

SECTION I

The Trustees and Their Relations to the Other Governing Agencies of Colleges and Universities

CHAPTER 1

THE SELECTION AND APPOINTMENT OF ABLE TRUSTEES

OUR colleges and universities are among our most important and most permanent institutions. They are important because they are the chief centers for the discovery of the truth, for the preservation of knowledge and for the advanced instruction of our youth. Their permanence can be appreciated by considering the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge in England as contrasted with the church, another permanent institution. These two universities were founded nearly a thousand years ago, when all English people worshiped in the Roman Catholic Church; later they flourished under the English Established Church; at present they contribute leaders to many of the dissenting churches, and continue to grow amid increasing sects. Today these universities are stronger and more influential than ever before. They play a permanent role in the cultural life of Great Britain.

The growth of attendance at our colleges and universities is evidence of the increasing confidence of our people in their work and service (see table 1).

Today the large majority of our able youth attend college, and many influences are at work to bring about the attendance of all youth of marked ability. In the near future almost all of our leading citizens will be college trained. All professional men and women must now prepare in college and professional school. Most research workers, of whom we require a rapidly increasing number, are trained in the graduate schools of our universities. Increasingly, industry and business are directed by college-trained men.

TABLE 1

	College Students	Percentage of Youth 18-21
1880.....	44,594 *	
1890.....	123,135	4.84%
1900.....	238,592	4.10%
1910.....	355,213	4.84%
1920.....	597,880	8.14%
1930.....	1,100,737	12.37%
1940.....	1,500,000	about 14 %

* About 15,000 more were enrolled in attached academies or were engaged in subcollegiate work.

Although we hear criticisms of these institutions on every side, many of them fully warranted, the faults and weaknesses are largely traceable to the magnitude of the task, to the enormous increase in the number of students in recent years, and to the great difficulty of training youth for the life of today and at the same time fitting them for a profession or other occupational career. The demands for special training are steadily increasing.

*The Importance of Able, Interested, and
Well-Informed Trustees*

Our colleges and universities are a necessity of civilization and must be maintained regardless of religious, political, economic, and social changes.

The final control of these institutions resides in the trustees, regents, directors, board of governors, or whatever the controlling board is called. The quality of their service depends largely on the attributes of the members of the boards and on their active concern for the institutions under their general direction.

There are in the United States about 1,700 separate institutions of higher learning. While some boards control several of these institutions, in general each institution has a separate board.

The number of trustees on each board varies from 5 to 100. Probably the large majority of boards are composed of 9 to 27 members. There are probably 18,000 to 25,000 persons on governing boards for institutions of higher learning in America. Their effectiveness, their competency to discharge their duties, and their full understanding of their responsibilities are important. Too often they merely serve as official rubber stamps of approval of the acts and recommendations of the president of the institution. The purpose of this book is to clarify the duties of the board of trustees and the duties of the president and of the faculty, and to show how an effective board can contribute most largely to the highest service of the institution it controls. It also attempts to outline the policies relating to many aspects of college and university administration that have generally proved to be sound.

Influences Affecting the Selection of Trustees

In view of the importance of these institutions to our civilization, it is most desirable that they be directed wisely and administered ably. The ideals and character of the faculties of these institutions, the quality and inspiration of the teaching, their adaptation to the current needs of society, their general efficiency, and their adequate support depend very largely on the trustees. It would seem that only the very best and ablest citizens available should be appointed.

Unfortunately, this is by no means the uniform practice in public institutions; too often men are appointed for political reasons. These are sometimes merely unimportant and useless people. Often they are highly injurious to the institutions, introducing political prejudices and pressures into the control of educational institutions. On the whole, however, the men and women on these boards are capable, conscientious, and deeply concerned to serve usefully.

In private institutions, members are often appointed be-

cause of their wealth, their prominence, or their supposed influence in securing money for the institution. Too often such hopes are disappointed. Appointments should be made with the purpose of securing the ablest persons available who will devote a reasonable amount of time and thought to the institution.

