



6-2016

The Liberal Arts on Trial: Charles H. Fisher and Red-Scare Politics at Western Washington College of Education, 1933-39

Ron C. Judd

Western Washington University, ronjudd@comcast.net

Follow this and additional works at: <https://cedar.wvu.edu/cedarbooks>



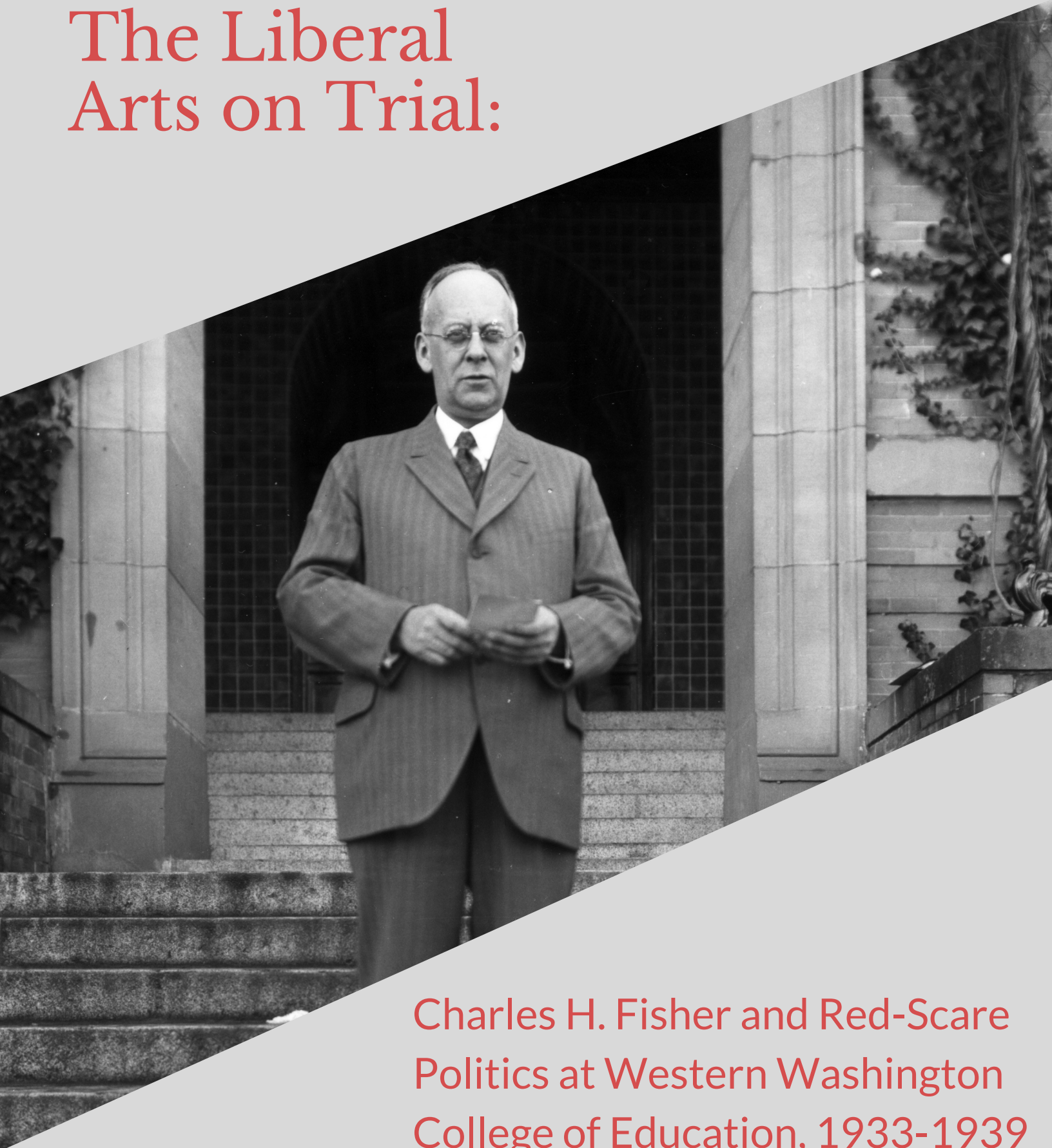
Part of the [Political History Commons](#), and the [Social History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Judd, Ron C., "The Liberal Arts on Trial: Charles H. Fisher and Red-Scare Politics at Western Washington College of Education, 1933-39" (2016). *A Collection of Open Access Books and Monographs*. 9.
<https://cedar.wvu.edu/cedarbooks/9>

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Books and Monographs at Western CEDAR. It has been accepted for inclusion in A Collection of Open Access Books and Monographs by an authorized administrator of Western CEDAR. For more information, please contact westerncedar@wwu.edu.

The Liberal Arts on Trial:



Charles H. Fisher and Red-Scare
Politics at Western Washington
College of Education, 1933-1939

Ron C. Judd

THE LIBERAL ARTS ON TRIAL:
CHARLES H. FISHER AND RED-SCARE POLITICS
AT WESTERN WASHINGTON COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, 1933-39

A Thesis

Presented to the

Graduate Faculty of the History Department

and the

Faculty of the Graduate College

University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

University of Nebraska at Kearney

By

Ron C. Judd

June 2016

Acknowledgments

A study of this size and scope would not have been possible without contributions from a number of people who shared a passion for telling this story. The author offers sincere thanks to the Heritage Resources staff at Western Washington University, including Director Elizabeth Joffrion; archivists Rozlind Koester and Ruth Steele of the Center for Pacific Northwest Studies; Tamara Belts and Paul Piper of WWU's Wilson Library Special Collections; WWU archivist Tony Kurtz; and the James W. Scott Research Fellowships. Thanks also to the Graduate History faculty at the University of Nebraska-Kearney, especially thesis advisor Dr. Linda Van Ingen; the staff at Washington State Archives in Olympia and at the Gelman Library at George Washington University; and to Hans-Joerg Tiede, associate secretary, Department of Academic Freedom, Tenure, and Governance, American Association of University Professors in Washington, D.C. Finally, a debt of gratitude is owed to my wife Meri-Jo Borzilleri, who watched a small project turn into a very large one with her usual grace.

Abstract

College president Charles H. Fisher's transformation of Bellingham State Normal School, a small state teacher's college, into Western Washington College of Education earned him the overwhelming respect of his peers, faculty, students, and much of the local community. His reward was an abrupt firing by Washington Governor Clarence Martin in 1938. Fisher's ousting was engineered by a cabal of "anti-communist" citizens led by Frank I. Sefrit, the conservative editor of *The Bellingham Herald*. The group had ties to a range of "pro-American" groups, including the American Legion, several conservative women's organizations, local churches, and the Ku Klux Klan. Sefrit called Fisher a communist sympathizer who fostered anti-Americanism, atheism, and "free love" on a campus infected by "Red" academics, many trained at Columbia University. College trustees in 1935 exonerated Fisher, but three years later, acceded to Gov. Clarence Martin's insistence that Fisher be fired. Subsequent investigations described the firing as politically motivated, raising alarms about infringement of academic freedom during a period of social strife. Existing accounts of the Depression-era incident paint Fisher's foes as oddball radicals. But the campaign did not occur in a political vacuum. Previously unknown documents about the Fisher case reveal varied personal motivations of Fisher's foes in a town torn by political rancor, fomented by a vicious, decades-long media war. New evidence also reveals a link between the Fisher case and a concurrent national red-baiting campaign directed at academic institutions across the United States. Additional new evidence suggests that the Fisher dismissal might have been influenced by a separate financial scandal at the college in the 1930s. This study will explore Charles

Fisher's ousting in unprecedented detail, placing it for the first time within the context of a decade of strident, ultra-conservative activism serving as what one historian has dubbed "a bridge between the two Red Scares."

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
1. Radical Red-Baiting and Academia: An Historical Overview	10
2. Bellingham: Charles Fisher’s Progressive Western Beachhead	53
3. Depression-era Politics and the “Would-Be Nero of Bellingham”	90
4. Red-Scare Roots Blossom: The Committee on Normal Protest	126
5. “Court” In Session, May 22, 1935	163
6. Rising Red Tide and a Doomed Presidency	210
7. Unraveling the Fisher Mystery: Investigations Old and New	274
8. Postscripts	323
9. Conclusions.....	356
10. Appendices.....	393
11. Bibliography	421

Introduction

The Fisher Case: “Embarrassing to all concerned”

Professor Herbert Hearsey, a newly hired reference librarian, never forgot the scene: It was a crystal-clear day in late September, 1941, his first day on the scenic campus at Western Washington College of Education. After a quick survey of the school grounds overlooking Bellingham Bay, he crossed College Avenue and came upon a woman working in her garden. The two exchanged pleasantries, but when Hearsey explained that he was a new college faculty member, fresh off the train from Chicago, the conversation turned gravely serious. "You know," the woman said, gesturing toward the hilltop campus, "they've had a nest of communists up there. I want to warn you." ¹

The woman described herself as a member of the local chapter of Daughters of the American Revolution. She informed her new acquaintance that she and other community members had recently sent the local college president of 16 years, Charles Henry Fisher, to an early retirement. Their *modus operandi* had been to attend campus assemblies and events, compiling a list of "communists" and other subversives Fisher had lured to poison young, patriotic minds. They later sent this dossier to Washington Gov. Clarence Martin. And in a move that stunned the Pacific Northwest, Martin, a conservative Democrat, succumbed to the pressure by forcing the president from office.

"We got *rid* of Fisher," the woman boasted. Hearsey remembered vividly his own astonishment and discomfort. "My blood kind of curdled because she was so vicious and

¹ Herbert Hearsey interview, box 2, folder 15, Western Washington University Centennial Oral History Project Records, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham WA., 5.

venomous," Hearsey recalled. "I really wanted to get away from there, because ... she took so much *joy* in it."

In historical terms, what is most surprising about Hearsey's encounter is not the basic premise of the story told by this woman. It is how successful this group was in pressuring the state's highest executive to remove a popular college president considered a national leader in progressive education. Arguably even more surprising is the time that this campaign unfolded: from 1934 to 1939.

The dates of the campaign against Charles Fisher are significant because they fall directly between the two prominent "Red Scare" waves acknowledged by US historians. The first came in the wake of World War I, the second during the Cold War following World War II. Both prompted attacks on civil liberties and other freedoms by Americans fearful of perceived internal or external threats to their way of life.² Red Scare historians have debated the existence of a so-called political "normal period" between the two scares. The little-studied case of Charles Fisher argues loudly against this notion. It suggests, in fact, that in Bellingham and other parts of the Pacific Northwest, important elements of the "super-patriot" political forces inspired by that First Red Scare barely paused to take a breath. In fact, they seemed to have been reenergized by a new perceived threat of radical, collectivist resurgence evident in the response to the Great Depression.³

² Robert K Murray, *Red Scare; a Study in National Hysteria, 1919-1920*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955).

³ The movement gained a stamp of legitimacy by Congressional hearings on "Communist Propaganda" held in Seattle in October, 1930, under the auspices of U.S. Rep. Hamilton Fish III. See United States Congress House Special Committee on Communist Activities in the United States, "Investigation of communist

These suspicions were granted legitimacy by conservative political leaders — many of them former public officials swept from office in the 1932 general election. The political climate thus was ripe for fresh attacks on resurgent symbols of progressivism. This was particularly true in Bellingham, a town described by newcomers as a place still in many ways situated squarely on the Western "frontier" in terms of its civic mindset toward politics, religion and education. In a community bitterly divided between old-school conservatives and New Deal liberals — representing, at least to some degree, the nation's political past and its future — Charles Fisher and his hilltop teacher's college came to be seen as the face of progressivism, and in the eyes of some, radicalism.⁴

The broad outlines of the Fisher case are well-documented: A group calling itself the "Committee on Normal Protest — "Normal" being a reference to the former name of the Whatcom Normal School, now Western Washington University — was organized in 1934 by the town's leading conservative power broker: Frank I. Sefrit, editor of the local newspaper, *The Bellingham Herald*.⁵ Sefrit, known for running his newspaper and the local Republican Party from the same office, traditionally had been a staunch supporter of the teacher's college. But as Fisher restructured what he called a "glorified high-school curriculum "into a highly progressive liberal-arts program of national renown, Sefrit, an

propaganda Hearings ... pursuant to H. Res. 220, providing for an investigation of communist propaganda in the United States. Part 5, volume no. 1, Seattle, WA, October 3, 1930, Portland, OR October 4, 1930."

⁴ Herbert Hearsey interview, 5. Political factions in Bellingham were represented by the two major news sources: conservatives generally subscribed to *The Bellingham Herald*; liberals listened to its arch-enemy, KVOS Radio. The battle between the two sides led to an important 1936 U.S. Supreme Court case, *KVOS v. Associated Press*, and numerous legal battles over licensing before the Federal Communications Commission.

⁵ The longtime *Herald* editor's surname is pronounced "SEE-frit."

ardent anti-communist, grew increasingly suspicious.⁶ His angst about Fisher's politics found common ground with disaffected local Fisher opponents, and with a broad swath of local conservative organizations: the American Legion, Daughters of the American Revolution, the Whatcom County Republican Party, some local churches, and even remnants of a once-powerful local Ku Klux Klan network. The group was small, with a dozen or a few members, but extremely well-connected. Its strategy was simple: Members would accuse the college president of a broad slate of "un-American" activities, backed by "evidence" collected by members and their surrogates. They demanded a hearing with the college Board of Trustees to present this evidence. Assuming the board ultimately defended the popular president, the group would take its case straight to the governor. And Governor Martin would cite the trustees' intransigence as cause for installing an all-new board willing to dispatch Fisher.⁷

Events unfolded largely according to this plan. Sefrit's only miscalculation was his overestimation of the fortitude of the college trustees. As he perhaps expected, they did defend Fisher against the original ten "un-American" charges levied by Sefrit's group in spring, 1935. But three years later, faced with threats of their own removal from the college by the governor, the trustees caved, informing Fisher that his presidency would

⁶ "Minutes of Hearing Conducted by the Complaint Committee Before the Board of Trustees of the Bellingham State Normal School 1935 May 22," box 1, folder 8, Bellingham Herald collection on President Charles H. Fisher, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Western Libraries Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA, 52. The college began granting Bachelor of Arts degrees in 1934.

⁷ Bellingham Herald Collection. Sefrit's hand-written notes outlining the plan are contained in box 7, folder 1.

end after 16 years.⁸ The action, unbeknownst to the public, occurred among whispers by high-level state officials of financial impropriety at the college (later proven largely unfounded). The forced removal created a furor among students, faculty, much of the community, and the state's political establishment, including its entire Congressional delegation. Leading national progressive figures joined the chorus of boos over the blunt exercise of power by Martin, a conservative Democrat who offered little public explanation. Fisher himself remained defiant, proclaiming publicly that his unjust removal exposed a critical flaw in the state's higher-education governance system that allowed political agitators to essentially commandeer a public college.⁹ But once Fisher finally let go, moving out of state, for a time, to pursue other jobs, the matter largely faded from public view. Fisher, who died in 1964, is credited today with being a visionary leader on the forefront of national education reform for teacher training.¹⁰ But that remarkable achievement, accomplished at what then was a tiny, far-flung outpost in the world of teacher education in the midst of the Great Depression, remains obscured by what amounts to a lingering asterisk. Trustees of the college were initially so ashamed of their role in Fisher's clumsy stumble from grace that they struck all references to the matter from college records, leaving an ominous blank space in the history of the college.

⁸ W. T. Laprade and A. J. Carlson, "Academic Freedom and Tenure: Western Washington College of Education," *Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors* 27, no. 1 (February 1, 1941): 48–60, doi:10.2307/40219179.

⁹ University trustees and regents in Washington State at the time were appointed directly by the governor; they continue to be at present.

¹⁰ Roland DeLorme, "The Liberal Arts Come to Bellingham," in James William Scott, Howard J. Critchfield, and Janet R Collins, *Pacific Northwest: Essays in Honor of James W. Scott* (Bellingham, Wash: Western Washington University, 1993).

