement of parents by alumnae. That change eliminated trustees who learned about the college from their daughters as well as from the president, though an alumna trustee who sent a son or daughter to Bennington could count on an unimpeachable second opinion.

* * * * *

Anyone assessing the early Bennington might ask how much of it has survived. Nearly half a century has gone by since the college welcomed its first students, and changes have occurred, but the college is still recognizable as the distinctive institution it became under Robert Devore Leigh. Crucial decisions about the college were made by the trustees before they found a president, and most of them have held. The first was its location. In the beginning it was to be in Old Bennington near Dr. Booth's church; then as the minister lost control it was given its present site on the edge of North Bennington with no church in sight, and enticements to merge with distant colleges were ignored.

A second decision, suggested by Hall Park McCullough and never challenged, was that trustees be given seven-year terms so that the board would be spared the somnolency which life membership has been known to entail and the flow of new members would challenge the onset of

corporate complacency.

A third, also sponsored by McCullough, was that students should pay the full cost of their instruction if they could afford it. This enabled the college to open at the bottom of the Depression but it meant that Bennington's tuition then and thereafter would be higher than that of colleges with substantial endowment income. The principle, however, has not saved Bennington's friends and alumni from solicitation because scholarships had to be provided for the relatively impecunious and tuition was never raised fast enough to keep pace with rising costs.

In the beginning it was taken for granted that Bennington would be a college for women. Booth himself had no interest in coeducation and one suspects that on Sunday morning he would want the students to be looking up at him in the high pulpit rather than sideways at each other. In fact the question was hardly raised because the families who founded Bennington were willing to send their daughters — few of their mothers had attended college — but not their sons who were expected to attend their father's alma mater. That decision went unchallenged for nearly 40 years.

Within this framework were fitted the structure and features of Leigh's Educational Plan of 1929 and subsequent alterations and additions. The most obvious changes that have occurred since the 1930s have been the switch to coeducation in the late 1960s, an increase in student enrollment from the original 250 to 600, an enlargement of the faculty from 45 to 75, only two of whom date back to the Leigh era, new buildings and higher fees.

What has persisted is the underlying philosophy and the ways it has been carried out in practice as later presidents have endorsed Leigh's educational pronouncements. Edward J. Bloustein, Bennington's fifth president, remarked in the 1960s that Leigh's statements "still have a very fresh ring" and could have been used "as a source for the revolutionary manifestos recently produced on many campuses..." Upon becoming president in 1977, Joseph S. Murphy circulated copies of Leigh's educational aims for the enlightenment of the faculty, and the latest catalogue affirms that the college remains true to its progressive roots.

The curriculum itself has changed but the divisional structure remains, and the relative position of each division in the whole is now virtually the same as it was in Leigh's last year. In both 1940 and 1980 literature, music and the social sciences were each taught by approximately one-fifth of the faculty; drama and science by about one-tenth of the faculty; the art faculty was down from 16 to 12 percent, the dance faculty up from 4 to 8 percent.

Expensive as it has been, faculty counseling is described as "an integral part of the Bennington education" and continues to provide students with advice, encouragement, criticism, instruction. Whether students see their

BENNINGTON COLLEGE: IN THE BEGINNING

counselors each week or less often, the counselor is the key witness when his or her students' provisional and final plans are considered and when their graduation is discussed.

The Winter Field and Reading Period, first promoted as a way to escape the rigors of Vermont winter, went through changes during the Leigh years as its educational potential became evident, but it was still viewed as "a vacation to be used for serious purposes." Under Lewis Jones the winter recess was renamed the Non-Resident Term, lengthened, raised in status, and given a full-time director. In each decade the supply of jobs for students has varied with the state of the economy and the enterprise of the NRT director. Though the economy was far from booming, all records on job availability were broken in 1978 by the present director, Alice T. Miller. From then to the present more than a thousand jobs have been listed each year and virtually half have offered remuneration ranging from board and room to a decent wage. Consequently, students have had a better chance of spending January and February in work of optimum educational value.

Since the Leigh era, programs of study continue to be designed in the light of each student's aptitude, interests and aims but the college has attempted to counter the tendencies Mrs. Jones called "divisionalism." These tendencies resulted in programs in which the student risked no exploration, did no advanced work outside of her major and graduated with a spotty general education.

Under Lewis Jones the trial major was terminated to weaken the power of any one division over the student's first two years, and every student was required to take basic courses in the arts, literature, political economy and scientific method. Under Frederick Burkhardt that requirement lapsed along with the designation of certain courses as "basic", but an Educational Counseling Committee was charged with the continuous oversight of student programs. Since 1970, exploration has been supported by the expectation that students work in at least four divisions during their first two years and multiple involvement has been assured by the provision that before graduation students will complete a year's study beyond the introductory level in two areas other than their major.

Not content with these provisions, Rush Welter, who teaches history, has proposed that Bennington seek ways to develop in students a plurality of resources for seeing, assessing and moving the world, "resources involving intellect, imagination, sympathy and responsibility." Whether that ambitious goal can be institutionalized, it has always been within reach of Bennington students whose zeal for learning has brought them command of a variety of subjects. Recently two Bennington trustees, graduates of 1937 and 1980, compared notes on their college experience and were fascinated to discover that they were grateful to the college for the

same reason: At Bennington they had acquired skills and resources not only in their major but also in other fields and through the varied experience of four Non-Resident Terms. While neither talked of "moving the world," both had a plurality of resources for continued personal growth and active participation in the human drama.

Shortly before graduating in 1974, Judith Wilson evaluated her college experience in the spring *Quadrille*. While she feared that her college education had taught her to defuse controversy and anaesthetize emotional responses by treating everything abstractly, she ended her statement with these words of hope:

"Just as my education has been elastic and illimitable, I realize that the non-academic world holds incalculable opportunities. It is this sense of the world outside of college that invites me. I will judge my education useful if it facilitates my adjustment to and participation in the world as an endless adventure, an uninhibited exploration of new ground, a constant prospecting for the ores that make life precious: Freedom, insight and integrity.

Robert Devore Leigh would have agreed.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Robert R. R. Brooks and I were graduate students at Yale before I came to Bennington and he went to Williams. Our 50-year friendship continues. He had heard of Bennington College years before it opened because his uncle, Dr. Vincent Ravi Booth, was its founder. In the 1950s, Brooks was a trustee of the college and more recently he promoted the publication of this book by fund-raising and editorial services. I am grateful also for his Foreword.

Barbara Jones, known to alumnae as teacher and president's wife between 1932 and 1947, has generously written an introduction which includes her own reminiscence of the early years and her appreciation of Bennington as an educator of the faculty. I am indebted to her for her kind words and for observations contained in her book on the college published in 1946.

The thankless task of editing an untidy manuscript and seeing it through the press has been performed with style and grace by Tyler Resch, already over-burdened as director of publications. The arduous job of indexing was carried out by Caroline Drake of Hoosick Falls, N.Y., whose years as a professional librarian are evident in the result.

