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Growth and Development

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Growth and Development

The turn of the century ushered in not only a new administration for Parsons College but a new era of development and growth. The Reverend Frederick W. Hinitt of Ottumwa, for many years a member of the Board of Trustees, was selected to succeed President Jenkins in 1900. Although Dr. Hinitt was a native of England, he had received his education in the United States, graduating from Westminster College and McCormick Theological Seminary. Hinitt assumed the presidency of Parsons College at a time when many Presbyterians were concerned with the problem of whether or not there were too many Presbyterian colleges in Iowa. In 1900 there were four, each leading a rather precarious financial existence. It was President Hinitt's task to balance the Parsons budget and yet to keep the physical equipment in good condition.

There was also a need to expand the physical plant. A dormitory for girls had been frequently recommended and approved, providing funds could be secured. As early as 1883 the Board announced that a \$10,000 dormitory would be constructed immediately, and William Bradley of Centerville promised the first \$1,000. This project

failed to materialize, however, and it was not until 1900, when Parsons received \$6,000 from the will of Calvin Ballard of Winterset, that construction began on a girls' dormitory. The cornerstone of Ballard Hall was laid on April 8, 1901, and the building was opened for occupancy the next fall, at a total cost of \$17,603.

With the erection of Ballard Hall, the prospects for a successful school year seemed assured. Suddenly disaster struck the Parsons campus. On August 19, 1902, a fire destroyed Ankeny Hall; only a typewriter from the president's office was salvaged. Although the fire occurred three weeks before the opening of the fall session, the school opened only one week late. Partitions were removed from the new dormitory in order to provide classrooms, and books for the library and equipment for the laboratory were secured. When school opened, there were only about ten students less than the number originally anticipated.

The destruction of Ankeny Hall disheartened many Parsons supporters. Some even proposed that the college should be moved from Fairfield. Cedar Rapids and Mount Pleasant each suggested the consolidation of Parsons with the colleges already located in those towns. Mount Pleasant conducted a particularly vigorous campaign for uniting Parsons with Iowa Wesleyan by offering \$100,000 in cash and a twenty-acre site. But to President Hinitt the disaster provided a

challenge and an opportunity. To him the future of Parsons College depended upon the school possessing a group of suitable buildings with modern equipment. At a minimum, Hinitt believed that there should be a general recitation hall, a science building, a library, a chapel, a gymnasium, and a central heating plant. The cost of such a program was estimated at approximately \$125,000.

In 1902 the Board of Trustees appointed a committee to formulate plans for the future development of the school. This group recommended a canvass to secure the necessary money, and a Chicago architect, H. K. Holsman, was employed to prepare the plans for such a building program.

A contribution of \$25,000 from Thomas Dove Foster of Ottumwa, vice-president of the Board, provided the first impetus for the new building program. This gift came at a crucial period in the history of Parsons College. The citizens of Fairfield and Jefferson County had raised \$26,428.74. By combining the insurance from the loss of Ankeny Hall, the Foster gift, and the Fairfield community donation, it was possible to start work on three structures — a science building to be known as Foster Hall; a classroom building to be called Fairfield Hall in recognition of the support of the local community; and a central heating plant. Construction began immediately and the three buildings were in use within a year after the letting of the contracts.

Only the library, chapel, and gymnasium remained to complete the building scheme envisioned by President Hinitt and the Board of Trustees. At this juncture, Dr. Hinitt and Dr. Willis G. Craig, president of the Board, sought the aid of Andrew Carnegie for the building of a library. Carnegie, who had attended Dr. Craig's church while working in Keokuk as a young man, promised to give \$15,000 if the college would raise an equal amount for endowment and upkeep. Because of a lack of funds, however, the proposal had to be dropped at that time.

In the midst of rebuilding the Parsons physical plant, Dr. Hinitt was offered the presidency of Centre College at Danville, Kentucky. Believing that the position presented a greater opportunity for service, Hinitt resigned from Parsons in 1904 at the conclusion of four very productive years. Not only had three new buildings been constructed, but the enrollment had increased and the academic curriculum had been broadened.

To succeed President Hinitt, the Board of Trustees elected the Reverend Willis Edwards Parsons, a grandson of the founder of the school. Born at Keokuk, Reverend Parsons had spent his early life in Michigan, graduating from Olivet College in 1881 and from Princeton Seminary in 1884. He had held pastorates in Michigan and Illinois before coming to Fairfield, and had served on the Parsons College Board since 1902.

When Willis E. Parsons assumed the presidency in September, 1904, his administration was faced with several problems. The library, which had been destroyed in the fire of 1902, had been rebuilt to a collection of only 600 volumes. Furthermore, there was no office staff, and no record of donors or friends of the college remained. Not even a list of prospective students was available. Despite the addition of Foster Hall and Fairfield Hall, the college had an enrollment of only 126 students. Finally, no attempt was made to segregate college and academy students, since the same instructors taught both groups.

Faced with these many problems, the Board of Trustees and the President took immediate steps. The Board decided to provide faculty housing on the campus. Each house was to cost not over \$3,500, of which \$750 was to be contributed by the faculty member. Only two such homes were completed. Next, in the summer of 1905, Andrew Carnegie made an unconditional offer of \$15,000 for a library building. T. D. Foster, who had crossed the Atlantic with Carnegie that year, aided in securing this gift, and added \$2,000 himself to the library fund. Building commenced immediately upon the receipt of the Carnegie and Foster grants, and the structure was formally dedicated on June 5, 1907.