One trustee, pressed on this action by an investigator, told the truth: “It was embarrassing to all concerned.”¹¹

For Western, now a thriving Washington state regional university with a strong liberal-arts focus, Fisher thus became an awkward historical footnote, neither disavowed nor celebrated. He remains an enigma, his ultimate innocence or guilt of the charges levied against him, remarkably, becoming less clear with the passage of time. Remarkably, at this writing, even the university’s own website, in a brief biography of the university’s most transformational leader, makes only vague reference to a curious controversy centered on accusations about the man’s “liberal leanings and non-traditional religious ideas” (Fisher, a seminary graduate, was a lifelong Presbyterian).¹² Lingering mischaracterizations of the event likely are due to the fact that existing historical treatments come only to the edges of Fisher’s story. A short history of the incident, written for a Western Washington University fiftieth and seventy-fifth anniversary publication by the late Professor Arthur C. Hicks, an outspoken supporter of Fisher, but not a trained historian, serves as the university’s only historical account.¹³ It is an eyewitness, but incomplete, treatment. External researchers have touched the broad outlines of the controversy: As will be demonstrated in the following chapter, the

¹¹ Laprade and Carlson, 57.

¹² https://library.wvu.edu/hr/specialcollections/sc_westernprofiles. The profile also asserts that Governor Martin “asked Fisher to leave Western,” and that this action was “Prompted by concerned community, student and faculty members.” These assertions are demonstrably false. Martin ordered trustees to fire Fisher. His actions were prompted by a conspiracy involving a relatively tiny fraction of community members. Faculty and students, almost to a person, vociferously opposed it.

¹³ Arthur C Hicks, *Western at 75* (Bellingham, WA: Western Washington State College Foundation, 1974).

political forces responsible for Fisher's demise have been examined in general terms by historians focused on Northwest political history, conservative attacks on civil liberties, U.S. academic freedom cases, national women's conservative activism, the Ku Klux Klan in Washington, and other matters.¹⁴ On a broader scale, many historians have documented, in much sharper relief, the Northwest's history as a bastion for social progressivism and left-wing labor activism — the sort that led U.S. Postmaster General James Farley to quip in 1936, "There are forty-seven states in the Union, and the Soviet of Washington." But little historical attention has been paid to the particularly virulent, tenacious reaction to that movement, which, this study will argue, stubbornly smoldered

¹⁴ Northwest history: Earl S. Pomeroy (Earl Spencer), *The Pacific Slope: A History of California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Utah, and Nevada*, University of Nevada Press pbk. ed. (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2003). Civil liberties: Albert F. Gunns, *Civil Liberties in Crisis: The Pacific Northwest, 1917-1940* (New York: Garland Pub., 1983). Academic freedoms: Ellen Schrecker, "Subversives, Squeaky Wheels, and 'Special Obligations': Threats to Academic Freedom, 1890-1960," *Social Research* 76, no. 2 (July 1, 2009): 513–40, 525. Also see Carol S. Gruber (Carol Singer), *Mars and Minerva: World War I and the Uses of the Higher Learning in America* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975); Sheila Slaughter, "The Danger Zone: Academic Freedom and Civil Liberties," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 448 (March 1, 1980): 46–61; and Timothy Reese Cain, "Silence and Cowardice' at the University of Michigan: World War I and the Pursuit of Un-American Faculty," *History of Education Quarterly* 51, no. 3 (August 1, 2011): 296–329, doi:10.1111/j.1748-5959.2011.00338.x, 298. For a regional perspective, see Keith A. Murray, "The Charles Niederhauser Case: Patriotism in the Seattle Schools, 1919," *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 74, no. 1 (January 1, 1983): 11–17. Women's conservatism: June Melby Benowitz, *Days of Discontent: American Women and Right Wing Politics, 1933-1945* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002); Glen Jeansonne, *Women of the Far Right: The Mothers' Movement and World War II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Christine K. Erickson, "'We Want No Teachers Who Say There Are Two Sides to Every Question': Conservative Women and Education in the 1930s," *History of Education Quarterly* 46, no. 4 (December 1, 2006): 487–502. Ku Klux Klan: Gabriel S. Mayers, "The Ku Klux Klan in Bellingham, 1900-1935." *Journal of the Whatcom County Historical Society* No. 2, October 2001: 34-45. Mayers concluded that while organized Klan activity continued beyond the broad demise of the "First Klan" nationally in the early 1920s, its influence was largely waning in Bellingham, Washington by 1932. Solomon Blanton Luther, a downtown Bellingham land owner and member of the Committee On Normal Protest, was a self-described Klansman, but no documentation of his place in the local KKK organization has been found.

across the region for decades.¹⁵ Given this, it is even more surprising that no historian to date has focused an in-depth inquiry on the Fisher case, which capably illustrates an instance of the emergence of this phenomenon in an important arena of public life – up to and into the highest office in the state of Washington.

Thus, the Fisher case – for both the state and the university, a seeming embarrassment still – continues to present more historical questions than answers: Was Fisher, now remembered on campus only by a small plaque on a fountain in “Red Square,” in fact, a communist, or at least a sympathizer with communist students of faculty? How radical were the “radicals” who successfully removed him — or were they truly radical at all? What motivated them, and were these forces a local phenomenon, or part of a broader movement? Why did the community at large fail to rally to Fisher’s defense? What political equation prompted the governor to be complicit and afford such power to such a small group of right-wing radicals? What is the legacy in Washington state government, and higher education, of his firing? And perhaps most importantly, where does the Fisher case fit into the historical narrative of the university, its community, the state, and the nation?

This study attempts to answer those questions, and to provide that historical context. It does so by examining large volumes of newly available primary sources –

¹⁵ This counter-revolution exploded in full force with the militarized crushing of the Seattle General Strike in 1919, militaristic suppression of Wobbly insurgents, and jailing of anti-conscriptionists during and after World War I. Notable histories of the Seattle General Strike include: Harvey O'Connor, *Revolution in Seattle: A Memoir* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1964); Robert L. Friedheim, "The Seattle General Strike of 1919," *PNQ*, Vol. 52 (1961), 81-98; and Ole Hanson, *Americanism versus Bolshevism* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1920). Works on violent clashes with the IWW include Lawrence Skoog, *Labor Violence: The Centralia Case: The IWW and Its Enemies* (Portland, 1975).

intriguing documents about the case discovered only recently in Bellingham, at the state capitol in Olympia, and in Washington, D.C. And it does so by reexamining, eighty years after the fact, a wealth of previously available materials, many of which had never been studied in relationship to the Fisher case. At the time of his firing, Fisher himself was perceptive enough to recognize the historic importance of the political fight of his life. The president left, in the college archives, a cache of materials that documented his own demise. They provide a worthy starting point for examining his legacy. Letters to his peers in that collection make it clear he saw his predicament as part of a much broader, uniquely American, struggle:

"The issues involved in my case are so much a part of our times that they certainly do not revolve around me personally," a distraught Fisher wrote to a colleague as he prepared in summer, 1939, to leave the campus he had built and grown to love.¹⁶ "The social forces that have clashed in this instance are the same forces in conflict all over the country. Out here on the Pacific Coast, the conflict seems to be more acute than in other sections of the country. This is a progressive and liberal state and we have tried to develop an instruction that is in harmony with the people of the state. The fundamental question I see is shall a small, influential group of fascist-minded reactionaries through false propaganda, get control of an institution and thus sabotage the will of the majority?"

¹⁶ Fisher to George A. Selke, American Association of Teachers Colleges, June 29, 1939, Charles Henry Fisher Collection, Heritage Resources, Special Collections, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.

Chapter 1

Radical Red-Baiting and Academia: An Historical Overview

While the broad outline of the Charles Fisher affair is known to some degree, at least among local historians, the political and historical context giving rise to the event has never received serious academic scrutiny. A closer examination reveals that Fisher's firing, often portrayed in scarce local accounts as the result of an inexplicable blip of local arch-conservatism, was an almost-predictable result of impassioned political wars waged for more than two decades on the piers, streets and alleyways below the heavily treed Bellingham hilltop campus. Local arch conservatives, their message amplified by the deep public insecurity brought by the onslaught of the Great Depression, were either directly or ideologically aligned with other "pro-American," "super-patriot" groups that fueled a conservative backlash to the New Deal across the nation during the 1930s. In Bellingham, as in other select cities across the nation, the reactionary movement chose as its primary target the local institution of higher education — a supposed breeding ground of the communist, atheistic enemy the groups feared most. That movement, however, did not simply materialize during the years of the Great Depression and the Franklin D. Roosevelt Administration. Its roots are traced directly to the conservative backlash evident in Northwest political battles sparked during the run-up to, and conclusion of, World War I.

Given the propensity to lump historic episodes into tidy chronological packages, historians have long identified two distinct periods of radical, conservative politics whose

defining feature was an assault on American people or institutions deemed "un-American," "pro-communist," or both. Generally, the first of these two "red scares" is defined as the period roughly from 1917, with the double whammy of the Bolshevik Revolution and America's entrance into World War I, to 1920, when the flames of political passion lit by the war finally began to ebb, replaced to some degree by more domestic concerns, such as Prohibition.¹ America's Second Red Scare — the only one now associated with the term in the minds of many in the general public — was the post-World-War II period of national insecurity, beginning around 1946 with the new, Cold-War reality that the expansionist Soviet Union and its allies posed a clear threat to the security of the United States. Historians have debated whether a period of relative "normalcy" was present in the country between these two easily identifiable eras. This study, focusing specifically on radical conservative attacks on academia, will join the multiplying voices of others arguing strongly against the "myth of normalcy," particularly as evidenced in political trends and occurrences in the Pacific Northwest during the 1930s.² The Fisher case strongly suggests, in fact, that in the Pacific Northwest, important elements of the far-right political forces inspired by the First Red Scare continued to gain momentum between the two periods, focusing on a new perceived

¹ Robert K Murray, *Red Scare; a Study in National Hysteria, 1919-1920*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955), 239.

² Nick Fischer, "The Founders of American Anti-Communism," *American Communist History* 5, no. 1 (June 2006): 67–101, doi:10.1080/14743890600763863.

threat of radical socialist and communist resurgence in response to the economic upset of the Great Depression.³

This "super patriot" movement that smoldered, in some respects, out of public view throughout the 1930s was given birth by the First Red Scare, an event described by historian Robert K. Murray as a period of "national hysteria."⁴ This was particularly true in the Pacific Northwest, and even more so in the Puget Sound region of Washington state. There, the early twentieth century had seen development of an unusually rich mélange of progressivism taking hold in labor unions, civic politics and even some religious institutions.⁵ These movements unfolded in the presence of — and sometimes with the direct involvement of — recent foreign immigrants drawn to the region's resource-extraction industries of logging, fishing, agriculture, and railroad construction. This former breeding ground for socialist thought turned into an ideal battleground for retribution after America's emergence on the global stage in World War I, coupled with

³ The movement in the Northwest gained a stamp of legitimacy by Congressional hearings on "Communist Propaganda" in Seattle in October, 1930, under the auspices of U.S. Rep. Hamilton Fish III. See United States Congress House Special Committee on Communist Activities in the United States, "Investigation of communist propaganda. Hearings ... pursuant to H. Res. 220, providing for an investigation of communist propaganda in the United States. Part 5, volume no. 1, Seattle, WA, October 3, 1930, Portland, OR October 4, 1930". For an analysis of the committee's limited effectiveness on exposing alleged communist activity nationwide, see Alex Goodall, "Red Herrings? The Fish Committee and Anti-Communism in the Early Depression Years," in Robert J. Goldstein, ed., *Little "Red Scares": Anti-Communism and Political Repression in the United States, 1921-1946*, (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2014), 71-103. The Fisher case would seem to fit the definition of a localized, limited-focus red scare that defined instances occurring in the period between the two "great" red scares as defined by Goldstein.

⁴ Murray, *Red Scare*. Latter scholars, such as Fischer, disagree however with the characterization of "hysteria," which Murray characterized as a sort of inexplicable, temporary insanity that died on its own. See Fischer, "The Founders of American Anti-Communism," 70.

⁵ The collectivist, pro-labor Social Gospel movement was heavily ensconced among mainstream Protestant denominations throughout the Northwest, particularly in Seattle. *Northwest Church Life 1911-1914*, Special Collections, University of Washington Libraries, Seattle, WA.

public fears that Bolshevism might consume America from within. The "Great War," as Albert F. Gunns notes in *Civil Liberties in Crisis: The Pacific Northwest, 1917-1940*, "stood at the head of the forces contributing to intolerance in the United States during the first third of the twentieth century." The war, Gunns writes, not only generated its own specific political controversies, but magnified and inflamed existing divisions by "distorting them out of their complex domestic contexts." He concludes: "Thus dissent and challenges to the status quo became transformed by the mentality of the day into acts of aid to the enemy or, after the war had passed, into a more vaguely defined transgression called, "un-Americanism."⁶

Numerous historical studies document the particular — arguably unique -- virulence with which political retribution of the First Red Scare swept the Pacific Northwest. Historian Earl Pomeroy describes this radical political transformation — not just a change in leadership, but an apparent change in philosophy of those already in leadership positions — as a mixture of political opportunism and the almost-frantic desire among Western leaders to prove their patriotism. Strong laws on criminal syndicalism approved in the once-progressive Western states from 1917 to 1919 seemed almost a means of atonement for the previous, widespread opposition to the war throughout the region.⁷ Retribution tended to focus on those associated with progressive labor causes, as

⁶ Albert F. Gunns, *Civil Liberties in Crisis: The Pacific Northwest, 1917-1940* (New York: Garland Pub., 1983), 1.

⁷ Earl S. Pomeroy (Earl Spencer), *The Pacific Slope: A History of California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Utah, and Nevada*, University of Nevada Press pbk. ed. (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2003), 224. Pomeroy uses the example of Seattle Mayor Ole Hanson, who as a state legislator supported liberal workplace reforms, but ran for mayor in 1918 as a business-community, anti-labor candidate. As mayor,

well as pacifist and anti-conscription movements. On less-frequent occasions, it turned on what was viewed as treasonous indoctrination in local secondary schools and colleges.

In the Puget Sound region, this political phenomenon was exacerbated by the timing of the failed Seattle General Strike of 1919.⁸ The strike, which began in local shipyards and spread citywide, collapsed within a week. But the new reality that unions could effectively shut down a major U.S. city cast a shadow that seemed particularly ominous, given ongoing public concern about the spread of Bolshevism to the United States.⁹ The fear was further heightened by ongoing combat between authorities and industries and members of the radical labor union, Industrial Workers of the World, or I.W.W. Violent clashes with "Wobblies" on two infamous occasions, the "Everett Massacre" of 1916 and "Centralia Massacre" of 1919, made it seem that war with foreign-influenced revolutionaries was at hand — and that the shores of Puget Sound were its most likely beachhead.¹⁰ While these events occurred a full decade before the onset of Charles Fisher's political battle for survival as the head of a college 90 miles to

Hanson summoned federal troops to help crush the "Bolshevik" Seattle General Strike of 1919, then attempted to turn public anger against the labor movement into a populist platform for a presidential candidacy.

⁸ Notable histories of the strike include: Harvey O'Connor, *Revolution in Seattle: A Memoir* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1964); Robert L. Friedheim, "The Seattle General Strike of 1919," *PNQ*, Vol. 52 (1961), 81-98; Ole Hanson, *Americanism versus Bolshevism* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1920).

⁹ Famed Seattle journalist and labor agitator Anna Louise Strong, in her autobiography, laments that her famous newspaper editorial about the Seattle Strike leading "We Know Not Where!" was meant as an honest expression of an uncertain goal for the surprise general strike, but was misinterpreted by politicians and the public as a coy prediction of a communist future: "Government officials in Washington announced that Bolshevism had made its appearance in the northwest of the United States," she writes. Anna Louise Strong, *I Change Worlds: The Remaking of an American* (New York: HHolt and Co, 1935), 74.

¹⁰See Lawrence Skoog, *Labor Violence: The Centralia Case : The IWW and Its Enemies* (Portland, 1975).

the north, in Bellingham, they are significant foundations of the regional political climate that would provoke that skirmish. Ideological spats, usually adhering to cultural and political lines etched deeply during the First Red Scare, would erupt throughout the Northwest on a regular basis throughout the interwar period. Ultimately they would blossom — well ahead of much of the rest of the nation, as evidenced by the Red-baiting "Canwell Committee" hearings in Seattle in 1948 — into the Second Red Scare after World War II.

