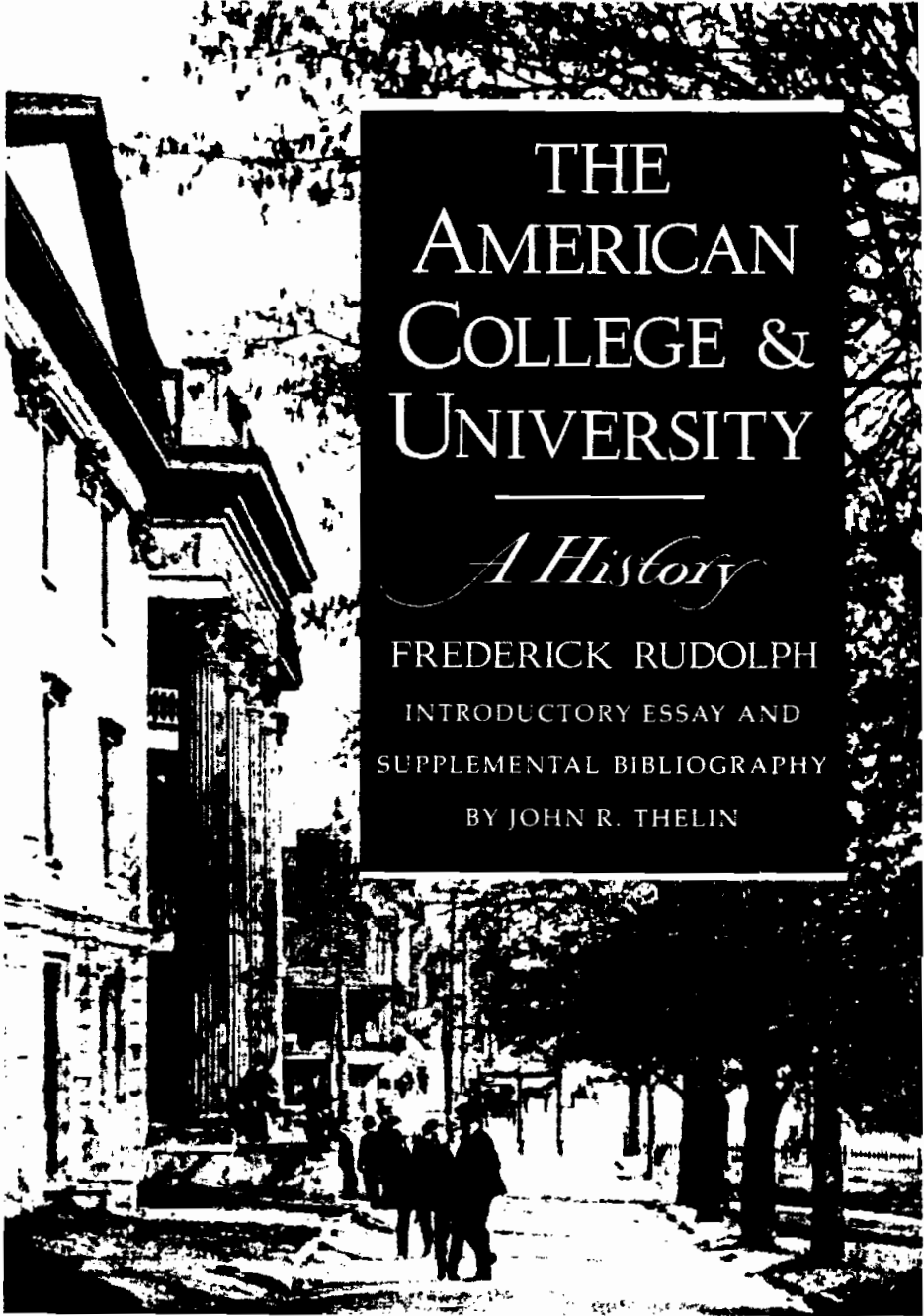


The background of the book cover is a black and white photograph. On the left, a portion of a classical building with large columns is visible. A path leads from the foreground towards the building, where a group of people are walking. The path is lined with trees on the right side, and the scene is dappled with sunlight and shadows.

THE AMERICAN COLLEGE & UNIVERSITY

A History

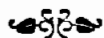
FREDERICK RUDOLPH

INTRODUCTORY ESSAY AND
SUPPLEMENTAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

BY JOHN R. THELIN

Rudolph

3



The College Movement

On a cold drizzly day in January 1795, a two-story empty brick building that called itself the University of North Carolina was opened to the public. An unsightly landscape of tree stumps, rough lumber, scarred clay, and a bitter wind greeted the governor, who had wanted to be on hand for this important event. He was also met by the faculty which consisted of one professor doubling as president. A month later the first applicant for admission knocked at the door. In the same year, far to the north, the founders of a college that would be called Bowdoin were offering the entirety of a township in Maine to any contractor who would build them a four-story building. They could find no takers.¹

In March 1802, Nassau Hall at Princeton was consumed by flames. The next year, at Dickinson College, Carlisle, Pennsylvania, its first building was burned down. At Burlington, Vermont, in 1806 President Daniel Clarke Sanders, who knew that the college had been in the process of creation since 1791, could not contain his enthusiasm for the way things now were going:

¹ Kemp Plummer Battle: *History of the University of North Carolina* (Raleigh, 1907-12), I, 63-5; Louis C. Hatch: *The History of Bowdoin College* (Portland, 1927), p. 9.