This volume owes much to those who responded to appeals in *Quadrille* and I thank them as primary sources. Most were graduates and thought well of the college. I suppose a true history would require the testimony of disgruntled dropouts. But even so, the message is not that there is a Bennington type, uncritical of alma mater, but that among the alumnae one finds endless variety, positive values and a refreshing candor.

Finally I warmly thank those friends whose financial contributions have removed the final obstacle to publication. Mr. and Mrs. William R. Scott not only donated generously but Bill also offered decorative typographical ornaments from his own collection. Other contributors whose names were available at the time of publication were Helena Coombs, Mrs. Burton Fisher, Mrs. William V. Skidmore, Mrs. Derek E. Till, Mr. and Mrs. Arnold Ginsburg, Robert R. R. Brooks, Vincent V. R. Booth and my daughter, Joan Brockway Esch.

T.P.B.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

The typescript from which this book was printed is on file in the Crossett Library. It contains inter-linear note or footnotes relating to the text. For the nine years before the college opened the principal sources are.

Vincent Ravi Booth: *Brief History*, typescript, 1944.
Mr. and Mrs. Hall Park McCullough: *Recollections*, Bennington College Bulletin v. 25, No. 2.
Lawrence A. Cremin: *Transformation of the School; Progressivism in American Education*, 1961.
Colony Club Meeting, 1924, typescript.
Educational Conference of 1924, typescript.
Miss Amy Kelly: *Curriculum to Build a Mental World*, 1927.
Andrew Bongiorno: *Ernest Hatch Wilkins, Memorial Minute*
Vincent Ravi Booth: *Effort to Secure \$5,640,500 to Establish Bennington College*, 1926.
Bennington College, a Prospectus, 1928 (Swan-Kilpatrick)
Bennington College, a New College of Liberal Arts for Women, March 1929. (Swan-Kilpatrick).
The Educational Plan for Bennington College, December, 1929. (Robert D. Leigh).
Trustee minutes from 1925.
Bennington Banner
New York Times.

For the nine years between the opening and Dr. Leigh's resignation in 1941 the principal sources are:

Letters from alumnae.
Faculty minutes 1932-1941.
Minutes of the Community Council, the Central Committee and the Student Educational Policies Committee.
Alumnae news in College Bulletins, *Alumnae Quarterly* and *Quadrille*.
e. e. cummings: *Selected Letters*, 1969.
Wallace Fowlie: *Pantomime*, 1951.
Barbara Jones: *Bennington College: The Development of an Educational Idea*,

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

1946.

Mabel Barbee Lee: *Gardens in My Life*, 1970.

Edwin A. Park: *History of the Art Division*, typescript 1944.

Frederick Rudolph: *The American College and University*, 1962.

Henry Simon: *Report on the Literature Division*, 1939.

Margot Suter: Excerpts from Diary.

Logan Wilson: *The Academic Man*, 1942.

INDEX

- Aaron, Daniel, 170
 Aaron, Janet Summers, 87
The Academic Man, 91
Accent, 181
 Actors' Cooperative, 152
 Adams, Leonie, 92, 172, 173, 174
The Adding Machine, 141
 Adelphi College, 170
Adventure of America, 179
 Albers, Josef, 116
 Alford, Emily Sweetser, 146, 151, 180
 All-American opera, 157
 Allen, Agnes Rogers, 224, 225
 Allen, Frederick Lewis, 117, 179, 216, 225
 Alumnae Association, 101
Alumnae Quarterly, 106
 Alumnae Scholarship Fund, 101
 Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union, 204
 American Association of University Women, 107
 American Institute of Dalcroze Eurythmics, 125
 American Laboratory Theatre, 142, 152
 American Nurses Association, 190
 American Psychological Association, 206
 American School for the Ballet, 132
American Sociological Review, 206
 American Sociological Society, 201
 American Student Union, 82
 American Univ. (Beirut), 80
 Ames and Dodge, 26, 33, 46, 49, 51, 66
 Amherst College, 198, 202
 Angell, James Rowland, 7, 43, 91
 Ansley Publication Prize, 181
 Antioch College, 18
Antony and Cleopatra, 174
 Appia, Adolph, 148
 Archibald, Anne Gardiner, 123
 Architectural League Show, 141
 Aristotle, 142, 145
 Arizona, Univ. of, 157, 159
 Arnett, Trevor, 38
 Association of American Colleges, 163
Atlantic Monthly, 56
 Aue, Margaret, 158
 Aydelotte, Frank, 27
 Bach, Johann Sebastian, 162
 Bach Cantata Club, 166
 Baer, Helena, 108
 Baker, George, 139
 Bales, William, 128, 135, 137
 Ballantine, Arthur, 45
 Ballou, Esther Williamson, 130, 156, 161, 165, 166
 Balmer, Adolph, 111
 Barbee-Lee, Mabel, 49, 56, 57, 67, 84, 85, 87, 106-107, 110
 Barber, Orion M., 14
 Bard College, 144, 153, 165, 179, 187, 213, 220
 The Barn, 58, 62, 66, 69, 96, 97, 98, 117, 118, 184, 195
 Barnard College, 9, 125, 129, 172
 Barnard, Eunice, 183
 Barnett, Faith Richardson, 135
 Barro Colorado Island, 195
 Bartok, Bela, 162
 Barzun, Lucretia, 128
 Battle of Bennington, 1777, 66
 Baudelaire, Charles P., 80
 Bauhaus, 114, 116
 Beebe, Marjorie Fisk, 104
 Beethoven, Ludwig, 162
 Behr, Marcia Ward, 143, 147, 149, 150, 153
 Belitt, Ben, 135, 136, 137, 148, 150, 173
 Bell Telephone Laboratories, 187
 Bellevue Hospital, 195
 Bennett, Maria Zimbalist, 162
 Bennett, Mary Jane Sheerin, 162
 Bennington Award for Achievement, 182
 Bennington Banner, 9, 50, 62, 130, 140, 205
 Bennington Battle Day, 49
 Bennington Battlefield, 46, 47
Bennington College, a new College of Liberal Arts for Women, 33
 Bennington College Catalogue
 Announcement for the first year, 53
 Announcement for the third year, 157
Bennington College: The Development of an Educational Idea, 202
Bennington College Publication, 176
 Bennington Festival, 151
 Bennington Guild, 164
 Bennington School of the Arts, 129, 151
 Bennington School of the Dance, 110, 127, 129, 130, 131, 132, 134, 136, 137, 161, 163
 Bennington School of the Dance (Mills College), 129, 134
 Bennington Survey, 200-201, 205
 Bennington United Front, 82
 Berman, Katrina Voorhees, 204, 210
 Bessie, Constance Ernst, 143, 150

