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Locating the Soul of a College

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LOCATING THE SOUL OF A COLLEGE

By PAUL PATTON FARIS

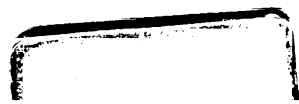


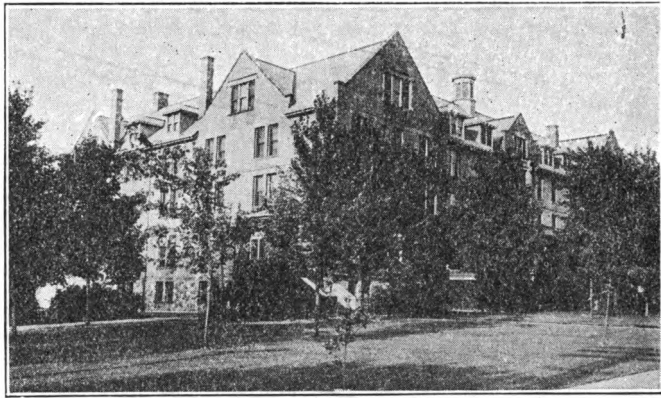
THE soul of a college is what I was seeking. For of course colleges, like corporations and humans, have souls; stalwart and strong, well-fed and menacing, or starving and impotent, souls are inherent in every combination of men. A certain college in the west is the soul of democracy; a southern institution is widely known as the soul of conservatism; the spirit of classical culture is the soul of a college in the east. It was in an attempt to locate, to uncover and recognize the soul of a college that I visited a thriving city in central Michigan. What I was seeking was the soul of that Presbyterian institution, Alma College.

Sometimes the spirit of an institution can be found in its surroundings. So it was with unwonted care that I examined the city of Alma and its environs. Here was a population-center of 7,000 people; a growing industrial city, with the college located in the park-like west side, the industries beyond the River Pine to the east. Two railroads serve the city, the Ann Arbor line cutting athwart the Saginaw valley from southeast to northwest, the Pere Marquette crossing westward from Bay City and Saginaw itself. Reminders of the early lumber-exporting days of the state lie hereabouts—high boots on the legs of many a farmer and yet unassimilated tree stumps in the fields, stunted reminders of the reign of the lumber kings. But up-to-date farming and post-war industry are rapidly banishing these remnants of a day that is done. The environs of the city are of interest, but the soul of Alma is not in the institution's surroundings.

Occasionally the soul of a college is the spirit of its architecture—stone buildings, ivy clad and moss embroidered; ancient brick mansions, whose columned porticos breathe the soul of classic Greece; stately, grand or wide-flung halls patterned after the glory that is Cambridge and the grandeur that is Oxford. Yet the academic seats of Alma College are neither palatial nor ancient. Its oldest building, inherited from an early normal school, is scarcely 40 years old, and even Wright Hall, erected in 1902, with all the comfortable proportions and convenience of which the college is justly proud, comes yet somewhat short of what one expects of an educational plant built for adequate service in a twentieth century American institution. The fact is, in Alma's earlier days the college centered its financial efforts on developing its endowment, and compelled itself to be content with small buildings; it would not let its building program run away with its endowment. So the soul of Alma is not its architecture.

There are colleges whose souls inhere in their traditions. And when I met Dr. John T. Ewing, ranking member of the Alma faculty, I began to think that I was near to Alma's soul. As we sat in Dean Mitchell's office and





Wright Hall is the Center of Alma's Social Life.

looked out of the window towards Pioneer Hall, I learned how Dr. Ewing had come to Alma, thirty years ago when the college was yet in its swaddling clothes. The professor of classics told of the greater demand everywhere in 1890 for Latin and Greek than there is today, though now a reaction is apparent from the modernism of a decade ago.

"In those early years there pervaded the college a sort of family life," said Dr. Ewing. "We lived close to one another. And much of this spirit endures today. I believe its present secret lies in Wright Hall." I had heard much of Wright Hall, built by the College's original benefactor, Ammi W. Wright. Indeed, the name and influence of Mr. Wright are written large on all the college campus. Mr. Wright died in 1912, but his daughter, Mrs. J. Henry Lancashire, of New York City, continues his interest in the institution, and is a member of its board of trustees. "That large, comfortable building," continued Dr. Ewing, "the young women's dormitory, in reality is the hub of the college life, its social center. Alma College even today is much like a Christian home."