Former University of Washington law professor Arval A. Morris, chief counsel in a key Washington state loyalty-oath case argued before the United States Supreme Court in the 1950s, wrote of the region's interwar history: "We know now that the link between the antiradical and antialien forces was not a temporary liaison arising in response to World War I and the Russian Revolution. But rather, the nativist backlash has been of long duration, and has not yet fully worked out its destiny."¹¹ Gunns places similar importance on the war's long-term political impact in the Northwest: "The war took the American government into previously little-explored corners of American life, frequently at the cost of diminishing civil liberties."¹² Left behind was an unpleasant legacy of eroded civil rights: conscription laws and a strong counter-reaction thereto; prosecution of civilians accused of treason under Espionage and Sedition Acts of 1917-1918; and subsequent mass raids on, and arrests of, leftist groups.

¹¹ Arval A. Morris, "The University of Washington Loyalty Oath Case," *AAUP Bulletin* 50, no. 3 (September 1, 1964): 221–31, doi:10.2307/40223126, 222. See also, Murray, op cit.

¹² Gunns, 22.

Another byproduct of World War I nativism was the phenomenon of private citizens increasingly taking it upon themselves to report suspicious activities of their neighbors. Mirroring a national trend toward vigilantism in rooting out "German spies," Seattle's own "Minute Men" organization formed in 1918, and in short time spread around the state of Washington.¹³ The group was soon affiliated with the national American Protective League, described by historian Harold M. Hyman, in the book *To Try Men's Souls* as a loosely organized group of volunteer snoops founded in 1916 by Chicago advertising executive Albert M. Briggs, with the goal of turning "every loyal American into a voluntary detective."¹⁴ Finding surprisingly few German spies, pro-German pacifists or pro-Bolshevik radicals to harass, the 350,000 national members of APL, a group quietly sanctioned by the US Department of Justice, invariably made themselves busy documenting the comings, goings, teachings and speeches of the next-best "threats:" political progressives, politicians and teachers. Even after it formally dissolved in 1919, the organization had left a solid, functioning network to roust out "un-American" citizens in all fields of life. It also left, as a legacy, the notion that spying on, and exposing, fellow citizens deemed enemies of "Americanism" was not only socially acceptable, but honorable. The ideals of the organization, Hyman writes, "penetrated deeply into the social fabric of America." He concludes: "America's first total war left a

¹³ Ibid., 14.

¹⁴ Harold Melvin Hyman, *To Try Men's Souls; Loyalty Tests in American History*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), 227.

permanent peacetime heritage" — fear of change, and anger at those deemed to be agents thereof.¹⁵

Particularly relevant in relation to this study are incidents in the World War I era where public suspicions translated into overt actions against "un-American" activities in academia. Historian Ellen Schrecker, citing as a starting point the 1915 firing of Wharton School economist Scott Nearing by the University of Pennsylvania, estimates the number of U.S. academics fired for similar reasons during World War I at approximately 20. But she and other historians caution that the number likely was much higher, as many resigned on their own, or were "quietly eased out of their positions or fired from such insignificant or isolated institutions that their dismissals did not reach the historical record."¹⁶

In a study of politically motivated academic purges during this period, *Mars and Minerva: World War I and the Uses of the Higher Learning in America*, Carol S. Gruber recounts the 1917 dismissal of outspoken University of Minnesota political scientist William Schaper. An early opponent of the war, Schaper was dismissed after a grilling by university regents, who determined that he was unfit to teach because of his "... expressed unwillingness to aid the United States in the present war."¹⁷ Other faculty

¹⁵ Hyman, *To Try Men's Souls*, 295-296.

¹⁶ Ellen Schrecker, "Subversives, Squeaky Wheels, and 'Special Obligations': Threats to Academic Freedom, 1890-1960," *Social Research* 76, no. 2 (July 1, 2009): 513-40, 525. Also see Carol S. Gruber (Carol Singer), *Mars and Minerva: World War I and the Uses of the Higher Learning in America* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975); and Sheila Slaughter, "The Danger Zone: Academic Freedom and Civil Liberties," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 448 (March 1, 1980): 46-61.

¹⁷ Gruber, *Minerva*, 176-179; Schrecker, "Subversives," 527.

members lost their jobs simply because of German heritage, an association with those of German heritage, or teaching Germanic languages. At the University of Michigan, six professors, assistant professors and instructors of German lost their positions during the 1917-1918 academic year.¹⁸ But the political pressure extended far beyond the language department at Michigan, where professors sympathetic to the war effort verbally attacked non-conforming colleagues.¹⁹ In 1919, Edward Allen, a math instructor at the University of Michigan's College of Engineering, also was fired on charges that he was sympathetic to Germany during the war — an accusation believed to be based upon the German heritage of his wife, Minne, a 1915 U.S. immigrant. Minne Allen, complaining after her husband's firing about hyper-patriotic community members, wrote to her mother that America's educational institutions, which should be centers of the greatest freedom and thought during insecure times, "have become places of silence and cowardice."²⁰ Campus unrest of a similar nature before and during World War I was documented at Hebrew Union, Marietta and Oberlin Colleges; Ohio State and Indiana Universities; and the Universities of Akron, Cincinnati, Illinois, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Toledo and Wisconsin.²¹ The most widely publicized dismissals, however, were those of Columbia

¹⁸ Timothy Reese Cain, "Silence and Cowardice' at the University of Michigan: World War I and the Pursuit of Un-American Faculty," *History of Education Quarterly* 51, no. 3 (August 1, 2011): 296–329, doi:10.1111/j.1748-5959.2011.00338.x, 298.

¹⁹ Cain, "Silence and Cowardice," 299.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 296.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 298. Also see Slaughter, "The Danger Zone," 53. Slaughter places the number of World War I educators fired at 22, but like other scholars, states that many firings were not recorded. To prevent mutual

University professors Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Dana and James McKeen Cattell, both fired amidst allegations that they were soft on the war cause. Those dismissals would lead to the well-publicized protest resignation of the noted Columbia University political historian, Charles A. Beard.

Educators so accused found few public allies. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP), the leading voice of college faculty that had only begun to organize as professionals during this period, largely caved to wartime public pressure to conform.²² The group, which in 1915 had issued a strong proclamation on academic freedom, made it clear in a 1917 amendment that the organization would not support teachers who ran afoul of laws related to the war effort. In fact, educators, especially those of German or Austro-Hungarian descent, had "special obligations" to refrain from teachings or even public pronouncements that might be construed as being in opposition to the war, the AAUP declared.²³ University leaders, even at supposed vanguards of progressive thought such as Columbia University, laid down the new law. President Nicholas Murray Butler, in a June, 1917 commencement address, bluntly compared political realities for faculty members before America's entrance into the war, and after:

"What had been tolerated before becomes intolerable now. What had been wrongheadedness was now sedition. What had been folly was now treason ... There is

embarrassment, some besieged faculty, such as Emily Balch of Wellesley, took leaves of absence and never returned.

²² For the development of professional associations devoted to academic freedom, see: Walter P. Metzger, *Academic Freedom in the Age of the University*, (New York and London, Columbia University Press, 1955).

²³ Schrecker, "Subversives," 525; Slaughter, "Danger Zone," 52.

and will be no place in Columbia University for any person who opposes or counsels opposition to the effective enforcement to the laws of the United States, or who acts, speaks or writes treason ... This is the University's last and only warning to any among us ... who are not with whole heart and mind and strength committed to fight with us to make the world safe for democracy."²⁴

The message could hardly have been clearer. But the end of the war soon brought a surprisingly swift respite from Red-scare politics in general, historians such as Murray contend.²⁵ Most historical accounts suggest that the succeeding decade did see a return to relative normalcy in U.S. academia. "(T)he years between the wars found most campuses fairly placid," observes Schrecker, who adds that political attacks on academia did not resume full force until the McCarthy Era associated with the Second Red Scare.²⁶

Yet sparsely explored even by historians who specialize in academic freedom was a second waves of attacks on academia, this time aimed at both faculty and administrators, in the 1930s. The movement was inspired and largely prosecuted by a small, persistent cadre of self-proclaimed "super- patriot" activists, one of whose self-appointed tasks throughout the 1930s was to roust out and persecute "anti-American" activity, particularly on American college campuses. The super-patriots — eventually given a significant public boost by the conscription to their cause of notorious newspaper

²⁴ Metzger, *Academic Freedom*, 225; Schrecker, "Subversives," 527; Gruber, *Minerva*, 199. The latter author notes that "the initiative for (the tone of the speech) came in part from faculty members."

²⁵ Murray, *Red Scare*, 239. Murray describes the transformation nationally as almost instantaneous after the First Red Scare's peak in January, 1920. "Then, suddenly, the crest of hysteria passed. Thereafter public fear was never again as intense ... anti-Red hysteria diminished almost as quickly as it had developed."

²⁶ Schrecker, "Subversives," 528.

publisher, and political heavyweight, William Randolph Hearst — carried forward the First Red Scare banner of nativism, xenophobia and Red-baiting. They added to those causes a heightened sense of urgency that the New Deal was aiding and abetting a communist takeover, from within, of the United States. Soundly defeated at the polls by nervous voters embracing Roosevelt's promised solutions to the Depression, the super-patriot conservatives of the 1930s were convinced that many New Dealers were associated with — for reasons both real and imagined — the global communist movement. The notion turned many an arch-conservative into a radical conservative, desperate to take personal action to save their country. Their largely leaderless movement combined existing ultra-right forces such as the American Legion's "Americanization" committees, the Ku Klux Klan, the fascist, William D. Pelley-led Silvershirts Legion, Daughters of the American Revolution, and other social organizations, all capitalizing on the broad civic unrest of the Great Depression.²⁷

One prominent voice emerged as a consistent thread in episodes of Red baiting that erupted around the country. The infectious political caterwauling of Elizabeth Kirkpatrick Dilling, a vituperative activist and fiery demagogue described as "a bridge between the red scares,"²⁸ has been documented by historians June Melby Benowitz, Christine Erickson and Glen Jeansonne, all of whom note her important — and oft-

²⁷ For a broader discussion on the effect of these combined forces nationwide on academia, see Timothy Reese Cain, "Little Red Schoolhouses? Anti-Communists and Education in an 'Age of Conflicts,'" in Goldstein, *Little "Red Scares"*, 105-133.

²⁸ Mildred Diane Gleason, "In Defense of God and Country: Elizabeth Dilling, a Link between the Red Scares," (PhD diss., University of Arkansas, 1997).

overlooked — role as a link between otherwise unlinked groups active in 1930s arch-conservative circles.²⁹ Jeansonne, documenting Dilling's rise from an upper-middle-class housewife of Chicago attorney Albert Dilling to public prominence as a leading "professional patriot," describes members of her hodgepodge political flock, many of them female, as "true believers" who combined "maternal rhetoric and anti-Semitism, love of Jesus and hatred of Franklin D. Roosevelt."³⁰ Erickson and other historians place Dilling, a leader of the "Protestant far right," in the ideological pantheon of Louisiana Sen. Huey Long and Father Charles Coughlin, the Roman Catholic Detroit "Radio Priest" famous for his weekly, anti-Semitic, anti-Roosevelt rants.³¹ Dilling first rose to public prominence in 1931, when she was urged to discuss a recent visit to Russia by a radio host at the Moody Bible Institute. She also was affiliated throughout her career with filmmaker Harry Jung, director of the American Vigilant Intelligence Foundation and producer of the film, *The Protocols of Zion*.³² Dilling's oratorical style, Erickson notes, set her apart from other right-wing activists: "Dilling sought to forge personal

²⁹ June Melby Benowitz, *Days of Discontent: American Women and Right Wing Politics, 1933-1945* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002); Glen Jeansonne, *Women of the Far Right: The Mothers' Movement and World War II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Christine K. Erickson, "'We Want No Teachers Who Say There Are Two Sides to Every Question': Conservative Women and Education in the 1930s," *History of Education Quarterly* 46, no. 4 (December 1, 2006): 487–502.

³⁰ Glen Jeansonne, "The Right-Wing Mothers of Wartime America," *History Today* 49, no. 12 (December 1999), 31.

³¹ C. K. Erickson, "'I-Have-Not-Had-One-Fact-Disproven': Elizabeth Dilling's Crusade against Communism in the 1930s," *Journal of American Studies*, 36 (2002); Jeansonne, "Right Wing Mothers," 31. See also Amy Dye, "The Powers of Perception: An Intimate Connection with Elizabeth Dilling.," Electronic Theses and Dissertations, May 9, 2009, <http://dc.etsu.edu/etd/1861>, 14.

³² Gleason, "In Defense of God and Country," 57.

relationships with her followers," often by capitalizing on her gender and flinging biting personal, humorous retorts and insults to highlight what she saw as the emasculating effects of communism.³³

A loose network of women's groups in a Dilling-inspired "Mothers' Movement," exhibiting "substantial clout by virtue of their numbers and fanaticism," claimed 10 million members at its peak, but likely numbered less than 6 million.³⁴ The alliance of mostly middle- to upper-class women drew much of its anger from social issues, ranging from unemployment to declining moral values.³⁵ Conservative women's groups old and new drew inspiration from Dilling's campaign to equate liberalism with treason. Among those that would play significant roles in the case of the ousting of Charles Fisher at Western Washington College of Education were the Daughters of the American Revolution and a newer group, Pro America, founded in the mid-1930s in Seattle, Washington.³⁶ The movement boasted several strong allies in Congress, among them Senators Burton K. Wheeler, Gerald P. Nye, and Arthur H. Vandenberg, and Representatives Clare E. Hoffman and Hamilton Fish.³⁷ So wary were the super patriots

³³ Erickson, "Not One Fact Disproven," 478.

³⁴ Jeansonne, "Right Wing Mothers," 31.

³⁵ Benowitz, *Days of Discontent*, 9. Erickson also argues that conservative women in the interwar years were drawn to activism not just to oversee their children's education, but reflects "...their heightened interest in the much broader theme of national defense," including internal threats such as political subversion. Erickson, "We Want No Teachers," 488.

³⁶ Allan J. Lichtman, *White Protestant Nation: The Rise of the American Conservative Movement* (New York: [Berkeley, Calif.]: Atlantic Monthly Press; Distributed by Publishers Group West, 2008), 84-85. Both the D.A.R. and Pro America in the mid-1930s demonstrated a particular affinity for the task of routing seditious teachers from American schools.

³⁷ Jeansonne, "Right Wing Mothers," 32.

of communist influence that many looked favorably upon fascism — including the Nazi rise to power in Germany — as a hedge against it. They were inspired by the fiery demagoguery of Dilling, an obsessive crusader who took it upon herself to alert the nation to the evils of collectivism, which she professed to have witnessed firsthand on a visit to the Soviet Union in 1931.

Dilling's fervor eventually translated to writings. Her most notable book, published in 1934, would become the American Red-baiter's favored propaganda device: *The Red Network: A Who's Who and Handbook of Radicalism for Patriots*.³⁸ The self-published tome was an alphabetized, 352-page compilation of some 500 organizations and 1,300 individuals therein declared "Reds" or Red-associated. *The Red Network* was a combined Yellow Pages directory and encyclopedia of Red activity — apparently with little or no fact-checking. Most subjects listed were implicated with what would become a standard Red-baiting tactic — guilt by simple association — which Dilling effectively pioneered two decades before the McCarthy Hearings of the Second Red Scare. With tens of thousands of copies eventually circulated nationally through a loose confederacy of far-right social, political and religious groups, Dilling's book became the bible of the super-patriot movement; the first Red-scare handbook accessible to the masses. Its author became the most-known red baiter in America for more than a decade, and earned her the title of "Female Fuhrer of America" in a German magazine.³⁹

³⁸ Elizabeth Dilling, *The Red Network: A Who's Who And Handbook of Radicalism For Patriots* (Chicago: Published by the Author, 1934).

³⁹ Jeansonne, "Right Wing Mothers," 33.

In spite of her undeniable populist appeal, Dilling and the super-patriot movement surrounding her have been largely dismissed — and occasionally even mocked — by leading mainstream U.S. historians taking the first looks back at the New Deal era. Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., noting that Dilling's book, *The Red Network*, listed among her hated cadre of Reds the likes of Felix Frankfurter, Mahatma Gandhi, Eleanor Roosevelt, and H.L. Mencken, as well as organizations such as the American Federation of Labor, the Federal Council of Churches and the National Education Association, scoffed that while Dilling "...did bring the red scare into an authentically Marxian world, it was, alas, more Groucho than Karl."⁴⁰ Less frivolous, in Schlesinger's mind, was the discernible political movement that accompanied Dilling's rants — particularly the overt, and potentially dangerous, nudges toward fascism given by leading supporters of her cause, particularly political king-maker Hearst.⁴¹

The relevance of Dilling and like-minded super patriots of the period to this study is two-fold. She was a leading figure in a movement that kept the flames of the first Red Scare burning until the arrival of the Second. But she also served as a critical reference, cheerleader, critical provocateur, and in one case, even an expert witness, for radical conservatives who would keep alive the First Red Scare proclivity for turning America's college campuses into convenient ideological battlefields. As Jeansonne notes, Dilling had been agitating against Reds in public schools since her own children's elementary school days. When they went off to college, their mother brought her crusade with them:

⁴⁰ A. M. Schlesinger, *The Age of Roosevelt. Vol. 3. The Politics of Upheaval*. (Heinemann, 1961), 87.