During the next five years three new buildings were added. In June, 1906, the Board accepted

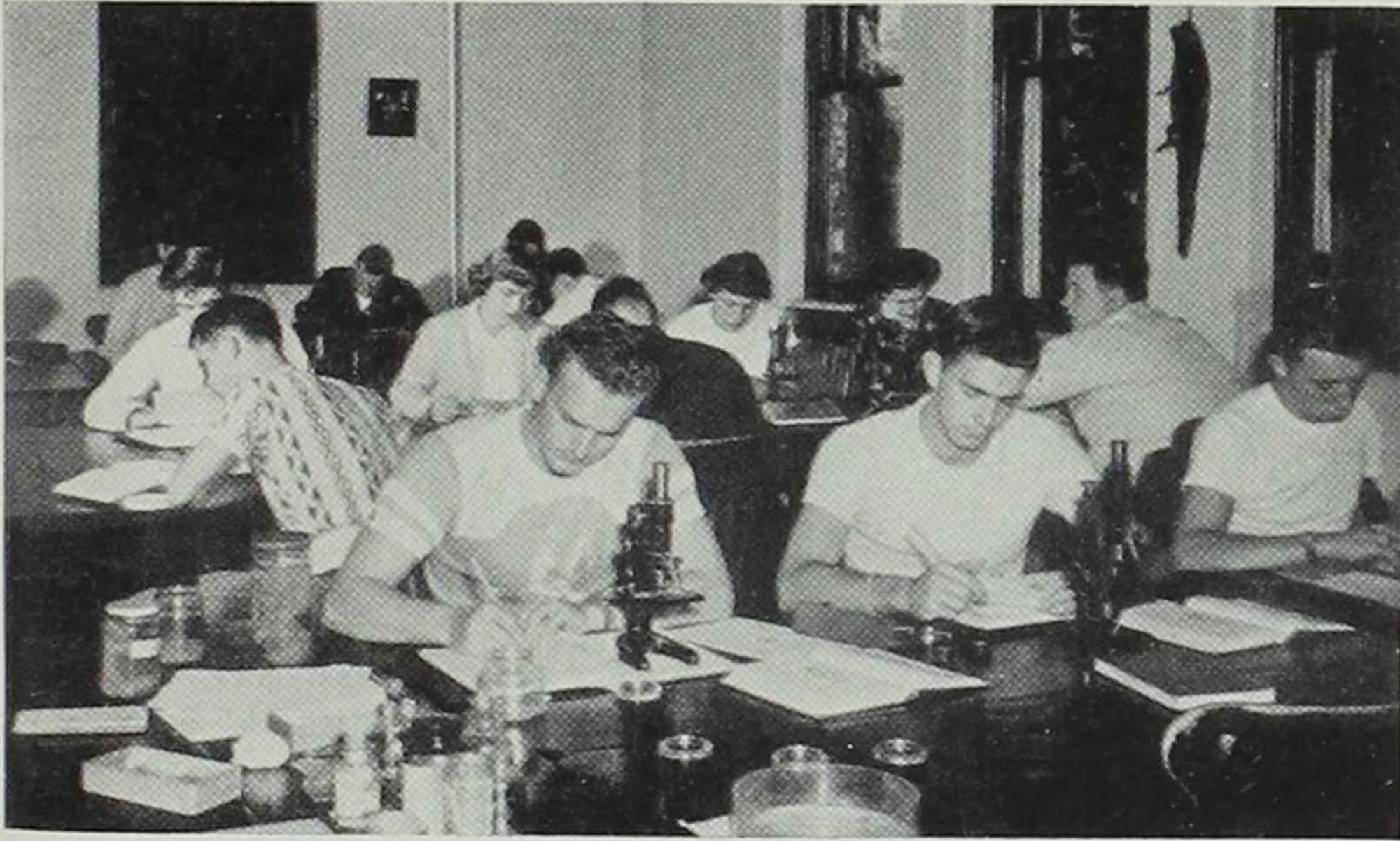
T. D. Foster's offer of \$10,000 toward the construction of a \$20,000 gymnasium, which was completed in time for the 1909 commencement exercises. In 1908 Theodore W. Barhydt of Burlington, a college trustee, proposed to erect a chapel. Work on the Gothic stone structure began in 1910 and was rushed to completion in time for the 1911 commencement. Barhydt Memorial Chapel was formally dedicated on October 18, 1911. Later a large pipe organ was installed in the chapel by Barhydt to complete his gift to the school. In 1911 President Parsons erected his own house, "Broadview," on a twenty-acre tract adjoining the campus on the north. This released the "Mansion," and it was renamed "Ewing Hall" in 1912 and housed the Conservatory of Music. Later "Broadview" was purchased as a home for future presidents of Parsons College.

Changes were also made in the curriculum. In February, 1905, James P. Moorhead was named director of the reorganized department of music. Under his guidance the department became one of the best conservatories of music in Iowa. Formerly the president of Parsons had taught mental and moral science. Philosophy was now to be offered in its place by Harry M. Gage, a young instructor who had just received his master's degree from Columbia University. Gage remained at Parsons for seven years and later became one of Coe College's most distinguished presidents. The college

also received \$80,000 from the estate of Colonel Charles Parsons in 1907, and, in accordance with a stipulation in the will, the Martha Pettus Parsons Chair of Biblical Literature and Evidences was established. This sum brought the total of the gifts to the school from Colonel Parsons to over \$140,000.

In 1913, after an administration of nine years, President Parsons resigned. He was succeeded by Dr. Lowell M. McAfee, who had served as an instructor and later president of Park College, Missouri. Under McAfee's administration Parsons continued to expand. One of his first acts was to centralize all business activities of the school in the college president's office. The following year the Board of Trustees established the Lewis B. Parsons, Jr., School of English Bible and Christian Service. Miss Julia E. Parsons and her brother, Charles L. Parsons, erected a building adjacent to the chapel to house the new school and connected the two by means of a cloister. On October 13, 1915, the structure was dedicated and became a part of the college plant. Dr. Parsons was selected as Dean of the new school, serving until 1927.

