

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

LEWIS HENRY JONES

1902 – 1912

With the arrival of Lewis Henry Jones as president in 1902, Normal entered upon a period of cooperative, constructive effort that was to last for nearly a third of a century. In Jones and his successor (Charles McKenny) the college possessed a highly capable leadership that inspired both enthusiasm and affection.

Jones was born in Indiana of Welsh Quaker parents, grandson of an anti-slavery agitator who had been driven out of Tennessee. Like his predecessor, Boone, he attended Spiceland Academy. He graduated from the Oswego Normal School at Oswego, New York, a strong admirer of its head and founder, Edward Austin Sheldon. He took work at Harvard under Professor Agassiz who made a lasting contribution to his interests. It was Agassiz who secured for him his first teaching position, instructor in natural science, at the Indiana State Normal School at Terre Haute. This was in 1872. By 1876, he was assistant superintendent of the Indianapolis public schools and eight years later became superintendent. He was awarded an honorary MA in 1888 by DePauw University, and another the following year by Wabash College. He remained in Indianapolis until 1894.

Meanwhile, he was elected to the National Council of Education (1888), a small body of the older and more deeply interested members of the National Education Association, organized to give more serious consideration to fundamental questions of education, and to direct research and investigations. In 1893, he was appointed to the Committee of Fifteen on Elementary Education of the Department of Superintendence of the National Education Association. One of the reports made by this committee presented a set of principles for the organization of large city schools systems designed to take them

out of politics, to vest great authority in the chief school officer, and to protect him in the performance of his duties. A fellow-member of that committee, James M. Greenwood, Superintendent of Schools at Kansas City, Missouri, later characterized Jones as follows:

Superintendent Jones was rather conciliatory, and he did more than any other member of the sub-committee to pull us together when we would get far apart . . . (His) mind is acute, penetrating, and acts quickly and readily . . . When pressed too closely, he is dangerous . . . He is too gentlemanly to be a rough-and-tumble debater . . . he always prefers to be impersonal.¹

Two years later, when the Cleveland school system was seeking a new superintendent, the choice fell on Lewis Jones.

Jones remained at Cleveland until he accepted the call to Ypsilanti in 1902. Those eight years were memorable. Favoring him were laws passed by the Ohio Legislature reducing the size of the board of education of the large city from 21 ward-elected members to 7 elected at large; conferring upon the superintendent the legal authority to hire, promote, and dismiss teachers; and protecting him with life tenure. His use of the powers vested in him was judicious and firm. It was later said that the Jones era saw one of the greatest experiments in school administration, and its success in Cleveland bore fruit in not less than a score of the greatest American cities.

His contacts with his teaching staffs were inspiring. At the time of his resignation the people of Cleveland presented him with a black leather chair and a loving cup. On the cup were inscribed these words:

Recognizing the services rendered the cause of public education by Lewis H. Jones, the people of Cleveland present this loving cup as a token of their personal esteem and appreciation.²

Jones came to the Normal at age 58. Less than a year earlier his wife, Sarah Ellen Good, had died, leaving a 16-year old daughter, Edith, to his care.

In Ypsilanti he purchased the spacious Samuel Post mansion, then in rundown condition, which he repaired. Its gently sloping shaded lawns stretched invitingly towards the campus; its hovering twin Camperdown elms made intriguing contrast to the stately trees that

provided the setting. Edith, who in time became Mrs. Harry Shaefer and made her permanent residence in Ypsilanti, always felt that one of the reasons why her father was willing to leave his life-time position in Cleveland and come to this small community was his concern for her.

Before accepting the call to Ypsilanti, Jones laid down a strict condition. The authority to hire and dismiss faculty must be in the president, also the initiative in determining institutional policy. His intent on coming to Normal was to remain for ten years, then retire. He was hired for five, but when the five were up was re-employed for another five, and when those years were over he carried out his original intention, against the fervent protests of his faculty, students and alumni—and the State Board. Edwin A. Strong, revered head of the Physics Department who had been at Normal since 1885, commented in later years:

Mr. Jones came to this school endowed with the greatest amount of power ever conferred upon any head of the institution. . . . no one ever used this power more sparingly, more justly or more graciously. This fixed policy gave us something upon which we could rely, and so the institution had rest after the turmoil of changing policies and administration.³

The ten years of the Jones administration at Normal were marked by a rapid increase in enrollments, with all the attendant problems of adequate facilities and staff, a reluctant and slow-moving State Legislature, further expansion of curricular offerings. Jones could scarcely have encountered a more difficult period from the standpoint of financial support, or a more enthusiastically receptive professional environment. At an interstate level he was active as a member of the North Central Council of State Normal School Presidents (an organization that later merged with the American Association of Teachers Colleges), serving as its president in 1911.

