

CHAPTER THIRTY

THE ALUMNI

A major influence on the life and growth of a college or university can be and at times is its alumni. Indeed, they are the bread cast upon the waters which in due time will return to bless or plague its maker. A college that has performed its function well will forever be blessed with successful alumni whose hearts are filled with gratitude and enthusiasm and tender memories of their alma mater, and who wish, in return, to make a contribution. There are, as might be expected, times when their zeal may be excessive or their judgment somewhat perverted. They may, for example, place an emphasis on intercollegiate athletic competition which is out of proportion to the function of the institution. Or, their feeling of interest may be so strong that it may lead to a desire to run the place.

The experience of the American college has, however, been so overwhelmingly favorable that the continuing interest and support of its alumni, both as individuals and through organization, has been zealously sought by the college administration. The creed drawn up for the University of Michigan by President Ruthven in 1932 expresses a widespread sentiment:

We believe that the student should be trained as an alumnus from matriculation. He enrolls in the University for life and for better or worse he will always remain an integral part of the institution.

In its long history, Normal had, as of June 30, 1968, issued 16,088 provisional teaching certificates, 21,130 life certificates and 5,093 others. As of the same date, it had conferred 25,837 bachelors degrees. It is worthy of note, however, than even as early as 1873 the records show that of those who did complete the full Normal curriculum and were entitled to be called graduates, only 59 per cent

actually made education their career—this in spite of the fact that all who enrolled at the Normal were required to sign a statement of intention to teach in Michigan schools. Most of these doubtless did do some teaching. But 10 per cent of them eventually became lawyers, and others found their life work in medicine, business, farming, the ministry and missions, and a number of other lines of endeavor.

Eastern has been fortunate from the first in the spirit of loyalty and continuing interest of her graduates. Because of the economic status of the teaching profession, the major gifts (Starkweather Hall [the religious center], the Briggs athletic plant, the Rackham building for the Department of Special Education) have not come from wealthy alumni. But these gifts from outside private sources have been equaled, if not surpassed, by the contributions of approximately 15,000 alumni.

Hence, the support given to Normal by her graduates has been much more through the activities of organized groups than by individuals. The fraternities, sororities and societies have consistently held their annual get-togethers with their alumni in the form of dinners and receptions, and thus have served to promote the sentiments that cling to college days and friendships. Some of the department clubs—the Chemistry Club is a prime example—have done the same. The Conservatory of Music formed, in 1897, a Conservatory Alumni Association which for many years held an annual reception. In 1938, an Alumni Track Club was formed.

The oldest, most consistent, and by far most important in terms of direct contribution has been the Alumni Association.

Early references to an association of alumni are fragmentary. Minutes of meetings were not preserved prior to 1922. However, there is evidence of the existence of such an organization in 1872. Typical of the history of alumni associations everywhere, this one has run an uneven course—now appearing, when some project captivated attention—now disappearing entirely—now reorganizing, and from time to time reorganizing again.

Normal was, from the beginning, solicitous to publish the names of its graduates. Every catalog, from the first graduating class (1854) through the class of 1893–1894, carried a cumulative list, shown by year of graduation. The alumni began the practice of gathering at Commencement sometime in the 1860's. In 1872, a "Mr. X," probably a member of the faculty, made a list "from memory, aided only by a catalogue of the Normal School," of names and positions of

Normal graduates, 1854 to 1872 inclusive, and published it in Normal's periodical, *The School*. The administrative positions shown were numerous and impressive. Three years later (1875) this periodical included an alumni directory, listing graduates and positions held, from the class of 1854 to 1875 inclusive.

The Association appears to have had a continuous existence from 1881 to 1899. Daniel Putnam, writing in 1899, said:

An Alumni Association was formed quite a number of years ago, but the organization has had somewhat of an intermittent life. Recently, however, it has held its annual meetings with a good degree of regularity, and several local societies have been formed in the larger cities of the State.

Putnam was able to list the presidents of the Association from 1881 to 1899 inclusive. Included were such later well-known names as C. T. Grawn, W. S. Perry, C. F. R. Bellows, J. M. B. Sill, Austin George, W. P. Bowen, Fred L. Ingraham. He also presented in full a song by Austin George, written to the tune of "Michigan, my Michigan," for the alumni meeting held in Lansing in December, 1895. Following is one of the stanzas:

The student life in Ypsi. town
 Michigan, my Michigan!
 Through all thy realm holds high renown,
 Michigan, my Michigan!
 Lyceum, S. C. A.'s fond spell,
 The rush, the club, the dinner bell
 The Normal girl! The Normal Yell!!
 Michigan, my Michigan.