Most institutions have on their boards at least a small group of able, devoted trustees generous of their time and thought. Such are invaluable. The entire board membership should be of this type.

The Appointment of Trustees

Usually the trustees of public state institutions are appointed by the governor and confirmed by the state senate. In some cases, as at the University of Michigan, they are elected. The trustees of a large proportion of private institutions are self perpetuating—new members are elected by the board itself. In many church colleges part or all of the trustees are appointed by the proper church authority. In some institutions part of the trustees are elected by the alumni. While other authorities appoint trustees in some cases, the great majority owe their positions to election or appointment by one of the above authorities.

The appointment of trustees is usually for three, five, six, seven, or nine years, or for life. In public institutions an effort is usually made to frame the laws so that no one governor in two terms can appoint a majority of the board and so gain control.

In most boards there are too many old men. The average age of the members of a given board is very often too high. It would seem desirable to keep the average age between 50 and 60. It would also seem desirable that no member should serve beyond the age of 70 years. There should cer-

tainly be a substantial number of members between 30 and 50 on these boards.

It seems more important that the board should be young enough to sense the needs of the people they represent and guide the changing institutions to their largest service, rather than that a large majority of aged men should maintain policies unchanged.

The membership of the board should certainly include some alumni of the institution and a majority of members who are college graduates. Some members of the professions are desirable. The members should broadly represent the classes of people the institution is designed to serve. Farmers should be represented on boards of agricultural colleges; engineers on boards of engineering schools, etc. On the whole there are likely to be proportionately too many lawyers on a board. Other types of citizens could well be represented. Some lawyers are always valuable members of a board. Newspaper editors often make very valuable contributions. Real devotion to the cause of education, profound concern for the public good, sterling integrity, courage to face pressure, political and otherwise, fearlessly—these qualities combined with high intelligence and some knowledge of higher education should be prerequisites to the consideration of a man or woman for appointment.

Meetings of the Trustees and Their Committees

The meetings of boards vary greatly. Large boards of small institutions usually meet once a year and handle interim business through committees. An Executive Committee ordinarily has several meetings annually in such a case, and other committees meet as required.

Where the membership of the board is small, from five to twelve, there is a strong tendency to have more frequent

meetings, to reduce the work of committees, and to handle a larger proportion of the business by the board as a whole.

It is the general opinion that a board of from seven to fifteen members is preferable to one larger or smaller. If the board is too small it is difficult to maintain on it a sufficiently wide representation of the people, and there is danger of the board members becoming too active in the detailed direction. On the other hand, as the board is increased above twelve or fifteen, it is hard to maintain its entire membership with persons of as high a type as is desirable, and with larger numbers the sense of responsibility of individual members decreases.

While the titles of committees vary, certain functions are usually covered by committees. In the case of large boards an Executive Committee almost invariably acts during the interim between board meetings. Most boards maintain a committee on buildings, a committee on finance, and a committee on education and faculty. An inspection of catalogues discloses a great variety of other committees determined by the needs of the several institutions.

Probably the ideal board would have seven to twelve members; would meet from four to ten times a year, depending on the size of the institution and the amount of its business; and would maintain committees on finance, buildings, and education and faculty.

In the early days, as the institutions were all small and as there were few expenses aside from professors' salaries, there was very little business for the trustees to consider. Often very large boards were appointed with a view to spread widely knowledge of, and promote interest in the institution. These boards met once a year. Now with much business of importance before every board we have a very different situation. A small group, the members of which are really interested, who will attend meetings regularly, and who fully grasp the problems of the institutions, is ideal. Their problems are

very similar to those of a board of directors of a business corporation.

With the large board fixed in the charter or by-laws, it is difficult to reduce its size. This situation has usually been met by delegating large power to a small executive committee which meets often and transacts the major business of the institution. The board as a whole meets once or twice a year to approve the actions of the executive committee and do such other business as is referred by the executive committee.

Some boards are split up into a number of committees, each having large authority within certain areas, and each reporting to the board as a whole.