⁴¹ Schlesinger, *The Politics of Upheaval*, 85.

She accused Cornell University, her son Kirk's choice of schools, of covertly advocating communism and fostering an environment of "free love" by using books written by communist Jews to teach about sex. She made similar charges against Northwestern University, where her daughter, Elizabeth Jane, had enrolled. She also was paid by conservative business interests to conduct investigations of alleged Red activities at the University of Michigan and the University of California at Los Angeles, in time concluding that both reeked of communism.⁴²

In Washington state, Dilling's *The Red Network*, broadly distributed among the nation's police departments and other public agencies, was enthusiastically endorsed in Seattle by the lieutenant commander of the Silvershirt Legion, which by the mid-1930s had established branches throughout the Northwest, including one in Marietta, a rural community immediately northwest of Bellingham, Washington.⁴³ Beginning shortly after its publication, the book would play a critical role in the drama of college President Fisher's fight for survival at a then-obscure state teacher's college in Bellingham, where his opponents would cite, nearly chapter and verse, the vile Dilling red-baiting line.⁴⁴

⁴² Jeansonne, *Women of the Far Right*, 12.

⁴³ Benowitz, *Days of Discontent*, 28. Erickson, "I-Have-Not-Had-One-Fact-Disproven," 479. Karen E. Hoppes, "William Dudley Pelley and the Silvershirt Legion: A Case Study of the Legion in Washington State, 1933-1942" (PhD diss., City University of New York, 1992).

⁴⁴ Notes left for posterity by Fisher in university archives state that Fisher, from the time he first was accused of "un-American" activity in 1935 until his official dismissal in 1939, operated under the premise that campus guest appearances by anyone listed in *The Red Network* might get him summarily fired as president of the college. Recently discovered working files of his chief nemesis, Frank I. Sefrit, also include references to *The Red Network* on lists of suspect campus speakers, books and other materials. Further, documents recently unearthed in the Washington State Archives also establish that the book was known to, and referenced by, a state examiner camped out in Bellingham, dutifully reporting salacious rumors of "Red" activities on campus back to his supervisor in the state budget office. See Chapter 6.

In 1935, when formal charges first were levied against Fisher for promoting an "un-American" atmosphere on his campus, it was no mystery to his chief accuser, Sefrit, a well-connected newspaper editor, that Dilling and her book were key weapons in a concurrent national Red-baiting attack on college campuses across the country. Many of these attacks were perpetrated by "journalists" under the employ of Hearst — arguably more for propaganda value, and as a crude tool to generate controversy and sell newspapers, than as sincere attempts to root out communists.⁴⁵ As described in detail by author David Nasaw in the Hearst biography, *The Chief: The Life of William Randolph Hearst*,⁴⁶ the onslaught began in November, 1934, when reporters from a Hearst newspaper, *The Syracuse Journal*, portraying themselves as students, attempted to entrap Syracuse University education professor John Washburne into making statements deemed subversive. In a subsequent front-page *Syracuse Journal* article, Washburne's general encouragement for the "students" to enroll in the university was portrayed as evidence of communist leanings. Two days later, possibly to avoid a libel suit, the paper ran a front-page editorial insisting that it had not actually charged any professor with being a communist or socialist, but "had only reported that the university had done nothing to root out the Communist professors, students, and clubs on campus."⁴⁷ The

⁴⁵ Hearst, already a notorious anti-communist, likely was inspired to employ his newspapers in an aggressive anti-communist campaign after a violent May, 1934 West Coast longshoreman's strike led to a General Strike in San Francisco, causing many business elites to organize vigilante committees and even invest in arms-manufacturing companies in fear of a Bolshevik uprising in the city. Peter Phillips, "The 1934-35 Red Threat and the Passage of the National Labor Relations Act," *Critical Sociology* 20, no. 2 (1994): 27–50.

⁴⁶ David Nasaw, *The Chief: The Life of William Randolph Hearst* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000).

⁴⁷ Nasaw, *Chief*, 504.

pattern was to repeat on multiple campuses. "In the weeks to come, Hearst witch-hunters, sometimes posing as students, sometimes admitting they were reporters, visited professors in Boston, Chicago, Syracuse, Madison and New York City," Nasaw writes.⁴⁸ In November, 1934, reporters from Hearst's *New York Journal-American* repeated the stunt at New York University, then attempted it once again a month later with professors at Columbia University's Teacher's College. The latter attempt was foiled by a sharp-eyed professor, George S. Counts, who would become a hated foe of Hearst in his national attacks on academia.⁴⁹

Hearst's actions may or may not have represented real fears of the spread of communism; his own employees lumped the crusade in with other Hearst pet projects designed more to titillate than educate. Charles Wheeler, a reporter for Hearst's *Chicago Herald-Examiner*, would admit in December, 1934, just before a pending Hearst attack on the University of Chicago: "We just do what the old man orders. One week he orders a campaign against rats. The next week he orders a campaign against dog peddlers. Pretty soon he's going to campaign against college professors. It's all the bunk, but orders are orders."⁵⁰ Even when professors failed to take the bait, Hearst's newspaper hit-men employed public smear tactics to compensate for what was touted as a lack of sufficient action against the alleged Reds by university administrators. Schlesinger noted that when

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid. Also see Schlesinger, *The Politics of Upheaval*, 86.

⁵⁰ Milton Mayer, "The Red Room," *The Massachusetts Review* 16, no. 3 (July 1, 1975): 520–50, 520.

New York University failed to fire professors Sidney Hook and James Burnham, both labeled subversives by a Hearst newspaper, the publisher then asked in an editorial whether N.Y.U., from that point forward, should be considered "an active center for treasonable plotting for the overthrow of the American Government."⁵¹ The "Chief's" message was heard loudly, and nationally. "Early in 1935 the Red Terror approached a crescendo in every Hearst town that had a university," writes historian Milton Mayer in "The Red Room," a 1975 journal article about the Hearst crusade, focusing on antics in Chicago. "California, Pittsburgh, Washington, along with Columbia, Harvard, NYU and Howard, all came under sustained barrage. But the *crème de la Kremlin* was the University of Chicago."⁵²

The Chicago incident was the attempt by Hearst's *Chicago Herald-Examiner* to paint as a subversive Frederick L. Schuman, a University of Chicago assistant professor of political history who had delivered a February, 1935 address on "Communism and Liberalism" to the Cook County League of Women Voters. Attacks on Schuman in the *Herald-Examiner* ("Hope Lies in Soviets, U. of C. Teacher Says," declared the first inventive, inflammatory headline in the newspaper on Feb. 24, 1934, after Schuman's talk) soon expanded to the university president, Robert Maynard Hutchins. The public battle grew uglier when Charles Walgreen, owner of the 500-store drugstore chain, announced that he was pulling his niece, Lucille Norton, a graduate of Lincoln High

⁵¹ Schlesinger, *Politics of Upheaval*, 86.

⁵² Mayer, "The Red Room," 522.

School in Seattle, from the university to save her from "the Communist influences to which she is so insidiously exposed."⁵³ An Illinois state legislature hearing on the matter — initiated under a threat to rescind the university's charter, thus threatening its very existence — evolved into a spate of spectacular political theatre. Hearst had personal animosity against university President Hutchins — an atypical Red-baiting target in that he was a president, rather than faculty member, Mayer writes.⁵⁴ The spring 1935 Illinois legislative inquisition, which came to be known as "the Walgreen Hearings" (and took place, coincidentally, in "The Red Room" of Chicago's LaSalle Hotel), included, as a star witness for the prosecution, Elizabeth Dilling, whose public vitriol about the spat had pressured legislators into calling the hearings in the first place.⁵⁵ The famed super patriot had described, in *The Red Network*, University of Chicago Professor Robert M. Lovett — a witness for the defense, as it were — as "a pacifist, Bolshevik, communist, and pale pink radical." When she testified at the close of the hearing, she stood and attacked various university teachers and other officials in her inimitable style, rambling on about suspects listed in her book. Dilling called U.S. Supreme Court Justice Louis D. Brandeis a contributor to a "filthy, lousy little college (Commonwealth College) down in

⁵³ Nasaw, *The Chief*, 505; Mayer, *The Red Room*, 528. Walgreen also was solicited by Dilling for a customized Red-baiting investigation of her own at the university before state legislative hearings were called (Jeansonne, *Women of the Far Right*, 11).

⁵⁴ Mayer, *The Red Room*, 523. Hearst, apparently attempting to co-opt the popular university president, had previously offered him a job as a Hearst newspaper publisher, which Hutchins summarily declined.

⁵⁵ Jeansonne, *Women of the Far Right*, 11.

Arkansas,"⁵⁶ and labeled industrialist Harold Swift, the chairman of the board of trustees at the University of Chicago, "a cream-puff type of Red." In her arms-waving diatribe, Dilling went on to attack the "Communist-aiding American Civil Liberties Union" and other targets. She eventually meandered into the matters at hand, accusing four Chicago professors of being Reds, and insisting that the university chaplain had called Russia "the hope of the world."⁵⁷ The hearing concluded with one of Dilling's favorite targets, the Chicago University professor Lovett, threatening to use time allotted for his defense to read aloud copious notes from his Seventeenth Century English literature lectures so that the more-learned experts on communism in the room could comb them for seditious thought.⁵⁸ The gavel then mercifully fell. In a subsequent ruling, four of five state senators on the panel voted to censure Professor Schuman and urged an honorary retirement of his 64-year-old colleague, Lovett, but dismissed the more-serious charges against the university itself. Publicly thumbing his nose at Hearst, university president Hutchins later convinced the Board of Trustees to waive the mandatory retirement age for Lovett and keep him on board.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ The college had, only months before, narrowly avoided an attempt by conservative Arkansas legislators to shut it down because of suspicion of "free love" and seditious labor activism. James A. Wechsler (James Arthur), *Revolt on the Campus*, (Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1973), 245-257.

⁵⁷ Mayer, *The Red Room*, 538-539; Jeansonne, *Right Wing Mothers*, 11. In the same hearing, a scuffle erupted in the gallery: Dilling's husband, Albert, reportedly threw a heckler of his wife and her cohorts up against a wall, calling him a "Dirty Little Jew," and bringing the hearing to an unceremonious close for the day. See also Wechsler, *Revolt on Campus*, 264.

⁵⁸ Mayer, *The Red Room*, 544.

⁵⁹ Mayer, *The Red Room*, 547. Hutchins, according to Mayer, subsequently received a letter stating: "You must have had a vile time with that inquisition. I sometimes think that Hearst has done more harm to the cause of democracy and civilization in America than any three contenders put together. Always sincerely, Franklin D. Roosevelt."

In spite of such stinging losses, the publisher's self-imposed crusade, pitched as a battle for the hearts and minds of America's impressionable youth, raged on in Hearst newspapers in major U.S. cities for months. In some cases, campus political unrest was evident even on campuses where Hearst's minions were not active; battles between students and on- and off-campus "patriots" raged over "seditious" student activity and Reserve Officer Training Corps units on some campuses.⁶⁰ While few of the assaults on universities and their employees resulted in firings or disciplinary actions, Hearst's red-baiting attacks on education found an attentive ear with many Depression-era Americans, Schlesinger noted: "In the spiritual turmoil of the year, the Hearst crusade found an immediate response, especially among troubled members of the lower middle class, already apprehensive over their status, resentful of the foreigner, and suspicious of sex and radicalism. For them 'Communist' did not mean a man under the discipline of the Communist party or an agent of the Soviet Union; it meant a dissenter or foreigner, if not simply an outlander who drank and smoked. Hearst promoted this confusion."⁶¹

Mayer's portrayal of Hearst in *The Red Room* echoes the notion that the publisher of 41 metropolitan daily newspapers had created his own anti-intellectual crusade specifically to line up convenient targets for retribution by the lower classes — his chosen audience — after the national economic crash: "The poor and the near-poor were the natural Hearst constituency, and this constituency mistrusted intellectuals; and

⁶⁰ One such battle on University of California campuses at Berkeley and Los Angeles led to the suspension of five UCLA student-government leaders said to be associated with the National Student League; a group of student vigilantes formed to root out others on both campuses. Student strikes and several violent clashes followed, fading in the spring of 1935. Wechsler, *Revolt on the Campus*, 272-286.

⁶¹ Schlesinger, *The Politics of Upheaval*, 87.

professors were intellectuals ... What Hearst had ordered his editors to call the Raw Deal was crawling with professors — Red professors, corrupting the young and selling out the country to the Bolsheviks. The way to destroy the Raw Deal was to convince the Hearst readers (still one out of every four families in the country) that Roosevelt was a tool of the academic devils."⁶²

In academic circles, the public battle carried less-visible, but deeper, implications. Much of Hearst's ire over American higher education ultimately focused on one man: Columbia University's Counts, who had almost singlehandedly foiled Hearst newspaper reporters' clumsy attempts to smear the university's influential Teacher's College. Counts, a disciple of progressive education reformer John Dewey, was an influential proponent of "Social reconstructionism," a new educational model that offered no apologies about its intent to build a new social order through a public education system that placed curricular choices in the hands of empowered teachers, not school boards.⁶³ His writings from the period make it clear that the new social order he envisioned would be a progressive one, with a more-just society that would evolve beyond individualism by gaining the courage to explore "a new age of collectivism."⁶⁴ These reconstructionist theories were embraced

⁶² Mayer, "The Red Room," 521. Parenthetical comment is by Mayer.

⁶³ Dewey and Counts both appear on Elizabeth's Dilling's list of Reds in *The Red Network*. Also see Erickson, "We Want No Teachers," 491.

⁶⁴ George S Counts, *Dare the School Build a New Social Order?* (New York: Arno Press, 1969).

by a Columbia University faculty colleague, Harold O. Rugg, who set out to implement the ideas in public-school textbooks.⁶⁵

Significantly shaping the reconstructionist theory was Counts' association with Columbia colleague Charles A. Beard, then the preeminent progressive scholar of history in America and the leading proponent of the theory of economic determinism as a motivational factor in U.S. history. In the monograph *George S. Counts and Charles A. Beard: Collaborators for Change*, Lawrence J. Dennis argues that Counts and Beard, more than just being colleagues, qualified as collaborators and ideological brothers, with a mutual respect that in the end influenced the philosophy of both men.⁶⁶ Hearst's attacks on Counts and his methods thus can be seen as broader attacks on leftist progressive thought of the era. The author makes it clear, however, that Counts, a visitor to Russia in 1929 and a frequent crusader for educational and social reforms to benefit the "common good," never became a classic Marxist. His embrace of the progressive historical theories of Beard, the famed economic-determinist historian also labeled a "Red" by Hearst, provided him with a suitable replacement philosophy for Marxism. It satisfied his

⁶⁵ Erickson, "We Want No Teachers," 491. Ruggs' textbooks, the first to introduce the notion that America had made numerous mistakes, were broadly distributed in America from 1929 to 1939. They drew their own strong conservative backlash, including organized book burnings, as well as condemnation in Hearst newspapers; Dilling branded Rugg a Soviet Propagandist. Dilling, *The Red Network*, 318. For a detailed accounting of the development of the social reconstructionist movement and its place in the political milieu during the Depression era, see C.A. Bowers, *The Progressive Educator and the Depression: The Radical Years*, (New York: Random House, 1969).