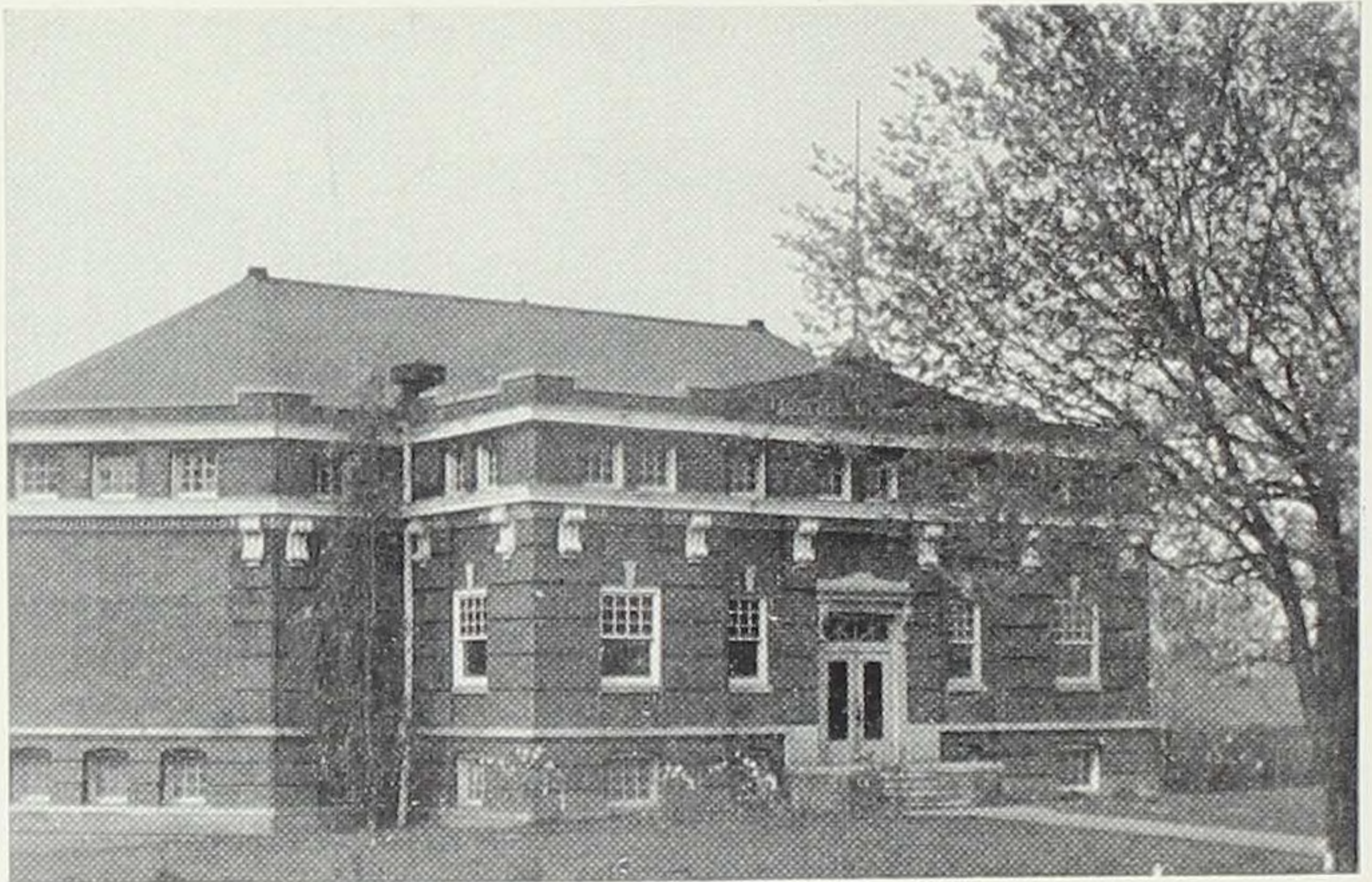
In 1915 Parsons College offered its first summer session. The principal purpose was to provide training for teachers who were not fully prepared for their work. Approximately ninety-five people enrolled, and the project was considered such a