The college edifice [he reported] is nearly glazed. The tower is finished and painted on the dome. The vane and lightning rod are up. The bell proves a good one. The masons are at work, and all the chimneys will probably be finished before commencement.²

In 1811 the Reverend John W. Browne, who believed deeply in the new Miami University in Ohio, set out on a trip to raise funds and a library. His visit to James Madison at the White House was unproductive, but he picked up a five-volume history of Ireland from a senator from Kentucky; in the state of Delaware he collected \$22.00, the good president of Princeton gave him \$5.00, and from old John Adams at Quincy there were kind words, two books, and \$10.00. All in all, a wagonload of books and \$700 for the new college in Ohio. A few weeks later the Reverend Browne, on a preaching mission, slipped as he crossed the Little Miami River and was drowned.³

In 1818 at Ohio University in Athens the first college building was struck by lightning; it was not yet completed, and only torrential rains kept it from being totally destroyed by fire. In 1822 there was a fire in Maine Hall, the first building at Bowdoin, the college in Maine which had been unable to give away a township in order to get it built. At Burlington, Vermont, in 1824 the building that had so pleased President Sanders in 1806 was lost in flames. The college hovered on the edge of extinction; the president went insane.⁴

In 1826 a group of citizens of the town of Easton, Pennsylvania, received a charter for a college that they would

² Thomas Jefferson Wertenbaker: *Princeton 1746-1896* (Princeton, 1946), p. 126; James Henry Morgan: *Dickinson College: The History of One Hundred and Fifty Years 1783-1933* (Carlisle, 1933), p. 87; Julian Ira Lindsay: *Tradition Looks Forward: The University of Vermont: A History 1791-1904* (Burlington, 1954), pp. 63-4.

³ Walter Havighurst: *The Miami Years 1809-1959* (New York, 1958), pp. 11-20.

⁴ Thomas N. Hoover: *The History of Ohio University* (Athens, 1954), p. 33; Hatch: *Bowdoin*, p. 403; Lindsay: *Vermont*, pp. 122-4.

call Lafayette. They went shopping for an academy in Philadelphia, hoping to move it to Easton and call it a college. They could not find one, and for the next four years they did not hold a meeting. Out on the prairies of Illinois a college called Illinois opened in 1829 with nine students, none of whom had ever studied English grammar. Seven years later three of them were graduated from the college. In 1830 half the plant of the University of Georgia was destroyed by fire.⁶ At Bloomington, Indiana, also in 1830, the Reverend Andrew Wylie arrived to take up the presidency of Indiana College. He had written ahead to suggest that for the good of the college something should be made of his arrival, and so he was escorted into town by the leading citizens, where he was met by a double file of the citizenry. There were huzzas, fires in the president's house, and in the evening a grand illumination of the college building by man-size and boy-size candles. The building did not burn down.⁷

On the twenty-second of November 1832, five young Presbyterian ministers knelt down on the new-fallen snow in the woods near Crawfordsville, Indiana, and there asked God's blessing on the site of Wabash College. Six years later (the year that Wabash was destroyed by fire) Emory College in Georgia was opened on the strength of the unpaid interest on what were still unpaid pledges. One day in October 1841, half the dormitory space at Williams College in Massachusetts went up in flames. Eight French priests, brothers of the Congregation of the Holy Cross, few of them speaking tolerable English, rode and walked in company into northern Indiana in 1842 because their bishop had

⁶ David Bishop Skillman: *The Biography of a College: Being the History of the First Century of the Life of Lafayette College* (Easton, 1932), I, 38-47; Charles Henry Rammelkamp: *Illinois College: A Centennial History 1829-1929* (New Haven, 1928), p. 40; E. Merton Coulter: *College Life in the Old South* (Athens, 1951), p. 99.

⁷ James Albert Woodburn: *History of Indiana University: 1820-1902* (Bloomington, 1940), pp. 51-2.

given them permission to begin a college that would become Notre Dame. On August 6, 1845, the University of Michigan held its first commencement exercises, awarding eleven bachelor's degrees. Clearly the institution was in business, and on the very same day the regents of the university undertook measures to provide for a university burying ground.⁸

Often when a college had a building, it had no students. If it had students, frequently it had no building. If it had either, then perhaps it had no money, perhaps no professors; if professors, then no president, if a president, then no professors. Perhaps as many as seven hundred colleges tried and failed before the Civil War.⁹ Yet Absalom Peters, a friend of the college movement, was unquestionably right when he remarked in 1851: "Our country is to be a land of colleges."¹⁰ For against a record of discouragement, there must be placed the remarkable staying powers which characterized the founders of nineteenth-century American colleges. The American people went into the American Revolution with nine colleges. They went into the Civil War with approximately 250, of which 182 still survive.¹¹ Absalom Peters was on safe ground in thinking of the United States as a land of colleges. A few decades later it was being pointed out that England was managing nicely with four universities for a

⁸ James I. Osborne and Theodore G. Gronert: *Wabash College; the first hundred years, 1832-1932* (Crawfordsville, 1932), pp. 1-2, 45-7; Henry Morton Bullock: *A History of Emory University* (Nashville, 1936), p. 69; Leverett Wilson Spring: *A History of Williams College* (Boston, 1917), p. 165; Arthur J. Hope: *Notre Dame: One Hundred Years* (Notre Dame, 1943), p. 35; Elizabeth M. Farrand: *History of the University of Michigan* (Ann Arbor, 1885), p. 59.