- Billings, Robert, 77
 Bingham, 117
 Bird, Dorothy, 128
 Black Mountain College, 116
 Blagden, Dorothea Draper, 155, 156
 Blitstein, Marc, 136
Blood Wedding, 135, 161
 Bloom, Mimi Wallner, 166
 Bloom, Robert, 166
 Bloustein, Edward J., 227
 Boepple, Paul, 163
 Boettjer, Margaret Jones, 204
 Boleslavsky, Richard, 142
 Bongiorno, Andrew, 24
 Boone, Geraldine Babcock, 136-137
 Booth, Katherine, 2
 Booth, Nora, 2
 Booth, Rev. Vincent Ravi, Chapters 1, 2
 passim; 23, 25, 26, 27, 31, 33, 35, 39, 42
 46, 47, 50, 59, 60, 63, 66, 67, 79, 80,
 226, 227
 Booth, Mrs. Vincent Ravi, 2
 Booth (student house), 60
Born Yesterday, 146
 Boston Children's Hospital, 190
 Boston City Hospital, 195
 Boston Dispensary, 190
 Boston University, 1, 131
 Bottomly, Helen, 149
 Boulanger, Nadia, 156
 Bowdoin College, 28, 30, 101, 170
 Bowman, Charlotte, 104
 Boynton, Violet, 106
 Bradford, Lindsay, 61
 Bradley, Mrs. J. Gardner, 61
 Brattleboro Outing Club, 77
The Bridge, 150, 161
 Brockway, Thomas P., vii, viii, x, 95
 198, 199, 215, 216
 Brockway, Jean, 92, 115
 Brooder, 66
 Brookings Institution, 196, 201
 Brooks, Robert R. R., vii,
 Acknowledgments
 Brown, Elizabeth Mills, 176
 Brown, Mary Warner Swan, 101, 204
 Brown Univ., 13
 Browne and Nichols, 123
 Brownell, Barbara Haywood, 193, 195
 Bryn Mawr College, 171, 201
 Bryn Mawr School, 12, 17
 Budapest Quartet, 78, 162
 Buffalo, Univ. of, 23
 Buhler, Carlos, 159, 160
 Building Committee, 51
 Bunting, Henry, 188
 Bunting, Mary Ingraham, 77, 187, 189, 191
 Burgess, Mary Steele, 206
 Burke, Kenneth, 94
 Burkhardt, Frederick H., 55, 73, 104, 228
 Burnett, Adele Bookman, 135
 Burr and Burton Seminary, 186
 Butler, Courtland, 188
 Butler, Jeanne, 92
 California, Univ. of, 170
 Calla Travis School of Dance, 138
 Cambridge School, 123, 190
 Cambridge University, 97
 Cape Playhouse, 149
 Capen, Samuel, 24, 40
 Carnegie Corporation, 40, 42
 Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement
 of Teaching, 88
 Carnegie Institute of Technology, 141
 Carter, Ruth D., 155
*Censoring the Conduct of College
 Women*, 56
 Central Committee, see Judicial
 Committee
The Changing College, 24
 Chapin, Maria Brown, 9
 Chapin School, 89, 129, 132
 Chapin Social Status Scale, 221
 Chapman, Dwight, 200
 Chapman, Jane Buckley, 200
 Chassell, Joseph O., 22, 108, 109, 211,
 212, 215
 Cherau, Hoima Forbes, 177
 Chicago, Univ. of, 18, 23, 24, 172, 195,
 198, 201
 Chicago Art Institute, 141
 Chicken Coop, 145, 158, 165, 199, 213
 Children's Environments Advisory
 Service, 135
Chimera, 182
 Cleveland Play House, 141, 149
 Colby Junior College, 2-3
 Cold Spring Harbor, N.Y., Biological
 Laboratory, 195
 Coleman, Frank, 72, 188
 Colgate, James C. 2, 14, 15, 20, 21, 22
 44, 45, 46, 59, 60

- Colgate, Mrs. James C., 2-5
 Colgate family, 3, 4, 11, 45, 46, 51
 Colgate site, 3, 45, 46, 79
 Colgate Univ., 2, 46
 Colgate-Booth brochure, 63
 College Organization bulletin (1934), 103
 Collegiate Cap and Gown Company, 97
 Colony Club, New York City, see Meetings
 Colorado College, 49, 56, 107, 151
 Colum, Padraic, 78
 Columbia Broadcasting System, 165
 Columbia Univ., 18, 24, 25, 28, 42, 47, 52, 58, 92, 106, 109, 167, 170, 173, 181, 182, 184, 200, 201
 — Bureau of Educational Service, 92
 — College of Physicians and Surgeons, 109, 190, 195
 — Council for Research in the Social Sciences, 201
 — Teachers College, 6, 15, 19, 28, 60, 103, 126, 190, 201, 202
 Commencement Ceremony Committee, 95, 96, 100
 Committee of Twenty-One, see Meetings
 Committee on Educational Plans, 30, 34, 37
 Commons building, 51, 62, 66, 78, 111, 117, 143, 144
 Commonwealth Fund, 42
 Communist-front organization, 132
 Communist Party, 81, 132, 197
 Community Council, 65, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 76, 81, 87, 140
Community Life, see *Educational Plan for Bennington College*
 Comstock, Ada, 7, 8
 Congregational Church, First, Old Bennington, Vt., 1, 2, 67, 79
 Congregational Church, Manchester, Vt., 1
Connecticut College for Women, 187
The Contrast, 150
 Cooper Union, 114
 Cooperative Test Service, Columbia Univ., 106
 Corcoran, Catherine, 110
 Corcoran School of Art, 114
 Concord School of Music, 155
 Converse College, 167
 Cooke, Nancy Reynolds, 77
 Cooperative Store, 212
 Copland, Aaron, 162
 Cornell Univ., 7, 186, 192, 195
 — Medical Center, 195
 Coryell, Dorothea Smith, 133, 134
 Coss, John J., 24, 25, 47, 61, 184
 Cousins, Dorothy McWilliams, 148, 152
 Cowell, Henry, 162
 Craig, Gordon, 148
Craig's Wife, 140
 Craine, Asho Ingersoll, 75, 87, 197, 207
 Crane, Hart, 150
 Crickett Hill, 62, 66, 199
Cripple Creek Days, 107
 Crowell, David, 144, 148
 Crowell, Joan Lewisohn, 177
 Crumley, Antoinette Larrabee, 175
 Cummings, E. E., 78, 170, 174
 Cummings, Mildred Hubbard, 172, 177, 181
 Cushman, Hall, 143
Cushman's Colonial Creations, 65
 Dartmouth College, 198
 Davies, Thurston, 137, 151
 Davies, Mrs. Thurston, see Hill, Martha
 Davis, John W., 15
 Davis, Virginia Todahl, 148, 153
 Day, Gardner, 80
 De Bakey, Michael, 191
 DeGray, Julian, 68, 155-158, 162, 163, 167, 202
 DeGray, Margaret Patterson, 46, 80, 202, 210, 215
 Dehne, Marian Sieck, 209
 Deming, Barbara, 176, 180
 Deming, Vida Ginsberg, 134, 135, 145, 147, 151, 152
 Dennis, James S., 46, 143
 Denniston, Nancy Fahnestock, 136
 Department of Education, 60
 DePauw Univ., 106
 Dessoff Choirs, 163
 Dewey, John, 17, 78, 92
 Dewey-Kilpatrick school of progressive education, 22
 DeWilde, Louise, 52
 Diller-Quaile School of Music, 9
 Dimock, Gladys Ogden, 203, 207, 209
 Dimock, Marshall, 216, 218
Divine Comedy, 80
 Don Cossack Chorus, 78, 162
 Donovan, Virginia, 172, 177, 178
 Dorset Players, 142