The meeting of the Alumni Association in 1881 was noteworthy for launching a project that would become a permanent feature of the Normal. The report of that meeting contains the following cryptic sentence: "At the business meeting of the Alumni speeches were made and it was decided to publish the Normal News."

The editorial page in the first issue indicated that the new monthly was to be published by the students, but three functions were listed as follows:

1. As a medium of publication for the students. Experience has demonstrated the advantage to young people of preparing articles for the press . . .

2. As a means of communication between the schools and those temporarily absent . . .
3. As the organ of the Alumni—making known all matters of interest to the Association, and conveying to its members such individual items as are always of interest to old friends and classmates . . . the Alumni are requested to keep us informed of their location and to let us know when changes in position occur, that we may make our files a complete Alumni directory.

At first a monthly, it combined the features of a literary and a news magazine. Student compositions, addresses and papers by faculty members, and articles on serious topics were mingled with news items, obituaries, and personals. In October of 1903, a change in policy led to the publishing of a weekly, the first three issues of each month to be devoted to news items, under the title *Normal News Letter*, and the fourth to be a magazine issue devoted to literary and cultural interests. This issue appeared under the title of *Normal College News* (recognizing belatedly that Normal had become a full-fledged college). The year 1904–1905 saw another change in policy which made of the *Normal College News* a professional magazine for the in-service teacher. Beginning with the following year (1906), it was separated from the *News Letter* and published under the name *Western Journal of Education*. Under this title it appeared until 1913 when the name was changed to *The American Schoolmaster*. In 1933, succumbing to the economic pressures of the depression, it ceased to exist.

Meanwhile, upon the separation that occurred in 1904, the *Normal News Letter* adopted the name *Normal College News* and was published under this name until the issue of October 25, 1951. The immediately preceding issue observed the 70th anniversary of the paper. In this issue a facsimile of the first page of the first issue was reproduced, showing the original name to have been *The Normal News*. Apparently influenced by this, subsequent issues reverted to this name. In 1954, coincident with the name change to Eastern Michigan College, the current name of *Eastern Echo* was adopted.

The 1880's saw no new Alumni projects, and the continuing one of maintaining an up-to-date register of graduates and their positions degenerated into miscellaneous news items. Friendships and contact with the school were, however, kept alive by annual meet-

ings. The 1890's witnessed a decided increase in activity. Two reunions were held, one at the time of the meeting of the Michigan State Teachers' Association at Lansing; the other at Commencement time in Ypsilanti. The mid-nineties saw a decided revival, due in part to the interest that Principal Boone took in the alumni and in the history of the school.

The big project of the 1890's was the establishment of "Foundation Day," to be an annual event honoring those who founded Normal and instructing the student body in its history. This observance, later to be known as "Founders' Day," appears to have been held more or less regularly in November, over a period of 33 years, culminating in the celebration of Normal's Seventy-Fifth Anniversary in January of 1928.

No subsequent observance could, however, have equaled the first one, held March 28, 1895. The day was declared a holiday from classes. The afternoon and evening programs featured alumni and others who in their person represented the early days: C. F. R. Bellows, now principal of the new Normal at Mt. Pleasant, had attended the dedicatory exercises, enrolled as a student in the first Normal class, and later served as professor and acting principal of Normal; Dr. F. K. Rexford, an Ypsilanti citizen, had subscribed to the original fund offered to meet the requirement of the State Board for financial assistance in establishing a Normal School; Ruth Hopkin, now retired, was an early Preceptress at the Normal. There were letters from E. M. Foote, first music professor at Normal, living in Ypsilanti but now too feeble to attend the exercises; Mrs. D. P. Mayhew, widow of Normal's second principal, David Porter Mayhew; Mary B. Welch, from California, widow of the first principal, Adonijah Strong Welch; and Malcolm Mac Vicar, from Raleigh, North Carolina, a former principal. Bellows recalled that his first child, born in Ypsilanti, was christened by Welch and thus was the first Normal baby. In addition, there were current dignitaries of the day: Perry F. Powers, president of the State Board of Education; H. R. Pattengill, Superintendent of Public Instruction, and Governor John T. Rich.

In the following year (1896) interest in organizing additional alumni clubs led to the formation of a University of Michigan-Normal School Alumni Association, composed of Normal graduates attending the University; and a Normal School Graduate Club in Ypsilanti composed of Normal graduates taking post-graduate work

and faculty. At about the same time, clubs were organized in Detroit, Jackson and Grand Rapids.