Now I knew I was coming closer to what I was seeking. One felt the invisible presence. But even yet I could not define it. The soul of Alma was not in its traditions.

Well, somehow the soul—But let the soul of Alma reveal itself to you as it came to me, suddenly. It stole on me unaware—and, I believe, was revealed by the college president without his knowing of the part he was playing in the revelation. At noon, I sat at a faculty table in the long and airy dining room of Wright Hall. Among my table companions was Mademoiselle Boissot, only two years out of France, two years ago an Alma student, now its instructor in the French language. Of her I was to hear again before the day was over.

Late in the afternoon, when the winter's early twilight was gathering, I sat in the home of President Harry Means Crooks. As was natural in the relaxation following a tiring day, the president talked of his hobby—his college. (He may have thought he was not "speaking for publication",

though this article informs him that he was!) He spoke of the faithful friends of the institution, of its loyal faculty, of its inadequate equipment, of the student life among its young men and women. Two Serbian young men, for instance. A philanthropic woman of New York, doing relief work in Serbia, had been touched by the ambition of Serbia's poverty-crippled youth and had brought with her to America sixty young men to be educated here. Two of these had come last year to Alma. At once the students had welcomed the strangers into their fellowship. Painstakingly they had talked English with them, doubtless often when they themselves were weary. Members of the faculty had given private instruction in English to the two. Consequently, the Serbians after one year at Alma were so perfected in their English-speaking that last autumn they entered a professional school, able effectively to carry on their advanced courses.

"Just the other day," continued President Crooks, "I heard of the two Serbians in a striking way. A committee of the students came to me. 'President Crooks,' they said, 'why can't we help an oriental, too?'"

"Now, just what do you have in your minds?" I asked them.

"Well, you know Miss Boissot came, and we were glad to be of help to her in learning American talk and ways. Then the two Serbians came and we helped them. Why not let's bring a Chinaman or some other oriental here, and help him, too?"

"And that is what they have definitely decided to do," concluded the president. "They want to help."

The Soul of Alma!

All day I had been pursuing it. All day it had been hovering near, and I had not recognized it. But now, of an enlightening sudden, it had revealed itself to me in all its gracious splendor. The spirit of good will, of concern for others, of desire to be of service. That was it—the Soul of Alma is the spirit of mutual service.

Typical of the Alma spirit is the tale of the oriental. The project began with a few members of one of the Christian Associations of the college. Then both the Y. M. C. A. and the Y. W. C. A. took it up. A day was set for soliciting every student in the college, it being understood that the college itself would equal the sum subscribed by the students.

"Now, don't try to surpass the girls," President Crooks advised one of the Y. M. C. A. boys. "I don't want you to be broken hearted over their certain victory!"



A Glimpse of Campus.

A grim look came over the boy's face. Rather early that afternoon he returned, now with a grin. "Well, sir," he announced, "we're through!"

"Fine! And when did the Y. W. C. A. finish?"

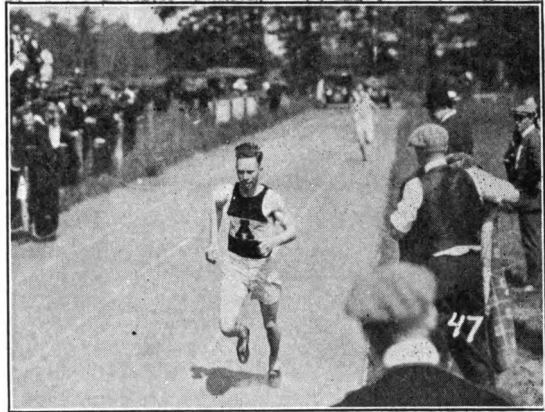
"They're not through yet!"

But the Y. W. C. A. completed its canvass, also on schedule time. And the day of comradely rivalry ended with an Alma record established for

both speed and generosity. The unnamed oriental is assured of an education because of the soul of Alma.

One day, a year ago, a question of procedure arose between students and faculty over a matter of discipline. It developed that the students were willing to abandon their point of contention, yet felt they had a grievance.