- Dos Passos, John, 174
 Dreier, Louisa Richardson, 95, 98
 Dreiser, Theodore, 170, 174, 179
 Drysdale, Alexander, 143
 Duke Univ., 172
 Duncan, Isadora, 125
 Durant, Kenneth, 172
 Earley, Emily Hornblower, 204
 Early Childhood Center, 198
East Lynne, 151
 Eastman, Max, 174
 Eastman School of Music, 157
 Eddy, Mrs. James, 3, 4
 Edison, Edna, 172
 Edgerton, Eleazer, 66
 Edgewood School, 125, 127, 158
 Edinburgh, Univ. of, 97
 Edmondson, Yvette Hardman, 191, 193
 Educational Counseling Committee, 228
*The Educational Function of the
Municipal Research Bureaus*, 198
*Educational Plan for Bennington
College*, 35-41, 53, 55, 63, 83, 91, 103,
125, 227
 Edward Clark Crossett Library, 106
*Effort to Secure \$5,640,500 to Establish
Bennington College*, 20
 Eisenstaedt, Alfred, 225
Eleanor of Aquitaine, 30
Electra, 150
 Eliot, T. S., 170, 174
 Elizabeth Harrington Dickinson Science
Building, 193
 Elliot, Mrs. Arthur, 142
 Else, Georgianna Greene, 124
 Emery, Andree, 201
 Engst, Erwin, 192
 Engst, Joan Hinton, 191, 192, 194
 Erickson, Isabella Perrotta, 167
 Erickson, Virgil, 167
 Ernst, Morris, 78-79
 Erskine, John, 94
*Essential Features of the Bennington
Program* see *Educational Plan for
Bennington College*
 Ethical Culture (Riverdale, N.Y.), 132
 Eurich, Alvin C., 69, 77, 213, 221, 222, 223,
224, 225, 226
 Eurich evaluation, see Eurich, Alvin C.
 Ewing, Ruth Dewing, 204, 210
 Executive Committee, 11, 44
 Executive Secretary to the College, 104
 Faculty Council, 52
 Faculty Row, 118
 Faculty Salary and Tenure Plan, 217
Fairview, see Jennings Hall
 Farmer-Labor party, 132
 Federal Theatre Project, 150
 Feeley, Helen Webster, 114
 Feeley, Paul, 94, 114
 Fels, William C., 99
 Fergusson, Francis, 92, 133, 139-153
 passim, 161, 170, 171, 174, 175, 178, 180,
181, 214-216
 Fergusson, Marion, 94, 136, 142, 144,
145, 146
 Fermi, Enrico, 192
 Finckel, George, 166
 Finckel, Marianne Wilson, 166
 Fineman, Irving, 93, 170, 175, 179,
197, 205
Finnegan's Wake, 182
 Fisher, Dorothy Canfield, 16, 50, 154, 155
 Fisher, Janet Austrian, 207, 210
 Fitzgerald, F. Scott, 175
The Five Fold Mesh, 173
 Flanagan, Hallie, 150, 153
 Flaubert, Gustave, 179
 Fleisher, Zipporah Shill, 186
 Flexner, Abraham, 45
 Flexner-Hauck investigation, 216
 Ford, Betty Bloomer, 138
 Foreign Policy Association, 196
 Foster, Catharine Osgood, 171, 172, 174,
175, 176, 177, 181, 182
 Foster, Thomas, 171
 Foster, William Trufant, 26
Foundations of Sociology, 205
 Fowle, Wallace, 69, 80, 92, 94, 143, 151,
153, 169, 172, 174, 177
 Frankel, Margaret Stein, 177
 Franklin, Mrs. George S., 11, 15, 21, 26,
30, 51, 61, 62, 110
 Freeman, Lucy Greenbaum, 205
 French, Altossa Herring, 204
 Frost, Frances, 170
 Frost, Robert, 16, 51, 66, 94, 170
 Fuller, Barbara, 173
 Fuller, Buckminster, 78
 Furman, Arlie, 159
 Gamble, Prudence Bredt, 130, 131
 Gandhi, Mohandas, 100
 Garcia Lorca, Frederico, 135, 150, 161

- The Gardens in My Life*, 107
 Garfield, Harry A., 28, 29, 184
 Garrett, Louise Steger, 93, 184, 185, 186, 187, 195
 Garrett, Mary, see Woodburn, Mary
 Garrett, Paul, 52, 89, 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189
 Gaus, John M., 42, 198
 Gavin, Frank, 79
 Gaylord, Mary Fletcher Wardwell, 140
 Geisha, 134
 General Education Board, 30, 45
General Problems in the Art Major, 120
 General Theological Seminary, 79
 Gifford, Honora Kammerer, 143, 153
 Gildersleeve, Virginia, 9
Gilfeather, 172
 Gillman, Leonard, 166
 Gillman, Reba Marcus, 166
 Glass, Edward, 144
 Golden Spur Award, 107
 Golfing, Francis, 78
 Goodman Theatre, 141
 Graduates Office, 101
 Graham Concert Group, 126
 Graham, Martha, 125-132, 135, 136, 138
 Graham, Stewart, 143
 Granberry, Diana Allyn, 122
 Grant, Fred, 143
 Grant, Marion Hepburn, 178, 181
 Graves, Frank Pierpont, 6, 7
 Graves, C. Q., 143
 Graves, Luther, 143
 Gray, Harold, 71, 170, 171, 174, 175, 178, 179, 218
 Green, Fred, 111
 Green, Wesley, 111
 Green, Mrs. Wesley, 111
 Green Mountain Flyer, 64, 126
 Gregory, Mary, 123
 Grieg, Edvard H., 163
 Griffiths, Jacquelin, 104
 Griswold, Margaret A., 106
 Guiterman, Arthur, 170
 Guiton, Jean, 70, 76, 94, 114, 142, 169, 171, 172
 Guggenheim Fellowship, 157, 170, 172, 182
Guns and Butter, 204
 Gutman, Sonya Rudikoff, 207, 209
 Haigh, Isabel Emery, 162
 Hait, Ida Mae, 98, 110
 Hall, Charles H., 11, 15, 21
 Hall, Elizabeth, 74, 106
 Hall, Emma Swan, 176
 Hall, Hiland, 3
 Halle, Univ. of, 171
 Hambleton, Merrell Hopkins, 148, 153
 Hankins, Margaret, 104
 Hanks, Jane, 199
 Hanks, Lucien, 182, 199
Harper's, 102, 117, 181
 Harvard Alumni Bulletin, 40
 Harvard Botanic Garden, 186
 Harvard Film Foundation, 186
 Harvard Univ., 4, 40, 50, 97, 121, 123, 142, 170, 171, 172, 183, 185, 186, 191, 200, 210
 Harwood, Walton, 143
 Haswell, Anthony, 205
 Hauschka, Elsa Voorhees, 81, 165, 176, 181
 Hayes, Helen, 140
 Headmistresses Association, 7, 9
 Healy, Marjorie, 111
 Healy, Robert E., 14, 15
 Heinrich, Barbara Willis, 195
 Held, John, Jr., 150
 Hellman, Katherine Henry, 152
 Hemingway, Ernest, 138, 173
 Hendricks, Dorothea, 104
 Herring, Hubert, 102
 Herring, E. Pendleton, 197
 Hess, Carolyn, 111
 Hewat, Lydia Vaill, 143, 149, 150
 Hill, Margaret, 110
 Hill, Martha, 76, 139, 150, 151, 161, Chapter 16 *passim*.
 Hill, Polly Childs, 135-136
 Hindemith, Paul, 78, 162
 Hinshaw, Lillias Dulles, 162
 Hinton, Carmelita, 191
 Hirsch, Elsa, 92, 115
 Hirsch, Stefan, 94, 114, 117, 120-123
 Hirschberg, Eleanor Mindling, 150, 151, 153
 Hirsh, Mildred Wile, 131, 200
History of the Art Division, 115
 Holden, Mrs. Arthur, 5, 46, 61, 104
 Holden, A. John, 104
 Holden, Constance Wigglesworth, 123
 Holden, E. H., 15
 Holden, Polly Bullard, 45, 104
 Holden, Waldo, 143
 Holm, Hanya, 128-129, 132, 133
 Hoosac School, 79