The annual meeting of the Association in June of 1905 was of particular importance. The position of "resident secretary" was added to the responsibilities of the general manager of *The Normal News*. At the same time a membership fee of \$1 per year was approved, which would include a subscription to the college paper. A life-membership fee of \$25 was also approved.

Continuing alumni activity was climaxed in 1916 by the purchase of land for an athletic field. This land, known as the Beal property, consisted of about 10 acres and lay within five minutes walk of the gymnasium, along the north side of Cross Street. The price was \$5,000 and the Alumni undertook to pay for it "little by little" from an Alumni Fund, the Athletic Council to make the necessary improvements so that it could be used for football, baseball and soccer. It was named Alumni Field.

In 1921, the Association discussed the need for an alumni office, where records could be kept and promotional activities centered. The executive committee was authorized in 1922 to appoint a permanent secretary, organize an alumni group in each State Teachers Association district and in the principal cities, devise a plan to improve the finances of the Association, and promote a proper observance of Founders' Day. At the same time, President McKenny was authorized to purchase a life-sized portrait of John D. Pierce for the price of \$500. This portrait was formally presented to the College at the 1923 Commencement and now hangs near the south entrance to Pierce Hall.

A committee was formed in 1923 to recommend reorganization of the Association. Their report proposed incorporation and a board of directors of nine members with three-year staggered terms. The Association was incorporated November 23, 1925. Annual dues of \$1 were set. The grand project, already well under way, of an "Alumni Building" to serve as a student union and a home for the Alumni Association was approved.

The story of this project actually began in 1924 when McKenny persuaded the executive committee of the Association to initiate the move. The building was to be "a general social center for student life . . . a home for alumni returning to the college, serving a purpose similar to that of the Michigan Union at the University of Michigan." The Flint alumni immediately responded to the proposal by

turning over to the Association the balance of funds in their treasury. The students were galvanized into action. In 1925, the Student Council secured pledges amounting to \$55,000. The faculty at the same time pledged \$10,000. By the time formal action of approval was taken by the Association, the steamroller had already begun to roll.

In 1926, a contract was signed with a professional fund-raising company (Tamblyn & Brown of New York City); preliminary plans for the building were drawn (Fry & Kasurin); an architectural firm was employed (Burrows & Burich). The plans called for a building costing about \$500,000.

A full-scale alumni drive was launched in April of 1927 with a dinner at the Masonic Temple in Detroit. Twelve hundred Normal graduates attended. A hundred thousand dollars had already been pledged from various sources. Governor Fred Green, a Normal graduate, spoke. An honorary committee was formed, headed by alumnus Frank Cody, Superintendent of the Detroit Public Schools. It was hoped that the drive could be completed in time for the formal celebration of Normal's seventy-fifth anniversary, scheduled for the Mid-Winter Conference in January. Alumni dinners were held over the State. The office of field secretary was created and Edwin Stahl appointed to it.

Indeed, as far as pledges were concerned, the prospects for a successful campaign were excellent. But enthusiasm and campaign pressure proved to be somewhat more than the traffic would bear. Payment of pledges lagged. Instead of a triumphant presentation at the Diamond Jubilee of a \$500,000 building fund, there was a quiet special meeting of some eighteen district representatives to promote the idea of organizing a new alumni club wherever 25 or more alumni could be found resident in one area.

Later in the year, a finance committee was created under the chairmanship of Daniel L. Quirk to pursue the collection problem. A discount of 5 per cent was offered for all pledges paid in full. A request to the legislature for an appropriation of \$160,000 was considered but abandoned. By the middle of 1929 somewhat more than \$50,000 had been collected from 7,000 pledges. The excellent record of the students in honoring their commitments was held before delinquent alumni. A year later, the Alumni Association had garnered \$133,000, a noteworthy achievement in view of the fact that by this time the depression had struck America.

The State Board had given its consent to the start of construction when \$175,000 was in hand. This was lowered to \$150,000. A bond issue was proposed, at first for \$150,000, soon thereafter for \$190,000, and this was arranged, at 6 per cent interest for a period of 16 years, with the First Detroit (Bond & Mortgage) Company. The bid of general contractors Lovering and Longbottom was accepted and, on November 8, 1930, the ground-breaking ceremony took place on a site provided by the State Board. Some 2,000 students, alumni and townspeople were present on this occasion. Speeches were made by the president of the Association, Norman Arthur, by President McKenny, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction (Webster Pearce, an alumnus), and by the Mayor of Ypsilanti ("Mat" Max) who presented the keys of the city to the Alumni Association. On January 17, 1931, the cornerstone was laid, and the formal dedication took place in the new ballroom Saturday morning, October 24.