The problem with the legislature was out of a nature that quite justified the apprehension of the school in earlier years over the creation of more Normals in Michigan. The legislature was faced with the obligation to construct facilities and finance operations of two new normal schools when Jones arrived and, a year later, of a third, the Western State at Kalamazoo. In his first biennial report to the State Board, he noted that many of the departments were inadequately staffed, some classes numbering 60 to 70. He said:

The Legislature should . . . supply enough teachers so that no class in the institution should go beyond twenty-five of thirty members. It is a false economy in an institution of this kind to carry classes beyond that size.

He referred to the new science building that was under construction and complained that there had been considerable delay and the building was not yet under cover. He asked for ventilation for the main building, saying:

The ill effects of this condition are noticeable in the classes in the presence of headaches and in the lack of power to concentrate attention through the entire period of the recitation hour.

In 1906, he asked for an addition to the Training School building to relieve the cramped conditions that had developed there, and to give more room to the departments of Domestic Science and Art, and Manual Training (then housed in the basement). He asked for an auditorium that would hold 2,500 people and also provide rooms for the Conservatory of Music. As for the auditorium he said:

There are many things which can be taught to students only under the influence of that united fellowship which comes from seeing the entire school together in one body. Such an auditorium would simplify administration greatly by developing a sense of unity and responsibility among the students and increasing their love for the institution as a whole.

The legislature honored the request for enlargement of the Training School, and provided in niggardly manner for ventilation for the main building. As for the auditorium, authorization was given for drawing plans. Jones expanded his request here to include provision for a men's gymnasium under the auditorium, so that the present gymnasium could be given over entirely to the women. As for the structure, he urged (with a note of bitterness)

that this new building be made of some architectural value rather than a mere makeshift, as have heretofore been all the buildings erected on the campus. With the single exception of the little chapel which was the gift of Mrs. Starkweather . . . no building on the campus has been completed according to the plans or wishes of the educational authorities; but modifications have always been brought about on account of the small appropriations allowed by the legislature . . .

The report of the Board of Visitors for 1907, noting that more than 1,300 students were then in attendance, said: "The equipment, apparatus and books for illustrative purposes are entirely inadequate to the needs of the various departments of the school." They proceeded to ask also for a "central power, heating, lighting and ventilating plant, such as is found at the University at Ann Arbor."

Eight years after Jones' arrival at Ypsilanti he was still asking for the auditorium, and still complaining about inadequacy of staff and equipment. After mentioning the fact that members of the faculty and citizens of Ypsilanti had recently purchased 20 acres of land as a gift for the college, and had subscribed money for the improvement of the property so that it could be laid out for tennis, hockey, football and baseball, but with no bleachers or fencing, he stated:

Appropriations for current expenses have been so meager for the college during the last few years that we have been obliged to purchase as few books as possible for our reference library. We are now far behind the times . . .⁴

At the same time the Board of Visitors carried on the tenor of complaint in some detail. They underlined the need for an auditorium, renovation of the main building, and enlarged facilities for physical education. The legislature made an appropriation for the auditorium, but it was vetoed by Governor Osborn.⁵

On the educational front the story was very different. One of the first matters that received attention was the relationship between the College and the high schools. With authorization by the State Board, Jones inaugurated what he termed "an important change of policy of a higher state institution toward the public high school." All graduates of four-year high schools who met certain standards would be admitted to Normal on the two-year (college grade) life certificate course without examination. All pupils from such high schools who had completed only two years of high school work would be admitted to the four-year (two preparatory and two college grade) life certificate course without examination. Students at Normal who failed to achieve a satisfactory standing in the first term could be either dropped from College or required to repeat the work, and in each case a report would be made back to the student's high school "to the end that superintendents and principals of high schools throughout the state may learn what our standard of

requirement is and take measures to prevent pupils from coming to us without due preparation.”⁶

With regard to curricular offerings, Jones gave immediate attention to expanding the work in domestic science and manual training. In 1904, he installed a course for rural school teachers. Encouragement and emphasis were given to the professional offerings in psychology, pedagogy, kindergarten, and the philosophy and history of education.