⁹ In a study of institutional mortality in 16 states, Donald G. Tewksbury discovered 412 extinct colleges before the Civil War. In the same states 104 colleges survived. In the remaining 18 states with 78 surviving colleges, a comparable ratio would give approximately 309 fatalities. *The Founding of American Colleges and Universities Before the Civil War* (New York, 1932), p. 28.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

population of 23,000,000, while Ohio with a population of 3,000,000 boasted thirty-seven institutions of higher learning.¹

One member of the governing board at Dickinson, General John Armstrong, should be remembered for having the "prophetic wisdom" to caution against the college mania. Said Armstrong: Why not erect modest academies in the back counties and thus prepare a certain number of students for entrance into the existing colleges, and as time passes, perhaps we will discover a place that actually needs a college, and then we might go ahead there.² But nothing could be further from the minds of most men who became involved in the college movement during the decades before the Civil War. One unwritten law of the early history of education in the United States would be: Where there are no elementary or secondary schools, there you will find a college. Another might go something like this: Offer a young man the principalship of an academy and he will try to make a college of it. For example, no sooner had Jasper Adams arrived in Charleston, South Carolina, than he set about changing the academy of which he was principal into a college. In no time at all he was passing out B.A. degrees, but things went too slowly for Jasper Adams, and in 1826 he went off to Geneva College in New York where he could be president of a really ambitious college. His action so stimulated the trustees in Charleston that Adams returned the very next year, convinced that Charleston was going to become a university before Geneva did.³

College-founding in the nineteenth century was undertaken in the same spirit as canal-building, cotton-ginning, farming, and gold-mining. In none of these activities did completely rational procedures prevail. All were touched by the American faith in tomorrow, in the unquestionable ca-

¹ Frederick A. P. Barnard: *Two Papers on Academic Degrees* (New York, 1880), p. 18.

² Morgan: *Dickinson*, pp. 21-2.

³ James Harold Easterby: *A History of the College of Charleston Founded 1770* (Charleston, 1935), pp. 77-8.

capacity of Americans to achieve a better world. In the founding of colleges, reason could not combat the romantic belief in endless progress.⁴

President Philip Lindsay of the University of Nashville, one of the really great figures in the history of American education, addressed himself in 1837 to the very appropriate question of whether the American people could sustain an institution comparable to the English universities, where collegiate foundations clustered around a center and helped to build up impressive monolithic institutions of great wealth and influence. He concluded that "our busy, restless, speculating, money-making people" required colleges as scattered and mobile as the American people themselves.⁵ Everything about America conspired to enlarge the imagination—the landscape, the geography, the distance from Europe, the fertility of the soil, the endless bounty of nature, even the necessity to be certain about the democratic experiment. And if the American could not imagine an Oxford or a Cambridge, he could imagine the beginnings of hundreds of them and be certain that tomorrow would fulfill these beginnings. It was no accident that the two state colleges of Ohio were placed in towns named Oxford and Athens, for from both the New World had taken the torch of learning. America would be the democracy that ancient Greece had promised, and the Greek revival in America would not only dot the landscape with adaptations of classical architecture but it would give almost every state its aspiring Athens. There is even one in Arkansas. Appealing to the state legislature for aid in 1795, the trustees of Princeton declared: We will make New Jersey the Athens of America.⁶ At approximately the same time the trustees of Williams College, uncertain that Harvard could do the job by itself, proposed to the General Court that state assistance to the little college in the Berkshires would help Massachusetts become the

⁴ Tewksbury: *The Founding of American Colleges and Universities Before the Civil War*, p. 3.

⁵ Wertenbaker: *Princeton*, p. 120.

Athens of the New World. From an enthusiastic supporter of the College of Charleston there burst forth in 1847 the plea: "Let us emulate the noble Bostonians. . . . [Let us make Charleston] the Athens of the South" (albeit the University of Georgia had already staked its claim at Athens, Georgia).⁷

In 1830 the Presbyterians of Indiana were called upon to give 25 cents a person toward a fund of \$600 to provide Hanover College with a professor of theology. Only \$100 was raised, but the college kept on. In fact, its president, in search of a charter, denied before the Indiana legislature that other state legislatures had placed limits on the number of colleges they were prepared to charter. The truth of the matter was that everywhere college-founding was out of control, and it would be unfair to Hanover to place it under control in Indiana. He got his charter.⁸

Every once in a while there would be something akin to the realistic appraisal of President John H. Lathrop of the University of Missouri, who in 1841 admitted that "the taste for a regular course of University instruction is in a good measure to be generated. . . . Let us," he argued, "not then be unwisely impatient of results, nor despise the day of small things. . . ." People who talked the way President Lathrop did were seldom listened to. The American way was much more in the vein of an enthusiastic delegate to the 1849 state constitutional convention in California. "Why should we send our sons to Europe to finish their education?" bragged this new son of California. "If we have the means here we can procure the necessary talent; we can bring the president of the Oxford University here by offering a sufficient salary." It was almost inevitable that later in the century when

⁷ Easterby: *Charleston*, pp. 105-6.