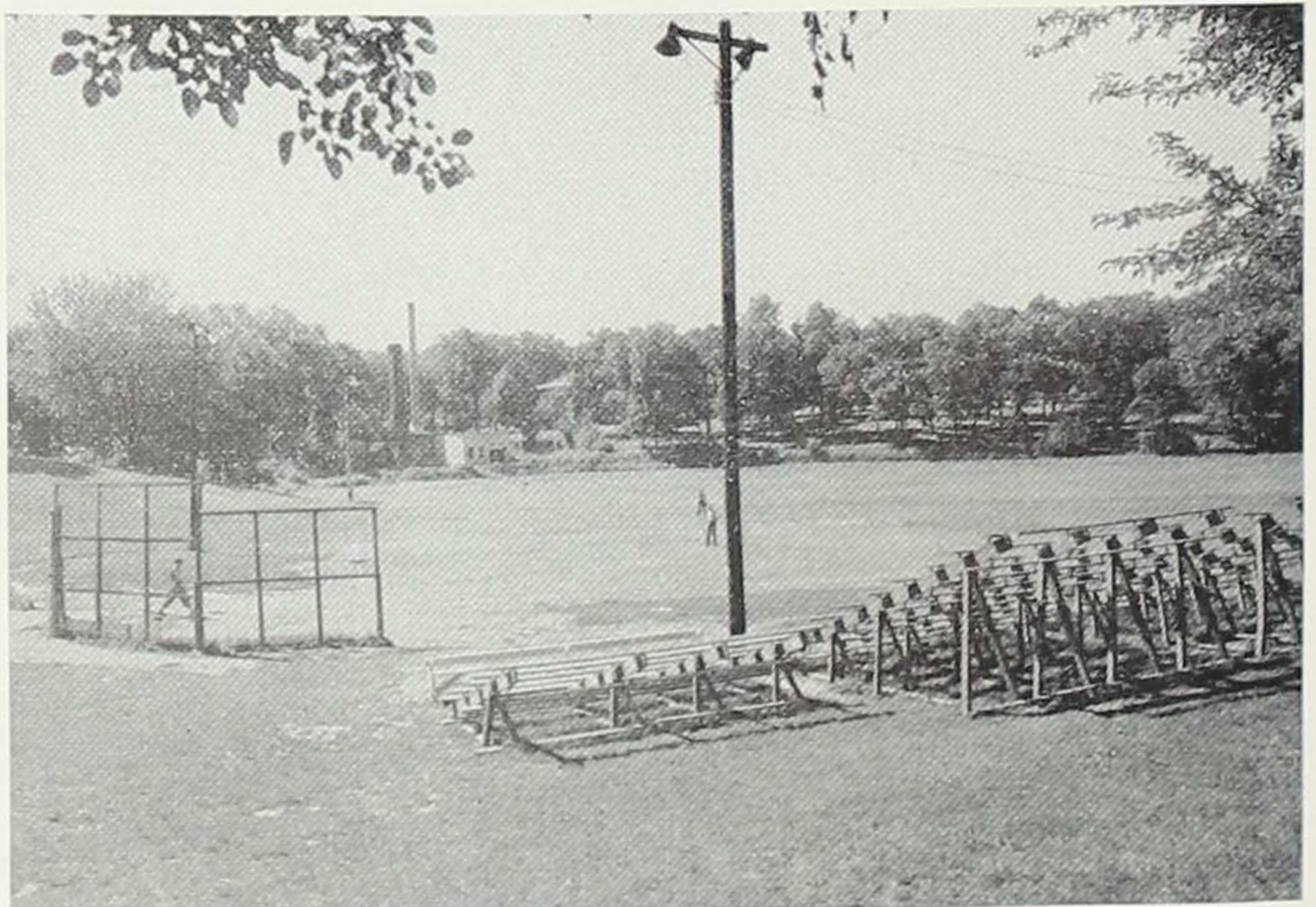
BIOLOGY LABORATORY



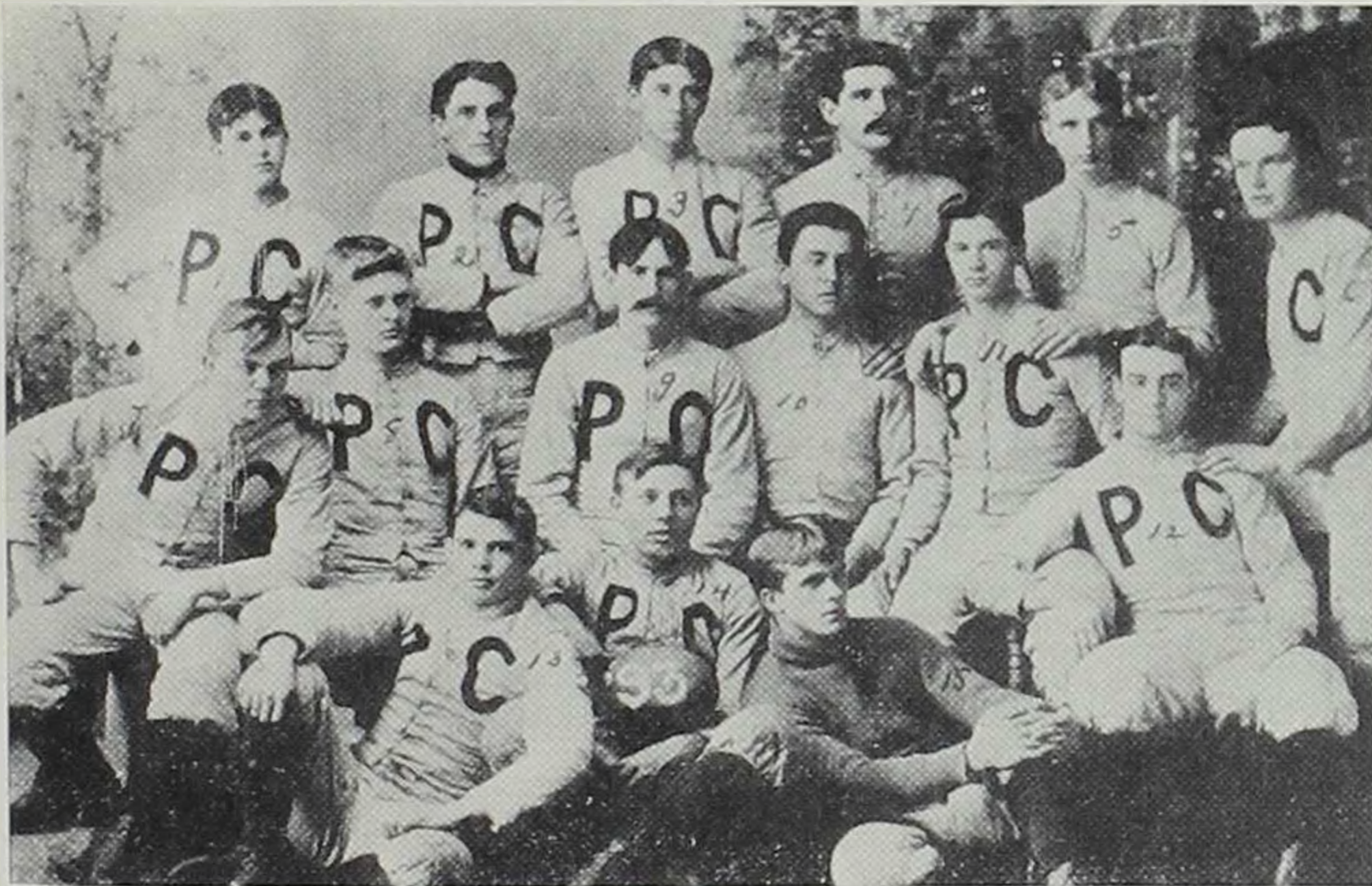
ROOM IN BALLARD HALL



TRUSTEE GYMNASIUM



JOHNSON FIELD



FOOTBALL TEAM — 1893



BASKETBALL TEAM — 1949-1950



LEWIS BALDWIN PARSONS
Founder

FOUNDER'S THOUGHT

"Having long been of the opinion that for the usefulness, prosperity and happiness of children, a good moral and intellectual or business education, with moderate means, was far better than large unlimited wealth . . . and having long been convinced that the future welfare of our country, the permanence of its institutions, the progress of our divine religion, and an enlightened Christianity, greatly depended upon the general diffusion of education under correct moral and religious influence, and having during my lifetime

used, to some small extent, the means given me by my Creator in accordance with these convictions, and being desirous of still endowing objects so worthy as far as in my power lies, I do therefore . . . give and bequeath the residue of my estate . . . to my said executors and the survivors or survivor of them, in trust, to be by them used and expended in forwarding and endowing an institution of learning in the State of Iowa." — LEWIS B. PARSONS