Nearly a year later, at the annual alumni meeting for 1932, an enthusiastic report on the operation of the building revealed that an average of 700 people a day had entered its portals and some eleven conventions had been held, including the 28th Annual Meeting of the American Geographical Society—a signal recognition of Normal's geographer, Mark Jefferson.

But the financial problem hovered like a dark cloud over all. In November of 1932, the bondholders were asked to waive their sinking fund rights for two years so that equipment obligations could be met. A year later, short-term notes were issued to pay interest on the bonds and the question of re-financing the \$190,000 issue was raised. Finally, the State Board was persuaded to take over the building and equipment. The Board purchased the bonds at par value. To make the purchase, it issued 20-year certificates of indebtedness at 4 per cent interest. These were funded by a student membership fee plus the net profits from the operation of the building. Thus was the long-standing problem finally resolved.

The grand project had occupied the minds and hearts of many people for a dozen years. It had required qualities of initiative, daring, dogged determination. It had run head-on into the greatest economic depression of all time. It had shrunk from a half-million dollar facility to one substantially more modest (equipped, it was valued at \$375,000). Normal's most prominent alumni had given freely of their time and thought.

To one in particular, a special tribute was felt to be due. On the death of Clarence E. Gittens, legislator and Detroit lawyer, in 1935, the Alumni Association passed a resolution which read in part as follows:

. . . it was largely through the efforts of Mr. Gittens that it was possible to promote a program of enlarged service and carry it to a successful completion. Much of the success in financing Charles McKenny Hall and putting it on a working basis was due to the wisdom of his counsel and to the personal service which he gave freely and generously.

Today its collegiate-gothic form stands as a monument to a loyal and devoted alumni body.

No stronger testimony as to the usefulness of this building could be asked than the action of the State Board of Education (March, 1963) approving plans for a \$2,000,000 renovation and enlargement.

Meanwhile, the Alumni Association had also been active with smaller projects. Founders Day was revived (1925), and observed annually. An annual Homecoming Day was initiated (October, 1928). An alumni paper was published from time to time. An Alumni Office was established (1928), an Alumni Song Book printed and sold (1929), the sale of a book of poems by President McKenny, published posthumously, was undertaken. Formal tributes were paid to outstanding faculty and alumni at time of death. Portraits of Professor Sherzer (1930) and Professor D'Ooge (1931), and a plaque of Dimon H. Roberts (1937) were presented to the College. The lovely ballroom in McKenny Hall was named after Fred W. Green (1937).

But the ensuing years witnessed a decline in alumni interest. Perhaps it was a reaction to the insistent demands of the McKenny Hall period; perhaps it was influenced by the continuing economic depression, or by the outbreak of World War II in 1939. Or perhaps it was due to a lack of interest on the part of the college administration.

By 1944 the Board of Directors felt a need to stimulate alumni activity and to make the Association a more positive factor in the affairs of the College. Ironically, one of the requests was for an alumni headquarters on campus. Special meetings were called, which evoked a number of suggestions that made the past seem very

dead indeed, such as an annual alumni membership fee, bringing alumni files up to date, an alumni publication, the encouragement of alumni clubs throughout the State, and alumni "homecomings" at times other than Commencement.

The story from this point is one of increased activity and increasing momentum. Encouragement soon came from the new president of the College, Eugene B. Elliott, who, in 1948, solicited alumni support and interest, and provided room for a headquarters and equipment, and assigned the function of Alumni relations to the Extension Division of the College. The board of directors was increased in 1946 to sixteen, including the President of the College *ex officio*. In 1951, two men, successful in the business world and prominent among the older alumni, were elected to the Board who were to exercise a strong influence—R. C. Runciman, '11, and Clarke Davis, '12.

A consistent record of activity and worthwhile contributions to the College was the result. In 1947, an Emeritus Club was formed for alumni of 50 years or more standing. In 1950, a Chimes Memorial Committee was created, under the chairmanship of Runciman, whose activities resulted in the dedication, on October 24, 1953, of a set of chimes in the Pierce Hall tower to the veterans of World War II. Money began flowing into the treasury from membership fees and drives for special projects, and the directors began to consider investment of surplus funds.

At the same time, there was greatly increased emphasis on the promoting of alumni clubs outside of Michigan. In 1958, it was Pasadena. In 1959, President and Mrs. Elliott visited clubs in Arcadia, San Diego, and Sacramento, California; in Corvallis, Oregon; and in Seattle, Washington. A plan for honoring alumni for outstanding loyalty to the College was inaugurated in 1957 with the recognition of Federal Judge Arthur Lederle.

The importance of a loyal, enthusiastic, and active alumni association to a college has been well demonstrated in the history of Eastern.