⁶⁶ Lawrence J. Dennis, *George S. Counts and Charles A. Beard, Collaborators for Change* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989). Beard's belief that schools could and should be used as instruments of social reform was outlined in the historian's *A Charter for the Social Sciences in the Schools* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1932), notes historian C.A. Bowers in *The Progressive Educator and the Depression*, 128.

intellectual thirst to champion social equality through schooling, but still allowed for democratic institutions to achieve it.⁶⁷ Other historians have noted, however, that Counts' thirst to instigate mass social change through public education led him to occupy political ground (particularly during the peak of his leftist radicalism, in 1934-1935) arguably to the left even of contemporary mainstream American card-carrying communists. In a hell-bent attempt to establish U.S. teachers as "agents of social change," Counts and colleagues at the helm of *The Social Frontier* pushed close to the edge of advocating the use of schools to propel a political revolution. In the fall of 1935, "The social reconstructionists, like many other left-of-center liberal groups who did not follow the Communist party line but sometimes adopted similar positions quite independently, began to move in a direction that was now even too radical for the Communists," writes educational historian C.A. Bowers. In an October, 1935 issue of the *The Social Frontier*, "the editors stated categorically that 'there is no hope for the significant practice of education in a social order based on property and profit.'"⁶⁸ But for Counts and many of his colleagues, the pendulum soon swung back the other way. Only four years later, Counts would be credited for ridding the New York locals of the American Federation of Teachers of practicing communists.⁶⁹ In his long career at Columbia, Counts' guiding

⁶⁷ Dennis, *Counts and Beard*, 3.

⁶⁸ Bowers, *The Progressive Educator*, 139. Bowers notes that Counts and his colleagues who visited Russian schools were impressed by the degree to which their communist administrators used schools cohesively as "agents of social change," a goal they shared for American schools in forging a new society, yet undefined. Bowers, 87.

⁶⁹ Bowers, *The Progressive Educator*, 166.

hand would be seen in a Teachers' College curriculum that ultimately would train a large percentage of the nation's emerging secondary and college instructors — including a surprising portion of those teaching in the mid- to late-1930s on the opposite side of the continent, at Western Washington College of Education in Bellingham.⁷⁰

Hearst's self-imposed Red Scare actually served to boost Counts' public status as a defender of academic freedoms. The reconstructionist journal he founded and edited at Columbia, *The Social Frontier*, was created in June, 1934 partially as a counter to Hearst's Red-baiting propaganda. Its initial issues were filled with reports about the nefarious nature of the Hearst empire.⁷¹ The journal soon helped coalesce the forces of a counter-attack to what Counts branded the Hearst "campaign of terrorism" against higher education.⁷² Counts and a cadre of influential professors, through their Progressive Education Association, called for a Congressional investigation of Hearst's business practices to prevent him from "Hitlerizing" the nation's schools.⁷³ These verbal assaults

⁷⁰ In 1935, Frank Sefrit would painstakingly assemble a roster of Columbia "connected" faculty members to make his case for a Counts-led conspiracy to indoctrinate Western college students, with Counts supposedly using Fisher as a dupe to open the doors.

⁷¹ An editorial marking the first anniversary of *The Social Frontier* acknowledged Hearst's role in making the publication popular: "According to an old proverb, a man is known by the enemies he makes. The same may be said of a journal. Certainly *The Social Frontier* has made many enemies during its first twelve months ... For these enemies the journal has reason to be proud. Particularly it is proud of the vicious and sustained attack made upon it by William Randolph Hearst. If had received no other attention during the year, it would have felt itself justified." "The First Year," *The Teachers College Record*, Volume 1 Number 9, 1935, 3. Also see Peter Soderbergh, "Charles A. Beard and the Radical Right," *The Teachers College Record* 68, no. 8 (1967): 631–39.

⁷² *Teachers College in the News*, "Educators Accuse Hearst of Hitlerism," *The Teachers College Record* 36, no. 5 (1935): 428–30.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

on Hearst proved surprisingly effective. Defiant anti-Hearst campus marches sprung up at numerous U.S. universities.⁷⁴ More significantly, a boycott against Hearst's flagging papers was organized by academics and embraced by the publisher's many foes. Labor unions and the U.S. Communist Party joined in, organizing a People's Committee Against Hearst. The publisher was branded an "un-American bigot" and the leading American fascist.⁷⁵ The protests reached a crescendo with a rousing condemnation of Hearst by historian Beard at a large convention of educators in Atlantic City, N.J. in February, 1935.⁷⁶ The boycott had a serious impact on the Hearst bottom line, prompting him by 1936 to take the "Hearst" name off of products such as theater news reels.⁷⁷ The pressure pushed Hearst even farther to the political right, creating new suspicions that he was a supporter of Hitler. By 1936, his crusade against academia faded as quickly as it had begun; his newspapers shifted their focus to attempting, unsuccessfully, to cast Roosevelt as a communist dupe during the run-up to the 1936 election.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ At Bellingham Normal School/Western Washington College of Education, Hearst's antics were roundly mocked by student journalists in the campus newspaper, *The Western Viking*. These references were later cited by Frank I. Sefrit, who closely monitored the student publication, as evidence of communist leanings on the campus.

⁷⁵ Nasaw, *The Chief*, 506.

⁷⁶ Ibid. Also see Soderbergh, "Charles A. Beard and the Radical Right."

⁷⁷ Nasaw, *The Chief*, 507.

⁷⁸ The far-right swing of Hearst, initially a lukewarm friend of the New Deal, came immediately after successful union-organizing campaigns of Heywood Broun's American Newspaper Guild in 1934, prompting a fiery, anti-left public response from Hearst, whose enterprises were flagging. By 1934, revenues of the Hearst enterprise had crashed from a heyday high of \$113 million to around \$40 million; half his newspapers were operating in the red. As the Guild's organizing attempts struck, Hearst's newspapers began running a series describing the "Soviet influence on American life." Nasaw, *The Chief*, 484-485; Mayer, *The Red Room*, 521.

All of these events, presumably, were observed with keen attention by another politically savvy, belligerent newspaperman, *Bellingham Herald* editor Frank I. Sefrit, described in a magazine article of the day as a man who fancied being known as "Little Hearst."⁷⁹ Sefrit's newspaper, owned by Tacoma, Washington industrialist, and national Republican Party insider, S.A. "Sam" Perkins, was not a Hearst publication. But the Bellingham editor's extensive dossier on "Red" President Charles Fisher, finally made public in 2013, contains numerous clipped articles from the nearest Hearst newspaper, *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, documenting the campaign.⁸⁰ Hand-written notes and other materials contained in those files mirror the thoughts and sources often cited by both Hearst and Elizabeth Dilling in their Red-baiting university attacks. Ten charges of specific examples of "un-Americanism" filed against Fisher in 1935 contain terminology nearly identical to the charges levied against faculty members at other U.S. colleges by Hearst operatives. When these charges were delivered to the Bellingham college's Board of Trustees in spring, 1935, the "Walgreen Hearings" in Chicago were still in motion, and rioting among students over "un-Americanism" was in full bloom in Southern California. The possible inspirational influence of Hearst's campaign on the imbroglio in Bellingham was also noted by others in the community at the time. On Sept. 2, 1935, KVOS Radio political commentator Leslie Darwin, an arch political rival of Sefrit, took to the air to revel in the national Hearst boycotts, rumored to be felt at Hearst's *Seattle Post-*

⁷⁹ "I'm Agin You," *Time* 34, no. 2 (July 10, 1939): 44.

⁸⁰ Bellingham Herald collection on President Charles H. Fisher, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Western Libraries Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.

Intelligencer. "In short, Hearst has been doing in a big way what Sefrit has been doing here in Bellingham in a small way," Darwin proclaimed. "How long do you think that Sefrit could remain in charge of *The Herald*, if the people who had been abused and maligned by him were to follow the example of those school teachers in regards to Hearst?" Darwin called for similar subscription strikes and advertising boycotts in Bellingham.⁸¹

The ultimately successful campaign against Fisher was unusual, from a national perspective, in that it came against a sitting president, rather than faculty members. But it was not the first such controversial removal of an educator in Washington state, where attacks by conservative "patriots" on public schools had flourished since the 1920s.⁸² The most memorable ousting of an educator during that decade, however, was caused by political factors far removed from Red-baiting. In 1926, University of Washington President Henry Suzzallo was forced from office by Governor Roland Hartley, an old political foe. This firing was a significant precursor to the Fisher case because the governor's chosen methodology — packing the university's board of regents with members sympathetic to his antipathy for Suzzallo — would be mimicked, in part, by

⁸¹ KVOB broadcast manuscript, Sept. 2, 1935, box 14, folder 7, Programming, Raw Transcripts, Rogan Jones Papers, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham WA.

⁸² In Seattle, the unapologetically left-wing journalist and Seattle strike ringleader Anna Louise Strong was recalled from the Seattle School Board in 1918 because of her leftist political activities. A year later, her brother-in-law, Charles Niederhauser, was fired from his job as a West Seattle High School teacher because of alleged pro-German leanings. Niederhauser's removal was largely viewed as guilt by association with Anna Louise and her father Sydney Strong, a Social Gospel preacher at Queen Anne Congregational Church. See: Keith A. Murray, "The Charles Niederhauser Case: Patriotism in the Seattle Schools, 1919," *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 74, no. 1 (January 1, 1983): 11–17.

Governor Charles Martin in his removal of Fisher from Western Washington College of Education in 1938.⁸³ While the facts surrounding the Suzzallo case are well-established, his firing, like Fisher's, has never been examined in detail in a peer-reviewed historical study. The visceral public reaction, however, was evident in news accounts, and is detailed in Gunns' *Civil Liberties in Crisis*: The firing, Gunns writes, was widely viewed as a blatant intrusion of politics into matters of state higher education. Suzzallo's removal "... did set a dangerous precedent if the insulation of the university from political pressure were to be respected."⁸⁴ Students, poised to stage a strike, were urged not to by Suzzallo. A recall campaign against Hartley was discussed, but fizzled.⁸⁵ A precedent had been established.

In the decade of the 1930s — a supposed period of "normalcy" on the civil-rights front, relative to the First Red Scare — politically motivated attacks on public schools in Washington continued. It is worth emphasizing here that conservative "patriots" around Puget Sound, by now distinct minorities at least in terms of national elections, did not simply fade away with the arrival of the Roosevelt Administration; they focused their

⁸³ The bad blood between the two men originated a decade earlier, when Suzzallo, serving on the local Labor Industries Board, advocated for an eight-hour work day for timber crews — including those at Hartley's lumber operation. The men also had squabbled over Hartley's campaign promise to curb education spending by creating a "super board" to manage all state education, dismantling the boards of regents and trustees that governed state colleges and universities. Hartley failed in that endeavor, but ultimately removed Suzzallo by replacing five of the seven members of the university board of regents with handpicked appointees assigned to remove the president. The board offered no reason for the popular president's dismissal after 11 years.

⁸⁴ Gunns, *Civil Liberties in Crisis*, 71.

⁸⁵ "Recall Falters," *Time* 9, no. 3 (January 17, 1927): 13. Suzzallo, a former professor of educational sociology at Columbia's Teachers' College, was replaced by Matthew Lyle Spencer, who instituted Hartley's desired spending cuts. Suzzallo in 1930 was named president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Today the university's central library is named in his honor.

ample energies on local politics, where the still-raging debate often led to public classrooms.⁸⁶ Gunns recounts the expulsion of nine University of Washington students for hosting a controversial labor speaker, Jessie London Wakefield, in 1933; the expulsion of 213 Roosevelt High School students who had attended an unauthorized anti-war rally at the University of Washington in April, 1935; a blanket restriction on outside speakers on the same Seattle campus in 1936; and the arrest of several "radicals" connected to an anti-war high school strike in Tacoma the same year.

Gunns also recounts several dismissals of University of Washington faculty for perceived "radicalism" during this period. In January 1935, engineering professors F. Burt Farquharson and Richard C. Tyler were announced speakers at a meeting of the League Against War and Fascism. Farquharson spoke and was roundly criticized, but kept his job. Tyler withdrew, but acquiesced to a university request that he resign due to his political activities. Another professor, Hugh DeLacy, was fired in January 1937 for political activities that included a run for Seattle City Council.⁸⁷ In November of the same year, a "Communist College" opening in downtown Seattle was scuttled on its first day by interruptions from police and a war veterans' group, leading to a fracas resulting in multiple arrests.⁸⁸ For Washington's education system, the 1930s look calm, Gunns

⁸⁶ Pomeroy, *The Pacific Slope*, 243. The author notes the election of conservative governors and legislators in the U.S. West in the mid-1930s, in spite of its strong support for the New Deal evidenced in national elections of 1932 and stronger support in 1936.

⁸⁷ Gunns, *Civil Liberties in Crisis*, 182-184.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 167.

concludes, only in relation to the tumult that would follow, in the volatile post-World War II era.⁸⁹

Most often, historians who have lifted the veil on matters of academic freedom issues in Washington state have explored the inarguably important academic-freedom battles that erupted during the Cold War, several of which had national implications. One field of study revolves around Washington's Red-baiting companion to the national "Un-American Activities" hearings of Sen. Joseph McCarthy. The Evergreen State's version was The Joint Legislative Fact-Finding Committee on Un-American Activities, popularly known as the Canwell Committee Hearings, conducted in Seattle in 1948-1949. The hearings, chaired by Republican State Representative Albert Canwell of Spokane, were called by the conservative-dominated Washington state legislature to investigate leftist Popular Front groups such as the Washington Commonwealth Federation and Washington Pension Union, as well as alleged communist influence among University of Washington faculty.⁹⁰ The hearings led to the nation's first firings of tenured faculty

⁸⁹ Ibid., 185.

⁹⁰ Charles Fisher, who in his post-firing career would serve as education director and then president of the Pension Union, was not called as a witness, but was singled out in the first round of hearings as a staff member who supported what appeared to be communist-inspired goals of the organization. See Chapter 8.

members because of Communist Party affiliations.⁹¹ Washington state was held up as a national model by other Red-baiters across the land.⁹²

The other oft-studied aspect of academic freedom in Washington relates to the state's role in an important United States Supreme Court decision, *Baggett v. Bullitt*, which in 1964 deemed state loyalty oaths for teachers and other public employees to be unconstitutional.⁹³ As recounted by Arval A. Morris, the Washington legislature in 1931 required all "professors, instructors, or teachers" to swear to uphold the constitutions of the state and nation, as well as to "by precept and example promote respect for the flag and the institutions of the United States of America."⁹⁴ A second oath was enacted amidst Cold War fervor in 1955. Noting that some form of loyalty testing has accompanied "virtually every period of social unrest or war since colonial days," historian Jane Sanders writes that pressure to implement the 1931 oaths "was brought about by pressure groups concerned with the erosion of allegiance to capitalism and

⁹¹ In the wake of the hearings, philosophy professor Herbert Phillips and English professor Joe Butterworth were fired in January, 1949, for party membership; psychology professor Ralph Gundlach was essentially fired for dishonesty about his alleged Communist Party proclivities. Three other professors were placed on probation. See: Jane Sanders, *Cold War on the Campus : Academic Freedom at the University of Washington, 1946-64* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1979); Vern Countryman, *Un-American Activities in the State of Washington : The Work of the Canwell Committee* (New York: Johnson Reprint Corp, 1967); Raymond B Allen (Raymond Bernard), University of Washington. Committee on Tenure and Academic Freedom, University of Washington; and Board of Regents, *Communism and Academic Freedom: The Record of the Tenure Cases at the University of Washington Including the Findings of the Committee on Tenure and Academic Freedom and the President's Recommendations*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1949).

⁹² Attacks on academics were widespread in the early Cold War era: The AAUP considered 227 cases involving academic freedom from 1945 to 1950. Morris, "The University of Washington Loyalty Oath Case" 225.

⁹³ *Baggett v. Bullitt*, 377 US 360 (Supreme Court 1964).

⁹⁴ Morris, "The University of Washington Loyalty Oath Case."

democracy in the midst of the Depression."⁹⁵ In 1955, attorneys for the American Civil Liberties Union, acting on behalf of two University of Washington faculty members, filed suit on the grounds that both oaths violated the First, Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments. The Supreme Court later ruled that both were "constitutionally vague" — a precedent that would lead to the fall of similar oaths across America.⁹⁶

The headline-grabbing prominence of those Washington state Cold War academic battles tends to distract from events of the immediately preceding period that gave birth to them. Similarly, the tendency of historians to focus on radical liberal politics in the Northwest in the decades preceding World War II serves to obscure the existence, let alone effectiveness of, conservative political agitators who continued to wage war against perceived seditious progressivism in many pockets of the state throughout the 1930s. Largely lost in the ether of this discrepancy is an event that folds together both trends — Charles H. Fisher's unceremonious 1939 departure from Western Washington College of Education, and the political realities that made it possible. This study, by detailing the political influences giving rise to his removal, and placing that removal within the context of national, regional, and Washington state politics, will attempt to fill some of these broad gaps in historiography.