⁸ William Alfred Millis: *The History of Hanover College from 1827 to 1927* (Hanover, 1927), pp. 20, 31.

a college was founded in Los Angeles the college catalogue should carry on its cover the announcement:

UNIVERSITY HOMES IN OCCIDENTAL HEIGHTS TRACT

A beautiful site. Best water in the country piped to every lot. Rich soil. Pure air. An educational center. No better place in the State for a home. Prices \$250, \$300, \$500. Terms to suit. Call on or write to the

*President of the Occidental University*⁹

Against such exhibitions as this, it is no wonder that seldom in the history of American higher education were college founders as modest, as reasonable, and as accurate as was Thomas Jefferson in the remarks with which he took notice of the University of Virginia toward the end of his life: "It is a bantling of forty years' birth and nursing, and if I can see it on its legs, I will sing, with serenity and pleasure, my *nunc dimittis*."¹⁰

One reason for the founding of colleges was the federal system of states, with their provincial loyalties and rivalries. In 1784 young De Witt Clinton, on his way to enter Princeton, became the first student to enroll at the reconstructed Columbia College, solely because the mayor of New York appealed to his father's sense of loyalty to the state of New York. In 1819 the argument was made in behalf of the University of Virginia that during the previous twenty-eight years Virginia, in the absence of a state university, had lost fourteen million dollars to other states. In 1851 a Minnesota newspaper encouraged the development of a state university with the assertion that "not a single youth of either sex should be permitted to leave the territory to acquire an edu-

⁹ Jonas Viles, et al.: *The University of Missouri: A Centennial History* (Columbia, 1939), p. 28; William Warren Ferrier: *Origin and Development of the University of California* (Berkeley, 1930), p. 8; Robert Glass Cleland: *The History of Occidental College, 1887-1937* (Los Angeles, 1937), p. 13.

¹⁰ Philip Alexander Bruce: *History of the University of Virginia, 1819-1919* (New York, 1920-2), I, 5.

cation for want" of a suitable institution in Minnesota. This sentiment would echo throughout the century until in 1894 the president of Indiana University, pointing with horror at the 385 sons and daughters of Indiana studying outside the state, was begging the state legislature:

Give us the money to make a great institution of learning and Indiana will not only save the greater part of the one-half million [dollars spent by Indianans elsewhere] but she will bring the sons and daughters of other states to spend a half million more.

Some state legislatures found arguments of this order convincing. The sheer continental dimensions of the United States and the difficulties of travel also tended to encourage localism and to augment the number of colleges. An important reason for the founding of Bowdoin was the unwillingness of people in the district of Maine to make the long trip to Cambridge.⁴

Another reason that the United States would become a land of colleges was the home missionary movement, which in the period after 1800 concentrated its attention on the West. Frequently Yale men were responsible for setting up Christian goals in the West, but they had a great deal of help from Princetonians.⁵ Between the Congregationalists and the Presbyterians, many western communities had difficulty being as western as nature intended them to be. In Indiana the first four colleges—Vincennes, Hanover, Indiana, and Wabash, all established before 1832, did not develop in response to any expressed local desire or necessity. The necessity was discovered by a group of Presbyterian home missionaries who tossed in their beds sleeplessly when they thought of

⁴ John Howard Van Amringe, et al.: *A History of Columbia University 1754-1904* (New York, 1904), p. 62; Bruce: *Virginia*, I, 232; James Gray: *The University of Minnesota 1851-1951* (Minneapolis, 1951), p. 17; Woodburn: *Indiana*, pp. 426-7; Hatch: *Bowdoin*, p. 1.

⁵ William Lathrop Kingsley, ed.: *Yale College: A Sketch of its History* (New York, 1879), I, 412-4; Wertebaker: *Princeton*, p. 114.

the benighted condition of life on the western frontier. Eastern Congregationalists and Presbyterians joined forces in sponsoring in 1843 the Society for the Promotion of Collegiate and Theological Education at the West, so successful an enterprise that Horace Mann, good Unitarian that he was, one day would lament that the great West had been conquered not only by Black Hawk but by John Calvin as well.⁶

If the colleges were not the work of missionaries, they were sometimes the work of people who might have been missionaries had they not decided to go west as permanent settlers. The process of re-creating a New England town in the West was often repeated. No urging from the outside was required to found such colleges as Oberlin, Carleton, Grinnell, Colorado, Whitman, and Pomona. These colleges were the natural outgrowth of New England-type towns that had been planted in the West by New Englanders; in the tradition of the Puritans, colleges dotted the countryside.⁷ One of the last of the colleges in the Puritan tradition was Pomona, established in 1888 by the Congregationalists of southern California who had gone on record three years earlier as being in favor of developing what they called "a college of the New England type." With the help of a board of trustees composed of graduates of Williams, Colby, Dartmouth, Yale, and Oberlin, they could hardly fail.⁸

⁶ Tewksbury: *The Founding of American Colleges and Universities Before the Civil War*, pp. 10-14, 69; Osborne and Gronert: *Wabash*, pp. 60-1; Arthur G. Beach: *A Pioneer College: The Story of Marietta* (Marietta, 1935), pp. 66-7; Rammelkamp: *Illinois College*, pp. 17-20 ff., 90.

⁷ Robert Lincoln Kelly: *The American Colleges and the Social Order* (New York, 1940), p. 31; Robert Samuel Fletcher: *A History of Oberlin College from its Foundation through the Civil War* (Oberlin, 1943), I, 3 ff.; John Scholte Nollen: *Grinnell College* (Iowa City, 1953), pp. 3-40 ff.

⁸ Charles Burt Sumner: *The Story of Pomona College* (Boston, 1914), pp. 4, 52-71.