"Just what is it you want, then?" inquired the president.



Alma Fosters Clean Athletics.

"We want self-government!" somewhat bolshevistically came the reply.

What the students did not know was that some members of the faculty themselves moved by the Soul of Alma, had been considering giving to the student body a measure of self-government. A meeting accordingly was arranged, concessions from their first stand were made by the students and soon Alma had in effective operation a Students' Council.

On questions of campus life, the council—composed of representatives of the four classes and of the faculty—wields executive and judicial powers. Wherefore the students are content. But the faculty retains an absolute power of veto—wherefore the essentials of government are safeguarded. Here seems to be an ideal ending for all socialistic agitation—a maximum of cooperation, with the essential minimum of over-government control. And it is a development of the Soul of Alma.

That spirit began functioning thirty-four years ago. A Presbyterian pastor of Bay City one Sunday evening from his pulpit announced the need in central Michigan of a Christian college. Before he had left the church that night, he was approached by one of the lumber kings of Michigan with an offer of \$50,000 toward the founding of such an institution. Actuated by the same pre-Alma spirit of service, Ammi W. Wright offered a campus containing two buildings erected for educational purposes but not in use, the whole valued at \$40,000. Other persons possessing similar ideals of service pledged five year professorships, the beginnings of a library and part of the expected current expense of the proposed college.

When Michigan Synod met in October it was confronted with the evident need of the young people of the state and with these imposing proffered gifts. Though it realized the grave responsibility of starting another college on what might prove a precarious life, its desire to serve led it to accept the combined challenge. The body resolved that it would "with God's help establish and endow a college within our bounds." So Alma College, already endowed with a soul, opened its doors in September, 1887.

As the college grew and the population of Michigan increased, the spirit of service clearly was evident in the city of Alma itself. For its own sake

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the college's and Michigan's young people's, it has been generous in gifts toward current expenses, new buildings and endowment. Alma's soul shone also in the lives of its faculty members. When modern educational demands increased in stringency and salaries decreased in buying power, the professors and their families exerted every effort to live on what Alma could pay, in order to serve here and to resist calls to other institutions. The members of the faculty themselves doubled devotion to their work, in order to maintain educational excellence at the Alma institution despite its very obviously inadequate equipment.

An impressive record of attainment has resulted. In many of the sugar plants of Michigan's beet-sugar territory the chemists are Alma graduates, much of whose scientific training was received in the confined spaces of the Administration Building's basement laboratory. At least 30 per cent of all Alma alumni, men and women, have pursued some form of post-graduate professional training, a fact that indicates both exalted scholarship at Alma and the college's characteristic incentives to complete preparation for lives of high achievement and of lofty service of mankind throughout all the world.

In nearly every quarter of the globe, indeed, are found men and women whose disinctively Christian service dates back to the days of their partaking of the Soul of Alma. These unselfish servants include 70 of the 400 graduates of Alma College. Among the first of them are Dr. Sherman L. Divine, pastor of First Presbyterian church, Spokane, Washington; Dr. John W. Dunning, pastor First Presbyterian church, Kalamazoo; Dr. Charles E. Scott of Tsinan, Shantung, China; Rev. Weston T. Johnson, western secretary Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions; Dr. Geo. P. Horst, pastor second Presbyterian church, Portsmouth, Ohio; Miss Alice Marsh, for years eminent in Y. W. C. A. work at Detroit, and Miss Louise Strange, head of the Y. W. C. A. at Lansing, Michigan's capital city. Nor can one omit T. E. Johnson, Michigan's state superintendent of public instruction, or Frank Knox, editor of that widely quoted New Hampshire daily, The Manchester Union.

It was when America entered the war—soon after the new president, Dr. Crooks, had set in motion an extensive and sorely demanded movement for Alma's adequate development and endowment—that the Soul of Alma showed its staying powers. Money grew timid. The campaign came to a sudden stop. Synod's givers did what they could to aid the institution during these stress-days, but it manifestly was troubled. Yet the college held fast. Its president stiffened his courage; the faculty sighed, but stayed by. You see, the Soul of Alma was a spirit of persevering service; so long as it was at all possible to continue its work, Alma was determined to continue it. And now it anticipates an early rallying to its need of all its friends, in a material recognition of what it has done in the past and yet can do.