While a few scholars have examined, at a relative surface level, other political trends in Bellingham and Whatcom County that might have contributed in some fashion

⁹⁵ Jane Sanders, *Cold War on the Campus: Academic Freedom at the University of Washington, 1946-64* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1979), 153. See also: Harold Melvin Hyman, *To Try Men's Souls; Loyalty Tests in American History*.

⁹⁶ Morris, "The University of Washington Loyalty Oath Case."

to Fisher's demise,⁹⁷ no peer-reviewed examination of the Fisher case itself exists. The most complete secondary account of his firing appears as a brief section in the book *Western at 75*, an anniversary publication designated by Western Washington University in 1974 as its official history to that point.⁹⁸ This volume, authored by longtime (1933-1969) university professor Dr. Arthur C. Hicks, includes an interesting treatment of the Fisher affair. The work by Hicks, who was not a historian, clearly relies on official university records for the bulk of its narrative. Like other local accounts of the Fisher case, it also relies heavily on an oft-cited report from an American Association of University Professors panel that conducted a post-mortem investigation of Fisher's firing.⁹⁹ But the lack of citations throughout makes it impossible to divine specific information sources, or to verify facts presented. Further, the book's narrative is supplemented in places by what appear to be personal asides by the author, who was present on campus for a large portion of the referenced history, and in fact, was personally involved therein.

In one sense, this dual-duty by the author works to the advantage of any historian considering Hicks' account of the Fisher affair: A careful reading makes it clear that

⁹⁷ One example: Gabriel S. Mayers, "The Ku Klux Klan in Bellingham, 1900-1935," *Journal of the Whatcom County Historical Society* No. 2, no. October 2001. One of the men on the Committee On Normal Protest opposing Fisher, Solomon Blanton Luther, was a self-described Klansman. Mayers concludes that while organized Klan activity continued beyond the broad demise of the "First Klan" nationally in the early 1920s, its influence was largely waning in Bellingham, Washington by 1932.

⁹⁸ Arthur C. Hicks, *Western at 75* (Bellingham, WA: Western Washington State College Foundation, 1974), 55-61.

⁹⁹ W. T. Laprade and A. J. Carlson, "Academic Freedom and Tenure: Western Washington College of Education," *Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors* 27, no. 1 (February 1, 1941): 48-60, doi:10.2307/40219179.

Hicks, himself, was a leader of a faculty committee to publicize faculty opposition to Fisher's dismissal. Because of this, Hicks likely possessed personal memories of details of events surrounding the firing — particularly the faculty response — that are not contained in existing university records. The account contains references, both direct and less so, to Hicks himself as an active participant in important post-firing events, including the authoring of a resolution, signed by every member of the faculty, condemning Fisher's dismissal. It also includes passages that suggest that Hicks himself was the lone faculty AAUP member on campus at the time of Fisher's dismissal; that it was he who contacted the AAUP and requested what would become a critical investigation of the matter; that he was the faculty member who subsequently hosted an AAUP investigator in his own home during a campus visit, and that he was the faculty designee who, in 1945, traveled with the blessing of fellow faculty to an AAUP convention to take the unusual step of protesting the organization's removal of Western from a list of "censured" universities.¹⁰⁰ This personal involvement, coupled with the fact that Hicks was an unabashed supporter of Fisher, who hired him as the college's first Dean of Humanities in 1933, raises questions about the appearance, at least, of objectivity in this "official" historical account. To his credit, Hicks' recounting is mostly straightforward recitation of

¹⁰⁰ Hicks, *Western at 75*, 57-60. In a taped interview conducted by Western Washington University journalism students in November, 1970, Hicks directly acknowledges his personal role in the faculty response, and does not dispute an interviewer's characterization of himself as one of Fisher's "primary supporters." Of the unanimous faculty declaration supporting Fisher, Hicks says: "I wrote it myself." He later added: "I think I can say without exaggeration that I was the spearhead of the movement of opposition to the Board of Trustees' and the Governor's actions [to remove Fisher]." Arthur C. Hicks, interviewed by Monroe McLaughlin, Nov. 20, 1970, box 28, folder 6, (unedited reel-to-reel tape recording), Rogan Jones Papers, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.

facts — most in evidence elsewhere. As well, he certainly did not hide his personal involvement: his second-hand references to himself in the text — a probable stylistic attempt to avoid repetition of his own name — were likely more the result of personal modesty than any intent to mislead. But the document should be considered by historians with this caveat.¹⁰¹

Historian Gunns' report on Northwest civil liberties ends with a short recapping of the Fisher firing, adding to the oft-recited facts one interesting perspective: Gunns writes that Bellingham "became a town virtually closed to liberals and radicals" during much of Fisher's (1923-1939) era, because of the heavy hand of local arch-conservatives: "Leftist speakers encountered great difficulty in finding auditoria and often found rental agreements cancelled at the last minute by nervous hall managers."¹⁰² The one safe zone for public speakers of a progressive persuasion was the college campus, where Fisher proudly maintained a relatively open door to speakers of a broad range of political viewpoints.¹⁰³ Gunns also notes that facts surrounding the Fisher firing, which "stirred the ashes of the Suzzallo firing of 1926," would long remain obscure. He surmises that

¹⁰¹ Arguing for the account's accuracy, William H. Fisher, Charles Fisher's son, stated in a note to university officials in 1974 that the Hicks account "is the best synopsis of the events involving my father's dismissal at Bellingham in 1939." Charles Henry Fisher Collection, Western Libraries Special Collections, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.

¹⁰² Gunns, *Civil Liberties in Crisis*, 185. The author attributes the statement to communiques in the ACLU Archives.

¹⁰³ The statement is significant given that a primary charge against Fisher was his choice of primarily leftist campus speakers.

Governor Martin, a staunchly conservative Democrat, "was doubtless concerned about allegations that Fisher, if not a communist, was at least excessively liberal." ¹⁰⁴

But the most-telling accounts of the Fisher incident lie largely unexplored, in primary documents left by the principles themselves. On his way out of town in 1939, an embittered Fisher delivered to the university archives a package of materials documenting his own demise, including letters exchanged with U.S. educational colleagues, written with the uncommon candor of a man who knew he had already lost his job.¹⁰⁵ Most of these documents have been little studied in the succeeding 75 years on a campus where succeeding administrators have considered the episode to be the blackest mark on the university's history. Any reference to Fisher's dismissal, in fact, was erased in 1939 from the record of the university Board of Trustees. No official documentation of his firing exists to the present day. Additionally, extensive new documentation of the motivations, strategies, and broader membership roster of Sefrit's anti-Fisher committee became available only in the summer of 2013, thanks to a private citizen's donation to the Northwest Region branch of the Washington State Archives a box of documents spirited from the basement of *The Bellingham Herald* in approximately 2001. An additional cache of documents related to the case – these describing a previously unknown state of

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 186. Note that Gov. Martin's primary political opposition from within his own party during most of his two terms as governor was from the far left – primarily the aforementioned Washington Commonwealth Federation, a communist group that successfully promoted their own candidates to election as Democrats in state and local races. For an exhaustive examination of internal Democratic Party politics during this period, see Fayette F. Krause, "Democratic Party Politics in the State of Washington During the New Deal: 1932-1940," (PhD diss., University of Washington, 1971.)

¹⁰⁵ These materials are copies of letters, personal statements, news clippings and other documents assembled by Charles Fisher for submission to the American Association of University Professors, who conducted an investigation of his firing in 1939. See Chapter 7.

Washington investigation into what appeared to be serious financial irregularities at the college around the same time Fisher was besieged by accusations of being a communist – was discovered by the author during research for this thesis. And finally, previously private, internal correspondence of the American Association of University Professors officials investigating the Fisher firing in 1939 were located and reviewed in an archive at George Washington University, adding yet another layer of perspective to the case.

All of these detailed, primary sources shine important new light on a long-forgotten case that adds significant depth, context and nuance to what it is now often referred to as an interwar period of “Little Red Scares” in United States history. The Fisher case, like similar cases now being fleshed out by regional historians, suggests a current of anti-communist sentiment in the U.S. which, while flowing largely underground after the early 1920s, never really waned, particularly in relatively isolated pockets of the nation. In Bellingham, most telling of all are the newly discovered notes, letters, action plans and other working files of the committee that created the scurrilous accusation that noted progressive educator Charles Henry Fisher was an active communist – charges that ultimately created the political uproar that led to his dismissal, effectively ending his career as an educator. Notably, that single box of materials contains the only known transcript of a critical, tumultuous, April 22, 1935 hearing before the College Board of Trustees (closed to the public) where Sefrit's Red-baiting group effectively put Charles H. Fisher — and what today would be referred to as liberal-arts education itself — on trial. It is through these direct, eloquent voices of Fisher and

Sefrit, each clearly a true-believer in his own cause, that a compelling tale of a public battle over personal, political, academic, and religious freedom is best told.

Methodology and Structure

From a traditional academic perspective, any one of the newly discovered materials related to the Fisher case likely would form the basis of a complete thesis. But given the paucity of previous historical inquiry into the Fisher case as a whole, the author has chosen in this study to attempt to tell, in a single narrative, the complete story of Charles Fisher's educational career, as it best can be related given current documentation. This methodology, while ambitious in scope, provides proper historical context for the new materials and revelations that would not otherwise exist. Given that, this thesis digresses somewhat from traditional formats by tracing the roots of the two main protagonists of this historical event – Charles H. Fisher and Frank I. Sefrit – from their upbringings to their professional lives in Bellingham, Washington, culminating with the firing of the president in 1938. The study thus incorporates additional materials considered perhaps tangential to the Fisher case, but critical to the understanding of the underlying politics that gave rise to it.

Chapter 1 has served as an historiography, summarizing currently available historical studies on issues of political repression, red-scare politics, and academic freedom in Washington state and the Northwest region. Chapter 2 tells the life story of Charles Fisher from his birth to his assumption of the college presidency of a teacher's school in Bellingham, Washington in 1923. It then elaborates on his innovative curriculum, which would stand as a national model in the 1920s and 1930s, and provides

an overview of life in the school and town during Fisher's era. Chapter 3 traces the life and career of newspaperman Frank Sefrit, discussing his unusual role as daily newspaper editor and political kingmaker in his adopted hometown of Bellingham, where politics during interwar years was remarkably personalized and vindictive, as illustrated by a long running media war between the town's newspaper and radio station.

The study then shifts to particulars of the Fisher firing itself. Chapter 4 discusses the coalescence of forces – including Depression-era politics and personal grudges – that led to the creation of the Frank Sefrit-led Committee on Normal Protest, which would file official charges against Fisher in 1935. Chapter 5 is a detailed glimpse inside the star-chamber “court” proceeding in which Fisher was essentially placed on trial before the college Board of Trustees, using materials derived from a newly discovered court reporter's transcript of that session. Chapter 6 follows the timeline of events after that hearing, when college trustees' expressed confidence in Fisher eroded between their defense of the president in 1935 and his firing in 1938. Chapter 7 introduces elements of new intrigue into the case, relating the findings of the state financial examination and what amounted an in-house state “spy” on campus – an auditor who learned of the red-scare activities in the community and related this information to the state capitol. The same chapter examines the Fisher case through the eyes of three investigative bodies who conducted inquiries immediately in the wake of the firing, and incorporates newfound correspondence about the case found in archives of the American Association of University Professors. Chapter 8 follows the career of Fisher in his post-college years, including efforts to change state laws to prevent similar occurrences, and connects the

Fisher firing to later anti-communist politics in Washington state via the 1948 Seattle “Canwell Hearings.” The chapter ends with the deaths of both Fisher and Sefrit, and a discussion of their respective legacies. Chapter 9 serves as the author’s analysis of the case, its role in regional and national history, and ways in which that perspective has been altered by new discoveries described in the study.

This assembled documentation of the Fisher case will offer important new insights into a little-understood historical event that offers important lessons about persistent Northwest and U.S. interwar anti-communism; political blowback to the notion of public schools being used to shape a “progressive” future U.S. society; implications of New Deal policies introduced into a pre-existing, vitriolic political climate; and general issues of free speech and academic freedom as these concepts were understood and debated in 1930s America.

Chapter 2

Bellingham: Charles Fisher's Progressive Western Beachhead

Charles Henry Fisher's venture to establish a nationally known teacher's college in northwest Washington state was the culmination of his family's long, nineteenth-century westward march from the state of Prussia, later Germany. The forebears of Fisher, on both his father's and mother's side, were first-generation immigrants from the Westphalia province. Fisher's grandfather, William John Fisher (1824-1909), a farmer, former soldier, and the youngest of 12 children, emigrated to Baltimore, Maryland on October 1, 1857, with his wife, Mary Catherine Strathmyer (1828-1918) to "escape militarism for his children." He found work in a stone quarry in York, Pennsylvania, where he would toil for his entire life. Reared as a devout Lutheran, William J. Fisher later became a prominent member of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ. The church, the first denomination formed inside the United States, rather than being imported from Europe, also became the denomination of choice for many other members of the extended Fisher family. Described as a community leader — often called upon to resolve disputes — with an uncanny memory, William Fisher and his bride arrived in the United States with an infant son, Henry F. Fisher, born June 12, 1857 in the province of Westphalia.¹

Henry Fisher, Charles Fisher's father, lived his entire life in York, Pennsylvania, where he found his first job as a child stripping tobacco and laboring at a brick yard. In 1869, he was hired as a moulder at a local foundry owned by the A.B. Farquhar

¹ "Fisher family genealogical and biographical material," box 1, folder 1, Charles Henry Fisher Collection, Western Libraries Special Collections, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.

Company; he rose to the rank of superintendent, a job he held for 37 years, until the day before he died from heart failure on Nov. 29, 1938, at age 81. Henry Fisher, a Republican, also served as a member of the first common council of York, when it changed from a borough to a city. He was active in United Brethren Church activities and councils, and served as a Sunday School teacher, at times tutoring his own children there. He also served as a member of the York School Board, and as a volunteer on a local fire company. Henry Fisher and his wife, Amelia Jane Carls, married in 1879, were the parents of seven children. The eldest, Charles Henry Fisher, was born in York on April 25, 1880.²

The Fisher's hometown, York, is located near the Susquehanna River, in the western portion of Pennsylvania Dutch Country. The Fisher home, as remembered by Charles Fisher's sister, Nettie, was a loving environment, but one with strict rules imposed by the Fisher children's' father, who had lofty ambitions for all his children. "In the home, as a parent, he was strict, kind, thoughtful and generous," Nettie Fisher recalled. The elder Fisher was "a self-made man who had very little formal education, but took every opportunity for advancement in whatever job he undertook." His overriding ambition was to secure the education that he had lacked for all of his children — and to grant them the freedom of inquiry and independent thought that he had not received from his own father. Their mother, Amelia, is remembered by Nettie Fisher as "patient, kind,

² Box 1, folder 1, CHF Collection. The Fisher family files found here also cite George R. Prowell, *History of York County Pennsylvania*, (Chicago: J.H. Beers & Co., 1907), Vol. 2, 188, for genealogical information about Henry F. and William J. Fisher. Most of the older family records were donated to the archives by the late William H. Fisher and the late Mary Ann Fisher Nichols, Charles H. Fisher's son and daughter.

gentle and direct ... a beautiful character whom everyone loved," with "very strong religious convictions. Her activities were the home and the church." Religion was a mainstay in the Fisher home. "Children were brought up in a religious atmosphere, where the Bible and prayer were encouraged," Nettie Fisher remembered. "Children were taught to be respectful, courteous, kind and thoughtful, especially of one's superiors. The Fishers' life was centered in the home, school and church, children were taught to take part in all activities related to these institutions. Motto for the home: A place for everything, and everything in its place."³

That home, Nettie recalled, was "a happy place. Children's friends were always welcome after the evening meal, when chores for the day were completed, all gathered around the dining table to do school homework; this accomplished there came play time. Charles was always an active participant, but never a leader in games. At the snap of the fingers of father, it was time to [illegible] friends and off we all scampered to bed." Charles thrived in this environment, his sister remembered. "As a boy, Charles jumped into everything he did. However, he hated to do chores around the home. Everyone had an assigned chore; he put his off until the last minute. He hated it, but he did it." Charles Fisher's greatest youth passion was baseball, which would prove to be a lifelong preoccupation. "Many a window was broken in the vicinity of the baseball field" in York, Nettie Fisher said. Charles was once even arrested for breaking a window, and had to be picked up from jail by his father. "Most of the time, he had to earn money to pay for

³ Letter, Nettie Fisher to Fisher family, Aug. 27, 1971, detailing her father's life after his death, CHF Collection.

damages to neighbors' property," Nettie Fisher recalled. "He retained his interest in the sport until the end of his life." But Charles took on other tasks with a sense of maturity beyond his years, family members recall: "Charles always accepted his responsibilities very seriously," Nettie Fisher said. "He was given a certain amount of freedom of expression — father especially was always ready to listen and give advice. Father was an advocate of true democracy, which he instilled in his children by giving a certain amount of freedom to work out their problems. Charles was very aggressive — he did everything with a certain degree of accomplishment. As a boy, he always had some kind of job, carrying morning and evening newspapers, working as a helper in a bakery in the neighborhood, or delivering ice. At home, the dignity of work was emphasized."⁴

Henry and Amelia Fisher's children attended local public schools. Charles completed the eighth grade, at which point poor eyesight and a desire to boost the family income prompted him to abandon studies. But after several years' working in a bakery, the young Fisher opted to return to school.⁵ On a scholarship, he entered York Collegiate Institute, a private high school and preparatory school which later would become a junior college. He became known as a good student and proficient debater. Fisher was taken under the wing of Dr. Eliakim Tupper "E.T." Jeffers, an ordained Presbyterian minister and the institution's second president, who encouraged Fisher to apply to Princeton University

⁴ Nettie Fisher letter, 1971.