Of course the busiest agents of all this college-founding were the religious denominations—some more so than others, some later than others, but few were not involved. They worked in an environment of national ambition, democratic aspiration, geographic isolation, and romantic imagination, and state by state they turned their own rivalries into sets of competing colleges. As the population moved westward, so did the denominations. Every state became a battlefield. Few were as productive as Ohio, where the rate of survival was apparently high: Franklin, Presbyterian; Western Reserve, Congregational; Kenyon, Episcopal; Denison, Baptist; Oberlin, Congregational; Marietta, Congregational; Muskingum, United Presbyterian; St. Xavier, Roman Catholic; Ohio Wesleyan, Methodist; Mount Union, Methodist; Baldwin, Methodist; Wittenberg, Lutheran; Otterbein, United Brethren; Heidelberg, Reformed; Urbana, Swedenborgian; Antioch, Christian; Hiram, Disciples. All were founded before 1850, and without the usual spate of Presbyterian colleges, which were not necessary in Ohio, since the Presbyterians had captured the two state colleges, Miami and Ohio.⁷

Inspired by the results of a second period of religious awakening and revivalism in the early decades of the nineteenth century, an awakening that turned back the forces of deism and atheism, the churches looked forward to a new day when Christianity would prevail in the lives of men. The successes of this counter movement of religious enthusiasm, however, whetted denominational appetites. The spirit of toleration that had characterized the colleges in the late colonial period and during the early years of the republic was now threatened by denominational ambition. The intellectual prospects of the American college were now jeopardized by a torrent of piety. The earliest and strongest friends of the new era of college-founding were the Congregationalists of New England and the Presbyterians of the middle and southern states. Both denominations were bitten by the

⁷ Lucy Lillian Notestein: *Wooster of the Middle West* (New Haven, 1937), pp. 6, 277-8.

new enthusiasm and committed to the Calvinist belief in an educated clergy. Other Calvinist denominations—German Reformed, Dutch Reformed, and Unitarians—fell in with them in the college movement. Last of the denominations to found colleges, naturally, were those with a dedicated hostility to learned clergymen, but even they, particularly the Methodists and Baptists, surrendered. Before long even those sects claiming to be closest to the people and least in need of the fancy obscurantist learning of scholars—the Disciples, United Brethren, Christians, and Universalists—would abandon their hostility. The Quakers, who had no need at all for clergymen, made a relatively slight contribution to the college movement. Roman Catholics, whose needs and opportunities would grow as immigration from the Catholic countries of Europe increased, would make their great contribution in a later era.

Denominationalism, more than any other factor, accounted for the founding of eleven colleges in Kentucky before 1865, twenty-one in Illinois before 1868, thirteen in Iowa before 1869.⁸ One Amherst graduate, explaining the founding of Amherst, remarked that in the commonwealth of the Puritans there was much need for "a college . . . not quite so far west as Williams, and not quite so far toward Plato as Cambridge."⁹ Mindful of the Unitarian heresies emanating from Harvard, President Edward Dorr Griffin of Williams often asked his students in chapel to remember the people of Boston in their prayers; but that was hardly as effective as having a citadel of orthodoxy in the Connecticut Valley; there had to be Amherst. By 1861 denominational ambition had covered the country with colleges.

Among those responsible were the Methodists. At first they had been hostile to the college movement, largely because they felt more at ease with ministers who had found

⁸ Jesse B. Sears: *Philanthropy in the History of American Higher Education* (Washington, 1922), p. 35.

⁹ Thomas Le Duc: *Piety and Intellect at Amherst College 1865-1912* (New York, 1946), p. 5.

their way to the understanding of God not through books but through experience. The conditions which led to a change of heart among the Methodists were the subject of a report at the 1832 Indiana Conference of the church:

When we examine the state of the literary institutions of our country, we find a majority of them are in the hands of other denominations, so that our people are unwilling (and we think properly so) to send their sons to those institutions. Therefore we think it very desirable to have an institution under our own control from which we can exclude all doctrines which we deem dangerous; though at the same time we do not wish to make it so sectarian as to exclude or in the smallest degree repel the sons of our fellow citizens from the same.¹

This statement was pregnant with colleges. It advanced the competitive necessity of founding Methodist colleges. It established the obligation of the denomination to its own people, and it indulged in the magnificent conceit of claiming that other sects were more sectarian than the Methodists. This conceit was a powerful justification, perhaps even a stimulant, of the college movement. Surely every denomination practiced it. For fundamentally it was an assertion that the denomination's colleges would be strong enough to serve the church and wide enough to catch members of other denominations. Such colleges of course would therefore have so many students they could hardly avoid success.

Methodists and Baptists everywhere were coming to much the same conclusions as the Indiana Methodist Conference of 1832. The Methodists, more impressed by the successes of their rivals than by their failures, sometimes took advantage of those failures and moved into abandoned buildings. Wesleyan in Connecticut began in 1831 in the empty buildings of a defunct military academy. In 1833 two floundering

¹William Warren Sweet: *Indiana Asbury-DePauw University, 1837-1937: A Hundred Years of Higher Education in the Middle West* (New York, 1937), p. 26.

Presbyterian colleges in Pennsylvania, Dickinson and Allegheny, were saved from extinction by the embrace of Methodism. Randolph-Macon appeared in the South, McKendree in Illinois, Indiana Asbury in Indiana. A committee on education at the general conference of the Methodist Church might lament in 1856: "We have, in many parts of the land, called into existence institutions that were not needed and could not be sustained." The same sentiment might be echoed at the general conference in 1860 and again in 1891. But the answer was the same as the answer of the president of Presbyterian Hanover when efforts were made to limit the number of colleges in Indiana in the early 1830's: Everybody's doing it.²

For the Methodists and Baptists, founding colleges became a part of that apparently endless American process of coming to terms with an essentially middle-class society. As churches of the meek and the disinherited, the Methodist and Baptist persuasions had at first been able to get along without educated clergymen and educated laymen. But opportunity in the United States being what it was, no church could establish itself as a permanent refuge for the permanently meek and disinherited. American life did not work that way, and Baptists and Methodists discovered that they were at the very least candidates for rank in the middle reaches of society. With that discovery went the necessity of erecting colleges, institutions which not only catered to some of the requirements of middle-class life, but which also helped to lend an aura of respectability to Methodists and Baptists as they worked their way from poverty to plenty.