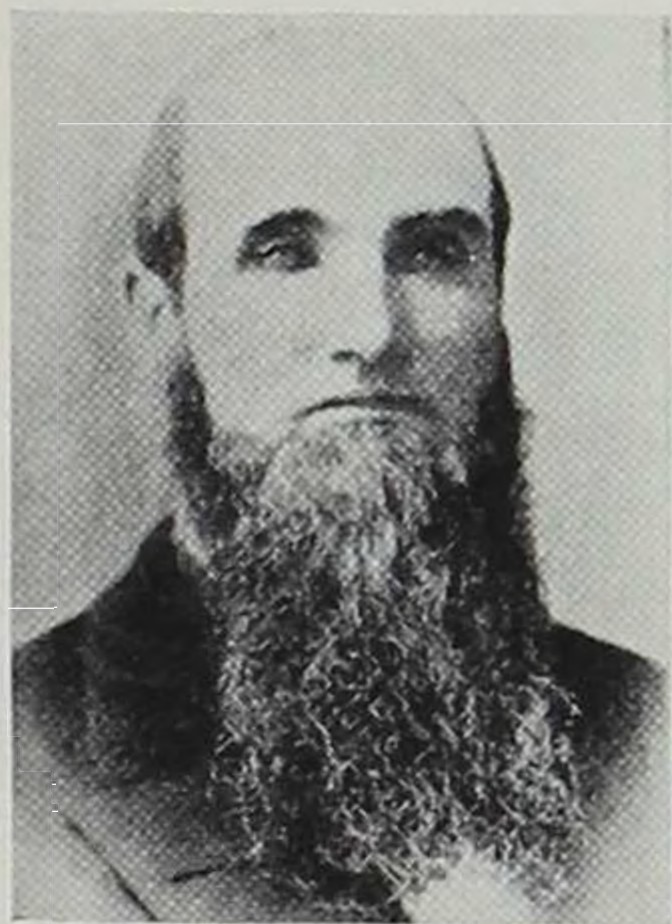


TOM E. SHEARER
President, 1948-

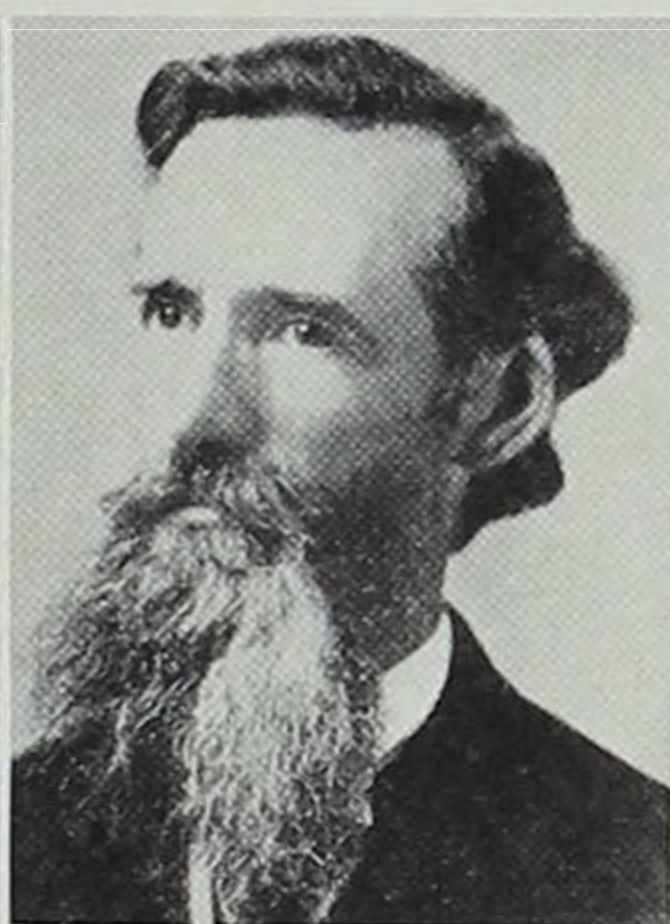


ALEXANDER G. WILSON
Rector, 1875-1877

SOME PAST PRESIDENTS OF PARSONS COLLEGE



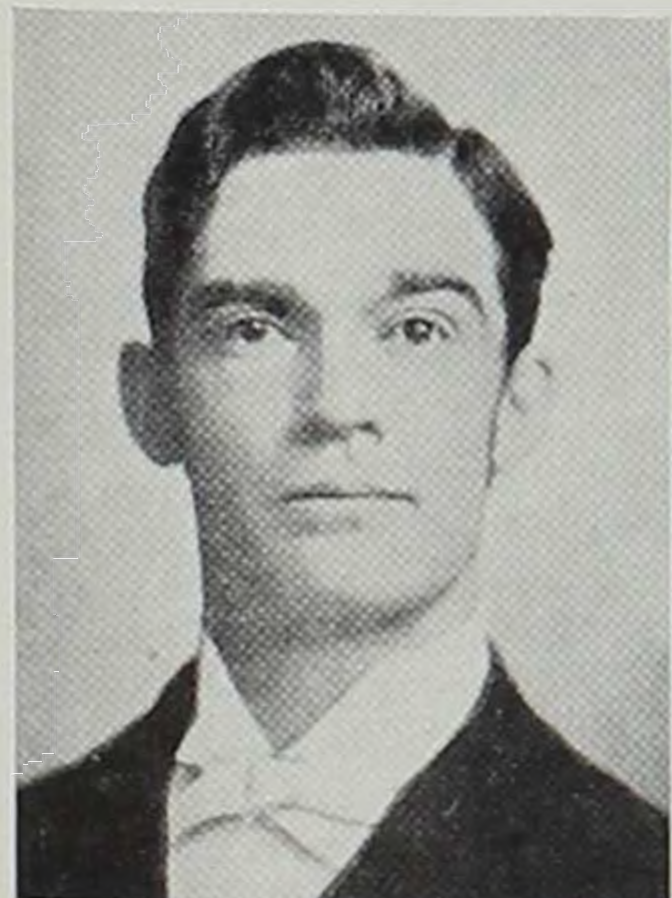
John Armstrong
1877-1879



Thomas D. Ewing
1880-1889



Ambrose C. Smith
1889-1896



Daniel E. Jenkins
1896-1900



Frederick W. Hinitt
1900-1904



Willis E. Parsons
1904-1913



Howard McDonald
1922-1927



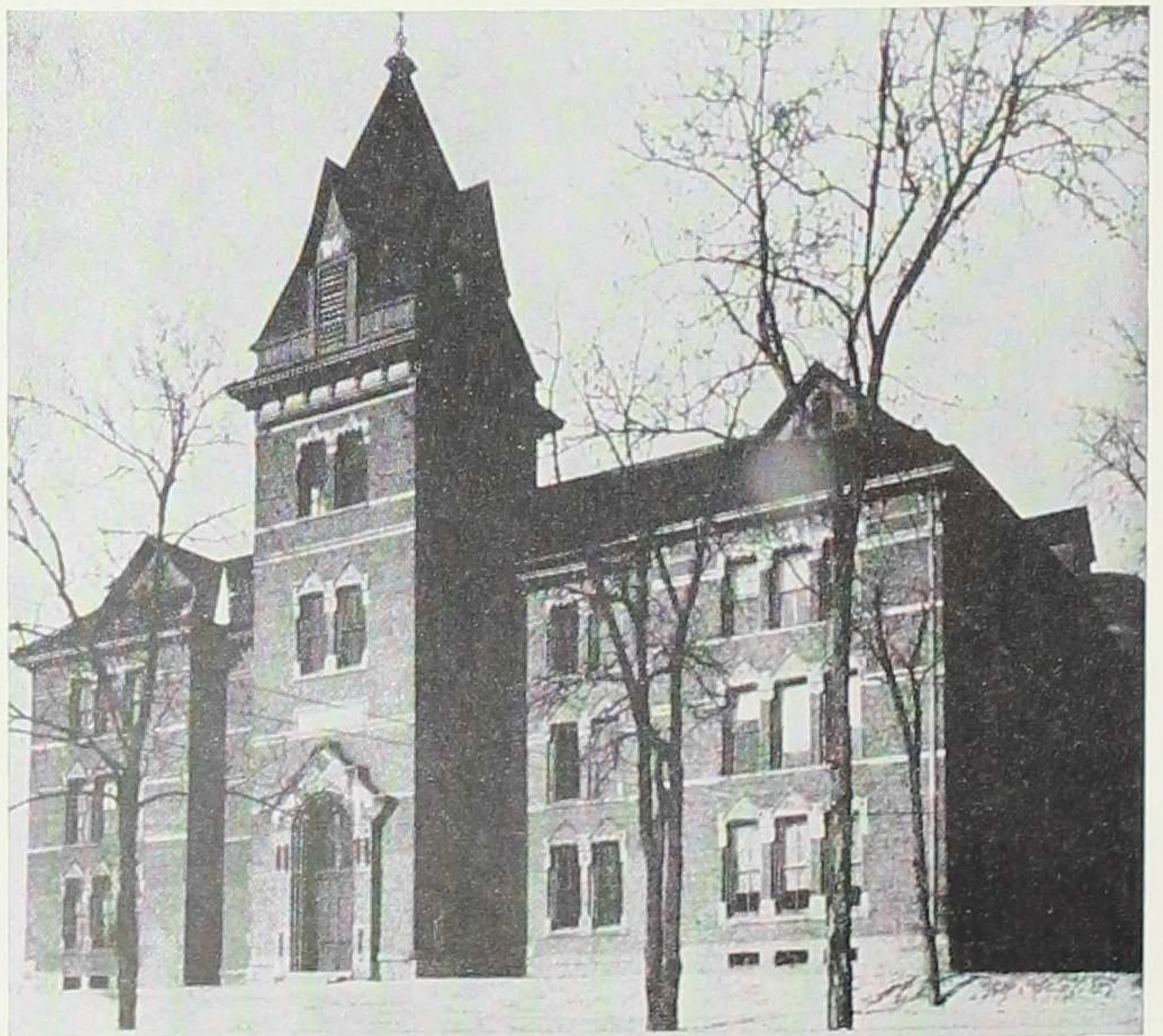
Clarence W. Greene
1928-1938



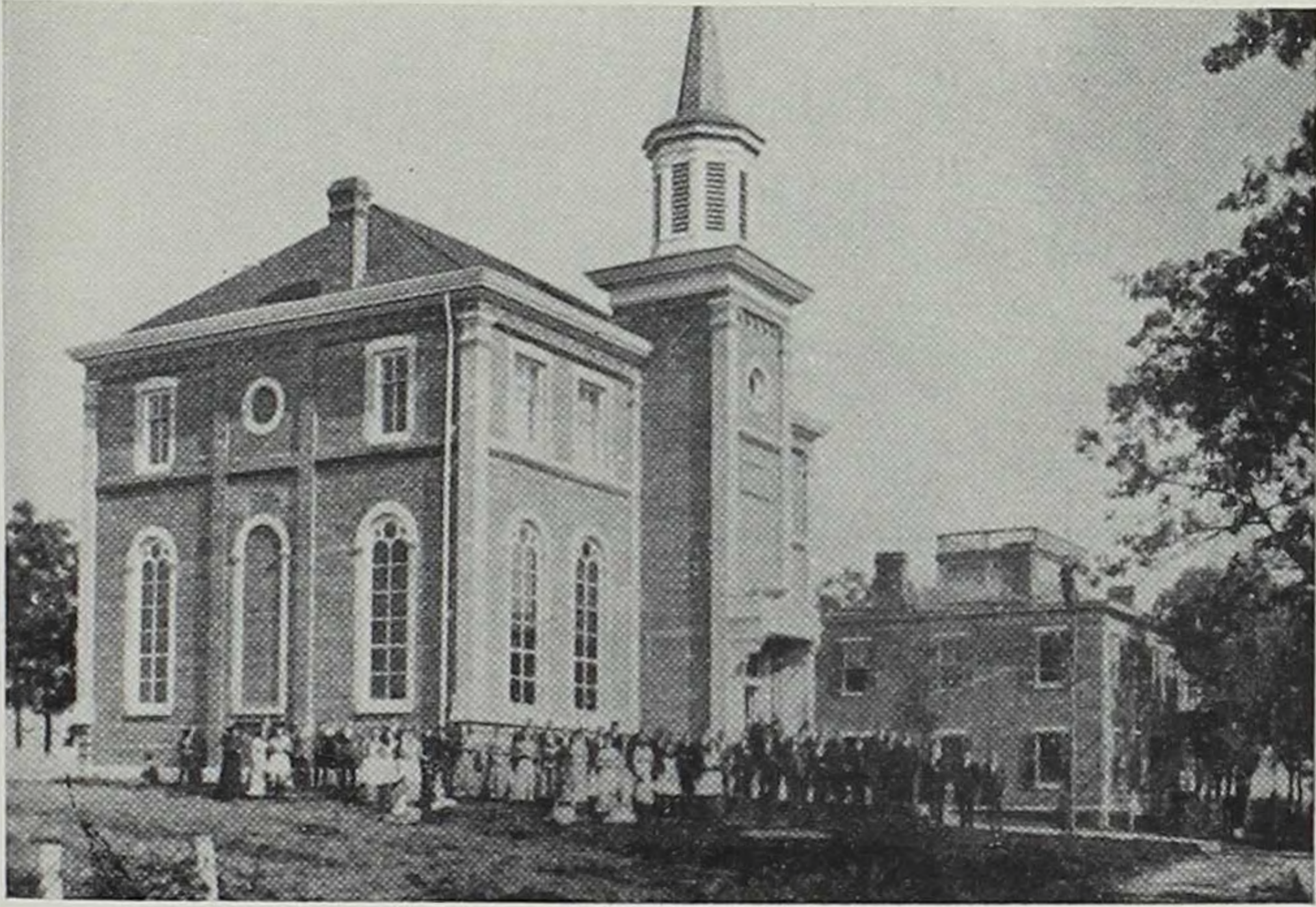
Herbert C. Mayer
1941-1947



EWING HALL



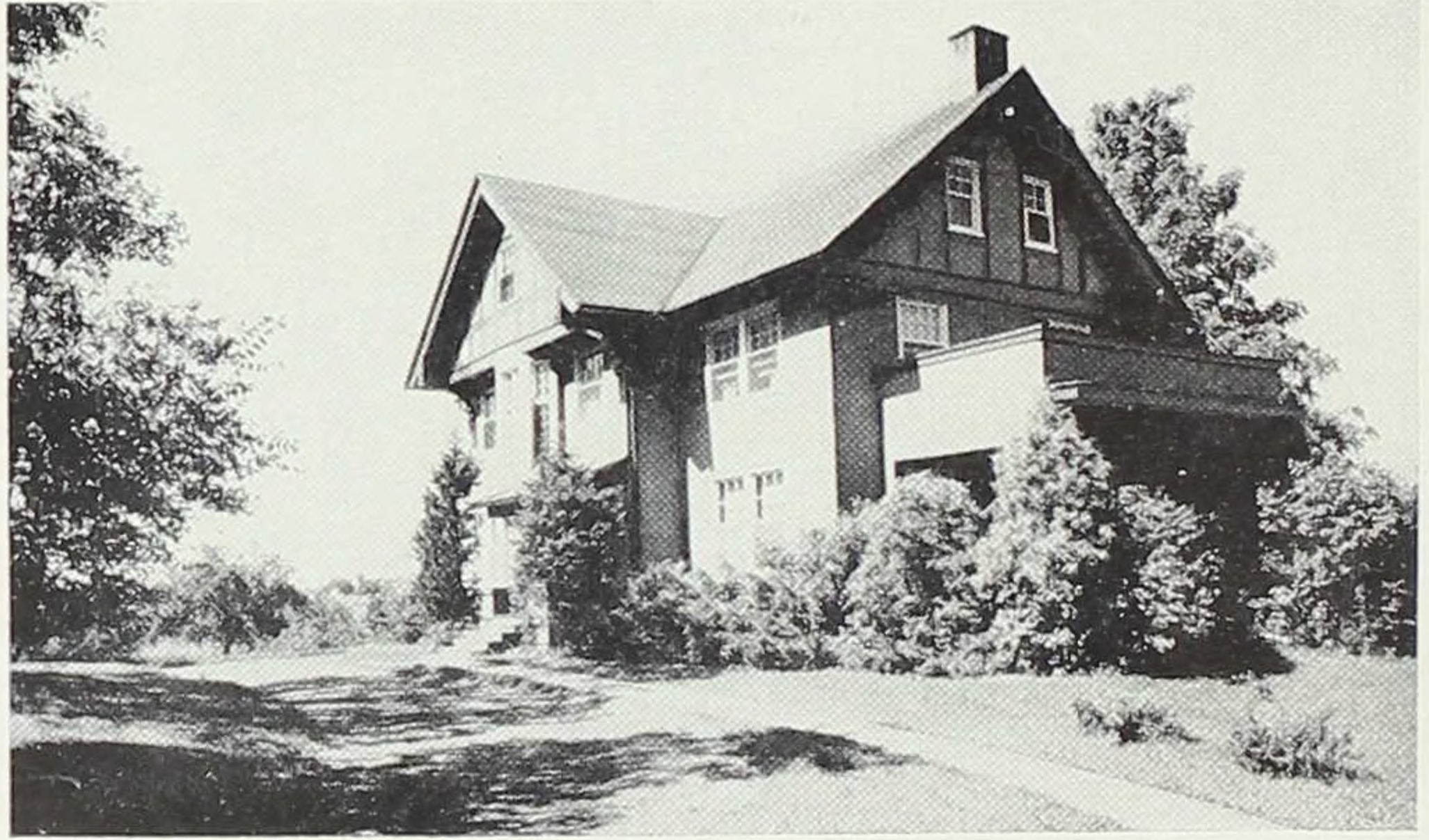
ANKENY HALL



PARSONS COLLEGE — 1876



TRAILER CAMP — 1946



STUDENT UNION



PARSONS MEMORIAL ROOM IN PARSONS HALL

success that it was continued the next summer. However, with another change in administration, a summer session was not offered in 1917, but a summer quarter was again inaugurated in 1919.

During 1914 and 1915 negotiations were begun between Parsons and Lenox College at Hopkinton, contemplating a consolidation of the two schools. Proposals were also advanced by Wesleyan and Simpson colleges to create with Parsons a school to be known as "Iowa Union College," but on March 7, 1916, the Board of Trustees announced the dismissal of any such consolidation proposals.