⁵ Robert L. Mitchell, "An Embattled Liberal: Charles H. Fisher," (unpublished history seminar paper, University of Washington, 1971), CHF Collection, 7. The Mitchell paper is significant because it incorporates a number of personal interviews with contemporaries of Fisher, recalling his career, in the early 1970s. The specific source cited by Mitchell is a private interview with Dr. William Fisher, Charles Fisher's son, on Nov. 23, 1970, in Seattle, WA.

and train to become a Presbyterian minister himself.⁶ However, the family's longstanding religious preference came into play: Fisher's grandfather, William, offered to finance Charles Fisher's education if he applied instead to the United Brethren-sponsored Lebanon Valley College⁷ and aim for a ministry position in that denomination.⁸ Charles Fisher did so, graduating with honors from the Annville, Pennsylvania college in 1904 with a degree in history and philosophy. After graduation, Fisher accepted a job at a New York City YMCA branch, and soon enrolled in Union Theological Seminary, where his lasting political and religious beliefs began to take shape. Fisher's three years in seminary "changed him forever," his son, William, would recall, "first in the sense of theological-liberalism, and subsequently, I'm convinced, that this was the basis of much of his conversion to political liberalism."⁹ In 1907, graduating with honors and a Bachelor of

⁶ Mitchell, "An Embattled Liberal," 8. The story is also recounted, and Dr. Jeffers mentioned, in the above-referenced letter from Nettie Fisher, Aug. 27, 1971, reminiscing about her father's life after his death, CHF Collection.

⁷ Founded in 1866 by the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, the present-day small liberal-arts college remains affiliated with the modern-day United Methodist Church, which was formed by a series of church mergers between Protestant denominations. The original Church of the United Brethren in Christ, founded in 1800, has its roots in Lancaster and York, Pa. during the "Great Awakening" revival period of the late 18th century. It is a Protestant denomination with an episcopal structure and roots in the Mennonite and German Reformed communities. The church split after a philosophical schism in 1889: A minority branch of the original church, led by Bishop Milton Wright (father of aviation pioneers Orville and Wilbur), continues at present as Church of the United Brethren of Christ, Old Constitution, based in Huntington, Ind. The congregation of the Fisher family presumably was the majority United Brethren branch affiliated with Lebanon Valley College. This branch merged in 1946 with The Evangelical Association to form the Evangelical United Brethren Church, which merged with the Methodist Church in 1968 to form the United Methodist Church. See Paul R. Fetters, ed., *Trials and Triumphs*. "A history of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ up to 1981."

⁸ Mitchell, 8, citing a letter, shared with the author, from Nettie K. Fisher to Dr. William Fisher, Nov. 10, 1970.

⁹ Mitchell, 9, citing a letter from William Fisher to the author, Feb. 24, 1971. Charles Fisher's daughter, Mary Ann, told the author that her brother during this time possessed political views "too liberal for his Republican businessman father to tolerate at the family dinner table." Mitchell, 9, personal interview with Mary Ann Nichols, Seattle, Aug. 21, 1970.

Divinity degree in religious education and comparative religion, Fisher, now 27, signed on as assistant minister of a United Brethren Church in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. The young minister was seen as being effective from the pulpit, but soon tired of the daily routines of ministry.¹⁰ In the fall of 1908, Fisher returned to York, Pennsylvania, where



Charles Henry Fisher, circa 1898, (approximate age 18) in York, Pa. (Charles Henry Fisher Collection, Special Collections, Western Libraries Heritage Resources, Western Washington University.)

he secured a job as a Latin and history instructor at York High School. He also continued an earlier courtship of Mary Light, a music student and poet he had met at Lebanon Valley College, now teaching music. The couple married on August 4, 1909 at the Trinity United Brethren Church in Lebanon.

¹⁰ Mitchell, citing Nettie Fisher letter, *op cit*, and private interview with Mary Ann Nichols, Aug. 21, 1970, Seattle.

The Fisher family grew as Charles Fisher's education career flourished. The couple's children, William, Robert, Mary Ann, and Charles, were born between 1910 and 1917. Charles Fisher, while progressing from his high school teaching job in York to a position as chairman of the history department at a high school in Trenton, N.J., also earned a Master's degree in Political Science and Sociology at the University of Pennsylvania in 1914. He soon made the leap to higher education, accepting in 1915 a job as the head of the department of education at the state-run West Chester Normal School, 25 miles west of Philadelphia.¹¹ For four years, he combined that post with teaching at the School of Education at Swarthmore College to help make ends meet for his family. In 1919, Fisher accepted a post as Assistant Director in the Pennsylvania State Department of Public Instruction, where he worked as a supervisor, reorganizing and coordinating 14 state institutions involved in teacher-preparatory training.¹²

Focusing his research on teacher training for rural education, Fisher landed a job as president of Pennsylvania's Bloomsburg State Normal School in 1920. The post allowed Fisher, at last, to impose his own vision of teacher training on an institution. It also vaulted him ahead, in a sense, of his own educational training. Fisher from 1914 to 1920 had attended summer sessions at the University of Pennsylvania and the Teacher's College of Columbia University, completing coursework for a doctorate in Education and Sociology, but lacking a dissertation. Once he became a college president, that goal was

¹¹ It became West Chester State Teachers College in 1927, with the introduction of four-year degrees for prospective teachers. Since 1960 it has been West Chester State College.

¹² "Preparation and Experience of C.H. Fisher," box 1, folder 2, curricular vitae attachment, CHF Collection.

abandoned. Yet Fisher forever after was referred to as "Dr. Fisher" by students and colleagues.¹³

At Bloomsburg, Fisher's innovations included a nine-week summer session for teacher training and better coordination and planning between the Normal School and local school districts. In 1922, Fisher established a junior high school classroom on campus, providing a laboratory for teacher training in the model of educational reformer John Dewey.¹⁴ He also established extension courses for "in-service" work by teachers. By late 1922, the program comprised roughly 50 courses, and was taught in 23 eastern Pennsylvania locations by Bloomsburg staff.¹⁵ The beefed-up training program allowed teachers to argue for more substantial compensation.

With his career in Pennsylvania seemingly established, Fisher in 1923 made what might have been considered a radical leap to the Far West. His move to Washington State Normal School in Bellingham, an obscure teacher's college in the far Northwest corner of the nation, came after a chance encounter at a 1923 convention of the American Association of Teachers Colleges in Cleveland, Ohio. There, Fisher met Dr. W.D. Kirkpatrick, chairman of the Board of Trustees at the Washington State Normal School at Bellingham. Kirkpatrick was seeking a replacement for interim Bellingham Normal interim president Dwight B. Waldo. Fisher's son, William, later said his father was

¹³ Mitchell, "An Embattled Liberal," 10, citing W.B. Sutlif, "From Normal School to Teachers College," in *Bloomsburg Through the Years*, ed. By Marguerite W. Kehr (Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania: Bloomsburg State Teachers College, 1951), 7.

¹⁴ Mitchell, "An Embattled Liberal," 11.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 11, citing Sutlif, 8.

tempted to make the long move primarily out of desire to gain even more freedom to create innovative teacher-training curriculum in a place where he could build programs "unhindered by what he had come to regard as the stultifying conservatism of the east."¹⁶ Fisher also was lured by greater financial security, with the Bellingham Normal offering a \$1,000 raise (and a rent-free house adjacent to campus) over Fisher's \$5,000 annual pay at Bloomsburg.¹⁷

A certain amount of what then might have been called "Manifest Destiny" also was involved. Fisher as a youngster had been taken in by Horace Greeley's *Go West, Young Man, Go West!* his daughter, Mary Ann, recalled. It appealed to their father's own love of uncluttered natural places, and the Puget Sound region seemed like a frontier wonderland. Further, an acquaintance of Charles Fisher had spent time on the faculty at the nearby University of Washington, and had extolled the virtues of the area to the Fishers at a family dinner. Family members "wondered about the Indians and how undeveloped the country was," Mary Ann Fisher said. "However we heard the daisies were as big as plates and roses bloomed at Christmas. We heard about the high mountains and beautiful Puget Sound ... So we were on our way."¹⁸ The family, after a stop at

¹⁶ Roland L. De Lorme, "The Liberal Arts Come to Bellingham: Charles H. Fisher's Plan for the Liberally Educated Teacher," *Essays in Honor of James W. Scott*, Howard J. Critchfield, ed., Western Washington University, June 1993. See also Mitchell, 12, citing interview with William Fisher Sept. 10, 1970, Seattle.

¹⁷ Mitchell, 12, citing interview with Mary Ann (Fisher) Nichols, Sept. 20, 1970, Seattle. Fisher's beginning salary was about twice the average faculty salary in 1923. It would be substantially reduced during the coming Depression years, commensurate with faculty and staff payroll reductions. Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Bellingham Normal School, Aug. 6, 1923, Western Washington University archives, Bellingham, WA.

¹⁸ "Mary Ann Fisher Edited Transcript," oral history interview, Aug. 18, 2004, Western Washington University Libraries Special Collections, Campus History Collection, 1.

Yellowstone National Park en route, arrived in Bellingham during the summer, quickly becoming enraptured with sweeping bay views from the president's residence at Oak and High streets. From the home, the Fishers could watch seafaring cargo ships, including familiar visitors such as the *Vigilant*, a 240-foot, five-masted topsail schooner sporting 110-foot masts, enter and exit Bellingham Bay.¹⁹ The Fisher children, aged 7, 9, 11, and 13, were enrolled in the college's Campus School, in the south wing of the main instructional building now known as Old Main, where they were taught by many Normal School faculty members, many of whom became close personal friends of the Fisher family. Faculty, administrators and other employees of the school, most of whom had arrived from other parts of the country, found themselves struggling to fit into a community which, by American standards, still felt remarkably young, rough around the edges — and perhaps unfinished. Fisher's new place of employment was similarly young; one of many such institutions in the American West founded as state-supported or land-grant colleges or training academies at the close of the nineteenth century. But the town in which it resided was only slightly older. Like many other early Northwestern U.S. outposts, Bellingham was a seaport frontier town thriving on extractive industries — primarily a seemingly inexhaustible supply of virgin timber, coal, and Pacific salmon.²⁰

¹⁹ “We loved the water,” Mary Ann Fisher recalled. “We could see the whole (Bellingham) Bay, the San Juan Islands, and the snow-capped mountains. At that time there were a lot of ships, big freighters coming into the bay. Mostly they came to deliver or pick up lumber. We’d call each other – “Hey look, here comes a big ship!” We’d run to the windows. That’s the story of our early arrival.” Mary Ann Fisher Transcript, 1. Schooners frequented Bellingham Bay until the early 1930s, well after steam-powered ships became the norm. Most of the ships carried lumber to California and the South Pacific.

²⁰ Bellingham Bay was named by visiting British sea captain George Vancouver to honor Sir William Bellingham, a Royal Navy provisioner, after an exploration of the bay in June, 1792. Sir Bellingham, like many others whose names were placed on Northwest U.S. features by Vancouver and his mates, never saw his namesake bay, or even the Pacific Ocean.

The first white settlers did not arrive on the heavily timbered shores of the bay in the northwestern corner of current Washington state — the traditional home of the Coast Salish Lummi, Semiahmoo and Nooksack tribes — until 1852, a year before the establishment of the Washington Territory. Their numbers grew with the Fraser Canyon (British Columbia) Gold Rush in 1858. Four bayside communities, Bellingham, Whatcom, Sehome and Fairhaven, all formed in the 1850s. They consolidated and legally incorporated under the single name Bellingham in November, 1903. By 1914, the town boasted a major railroad terminal, its own federal building, and streetcars. Bellingham flourished economically during World War I, when the town's mills, canneries and mines supported the war effort in 1917-1918. A brief post-war recession gave way to further prosperity with increased shipping and industrial activity through the 1920s.

By the time Bellingham truly gained its feet, economically, in the mid-1920s, the town's hillside school had been producing public school teachers for more than two decades. The school, in fact, was a constant looming presence that served to blunt the rough edges of Bellingham's cultural milieu almost from the town's beginning. The institution now known as Western Washington University, a 15,500-student, state-sponsored regional institution often recognized nationally for its liberal-arts offerings, has roots extending far into the city's foundational period. In an era marked by the rapid foundation of public colleges, universities, agricultural and technical schools, and "normal" or teacher-training schools throughout the American West, residents of booming Whatcom County as early as 1886 had sought to establish a training school to provide numbers of teachers sufficient to keep pace with population growth and

construction of new primary schools.²¹ After several stops and starts in other locations, a new school plan, backed with the clout of an offer for donation of a school site by the Fairhaven Land Company and Bellingham Bay Improvement Company, was approved by the state in 1893, albeit without initial funding.²² After reviewing sites in Ferndale, Lynden, Blaine and Lake Whatcom, a ten-acre site at the base of Sehome Hill in New Whatcom — present-day central Bellingham — was chosen. The territorial legislature in 1885 appropriated \$40,000 for initial construction. The school was one of three such state "normal" schools, the others located in Ellensburg, in Central Washington, and Cheney, on the state's east side, near Spokane.²³

The school sequentially known as “Whatcom Normal,” “New Whatcom Normal,” and then “Bellingham Normal,” as the small communities on Bellingham Bay coalesced into the city of Bellingham, took shape slowly.²⁴ The first, and for some time only, building, today's stately, brick-and-sandstone Old Main, was built in early 1898. By fall,

²¹ The lack of secondary schools in Whatcom County at this time necessitated that these new teaching academies admitted, and provided curriculum appropriate to, the equivalent of current seventh- and eighth-graders. A person could qualify for a teaching certificate at the age of 16 by passing exams administered at the territorial capital in Olympia. Arthur C. Hicks, *Western at 75* (Bellingham, WA: Western Washington State College Foundation, 1974), 8.

²² A private normal school was established by J.R. Bradley in Lynden, in the north section of the county, with 71 students in 1889. With the granting of statehood for Washington the same year, county leaders sought public funding for a larger institution, perhaps converting Lynden's school into a public normal school. Separate bills to achieve this end, or to establish a separate public school, instead, in the town of Fairhaven, languished in the state legislature for several years, ultimately failing.

²³ Roland L. De Lorme, "Introduction," Roland L. De Lorme and Steven W. Inge, *Perspectives on Excellence: A Century of Teaching and Learning at Western Washington University* (Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Western Washington University, 2000), vii - xviii. See also Hicks, *Western at 75*.

²⁴ The school was officially called “Washington State Normal School at Bellingham” from 1904 until 1937, when it became “Western Washington College of Education.” For brevity, the school from the time of Fisher’s arrival until 1937 will be referred to herein as “Bellingham Normal.”

