

APPENDIX ONE

STUDENT LIFE AND INTERESTS  
IN THE 1870's

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[Written about 1935]

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The Old Main, which was completed and made ready for occupancy in 1867, was the college. There was no other building, and within its sheltering walls were housed most of the faculty members and all the students. It was a complete college building, containing sleeping quarters, class rooms, public rooms and living quarters. Long after the institution had grown and departments had buildings of size and beauty of their own, the Main continued to be regarded as the college, its center and circumference. Other buildings within the encircling horizon were secondary, it was premier. Until its destruction by fire in the early 1900's it retained its supremacy.

For a good many years the attendance never exceeded a few hundred and students and faculty members commingled in the spirit of a large family. Coming in contact every day, sometimes oftener, in class and laboratory practice, there was an intermingling that developed a spirit of community and a healthful interest in the main purposes. Because of those intimate personal associations and attachments then formed, the ties of early college days have been peculiarly lasting. There was a nearness between the faculty and students in the small colleges that was never possible in the larger institutions. The strong men and women in the faculty were interested in the welfare of the students and rendered assistance in many ways. Students were thereby inspired to greater effort and better accomplishments. This side of college life has disappeared in the mass associations of the universities and colleges of the present day, a consummation to be regretted.

Life in the Main began when students arrived, from different parts of the state. As the year started in March, and the weather was generally inhospitable, the work of preparing living quarters was often fraught with difficulties. Students had been notified before leaving home what was necessary to bring in the nature of equipment for living quarters. First, a

<sup>1</sup>From Sketches of Iowa State College. Typewritten manuscript in College History Collection.

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bed tick was essential, then were enumerated sheets, pillow and cases, and a few toilet articles. A supply of clean straw was piled at the entrance and from this ticks were filled and dragged to the rooms. Generally there were boys enough on hand to fill the ticks for the girls. Beds were easily "made" with the supply of new straw, but when the straw broke into short bits, as it did after a short time, and the slats beneath felt through, the soft beds that "mother made" were present in troubled dreams.

The rooms were scantily furnished. The list charged to the occupant included two straight backed chairs, a wardrobe, study table, washbowl and pitcher and waste receptacle. Carpets were permitted but not furnished. Decorations on the walls were taboo, as there was an effort to prevent defacement. Shelves were fastened to the walls to accommodate toilet articles, ornaments and bric-a-brac. The shaving kit, the bootjack and assortment of brushes were in evidence, and a vase for flowers had a place. Some of the boys used for vases the mustache cups that came among their Christmas gifts. The average students had pictures of some notable on the wall. It might be Lincoln, Grant, Gladstone, Darwin or Agassiz. Or Frances Willard, Grace Darling, or highly colored plates from Godey's Ladies Book, or Pius IX et al. All depending on the taste of a widely differentiating multitude.

The white collared class was in a minority among the boys, who for the most part came from the farms and workshops. They were accustomed to the open spaces and cared less for the sartorial excellence than comfort and were satisfied with what was merely conventional. They all wore boots, derby and sometimes stovepipe hats, string ties, red flannel underclothes, paper or celluloid collars and boiled shirts, with sizable solitaires in the bosom, also scarfs two feet wide and ten feet long and woolen socks. It was the day of the bull's eye watch and the hunter's case that could not be jammed if run over by a railroad train. The watch guard was a loop around the neck usually carrying a locket which contained the picture of the wearer's favorite. Stiff cuffs that extended to the finger tips were conspicuous and uncomfortable.

Doctor A. S. Welch, president for the first decade and a half, was a man of fine fibre. He was an educator of national prominence when, because of failing health, he was obliged to seek relief in change of climate. In the stirring days of reconstruction he was elected United States senator from Florida. His first arrival at Ames was delayed because of congressional duties, so when he took charge he was fresh from the activities of business and politics. He was splendidly equipped for the duties of his new undertaking. In its organization he did not neglect spiritual needs of the student body and this side of college life he faithfully maintained. Mid-week

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meetings were fostered and sustained, and Sunday services were never omitted. When Dr. Welch preached there was always a large attendance. His addresses were full of experiences from varied phases of life, and his philosophy so inspiring that students seldom were absent without a cause. Professor W. H. Wynn, head of the department of English Literature, was also a favorite. His long periods and polysyllabic diction were sometimes mystifying, but there was so much in his preaching that students listened to with absorbed attention. It was said of him, however, if he were describing a minnow, he would, like Dr. Samuel Johnson, make it talk like a whale. Some of the best speakers in the country were called to conduct Sunday services. Their presence was a treat, as it afforded opportunity to see and hear notable pulpit orators. Nevertheless, they were the subject of criticism by the students. Students, at least in former years, have standards that few can attain. Their demands as a rule extend to the impossible and the instances are rare when they are disposed to commend. A college audience is the most difficult in the world to satisfy.

Darwinism made its way into the study of biology in the period that the college opened. Obviously, the origin of the species, descent of man, natural selection, etc., received major attention. The Darwinian theory gripped the mind of the materialistic thinkers and afforded more definite basis on which to dispute the conclusions of revealed religion. On the other hand, more balanced thinkers saw in the theory nothing to affect the basis of orthodoxy. Not hesitating to follow the teaching of science, they insisted that it accept only truth as distinct from unwarranted assumption. The result was a clarification of the premises, leaving science holding its own and orthodoxy firm in the citadel of faith. Apropos, it is to be doubted that the college course had harmful effect on the religious mind of the students. They came from homes, good, bad and indifferent, on the religious question. A large per cent had vague, indefinite notions about spirit, biology or soul destiny. Through mental growth and the teaching of the savants, clarification came and young people went forth strengthened in the faith. Spiritually, student experience at Ames served to reenforce rather than to imperil the structure.