After three years of service President McAfee resigned in June, 1916. The administration of the college was then placed for one year in the hands of a committee composed of three capable faculty members — Dean William A. Wirtz, chairman, Dr. W. E. Parsons, and Professor Charles Carter. During this period two important events occurred. On September 12, 1916, a committee which had been appointed to formulate a statement of the purpose of Parsons College reported in detail. The following March the Board discontinued the academy since its purposes were being performed by the public high schools.

After operating one year without a president, the Board chose the Reverend R. Ames Montgomery of St. Louis. Dr. Montgomery, a trustee of the school, was an alumnus of Miami University, Ox-

ford, Ohio, and McCormick Theological Seminary. The nation had just been plunged into war and Dr. Montgomery began a vigorous campaign, in spite of unfavorable circumstances, to increase the endowment and to secure additional students. Although World War I took its share of students and financial support away from Parsons, the college was aided by the establishment of a Student Army Training Camp on the campus in 1918. Both Fairfield Hall and Ewing Hall were used for barracks, mess hall, and hospital. Foster Hall was utilized for classrooms and quarters for the officers.

In 1922 President Montgomery resigned to accept a similar position at Centre College, Danville, Kentucky. During his administration, the student body had grown from 348 to 563. In addition, a department of oratory and public speaking had been established in 1919; a two-year normal course was added in 1920; and student government was adopted in 1921, the same year that a budget was used for the first time to handle the finances of the college.

At a called meeting of the Board of Trustees on August 7, 1922, Dr. Howard McDonald, who had served four years as Dean of Parsons, was elected President of the college. McDonald received a B. A. from Princeton in 1902, a Ph. D. from the University of Michigan in 1914. He achieved the presidency at a favorable time since, in 1923, the

Presbyterian Church in Iowa started a drive to secure two million dollars for educational purposes. This sum was to be divided among the three Presbyterian affiliated colleges in the state and the student centers at Cedar Falls, Iowa City, and Ames. Parsons was to receive approximately \$500,000. The campaign, unfortunately, was not as successful as anticipated and Parsons received only \$250,000. The Fairfield community responded to this drive by raising \$150,000 although originally asked to subscribe only \$100,000.

The physical plant of the college was enlarged during President McDonald's administration. In the fall of 1923 Parsons students suggested the purchase of "Broadview," which was eventually accomplished. In addition, the Grove residence and nine and one-half acres of land were acquired and later occupied by the Empyrean Sorority.

The semi-centennial services commemorating the founding of Parsons College were held on June 9, 1925, in Barhydt Memorial Chapel. Dr. Willis E. Parsons was chairman of the committee appointed by the Board of Trustees to arrange for the exercises and Dr. William Chalmers Covert, Secretary of the Board of Christian Education of the Presbyterian Church, gave the main address.