- Hoover, Herbert C., 197
Hopkins, Gerard Manley, 136
Hopkins, Mary, 106
Horst, Louis, 131, 132, 161
Hoshor, Anne Newhall, 187, 190, 194
Howe, Carleton, 143
Howe, Frank, 205
Huckleberry Finn, 151
Hull, Morton D., 15, 21, 45, 47, 48, 61
Human Development Committee, 199
Humphrey, Doris, 128, 129
Humphrey-Weidman Group, 128
Humphreys, Georgina Hazeltine, 204
Hutchins, Robert Maynard, 24, 39
Hutchison, Mrs. Martha Brooks, 51
Hutton, Goodall, 143
Huxley, Aldous, 174
Huyck, Edmund N., 15, 21, 25-26
Ibsen, Henrik, 150
The Idea of a Theatre, 152
Imandt, Mary Kellett, 195
Imperial Univ. (Tokyo), 179
Industrial Democracy and the Men's Clothing Industry, 204
Information for Entering Students, 64
Ingraham, Laura Jennings, 195
Institute for Advanced Study (Princeton), 213, 217
Institute of International Studies, Geneva, 50
Institute of Politics (Williamstown), 50
Intercollegiate Music Guild of America, 165
Introduction to Dance, 127
Introduction to French Literature, 174
Iowa, Univ. of, 149
It's Later Than You Think, 107
Ives, Ruth L., 167
Ivy League schools, 7, 12, 56
Jackson, Faith Reyher, 132-133
Jackson, Mrs. Percy, 115
James, Elizabeth Zimmerman, 143, 150, 151, 152, 153
Jennings family, 45, 46, 52, 111
Jennings, Frederic B., 45, 111
Jennings, Mrs. Frederic B., 30, 49, 52
Jennings Hall, 145, 165, 199, 213
Jerome, William Travers, 51
Jester, Ralph, 93, 114, 139
John Price Jones Corporation, 22, 25, 30, 31
Johns Hopkins Univ., 184, 187, 195
Johnson, Alvin, 141
Johnson, Henry, 159, 160, 167, 168
Jones, Barbara (Mrs. Lewis W.), vii-x, 68, 73, 74, 79, 84, 93, 103, 187, 196-198, 200, 202, 211, 212, 218, 222, 224, 228
Jones, Catharine, 104
Jones, Evan, 225
Jones, Judith Bailey, 225
Jones, Lewis Webster, x, 68, 73, 74, 89, 92, 93, 95, 103, 109, 132, 152, 189, 196-199, 202-204, 208, 210, 211, 213, 214, 215, 216, 218, 220, 228
Jones, Myra, 104, 105
Jones, Ralph, 105
Jones, Robert Edmond, 148
Journal of Higher Education, 193
Joyce, James, 171, 174, 176, 179
Judicial Committee, 73
Juilliard School of Music, New York, 135, 137
Julius Rosenwald Fund, 42
Junior Division, 36, 53, 119
Junior Miss, 153
Kandinsky, Wassily, 115, 116
Kansas State Teachers College, 125
Kastenbein, Clarence, 143
Keller, Elizabeth Reed, 210
Kellogg School of Physical Education, 125
Kelly, Amy, 13, 17, 18-19, 23, 26, 29, 39, 60
Kennedy, Gail, 202
Kent, Frederick, 42
Keppel, Frederick P., 40
Kilpatrick, William Heard, 23, 25, 26, 27, 31, 32, 33, 35, 37, 38, 39, 42, 44, 45, 46, 47, 53, 60-63, 92, 98, 100, 183, 202
Kind Lady, 143
King, Grace, 76, 126-127
King, John Fitch, 184
The King and the Duke, 151, 161
Kirkpatrick, Hope Miller, 159
Kirkpatrick, Ralph, 159
Klavun, Elizabeth Beebe, 122, 146
Knapp, Ellen, 123
Knapp, Frederick, 111
Knapp, Winnie (Mrs. Frederick), 111
King, Martin Luther, 133
Kinsolving, Arthur Lee, 80
Kouwenhoven, John, 179-180, 214, 216
Krob, Russell, 114
Lake Placid Club, 110