While the student body was much of a family group and students dwelt together in a community spirit, the system was distinctly the segregation of the sexes. Laws were laid down as immutable as those of the Medes and Persians—"thus far shalt thou go and no farther." Young men and young women were under certain restrictions that must not be ignored. In the class rooms and in the dining hall there was no bar, they were seated promiscuously and went to classes and returned from the same without taboos. But there was no social intercourse, nor passing hither and back in

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restricted quarters. There was a social hour after the evening meal and restrictions were raised, within certain limits, on the grounds. Saturday afternoons taboos were withdrawn and young people were granted social privileges on the campus. Then there were divisions into groups and couples. "Campus Lab" was the order, and on such occasions matches were made on the campus, not in heaven. Saturday afternoons, by the way, were signalized by the boys entering the Main by the front entrance, when at all other times they were obliged to enter by the side or back doors. Supervision over social conduct was exercised with rigid discipline, but not too much so, for it was vital to the welfare of the college.

Discipline within the college was enforced through a self governing system. Living quarters were divided into sections, boys and girls separately organized, and from each section were elected a captain and member of the council. Captains exercised police power and the council was a judiciary body. The accused, dissatisfied with the action of the council, had the right of appeal, the decision of the faculty being final. . . .

There were no fraternities in the college for a number of years after its opening. Students had other activities which were quite as engaging and perhaps equally as profitable. In their out-of-class engagements they had plenty to do in the literary societies of which there were at least four. This afforded sufficient variety and students chose that which most suited their tastes. In the main the programs were similar, though some may have put more stress on this feature or that than others. Debate was stressed, for all aspired to proficiency in discussion and public speech. The programs included miscellaneous exercises, and development was attempted along forensic lines. The benefit derived was noticeable in the progress made by earnest society workers, and many attributed the proficiency attained at college to the work in literary society.

Possibly the things that ultimately displaced the societies, fraternities, sports, and regulated pastimes are more conducive to success in practical life; it is a moot question.

The chapel was used as a place for assembling of the students. There the students gathered after classes were over and listened to brief devotional services. Announcements of special and general nature were made. Then, after the evening meal, students commingled promiscuously. Then all distinctions of class, color, previous condition of servitude and mental bias disappeared. Discussion included every question, private and public, conversation knew no bounds, the sky was the limit. It was there that acquaintances were made and friendships formed that lasted through life.

The Main compared well with public buildings of the time, but in structure and material it lacked the substantial qualities of buildings of

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later date. Nor were its appointments as complete. It was heated by hot air which came from a furnace in the sub-basement, and the impossibility of heating a large building to the fifth story above was demonstrated every time a cold blast swept from the northwest. One part of the building would be too warm, and windows would be thrown open, while on the windward side it would be uncomfortably cold. The heating system became so intolerable that in time it was replaced by steam heat.

Light was furnished by gas generated from naphtha. The light was inferior to that furnished by kerosene lamp in the homes. There was insufficient compression and the lights flickered and were unsteady. Incandescent mantels had not made their appearance and illumination by gas was far from present day efficiency.

Water was pumped from the spring north of the farm barns to a supply tank in the top story of the south wing, but was not well distributed throughout the quarters, which often caused congestion when too many appeared to fill their pitchers. Toilet facilities were maintained within the building, and when the pipes worked and equipment was in order, the system was sanitary. Bathing facilities were ample, for the kind. But they consisted of bowl and pitcher, available to every student occupying a room. Quite as good as most students had at home, for bathtubs were still strangers in private homes in Iowa. Nor is that a reflection on the college, or Iowa homes. About that time the president of the United States was urging congress to make an appropriation for improvements in the White House, and among the things urged were bathtubs and increased modern conveniences for the guests. Electric lights were installed along in the 80's when electricity was made practical for illuminating purposes.

The college had graduated a dozen classes or more before the advent of the telephone. Unmindful of a handicap of any kind, it forged ahead meeting each new responsibility with renewed resourcefulness. The telephone was unknown outside the laboratory where Edison and Bell were seeking to make it practical. It was only an expectation, a hope, and the world was getting along without it. But the processes were slow. Communications with the departments were broadcast by messenger-boy service, and for longer distances a miniature pony express service was maintained, similar somewhat to the vogue on the western plains in an early day. Cumbersome? Slow? Perhaps, but representative of the way things were done at the time.

Stenographer, typist, typewriters, dictagraphs and radios are innovations of later years. Typists were in the cradle, typewriters and kindred paraphernalia in confused experimentation in the inventors' studios, and yet the college progressed. Documents emanated from the offices in long

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hand, it was a time for the copyist and the messenger. The appearance of the typewriter had the effect of destroying penmanship and degrading handwriting to the appearance of hen's tracks.

The college had its beginning in the days of the simple life. Individual experience was confined to a narrower range. The things that have since appeared were born of necessity, they meet new demands and serve in a more complicated, abundant life.