In 1903, the Legislature had been persuaded to vest sole certification authority with regard to graduates of the several normal schools in the State Board of Education, thus taking an important step in expanding the authority of the Board.⁷ This aided the move to regularize and develop course programs.

In 1906, the summer school was enlarged by provision that its program should include the summer institute work of Washtenaw and the six adjoining counties. To enrich the summer’s experience, a series of lectures was scheduled that brought national leaders in education to the campus, including John Dewey (of Columbia), George H. Palmer (of Harvard), Richard T. Wyche (of New York City), and Colonel C. H. French (of Miami). The enrollment jumped from about 600 in 1902 to more than 1,400 in 1906.

When Jones came to Normal in 1902 he found an exceptionally capable and relatively young staff awaiting him. One, Geographer Mark Jefferson, was to achieve an outstanding international reputation. Three had already achieved national stature (Frederic Pease in music, Benjamin L. D’Ooge in ancient languages, and William Hittell Sherzer in natural science), and five were to earn like distinction in the coming years (Wilbur Pardon Bowen in physical education, Charles Oliver Hoyt in pedagogy, Elmer Adelbert Lyman and John Charles Stone in mathematics, and Edwin A. Strong in the physical sciences). Besides these there were at least a dozen who had made or were to make a strong impression at the State level and contribute much to the spirit and tone of the institution.⁸

In raising the question as to how this came to be, proximity looms large in the answer. Strong came to Ypsilanti from Grand Rapids, Michigan, where he had been high school principal and Superintendent of Schools, D’Ooge was a gift from the Netherlands by way of Grand Rapids, his parents having emigrated from the village of Zonnemaire, Province of Zeeland. Both he and his brother, Martin Luther (older by 21 years), were trained at the University of Michi-

gan. Sherzer married a Saginaw, Michigan, girl and served as high school principal both in Saginaw and Houghton. He, too, was a product of the University of Michigan. Bowen was born within 20 miles of Ypsilanti (at Lima, near Chelsea), was educated at the University of Michigan and taught physiology there for a short time. Hoyt graduated from Saline, Michigan, high school (ten miles from Ypsilanti) and from Albion College. He held administrative positions in public schools geographically nearly encircling Ypsilanti before being drawn to the epicenter. Lyman graduated from the University of Michigan and taught there for some years.

One might also assume that some already on the Normal staff may, by their contributions and growing reputations, have attracted others of outstanding caliber. Frederic Pease had drawn wide attention for his choral work and compositions, stamping the institution with the mark of superiority, by the time that any of those mentioned above arrived. Strong replaced Lewis McLouth, a man of exceptional competence in the physical sciences. David Eugene Smith, himself successor to a University of Michigan product, the outstanding Charles Bellows, left a challenging vacancy in mathematics for Lyman to fill. Sherzer could only be strongly impressed by the work in the biological sciences of that remarkable woman, Lucy Osband, and Jefferson could look upon his predecessor in geography, Charles T. McFarlane, with very high regard.

One cannot but speculate that the attraction which led Jones to accept the Ypsilanti offer may have been heightened by the promise of Normal's faculty.

During the period of his administration, Jones added to his staff names that were to become widely known: Clyde Ford in modern languages (1903) and Charles C. Colby in geography (1906). Others whom he brought to Normal lent great strength to the professional side of the College: Nathan Harvey in pedagogy (1904); H. Z. Wilber, pioneer in off-campus teaching (1908); Webster Pearce, mathematics, who became State Superintendent and college president (1909); and Charles M. Elliot, pioneer in the training of teachers for handicapped children (1910).