- Landon, Alfred M., 207
 "Langanlit", 174
 Lange, Hans, 163-164
 Lauterer, Arch, 71, 92, 114, 122, 133, 135, 137, 141-142, 144-146, 148, 149, 151-152, 180, 213
 Lauterer, Helen, 92, 95-96, 99, 115, 130, 141, 145-146, 148, 149
 Lauterer, Myra Rush, 149
 Lazarsfeld, Paul, 206
 Lee, Gypsy Rose, 150
 Lee, Roger I., 196
 Leger, Fernand, 122
 Leigh, Helen, 125
 Leigh, Mildred Boardman (Mrs. Robert D.), 26, 28-29, 38, 52, 65, 92, 103-106, 107-109, 211-212, 214, 218-219
 Leigh, Robert Devore, appointed president 25-26; Educational Plan 35-40; on faculty 52-53; statement of aims 53-54; on pets 71-72; total education 75; on religion 79-81; on tenure 89-90; on faculty 91-94; resignation 211-219
 Leigh prospectus, see *Essential Features of the Bennington Program*
 Leonard, Elizabeth Lindeman, 132
 Leslie, Mrs. Gladys Y., 58-59, 105-106
 Levin, Louis, 143
 Lewis, Sinclair, 170, 174
 Lewisohn, Ludwig, 174
 Life, 225
 Limon, Jose, 128, 135
 Lindeman, E. C. 201
 Little Carnegie Hall, 165
 Livingston, Barbara Ramsay, 175, 180
 Livingston, Isabella Lee, 118
 Lloyd, Norman, 161
 LoMele, Betty Wheeler, 121
 Lorca, Federico Garcia, see Garcia Lorca, Federico
 Look, Virginia Keene, 126
 Lorenz, Franz, 163
 Louvain, Univ. of, 190
 Lowe, Carol Channing, 136, 153
 Lowell, Elizabeth Shurcliff, 98
 Lowell, Mariana, 94, 155-159
 Luening, Otto, 94, 137, 142, 153-155, 157-164, 167, 168
 Luening, Mrs. Ethel, 157, 159
 Lundberg, George, 193, 201, 202, 203, 205, 206, 208-209
 Lurcat, Jean, 122
 Lynd, Helen, 42
 Lynd, Robert, 42, 201
 Lynn, Molly Howe, 134
 Lyon, Mary, 21
 Macbeth, 152, 180
 MacCormick, Austen, 31
 MacDowell Colony, 170
 MacIver, R. M., 201
 MacKnight, Jill Anderson, 140
 McBride, Carol Haines, 166
 McBride, Robert, 159, 163, 166
 McCall Mission, 3, 6
 McCamy, James, 92, 198, 199, 204, 212
 McCamy, Julia, 92, 187, 198, 202
 McCullough, Edith Arthur van Benthuyssen, 3, 5-8, 11, 13-15, 17, 20, 21, 23-27, 29, 30, 38, 43, 45, 47, 50, 52, 58-64, 202
 McCullough, Elizabeth, 109
 McCullough, John G., 2-3, 163
 McCullough, Hall Park, 2, 3, 7, 11, 13, 14, 15, 20, 21, 22, 24, 26, 38, 45, 46, 47, 52, 59, 61, 62, 67, 91, 100, 104, 105, 226-227
 McCullough family, 11, 46, 52, 105
 McGuire, Margaret, 112
 McGuire, Murray, 111-112
 McCracken, Henry N., 44
 Madame Bovary, 174
 Magnusson, Margaret Lawsing, 206, 209
 Major Barbara, 141
 Malon, Ray, 152
 Mann, Thomas, 176
 Manning, Katharine, 128
 Marine Biology Laboratory (Bermuda), 185
 Marriage of Figaro, 98
 Martha Hill Workshop, 138
 Martin, Denise Underwood, 200
 Martin, John, 125, 137-138
 Marzola, Marie Galyn Winter, 162
 Mass in C Minor, 163
 Mathews, Elizabeth Uptegrove, 99
 Matthay, Tobias, 155, 158
 Matthay School, 155
 Mattison, Elizabeth Alford, 185
 Mattison, William, 185
 May, Joan, 186-187
 May Day parade, 132
 Mead, Margaret, 85
 Meader, James, 43
 The Medium, 153, 166-167

- Meetings
 At Mrs. Eddy's, 3-4; At the Colgates', 4;
 Committee of Twenty-One, 5-6; At the
 Colony Club, 7-10; Educators, 12-13;
 Educators, 1930, 42-43; Trustees, 1930,
 44-45
- Memorial Minute*, 25
- Mestre, Harold, 213
- Metropolitan Opera School, 131
- Meyer, Ernestine Cohen, 114, 118
- Miami, Univ. of, 155
- Michigan, Univ. of, 149
- Middlebury College, 2, 3, 4, 12, 14, 15
- Mies van der Rohe, Ludwig, 116
- Milton, John, 175
- Miller, Alice T., 228
- Mills College, 134, 151
- Minnesota, Univ. of, 201
- Moholy-Nagy, Ladislaus, 116
- Moll, Gretchen Hutchins, 190
- Moody, Paul D., 2, 4, 12
- Moore, Harriet Grannis, 122, 123
- Moore, Mildred, 149
- Morgenthau, Jean, 149
- Morize, Andre, 172
- Morrison, Ralph, 104
- Moscow Art Theatre, 142, 145
- Moselsio, Herta, 115, 116
- Moselsio, Simon, 92, 114-115, 117-118, 185
- Mount Anthony site see Colgate site
- Mount Holyoke College, 4, 21, 43, 170, 171
- Much Ado About Nothing*, 147
- Muma, Edith Noyes, 101
- Munger, Elizabeth Evans, 186, 191, 194-195
- Munroe, Vernon, 45
- Murphy, Joseph S., 99, 227
- Murray, George, 112
- Museum of Modern Art, 123
- Music for Children*, 166
- Nance, Ruth Cleveland, 124
- Nash, Edward, 111
- Nash, Mrs. Edward, 111
- The Nation*, 173, 181
- National Book Award, 182
- National Committee on the Costs of
 Medical Care, 196
- National Education Association, 107
- National Labor Relations Act, 204
- Neebson, Lyda, 157
- Neighborhood Playhouse, 149
- Neilson, William A., 4, 7, 8, 44, 50
- Nelson, Kathleen, 111
- Nelson, Peter, 111
- Neruda, Pablo, 173
- New Backgrounds for a New Age*, 115-116
- New Dance League, 132
- New Deal*, 176
- New Directions*, 181
- New Musical Quarterly Recordings, 163
- The New Publication*, 176
- New School for Social Research, 113, 132,
 133, 141, 171
- The New Vision*, 116
- New York (City), Dept. of Health, 191
- New York City Center Ballet, 137
- New York Herald-Tribune, 166, 183
- New York Public Library, 58
- New York Times, 62, 125, 138
- New York Univ., 126, 127, 129, 132,
 162
- New York Univ., Washington Square
 College, 172, 173
- New Yorker*, 181
- Newcomb, Theodore, 132, 199, 200, 203,
 205-209, 212
- Newhall, Mr. & Mrs. Richard, 29
- Nielsen, Florence Lovell, 152
- Nine Pine Street*, 143
- Noah*, 135
- Non-Resident Term, 37, 85, 129-130, 135,
 136, 185, 221-224
- Norris, Barbara Coffin, 165
- North Bennington Bank, 105
- Northfield Seminary, 2
- Northwestern Univ. School of Speech, 144
- Nowak, Lionel, 78
- Nursery School, 92, 131-132, 198-200
- Oberlin College, 13, 21, 24, 25, 184, 200
- Obey, Andre, 135
- O'Brian, Michael, 110
- Ochsner, Alton, 191
- Office of War Information, 225
- Of Thee I Sing*, 150
- Ogborn, Jane, 93, 139-140, 141-142
- Ogburn, William, 201
- Ojai School (See Edward Yeomans)
- Oklahoma, Univ. of, 149
- Old Charleston*, 114
- Old First Church, see Congregational
 Church, First Old Bennington, Vt.
- Old Virginia in Block Prints*, 114
- Oregon, Univ. of Medical School, 108
- Ornstein, Leo, 158
- Osborne, Wilmoth, 77, 106-109, 184, 211
- Othello*, 149