The particular aptitude of Presbyterians for founding colleges enabled them to outdistance all their rivals. By the eve of the Civil War they were operating, through one form of control or another, over 25 per cent of the existing colleges that would survive into the twentieth century. Presbyterian

²Carl F. Price: *Wesleyan's First Century* (Middletown, 1932), pp. 19 ff.; Sylvanus M. Duvall: *The Methodist Episcopal Church and Education up to 1869* (New York, 1928), pp. 65-70, 72, 113-14.

success in founding colleges owed much to an evangelical revivalist fervor which provided great reservoirs of denominational enthusiasm. Equally important were the financial and bureaucratic support of a tightly organized church hierarchy and the fortuitous flow of Scotch-Irish Presbyterian immigrants into the advancing West. Sometimes co-operating with the Presbyterians were the Congregationalists, who had been founding colleges in America since 1636, but by 1860 they had fallen behind even the Baptists.*

The American college was conceived of as a social investment. Certainly, no college president in the early decades of the nineteenth century was guilty of issuing the invitation to self-indulgence which the president of one midwestern university issued in his greeting to freshmen in 1940: "I want you to have a good time. I want you to learn to know people. I want you to learn to be an American." Perhaps such purposes were in the process of development even earlier than 1800. To a degree perhaps they were nothing more than an Americanization of what the young Elizabethan gentleman looked for at Oxford or Cambridge. But they were a far cry from the sentiments expressed by President Joseph McKen at Bowdoin in 1802:

It ought always to be remembered, that literary institutions are founded and endowed for the common good, and not for the private advantage of those who resort to them for education. It is not that they may be able to pass through life in an easy or reputable manner, but that their mental powers may be cultivated and improved for the benefit of society. If it be true no man should live for himself alone, we may safely assert that every man who has been aided by a public institution to acquire an education and to qualify himself for useful-

* Tewksbury: *The Founding of American Colleges and Universities Before the Civil War*, pp. 62-129.

ness, is under peculiar obligations to exert his talents for the public good.*

President McKen spoke not only in the tradition of the Puritan colleges of New England, but of the entire Western world of the time, a tradition that recognized institutions of education as social institutions and learned men as both masters and servants of society. The college which President McKen represented and all other colleges of early nineteenth-century America were committed to social needs rather than to individual preference and self-indulgence. When college presidents thought of their students they were reminded not of society's obligation to young men but of the obligation of young men to society. In describing Bowdoin as a public institution, President McKen acknowledged the public nature of the private educational corporation, as indeed any early nineteenth-century college president would have done, and he reminded the students that they owed their benefactor, society, a return on its investment.

The notion that a college should serve society through the lives of dedicated graduates was not new. As a collegiate purpose it would never disappear. What would be new would be the degree to which such purpose would be diluted as the century progressed. It would know some moments of high esteem before the century was over, but as the nature of American society changed, so would the expectations which society placed upon its colleges. As the public displaced the public servant in the conduct of civil affairs, the college was denied some of its sense of purpose. As Americans lost their sense of society and substituted for it a reckless individualism, there was less demand on the colleges to produce dedicated leaders such as President McKen had in mind. In time colleges would be more concerned about the

* James E. Pollard: *History of the Ohio State University: The Story of its First Seventy-Five Years 1873-1948* (Columbus, 1952), p. 350; Hatch: *Bowdoin*, p. 19.

expectations of their students than about the expectations of society. In time going to college would come very close to being an experience in indulgence rather than an experience in obligation. For many years, however, a fundamental purpose of the college movement in the United States was the one which President McKeen had expressed so well in 1802.

This broad social purpose took many forms. It might appear in the role of social control, as was the case in South Carolina, where a leading purpose in the founding of South Carolina College in 1801 was the desire to create an institution that would help to unite a state seriously torn by up-country and down-country rivalries, by the legacy of bitterness inherited from internal conflicts of the Revolutionary era, and by other divisive tendencies. South Carolina College was the design of low-country aristocrats. With it they intended to educate and thereby make more conservative the leadership of the great Piedmont majority which threatened aristocratic control of the state. In this tradition late in the century the president of the University of North Dakota addressed the sober, responsible interests of the state in a time of agrarian unrest and appealed to the legislature for increased appropriations with the challenge: "We must educate our young men of today so that they will not become the mad socialists of tomorrow."⁵

Or this social purpose might be nothing more than a recognition that on any college campus were to be found the responsible, creative political leaders of tomorrow. It was not for narrow reasons of self-advancement and success in business that the University of North Carolina in 1837 recommended Chapel Hill for the "formation of lasting friendships and associations . . . among those who are to consti-

⁵Daniel Walker Hollis: *University of South Carolina* (Columbia, 1951-6), I, 14 ff.; Louis G. Geiger: *University of the Northern Plains: A History of the University of North Dakota 1883-1958* (Grand Forks, 1958), p. 47.

tute no small portion of our future rulers."⁶ A sense of this purpose was conveyed by a president of the University of North Carolina who was attempting to explain the meaning of a degree from Chapel Hill in the years before the Civil War:

The University diploma, while it did not, unless accompanied by an honor, prove scholarship, yet was of great value. Its possessor in this little world had learned much that gave him an advantage over his neighbors not blessed as he was. He had learned human nature and how to manage men. He had learned to a considerable extent polished manners. He could think and speak on his feet. In county meetings he knew rules of order and how to conduct business. He had confidence in himself, and realized that he secures the fruit who has the boldness to seize it and to hold it with tenacious grasp. He saw that his neighbors expected much of him and his self-respect forced him not to disappoint them, on the principle 'noblesse oblige.'