The open fact is, the soul of Alma is hampered. It is fettered in its longing to extend the service to the increasing number of Michigan's ambitious young people. Located close to the population center of the state, it is quite the only college of liberal arts north of a line that runs from Detroit west to Holland and that therefore lies far to the south. It is the only college, accordingly, that serves the people of central and northern Michigan, including the vast northern peninsula. Whereas throughout the United States the average population for each college is 161,138, Alma must serve a total well over 1,000,000. Here is an indication of the far-thrown influences of Alma: The United States Bureau of Education states that colleges draw most of

their students from within a radius of fifty miles, yet in a recent year 70 per cent of Alma's enrollment came from outside its own fifty mile radius. So far as Presbyterian young people are concerned, moreover, Alma is Michigan's sole Presbyterian college.

Alma is ready for enlargement. Elaborate and carefully prepared plans have been laid down. On the commodious campus some day there are to be a science building, roomy gymnasiums for men and women, new library, a women's dormitory and an Oxford-unit group of men's dormitories. President Crooks feels that the minimum immediate effort of friends of the college should be for a fireproof stack-room for the shamefully overcrowded library; a science building, whose magnificent proportions are suggested above; one gymnasium and two units of dormitories for men at present housed in the aged Pioneer Hall.

Urgency is a potent word at Alma just now. It is an urgency growing out of both need and opportunity. The Presbyterian General Board of Education has pledged \$12,500. Alma and Gratiot county have pledged \$88,000 for the Memorial Auditorium and Gymnasium. The Carnegie Corporation has pledged \$50,000 towards \$250,000 endowment. The great General Education Board has pledged \$75,000 toward a fund of \$300,000, all for endowment for professors' salaries. Over five thousand people have made individual pledges. One hundred twenty-five thousand dollars are pledged conditionally. To meet these conditions about \$146,000 must still be secured.

To reach the total immediate need of \$685,000, additional pledges for \$206,000 must be secured. The laboratories are crowded. The library reading room is outgrown. The old gymnasium is out of date and far too small. The college is growing in reputation and in numbers; its prosperity requires new funds.

It is hoped that the necessary pledges will be in hand by June 1.

Large areas in the Synod of Michigan have already pledged their share. Lake Superior Presbytery was the first to oversubscribe its goal. Petoskey Presbytery came next with an oversubscription. Most of the churches in Saginaw, Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo Presbyteries have reached or exceeded their goals. The remaining churches in the Synod of Michigan will do their part of course. Alma is their own, and their only, Synodical college, an enterprise whose adequate support is as much a logical part of their church budgets as their pastor's salaries or coal bills.

But now comes a novel expectancy of Michigan's Presbyterian college. Alma is turning expectant eyes toward the admirers of Michigan's surpassing summer climate. Many thousands of persons from other states annually spend from a month to an entire season in their summer homes in Michigan's extensive resort region. There are the summer residents — to mention only the northern lakeside centers of breeze-swept homes in a long line stretching from Marquette, on the Lake Superior shore, across the northern peninsula to the Straits of Mackinac and so to Manistee and Ludington, including Charlevoix, Traverse City, Frankfort and other points south. Such



"Through Learning's Gates"

a hopeful look seems not unreasonable, does it? If I expect to do my share in supporting the enterprises of the state in which I live during nine months of the year, I'm inclined to think I ought to be as public-spirited and self-respecting in relation to the state that is my home the remainder of the year.

As a home mission enterprise, also, Alma still bears an inviting prospect. Not yet 35 years old, Alma still is a pioneer. Years ago New England, New York and Pennsylvania, for the love of service and of Christ, founded and maintained colleges and churches in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and the west. Later the same spirit in a now prosperous Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and the central west cared for Christian institutions on the frontier of their own day. To them all—east and central west alike—the appeal of Central and Northern Michigan is the appeal of the frontier, an invitation to continued Christian service for Christ and the Church.

One cannot visit Alma College with open eyes, alert ear and sympathetic heart without experiencing a deep conviction that the very soul of Alma is calling to the soul of the Presbyterian Church for immediate help. As it has served, it anticipates service from others. And the day of its immediate hope is June the first.



Pioneer Hall