- Ouspenskaya, Maria, 142, 143, 144
 Oxford, Univ. 97, 142, 170, 171, 198
 Page, Arthur, 61, 104, 216
 Park, Edwin A., 53, 66, 113-117, 120-121
 Park, Frances (Bernard), 12-13, 215
 Parker, Gail T., 95
Partisan Review, 181
Peking Chronicle, 134
 Pennoyer, Cecily Henderson, 137
 Peoples Republic of China, 192
 Peplau, Hildegard, 189
 Performing Arts Center, 165
 Perkins, Frances, 81
 Perry, Ralph Barton, 40
 Perry, Thomas, 72, 188
Persistence and Change, 207
 Perrine, Mary, 148, 153
 Peterborough Playhouse, 143, 144, 149
 Petersen, William, 110
 Petri, Egon, 78, 162
 Philadelphia Domestic Science School, 110
 Philharmonic Symphony Chamber Orchestra, 163-164
 Phillips, Georgianna, 142, 143
 Phillips Gallery, Washington, D.C., 114
 Phoenix Theatre, 153
 Pike, Stanley, 105
 Pinney, E. J., 51
Pioneers, 136
 Pirandello, Luigi, 150
 Pittaway, Rudolph, 158, 159
 Pitts, Jane D., 124
 Plumb, George, 143
 Polk, Frank L., 15
 Poole, Mrs. Ernest C., 61
 Poor, Anne, 122
 Poor, Henry Varnum, 122
 Porter, Katherine A., 174
 Portland State Univ., School of Social Work, 132
Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, 174
 Post, Anne Bretzfelder, 123
 Potter, Alice Otis, 123
 Pound, Ezra, 170
 Powell, Wilson M., 15
 Pratt, James B., 80
 Primrose, William, 78, 162
 Princeton Univ., 97, 113
 Progressive Education Association, 11, 87
 Proust, Marcel, 176
Public Opinion Quarterly, 206
 Purdue Univ. (See also Music for Children, Reba Marcus), 166
 Putnam, Henry W., 45
 Putney School, 191-192
Pygmalion, 140
Quadrille, 180, 207, 229
R.U.R., 140
 Racine, Jean B., 80
 Radcliffe College, 7, 56, 121
 Radio Corporation of America, 163
 Radio Liberty, 153
 Rappard, William E., 50
 Ravi, Vincenzo, 1
 Ravi-Booth, Vincent, see Booth, Vincent Ravi
Recollections, 5, 6, 14, 18, 24, 59
 Recreation Building, 77, 165
 Recreation Council, 73
 Reduced Tuition Fund, 101
 Reed College, 18, 25, 28, 39, 78, 95, 108, 170
 Remarque, Erich, 174
 Riegger, Wallingford, 166
 Riley, Mary Jones, 202
 Rix, Mary Parker, 149
 Roaring Branch Choral Society, 163
 Robare, Leon, 143
 Robinson, Frances Trott, 189
 Rockefeller fellowship, 196
 Rockefeller Foundation, 38, 42, 221
 Rockwell, Paul, 152
 Roelli, Ximena De Angulo, 177
 Rood, Margot Suter, 78, 80, 87, 95, 98, 126, 140, 181, 203
 Roosevelt, Franklin D., 67, 81, 197, 207
 Ross, Elinor S., 4
 Ross, Lucretius, 15
 Rossmann, Ursula, 93-94, 169, 171
 Rothschild, Ann Meyer, 204
 Rowland, Carolyn Crossett, 115, 118
 Rudolph, Frederick, 65, 93
 Ruggles, Carl, 117, 154, 155
 Runyon, Jean Wood, 188, 190, 193
 Russell Sage College, 2, 43
 Rutgers Univ., Douglass College, 188
 Dept. of Psychiatry and Nursing, 190
 SEPC, see Student Educational Policies Committee
 Sachs, Curt, 128
 Safford, Charles, 80, 156
 Safford, Mrs. Charles, 156
 St. John's College, 170, 198
 St. Lawrence Univ., 80
 St. Paul's Univ. (Tokyo), 179

- Salmond, Felix, 78, 158
 Saltonstall, Cecelia Drinker, 99, 162, 164, 167
 Sanford, Mary, 4, 5
 Sarah Lawrence College, 42, 43, 44, 56, 92, 128, 135, 151, 153, 165, 172
 Sargent, John C., 15
Saturday Review, 93, 181
 Scanlan, Grace Sullivan, 140, 142
 Schindler, Kurt, 53, 91, 93, 140, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158, 159
 Schnabel, Artur, 163
 Schoenberg, Arnold, 162
 Schola Cantorum, 155
School for Wives, 151
 Schubert, Franz P., 156
Science and Culture, 208
 Science Workshop, 188
 Seelye, Laurens, 80
 Seelye, Mary-Averett, 135, 145, 147, 148, 153
 Senior Division, 36, 53, 83, 118, 119, 160-161, 189
Shackled Youth, 5, 140
 Shady Hill, 190
 Shakespeare, William, 150, 175
 Shaw, Gloria Eksergian, 127
 Shaw, Herbert, 81, 143-144
 Shelly, Mary Josephine, 106, 129
 Shelley Memorial Prize, 173
 Sheppard and Enoch Pratt Hospital, 108
 Shingle Cottage, 66
 Shraffts', 110
 Simon, Henry, 178, 181
 Ski Hall of Fame, 77
 Skidmore College, 43
 Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, 121
Silo, 176
 Sinclair, Ronald, 143
 Sloan, Rhoda Scranton, 142, 153
Small Miracle, 142
 Smith, Barbara Howes, 176, 182
 Smith, Bradford, 179, 180
 Smith, Chard Powers, 170
 Smith, Charles, 97, 114, 115, 118
 Smith, Elizabeth Reitell, 151
 Smith, Hannah Coffin, 98, 166
 Smith College, 4, 7, 12, 16, 42, 50, 104, 108, 153
Social Attraction Patterns in a New England Village, 206
The Sociography of Some Community Relations, 206
 Socialist Party, 6, 197
Sociometry, 206
 Sophie Newcomb College, 171
 Sorbonne, 172, 173
 Southern Methodist Univ., 202
Southern Review, 181
 Southern Tenant Farmers Union, 182
 Spargo, John, 5, 67
 Stanford Univ., 108
 Stanislavsky, Konstantin, 151
 Stanwood, Shirley, 153
 Stassevitch, Paul, 155, 156
 Stedman, Susan Winter, 204
 Steele, Catherine McKearin, 180
 Steger Louise, see Garrett, Louise Steger
 Stein, Gertrude, 174
 Steven, Gladys, 74
 Stewart, Walter, 61
 Stokes, Helen Phelps, 6
 Stonington, Catherine Davis, 226
 Stokowski, Leopold, 43, 154
 Strachey, John, 78
 Stravinsky, Igor, 162
 Strongin, Harriet Stern, 156, 165
 Strongin, Theodore, 165
 Strouse, Louise Friedberg, 190, 195
 Student Educational Policies Committee, 74, 84, 93, 103, 120, 165, 178, 181, 194, 212
 Student Personnel Committee, 55, 70, 84, 106-108, 119, 160
 Sulloway, Alison Green, 181
 Surette, Thomas, 155, 157, 168
 Swan, Nathalie Henderson, 15, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 31, 33, 45, 61, 62
 Swan-Kilpatrick prospectus, 22, 38, 63
 Swarthmore College, 7, 18, 27
 Swartz, Gertrude Doughty, 186
 Syracuse Univ., 104, 167
 TRW Systems, 187
 Taggard, Genevieve, ix, 89, 170-172, 175, 180-182
 Tamblyn and Brown, 42
 Tamiris, Helen, 129, 130
 Tamm, Olive Pitkin, 191
 Tass, 172
The Telephone, 153
 Teller, Edward, 192
The Tennessee Valley Authority as a Means of Regulating Power Rates, 204

