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NEW YORK 27, N. Y.
May 10, 1955

for publication
5-12-55
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President Frederick Burkhardt
Bennington College
Bennington, Vt.

Dear President Burkhardt:

I have read Mrs. McCullough's ms. with great interest and admiration. She has achieved a remarkable psychologic success: she makes her readers feel both the hard work and the devotion that stood out in the bringing of Bennington College into existence, devotion by the McCulloughs, by Mrs. Swan, by Dr. Booth, and others. In this psychological effect McCullough's success has been remarkable. I quite envy her.

Now I wish that Mr. McCullough also would make his contribution to the history of Bennington College, not to try to repeat from his angle the same full story, but simply to tell of the particular incidents which he especially saw and appreciated. This will supplement Mrs. McCullough's full account. And I think the same should be done by Mrs. Swan, only I would encourage her to make as full an account as she will. Unfortunately Dr. Ravi Booth has left us. I wonder if he left papers or a diary.

I judge that Mrs. McCullough availed herself of the official historic records that the College has kept, for I see a number of instance that indicate this, but I wonder if she has kept personal records. My diary gives me some contemporary check on some things that are commented on. On p. 17 she speaks of receiving a telephone message from Dr. Coss, "saying he had a splendid young candidate for Bennington College, Robert D. Leigh," etc. My diary for Dec. 9, 1927 says: "Meet J. J. Coss . . . talk to him about Bennington College. . . . I ask him if he can suggest a president. He suggests several names including Robert D. Leigh of Williams College, formerly a co-worker with Coss in the Contemporary Civilization. I later call up Mrs. McCullough and tell her of my conference with Coss. She is much interested in Leigh and proposes to investigate." I think this conversation of mine was Dr. Coss's first thought about a Bennington president and my consequent telephone call to Mrs. McCullough her first hearing about Leigh. This is of course a small matter.

Another minor matter is on p. 10: the president of Sarah Lawrence did not report to me "the next day" but some years later that she had changed her curriculum plan to fit the discussion on April 28.

Again on p. 38 I do not myself recall having named physics as the subject preferable to mathematics for mental training. I fear such a statement would be misunderstood. The statement goes counter to any statement I would now make. So I think it would be better to cut off the sentence at the word "only."

And similarly for the discussion reported at the bottom of p. 39f. on "religious education." I would be happier if this were omitted.

Also for the discussion of co-education on p. 40. As I recall there was some positive demand for co-education, but we were told that the state board of Vermont would not give a charter to a new co-educational college. So I would suggest a reconsideration of this paragraph.

My diary gives a somewhat different account of Dr. Capen's declination to accept the Bennington presidency. Nov. 16, 1927: "Hurry to Mrs. McCullough's where there is a meeting of the Bennington Committee to meet Dr. Capen of Buffalo. We had been told that he possibly could be persuaded to change his mind and accept the presidency of the College. I was asked to draw him out. In the end he said very positively that he could not consider a call." Mrs. McCullough's account, however, is much more dramatic.

A very minor difference appears in the account of Dr. Leigh's first meeting with the nominating committee. As I have it in my diary: Dec. 20, Tuesday: "In the afternoon meet with Bennington Committee and Robert D. Leigh. The investigation so far makes Mrs. McCullough and Mrs. Swan quite enthusiastic. They are ready to nominate him for the presidency. After discussion we ask Dr. L if he would feel free to consider an offer and we invite him to meet on January 3 with the trustees. He accepts the invitation, I thought gladly." On Dec. 26 the Committee met and voted to call a meeting of the trustees and to recommend Dr. Leigh's election. The trustees did meet on January 3 and elected Dr. Leigh unanimously.

One other matter that raises doubts in my mind is the fullness and degree attributed to her initial meeting with Dr. Frank P. Graves (evening and next morning). The intimation seems to be that they even at this early date (December 1923) planned the important meeting which came on April 28, 1924 even to planning the details of who should speak and what their several topics would be. This seems hardly to fit with the intervening developments and uncertainties. She came to see me Dec. 21, 1923 shortly after seeing Graves. My diary for that date says little beyond stating the fact of her visit and "In the end I agree to dine with her to-morrow evening." But in 1942 (much later, of course) I wrote this statement: "When Mrs. McCullough sought my advice and assistance in the founding of a new girls' college, I asked 'What kind of college?' saying that if it were simply one more of the kind we now had I was not interested, but if they would make it not simply new but a new kind, then I would be interested. She asked 'How new in kind?' I said that was a longer story. Then she asked me to dine with her the next evening to explain."

My diary for Dec. 22, 1923 tells of the dinner the next evening and concludes: "We discuss many matters including a public meeting at Mrs. Straight's at which I am to make an introductory speech striking the keynote so far as concerns the educational policy. Meanwhile I am to see and talk with the principal promoter, the Rev. Ravi Booth."

On Dec. 28 I did talk with Dr. Booth and my diary says that we agreed on this statement:

- "1. A college for girls, of first rank, non-vocational.

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- "2. A curriculum based on the best available thought, an attempt to do for the college what the Lincoln School is attempting in elementary and secondary education.
- "3. Such administrative control as insures that in the remote future the best thought of that day, not the dead hand of tradition, shall rule."

My diary states that "all these statements were my own" except that Dr. Booth suggested naming the Lincoln School

The account of Mr. Hull's decision to "go with the ship" does not quite fit with my recollection, but Mr. McCullough will take care of that.

Let me repeat my admiration for Mrs. McCullough's account. It will take a lasting high place in the eventful history of Bennington College.

Very sincerely yours,

William H. Kilpatrick