It would be stating the situation mildly to say that Jones commanded the respect and whole-hearted cooperation of his faculty. In his written notices to them he frequently signed himself "Respectfully, L. H. Jones, President." They responded to his leadership with enthusiasm, and in their personal relationships developed a strong

affection for him. Midway in his years at Ypsilanti he reported to the State Board his feeling about the faculty:

At no time during my administration of the State Normal College have the internal affairs of the institution been in a more satisfactory condition than they have been during the year just closed. The unity of purpose, enthusiasm in the work of training teachers, thorough devotion to even the details of work required—all these qualities of successful teaching have been signally illustrated in the work of the various members of the faculty.⁹

Two years later the Board of Visitors, in its report, noted the tone and atmosphere of the school in these words:

An uplifting atmosphere pervades the entire institution. One cannot but be greatly impressed with the spirit of unity and harmony existing between President Jones, his able and efficient faculty, and the student body.

A close relationship between faculty and students is one of the great merits of a smaller college. At Normal, the president could generally be included. Jones made a particularly lasting impression on the students. The chapel hour, for instance, though attendance was not required, became a strong attraction. "Through the stimulating influence of President Jones," said the college annual, "the hour has become the nucleus about which all the student life seems to center."¹⁰

Clarke Davis, loyal and active alumnus throughout the years, recipient of the Distinguished Alumni Award, and one-time president of the Alumni Association, has given this account of his first contact with Jones:

One week before college opened I came to the campus and, not knowing any better, I made my first call upon the man to whom I had been writing—namely, President Jones. He treated me cordially and courteously, received me at his home, took me to his office, and walked over some of the city streets to show me rooming houses and boarding houses. Little did I realize that I was imposing on his time and that not all freshmen entered college in this manner.¹¹

A year before his retirement, Jones bought some acres on the far side of the Huron River (in whose valley Eastern lies), bounded on

the west by the river and on the northeast by a tributary stream. Here he built a rustic summer cottage with a fieldstone fireplace, and planted his favorite trees and shrubs and flowers. Until the ruthless invasion of apartment house owners, mute reminders of his stay were the hedge of black locust trees; the wild plum, red-bud, lilacs, syringa and honeysuckle growing along the drives; the bridge (student-built) over the creek; the great bed of lilies of the valley. He called it Riverbrink,¹² and shared it generously in the years of life that were left to him. Students strolling by on a chilly Sunday afternoon in the fall would be hailed in for a cup of tea before the fire.¹³ Here he would retire for meditation and reading, and quiet conversation with colleagues and friends.

At the fall gathering of the Alumni Association, in the year of his retirement, Jones gave a short farewell talk in which he said:

I have been assisted by what seems to me to be the best and most loyal faculty I have ever known. I have been supported by a loyal band of graduates of this institution . . . Of course I cannot but admit some of my visions have failed and many of my dreams are not yet actualized. There have been some short-sighted policies of legislators and state officers who ought to have known better and could have known better, but who had other interests to serve which seemed at the time dominant. So we have been compelled to wait for some things, but I am more than ever convinced that our day has now come, that the sentiment has now changed with respect to the financial support of the institution . . . It would be impossible to return adequate thanks to the students of this institution and the alumni who have so magnificently supported us in our efforts.

The five short years left to him after retirement were spent in Ypsilanti. In community activities he helped to write a new city charter and was active in the matter of improving county roads. He collaborated in writing the creed for the local Congregational church and opened Riverbrink to the public. He was at home to his friends on a portion of every pleasant day.

When reflecting on the past, he had much to remember. In addition to his work as administrator he had done some publishing of practical books for the teacher—a set of readers for the grades, a book on “Education as Growth.”¹⁴ He had been the recipient of four honorary degrees. He had founded for Normal an educational periodical, *The Western Journal of Education*, later changed to *The American Schoolmaster* and to continue publication until 1933 when

the stringencies of the Great Depression forced its abandonment. To initiate this project, he had contributed generously from his own pocket.¹⁵

Upon his death (at the home of his daughter) in Ypsilanti in 1917, Edwin Strong, filling the front page of the college paper with review of his life, commented: "Few events of recent years have moved the whole community so deeply."

The administration of Lewis H. Jones was undisturbed either by invention or innovation. Rather, it was a time of expansion and constructive support for trends and purposes already in motion. He was unfortunate in his appeals to the legislature; fortunate in falling heir to a faculty of great promise, stimulated by the newly-acquired status of College. The College was most fortunate in a president who recognized and placed supreme value on this fact, and possessed the personality and judgment that could lead towards fulfillment.¹⁶