- Texas, Univ. of, 198
 Thayer, Nika Pleshkova, 148, 153
Theatre Arts Monthly, 144
 Theatre Guild, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143
 Thomas, Norman, 197
 Thommen, Edward, 143, 144, 152, 171
 Thompson, Clara, 108
 Thomson, Virgil, 166
Three Sisters, 147
 Thurber, Margaret Dudley, 74, 208, 209
 Thwing, Charles F., 16
 Tiers, Mary-Lowber, 124
 Till, Mary Berna, 208, 210
Time, 51
 Tone, Benjamin, 152
 Town Hall, 163, 164
 Traphagen School, 141
 Trentman, Emalea Warner, 226
 Trinity Church (Boston), 80
 Trotter, Marion Warner, 162
 Troy, Leonie Adams, 92, 172, 173, 174
 Troy, William, 92, 172-181
 Truman, David B., 198
 Tschorn, Frank, 77, 109, 110, 111
 Tucker, Elizabeth Ketchum, 165, 166
 Tucker, Gregory, 94, 125, 127, 135, 137, 150, 158, 161, 163, 166
 Tucker, William B., 185
 Tugwell, Rexford, 197
 Tulane Univ. Medical School, 191
 Turgenev, Ivan S., 98, 148, 150
 Tyler, Royall, 150
 UNESCO, 171
 Ulrich, Lila, 94, 114, 115, 116
Ulysses, 177
Uncle Vanya, 141
 Underwood, Suzanne Stockard, 124
 Union Theological Seminary, 200
 United Mine Worker's Union, 204
 U.S. Army Nurses Corps, 190
 U.S. Public Health Service, 28
 U.S. War Department, 110
 University Women's Club, N.Y.C., 17
 Valery, Paul, 172
 Varley, Bessie Schonberg, 128, 135
 van Benthuyzen, Ethel, 6
 Vanderbilt, Marion Lambert, 118
 van der Gracht and Kilham, 144
 Varese, Edgar, 154
 Vassar College, 4, 5, 44, 187, 222
 Vermont, Univ. of, 15, 110
 Vermont Academy of Arts and Sciences, 192
 Vermont Dance Company, 128
The Vermont Gazette, 205
 Vermont Music Educators' Association, 167
 Vermont Symphony Orchestra, 163
 Vick, Louise Stockard, 136, 200
 Villon, Francois, 80
 Vince, Connie, 111
 Vince, Stephen, 111
 Virginia, Univ. of, 173
 Medical School, 190
 Visual and Performing Arts Center, 138
 WAVES, 106
 WPA (Vermont), 163
 Wabash College, 184
 Wadsworth, Chester, 143
Waiting for Lefty, 150
 Wallace, Henry, 198
 Wallace, Michel (pseud.), see Fowlic, Wallace
 Walloomsac River, 205
 Warner, Mrs. Irving, 61
 Washington National Ballet Academy, 133
 Wathen-Dunn, Ruth Magnusson, 124
 Wayland, Francis, 14
 Warren, Constance, 44
 Watkins, Helen, 124, 130
 Weaver, Edith Conklin, 176, 177, 181-182
 Weidman, Charles, 129, 130
 Welbourn, Datha Seaverns, 193, 194, 195
 Welch, Mary Eddison, 207
 Wellesley College, 4, 13, 57, 76, 169
 Welling, Fred, 143
 Wells, Henry, 47
 Wells College, 47
 Welter, Rush, 228
 Wesleyan Univ., 1
 Western Reserve Univ., 16, 141
 Western Writers of America, 107
 Westra, Dorothy, 159
What's My Line?, 118
 Whitcomb, James L., 79
 Whittin, Elizabeth Walsh, 204
 Whitman, Walt, 133
 Whitney, Ruth Bailey, 95, 123
 Whitney foundation, 221
 Whittinghill, Maurice, 188
Who's Who of American Women, 209
 Widmayer, Alene Potter, 200
 Wightman, Hazel Hotchkiss, 77
 Wilkins, Ernest H., 20, 24, 25, 39, 40
 Wilkins, Mrs. Ernest H., 25

Williams College, 25, 26, 28, 29, 31, 67,
 72, 73, 77, 80, 93, 101, 102, 104, 111, 150,
 156, 183, 184, 186, 198
 Wills, William H., 197
 Wilson, June Parker, 146
 Wilson, Judith, 229
 Wilson, Logan, 91
 Wilson, Gov. Stanley C., 50
 Winslow School, 131
 Winter Field and Reading Period, 86, 221,
 223, 228
 Wisconsin, Univ. of, 18, 42, 187, 190, 192
 Wistar, Richard, 186, 188
The Women Have Their Way, 141
 Wood, Ben, 106
 Woodburn, Mary Garrett, (Mrs. John),
 106, 109, 110, 184, 186, 212, 215
 Woodworth, Robert, 109, 183-195 *passim*,
 212
 Woolley, Mrs. Clarence M., 61, 164
 Woolley, Mary, 43
 Workers' Defense League, 182
 Wright, Frank Lloyd, 66, 78
Writers on the Left, 170
 Wunderlich, Eva, 171, 174
 Wyant, Rowena, 206
 Y.W.C.A. (New York City)
 East 92nd St. branch, 30
 West Side branch, 132
 (Pittsburgh), 104
 Yaddo Festival, 163
 Yale Essay prize, 173
 Yale Series of Young Poets, 181
 Yale Univ., 1, 3, 7, 24, 43, 97, 108, 113,
 114, 139, 172, 173, 198
 — Medical School, 190
 — Institute of Human Relations, 121
 — School of Drama, 139, 144
 Yeomans, Edward, 5, 40, 44
 Yenching Univ., 134
 Young Communist League, 81
 Zimbalist, Efrem, 78, 162
 Zimmerman Upholstery Company, 151
 Zurich, Switzerland, 157