Here were the social advantages and social obligations of a graduate of Oxford reduced to the requirements of rural life and county government in North Carolina. There was a world of difference, but the same great tradition prevailed.

Social purpose might also be defined as national purpose. A commitment to the republic became a guiding obligation of the American college. The American people were conducting an experiment in free government of a nature and scope that the world had not yet known. The American college intended to serve that mission. The act of incorporation of Indiana College in 1828 matter-of-factly committed the institution to the education of youth in the "American" lan-

⁶Luther L. Gobbel: *Church-State Relationships in Education in North Carolina Since 1776* (Durham, 1938), p. 42.

⁷Battle: *North Carolina*, I, 781-2.

guage. The country and the colleges would walk into the future together, as the Ohio Baptist Educational Society made clear in its report on its work at Denison in 1832:

Our object has been, and is, to build up a useful Institution—suited to the wants, and calculated to promote the welfare of a rapidly growing and free country, where virtuous intelligence, industry, and enterprise are sure to meet a quick reward.

Danger to a firmly held social purpose lurked in this 1832 statement of the Baptists of Ohio, as it did in the 1835 charter of Oglethorpe University in Georgia, which declared that "the cultivation of piety and the diffusion of useful knowledge greatly tend to preserve the liberty and to advance the prosperity of a free people." For to the degree that the colleges and the country became captivated by the notion that "virtuous intelligence, industry, and enterprise are sure to meet a quick reward"; to the degree that they developed a commitment to "prosperity"—to that degree they were in danger of substituting for the old sense of society a concern for the success of individuals. By 1868 it would be difficult to know exactly what Andrew D. White meant when he declared to his students at Cornell: "You are here to begin a man's work in the greatest time and land the world has yet known." Whether these words were an invitation to personal success or public service there could be some question, as there never could have been in the words of President McKeen to his students at Bowdoin almost seventy years before.*

The American college was faced with one problem with which its aristocratic tradition of social purpose was never

*Woodburn: *Indiana*, p. 32; G. Wallace Chessman: *Denison: The Story of an Ohio College* (Granville, 1957), p. 58; Allen P. Tankersley: *College Life at Old Oglethorpe* (Athens, 1951), p. 147; White quoted in Orrin Leslie Elliott: *Stanford University: The First Twenty-Five Years* (Stanford University, 1937), p. 409.

intended to cope. The American college, for all of its European origins, was expected to be democratic. As Lyman Beecher, one of that tribe of self-appointed keepers of the public conscience, declared in 1836:

Colleges and schools . . . break up and diffuse among the people that monopoly of knowledge and mental power which despotic governments accumulate for purposes of arbitrary rule, and bring to the children of the humblest families of the nation a full and fair opportunity . . . , giving thus to the nation the select talents and powers of her entire population.

By 1850 the man soon to be president of the University of Michigan was aghast at how closely the United States had adhered to the spirit of Beecher's comments. He wailed: "We have cheapened education so as to place it within the reach of everyone."† In another twenty-five years his complaint would run the risk of being misunderstood as a congratulatory report on democratic progress.

Because democratic growth in the United States was contemporaneous with the growth of the colleges, they experienced some difficulty in establishing rigorous learning as one of their fundamental interests. Americans were on the whole much impressed by the careers of self-taught, self-made men, men whose elevation to positions of responsibility, eminence, and wealth was accomplished without benefit of formal schooling. Against this record of success the colleges could with difficulty advance the necessity of close, rigorous intellectual exercise as a justification for attending college. In the end, the colleges to a certain extent incorporated a posture of anti-intellectualism in their behavior.

Collegiate anti-intellectualism, essentially democratic in origin, was bound to enter any institution founded by Methodists or Baptists, neither of which could fully commit themselves to the necessity of an educated clergy. In other

†Tewksbury: *The Founding of American Colleges and Universities Before the Civil War*, pp. 6, 8.

collegiate foundations, however, piety also held a higher place in the scale of values than intellect, and as a consequence intellectual purpose would necessarily have to struggle for recognition in the American college. As early as 1837 Philip Lindsley, president of the University of Nashville, concluded that "Massachusetts is perhaps the only State which continues to bestow spontaneous honours and unsought offices upon superior talent, learning and integrity." Surveying the world as he had come to know it in Tennessee, Lindsley contrasted the ritual devoted to learning that characterized a New England commencement with the horse races and cock fights of a commencement day in Nashville. He could not avoid the conclusion that the future of America was being determined not in Cambridge but in Nashville. In 1869 Charles William Eliot took the occasion of his inaugural address at Harvard to register his own suspicion that in America the self-made man had achieved a popular appreciation denied the Harvard-made man. "We are accustomed," complained President Eliot, "to seeing men leap from farm or shop to court-room or pulpit, and we half believe that common men can safely use the seven league boots of genius."¹

In a society that embodied its suspicion of learning in the symbol of the self-made man, the college was bound to adopt either some shield of protective coloration or some sincere indifference to learning. By the end of the nineteenth century a combination of popular and pietistic influences had led the American college to a point at which it could be said that among the purposes of the American college was the purpose not to take learning very seriously. Of Yale at the end of the century it was remarked: "The life of the campus was so dynamic and vital that even professors . . . at heart half accepted the fact that ideas, the search for

¹ LeRoy J. Halsey, ed.: *The Works of Philip Lindsley, D.D.* (Philadelphia, 1866), I, 426; *Addresses at the Inauguration of Charles William Eliot as President of Harvard College, Tuesday, October 19, 1869* (Cambridge, 1869), p. 39.

truth, and scholarship must be among the lesser products of their show."² Theodore Roosevelt could dedicate a new law school building at the University of Chicago in 1903 with the warning: "We need to produce, not genius, not brilliancy, but the homely, commonplace, elemental virtues. . . . Brilliancy and genius? Yes, if we can have them in addition to the other virtues." In 1904 Dean Briggs of Harvard announced his preference for "moderate intelligence," and fifteen years later the dean of Yale was advising the Eli freshmen: "A man should not put more than half of his time into his studies."³

Inevitably the American college would face up to the self-made man on his own terms and in the process discover a new purpose. In the end, it became necessary to argue and possible to prove, on the basis of selected individuals, that going to college was a way of making more money than if you did not. In the very early years such an idea had not been an expressed purpose of the colleges. But the time came when graduates discovered that a college education as social investment was now of less importance than a college education as a personal investment. When did this time come? Surely before 1878 when the College of Wooster held out to the farm population of Ohio the assurance that: "It is better to give a son a complete education than to give him a farm. He will then be able to earn far more in a year than a farm could produce, and he may besides wield a great influence for good." Surely before 1871, when a Harvard student said to Henry Adams: "The degree of Harvard College is worth money to me in Chicago." Even before 1863, when the University of Notre Dame catalogue admitted that "A

² George Wilson Pierson: *Yale: College and University 1871-1937* (New Haven, 1952-5), I, 269-70.

³ Thomas Wakefield Goodspeed: *A History of the University of Chicago Founded by John D. Rockefeller: The First Quarter Century* (Chicago, 1916), p. 351; Le Baron Russell Briggs: *Routine and Ideals* (Boston, 1904), p. 5; Pierson: *Yale*, II, 193.

few years in college would be profitably employed, if nothing else were learned but to converse and behave with the dignity and propriety of gentlemen [sic]."⁴

There had, of course, always been some correlation between wealth and going to college, but the relationship had either been incidental or unavoidable in a world where wealth and college diplomas were the marks of a ruling aristocracy. As preprofessional institutions, colleges had always intended to serve those who were expected to make out best in this world. In nineteenth-century America, however, the nature of the ruling aristocracy was in the process of change; an atomistic, mobile society, as Alexis de Tocqueville had predicted, was creating an aristocracy of manufacturers—at first largely unacquainted with formal collegiate learning, but finally drawing freely from those for whom college-going was recognized as a social elevator.

At the ceremonies which launched Allegheny College in 1817 someone put into the cornerstone "a chip off Plymouth Rock, one from Dido's temple, and another from the tomb of Virgil."⁵ These chips symbolized the broad and ancient commitment of the American college in the nineteenth century, a commitment fervently expressed in 1868 by the president of the board of trustees of the College of California:

This, then, is our vocation—to make men more manly, and humanity more humane; to augment the discourse of reason, intelligence and faith, and to kindle the beacon fires of truth on all the summits of existence.⁶

⁴ Morgan: *Dickinson*, p. 107; Notestein: *Wooster*, p. 290; Henry Adams: *The Education of Henry Adams* (Boston, 1918), pp. 305-6; Sebastian A. Erbacher: *Catholic Higher Education for Men in the United States 1850-1866* (Washington, 1931), p. 105.

⁵ George P. Schmidt: *The Old Time College President* (New York, 1930), p. 97.

⁶ Ferrier: *California*, p. 273.

This fundamental commitment was sometimes distorted. Denominational fervor on occasion might overwhelm it. The demands of a population grasping for economic and social satisfactions could warp it. But the variety, the vitality, the spontaneity of the American colleges cannot be denied simply because the records they compiled were often records of discouragement or because the purposes they chose to serve were often confused or self-contradicting.

The institutions of the college movement in America intended to be, to the best of their ability and knowledge, democratic institutions for a democratic society. Necessarily they reflected both the best and the worst of that society. In 1854 an English traveler, impressed by the high morale and effective discipline of the United States Military Academy, sought an explanation and was told by a cadet: "We must get up early, for we have a large territory; we have to cut down the forests, dig canals, and make railroads all over the country."⁷ The English traveler would not have found the same discipline or the same morale in every American college, but everywhere he would have found the same dynamic belief that there was work to do. He would have found highly motivated students, young men—and later, young women—and institutions which knew what they intended to do with these young people during the few years at their disposal. With its denominational and religious orientation, the English traveler would have found the American college something of a Sunday school. He would have found it something of a success school, given the degree to which the United States was synonymous with opportunity. And perhaps most of all he would have found it a place where the Americans were eloquently putting to a test their unbounded faith in man, their unquestioning belief in progress.

⁷ Sidney Forman: *West Point: A History of the United States Military Academy* (New York, 1950), p. 86.