1899, the all-new faculty, with the help of community members, had made 32 of the building's 38 rooms ready for use.²⁵ New Whatcom State Normal School, as it was known for its initial two years, opened for classes on September 7 of that year with 88 students, but the number quickly grew to 150, with a "model school" primary enrollment of 64 local school children. Within two years, the Normal's teacher-training enrollment had risen to 329 students, and President Edward T. Mathes saw fit to hire a fulltime librarian, Mabel Zoe Wilson, who arrived in 1902 from Ohio, launching a long-term career that would make her a campus legend.²⁶ Over the next decade, the Normal grew at a steady pace, adding physical buildings, faculty and staff to meet student enrollment that grew to more than 1,000 by 1910.²⁷

The Normal's early curriculum, due to the school's specific, state-mandated teacher training mission, and an ongoing shortage of secondary schools in the still-developing state of Washington, is worthy of brief examination as a baseline for changes that would soon be made by the arrival of Charles Fisher. Campus historian Roland De Lorme observed:

The training included in the regular two-year program for elementary teachers made provision for brief surveys of introductory science and English classics, but little else remotely defensible as liberal arts. An optional third year included a

²⁵ DeLorme, 2000, ix. Also Hicks, *Western at 75*.

²⁶ Western Washington University's current main library bears her name.

²⁷ That year also saw an important community connection — an "extension" program that offered academic lectures to community members, off-campus. The community at large was supportive, and the atmosphere on campus was one of excitement over building something entirely new. Faculty members developed camaraderie around this common denominator, Librarian Wilson remembered: "All were individualists," she wrote. "Their individual subjects were most important. Each one said so." But they came together in their commitment to build the school: "Being a builder was the psychology! No authentic history can be written of this period ... unless the mental, spiritual drive is understood." De Lorme, 2000, xi.

semester each of Ancient history, Medieval and Modern history, Latin and literature. A slow accretion of courses outside the required pedagogy took place year by year, but by 1917, courses of a liberal arts cast remained a miniscule portion of the offerings and were judged by the State Board of Education to be equal to high school courses. Still, Bellingham Normal offered a great many more such courses than the normal schools at Ellensburg and Cheney, and there was a growing number of students enrolling at the Bellingham school who were not planning to teach. Some sought work in "practical" subjects like dietetics; others planned to transfer eventually to the University of Washington and wanted coursework that would be accepted there.²⁸

Demand for more liberal-arts-oriented classes continued to grow, however, particularly after the nation began to recover from a World War I-era period of academic retrenchment. This trend intensified amidst subsequent pressures to institute survey-level general education classes in a broader national push to "Americanize" U.S. higher education.²⁹ In 1922, the retirement of Bellingham Normal's longest-serving leader, President George W. Nash, provided school faculty and its three governing trustees an opportunity to push more rapidly in a new academic direction, following an emerging national trend toward teacher training enhanced by a curriculum far broader than traditional teaching pedagogy. The Normal's Board of Trustees found, in Fisher, a man who would push his newly adopted school to the leading edge of that philosophy.

Fisher, notes De Lorme, "was pleased by what he found" upon arrival at Bellingham Normal in 1923: "An attractive setting and physical plant poised for growth, a normal school with a healthy enrollment and funding level; an upgraded faculty, offering not only the standard teacher education programs but a number of college-level

²⁸ De Lorme, 1993, 233-234.

²⁹ De Lorme, 2000, xii.

courses in English and American literature and drama, European, American and regional history, and courses in the history and philosophy of arithmetic as well as mathematics."³⁰ Fisher saw the 1,300-student school, physically and in curricular concerns, as much more of a blank slate than learning institutions in which he had toiled in the relatively staid academic environment of Pennsylvania. He quickly set about converting what he would later call the Normal's "glorified high-school curriculum" into a model for teacher training that he believed was societally appropriate for a post-World War I era already emerging as one of the most tumultuous in the nation's history.

Fisher's constantly evolving mission ultimately would turn the traditional teacher-training model on its head. His ideal graduate would leap forth into a complex world not bored stiff by rote pedagogical concerns, but enlightened with the sort of intellectual curiosity that would allow him or her to ponder — and sometimes answer — the great questions of the universe. Those were the qualities necessary, Fisher believed, to inspire subsequent generations of American citizens facing an ever-complex, globalized future. The earlier, traditional teacher-training skills remained to a degree, but became more of an afterthought than the school's focus. Fisher unleashed librarian Mabel Zoe Wilson's pent-up drive to expand the campus library, then still shoe-horned into Old Main, into a world-class facility to be housed in a sprawling, stately new building by 1928. And he set to work developing a curriculum that would make that library a necessary second home to his students. Teachers, Fisher decided in these early years,

³⁰ De Lorme, 1993, 235.

"need to understand what we mean by civilization, and in the problems of civilization find a basis for education."³¹

Convinced that curricular change should be a never-ending process in a dynamic institution, Fisher sought, and received, buy-in from faculty by appointing a new, beefed-up faculty curricular committee that would guide this process. His choice of new faculty members reflected the trend. Contacts Fisher had established with the faculty at Teacher's College at Columbia University provided an opportunity to recruit young graduates of that program who might be induced to come west.³² "He had a nationwide reputation," longtime faculty member Miriam Mathes, herself trained at Columbia Teacher's College, recalls about her hiring by Fisher. "The placement bureau at Columbia was very enthusiastic when they knew I was considering a position [in Bellingham]."³³

Fisher, whose energy and commitment would soon become legendary, presented a radically reorganized curricular plan to the State Board of Education by the end of his

³¹ De Lorme, 1993, 235, citing letter from Fisher to Norman W. Cameron, president of West Chester State Teacher's College, July 18, 1931, Presidents Papers, Western Washington University Archives.

³² A survey of faculty hired from 1924 to 1933 shows more than 20 Columbia graduates. Mitchell, 11. Mitchell also suggests in his paper that direct contact between Fisher and Columbia-based progressive educators William H. Kilpatrick, George S. Counts and Harold Rugg "gave [Fisher] access" to a pool of potential recruits (Mitchell, 9). But such personal contact, at least in the case of Counts, is not documented. Fisher studied at Columbia between 1914 and 1920. Counts did not join the faculty at Teacher's College until 1927. Rugg taught there from 1920 to 1951; Kilpatrick, a protégé of John Dewey, was a student and faculty member between 1907 and 1937.

³³ Miriam Mathes, interviewed by Jackie Lawson, Nov. 17, 1970, reel-to-reel tape recording, box 28, folder 7, Rogan Jones Papers, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham WA.

first academic year as president:

Nineteen of the forty-eight and one-half credits in the first year of the four Education curricula were to be taken in liberal arts courses: surveys in general literature, science and contemporary civilization. Students in the Intermediate Education program also were required to take three credits each in history, geography, mathematics, and English during the second school year. Only minor adjustments were made during the remaining years of the decade. Still, by 1929, the required liberal arts component, called 'Introduction to Contemporary Civilization,' and including surveys in the history of civilization, general literature and science, accounted for twenty-seven credits. The increasing importance of liberal arts subjects in the school's curricula was emphasized by the fact that of a total of twenty-five upper division courses offered, only three were in teaching methods.³⁴

Only five years after his arrival, Fisher had remolded the hilltop school into a higher-education institution in fact, if not in name. It was one capable of producing the well-trained, well-rounded, primary school teacher of the future. His vision was proudly outlined in what amounted to a sales brochure distributed to regional high school students after his curricular makeover. The May, 1928 pamphlet, titled "Liberal Education and Teacher Training," features scenic cover photographs of Mount Baker, Puget Sound and other natural sites — the school's drawing card, to many students. But inside, amidst descriptions of campus sports, cultural events and social activities, Fisher expounded upon his own philosophy for teacher training, which reflected higher standards for the teaching profession. He particularly emphasized the need for state-sponsored normal schools to create more highly trained, professional teachers, rather than fill teaching jobs with what amounted to high-school graduates who had completed only a cursory, one-

³⁴ De Lorme, 1993, 235.

year teacher-training program.³⁵ "Standards of teacher training have gone up in this state and will probably go higher," he predicted.³⁶

A more-rigorous, well-rounded teacher-training curriculum would serve two purposes, Fisher stated in the pamphlet. The first was practical: Limiting the supply of teachers through more-vigorous training would slow the flood of applicants for existing jobs — what Fisher called "ruinous competition" that had caused a spiral in pay for young teachers in the state.³⁷ Fisher referred to a glut of teachers qualified by one-year training programs as a "vicious circle" characterized by "over-supply, lower salaries, normal schools crowded with less capable but more numerous candidates, poorer teachers, poorer education for children, parents and school officials ever less willing to pay good salaries for poorer teaching service."³⁸ To reverse that course, Fisher and Bellingham Normal had, in fact, already acted in concert with the state's two other normal schools to take corrective action: "This Normal School has been working in line with this policy of selection for several years," Fisher wrote. "During the school year

³⁵ The state requirement had already been raised to two years in 1927; Bellingham Normal and other institutions were already aiming for three.

³⁶ Charles H. Fisher, *Liberal Education and Teacher Training*, Washington State Normal School, Vol. XXV, No. 1, May, 1928, Special Collections, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.

³⁷ Fisher here cites an article from the May, 1928 issue of the *National Education Association Journal*, "Teachers' Salaries — A Constructive Program," to make the point that an oversupply of primary teachers was a national problem. The paragraph highlighted by Fisher in his pamphlet points to the need for "scientific study and statesmanlike action" to achieve a balance between supply and demand of teachers, lest "... a swarm of evils will result. Teachers' salaries will be reduced. Many capable teachers will leave the profession. New recruits will come from the least promising high-school graduates."

³⁸ Fisher, *Liberal Education and Teacher Training*, 7.

1925-26 it cut in half the number of elementary certificates issued. The next year in common with other normals it did not issue any elementary certificates. Graduates of accredited high schools may enter our school, but they must meet our standards of graduation before they receive the Normal Diploma. Each year from five to ten percent of our students find they are unable to meet our standards."³⁹ While this might not have been in keeping with the school's past practice, it was in keeping with national trends toward four-year degrees. It also was in keeping with the school's charge from the state — to provide better teachers, not necessarily more, Fisher concluded. "This school has definitely turned its back upon the business of growing large in number of students," he wrote. "We are concerned with a high quality of service in teacher training for the state of Washington."

Based on the exuberance with which it was presented, the second of Fisher's reasons for tripling down on teacher requirements seemed nearer and dearer to the heart of the career educator: "Teaching requires a liberal as well as a professional education," Fisher wrote to prospective students. Here Fisher describes the necessity for well-rounded educators in more-grandiose terms — as a concept he saw as critical to modern society, if not democracy itself:

Teaching may be thought of as a particularly active and useful type of citizenship. It deals with human nature and human society. Its purpose is to fit the human nature of a growing generation for living in a civilization with the ever new conditions and problems of a moving present. It is impossible to think of a teacher as being well trained who has not been liberally educated. A well trained teacher

³⁹ Ibid, 10.

will surely be a clear thinking and a well informed individual and will have wide interest in the problems of human nature and human civilization.⁴⁰

Thus, first-year students at Fisher's school studied not basic teaching techniques, but contemporary civilization. The curriculum also would include courses necessary to develop "a philosophy of life." By studying literature, history and science, Fisher wrote, "the student finds the records of man's adjustments to the necessities of existence; to the control and use of natural forces and resources; to the control of himself in his living with other men. Here is found the record of his search for the meaning and purpose of life itself."⁴¹ These courses would be college-level studies, with an emphasis on scholarship. "It is the plan of the course of training," Fisher wrote, "that each student should become capable of thinking and learning for himself." ⁴²

Critical to that process, Fisher believed, was direct exposure by students to some of the world's leading thinkers, either through studying their books or, when possible, face-to-face confrontation in campus assemblies or special events. Bellingham Normal's mandatory assemblies, held from 11 a.m. to noon, every Tuesday and Friday, on campus, typically featured notable performances or guest lectures.⁴³ Especially prominent voices would be heard in larger-venue appearances open to the community. Participants up to

⁴⁰ Fisher, *Liberal Education and Teacher Training*, 12.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid, 13.

⁴³ "He brought musicians, opera singers – it was fantastic," recalled Fred Knapman, a student in the 1930s who would become a faculty member at in Chemistry and later Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Western Washington College of Education. "He believed that much of your education went on outside the classroom." Fred Knapman Interview, Western Washington University Centennial Oral History Project Records, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.

that time⁴⁴ ranged from musicians such as the tenor Edward Johnson, violinist Georges Enesco, and pianist Harold Bauer to a broad range of writers and social commentators, explorers, journalists and others, including the poet Carl Sandburg, writer Maurice Hindus, novelist Floyd Dell, playwright John Van Druten, and even global explorers Richard Byrd and Roy Chapman Andrews.⁴⁵

Placing an aesthetic bow atop this description of what then must have been viewed as an unusually weighty curriculum, Fisher used much of the 27-page recruiting pamphlet to play up his school's enduring attraction: the stunning physical beauty of the location of "The Normal by the Mountains and the Sea." The school was located near the shores of Bellingham Bay and northern Puget Sound, within sight (and a short motorboat ride) of the picturesque San Juan Islands, and only about 50 miles west of the volcanic, glacier-capped, 10,781-foot Mount Baker and other craggy peaks of the North Cascades mountains, a sprawling wilderness later dubbed "America's Alps." The Normal offered hands-on instruction in marine biology at the University of Washington's laboratory at Friday Harbor on San Juan Island. It had its own getaway vacation properties near Mount Baker, on Sinclair Island, and on nearby Lake Whatcom. "The Bellingham region is

⁴⁴ The speakers would become even more-prominent, especially in the political realm, and more controversial, in the eyes of Fisher's critics, as the president's tenure proceeded.

⁴⁵ Fisher, *Liberal Education and Teacher Training*, 18. This partial list illustrates the small, relatively unknown school's remarkable ability to attract world-famous speakers who must have had the rapt attention of students. Byrd's travels are well-known today, but the adventures of others named here are less remembered. Chambers, who explored much of central Asia, is credited with the first discovery of fossilized dinosaur eggs in 1923. Some historians point to him as the inspiration for the fictionalized Hollywood "Indiana Jones" character. He also is credited with popularizing the term "Outer Mongolia" as a reference to a far-flung locale. See: Douglas J. Preston, *Dinosaurs in the Attic: An Excursion Into the American Museum of Natural History* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993).

endowed with rare natural beauty, and offers opportunities for outdoor recreation unsurpassed by any other section of the country," Fisher proclaimed.⁴⁶ The clincher: As a state institution, "tuition, of course, is free, although certain small fees ... are required," Fisher wrote. Total costs, including housing and meals, were estimated at \$375 to \$400 per quarter.

The Fisher children reaped the same benefits, attending classes at their father's institution. Their family life was described by children as happy, in spite of challenges presented by a serious accident involving their mother only a year after arriving in Bellingham. On December 2, 1924, Mary Light Fisher, already applying her considerable musical skills and attracting a cadre of local pupils, had been struck by a car while crossing Holly Street to attend a music recital. Seriously injured, she was unconscious for several days, and a month later remained only semi-conscious. She spent two months in a local hospital before being transferred to a state facility in nearby Sedro-Woolley, where she stayed for an additional four months. Family members said she never fully recovered from the near-fatal accident, which caused serious, irreparable damage to her right ear. "She was a perfectly ordinary person, but after she was in that car wreck, something happened to her," recalled former student Florence Lowe, a 1933 Normal graduate. "She was childlike from then on."⁴⁷ Other family members would describe Mrs. Fisher's injury as debilitating, leaving her unsteady on her feet and prone to outburst and a generally

⁴⁶ Fisher, *Liberal Education and Teacher Training*, 20.

⁴⁷ Transcript, Oral History Interview, Florence Margaret Smith Lowe, Aug. 29, 1988, Western Washington University Centennial Oral History Project Records, 48.

contentious personality. Relatives and friends of the Fishers would describe Henry Fisher's longstanding devotion to what must have been a difficult marriage – they would remain together for another four decades – as heroic. In the years following the accident, The Fisher's daughter, Mary Ann, picked up much of the slack, both at home and for official hosting duties related to the school.⁴⁸ Her promotion to fill-in head-of-household duties might have been further hastened by an apparent bout with mental illness suffered by the Fisher's oldest son, William, during his teenage years. "Always we were strengthened through our various perils by his [Charles Fisher's] love, wisdom and optimistic nature, all stemming much from his religious faith, even while going through perils-a-plenty on his own," Mary Ann Fisher recalled.⁴⁹

Charles Fisher seemed determined to prevent family challenges from derailing his ongoing mission on the campus adjacent to the president's residence. And, family members would later recall, he devoted himself, after the accident, even more passionately to his work. Bellingham Normal's historical records depict a 1920s lifestyle

⁴⁸ De Lorme, 2000, xvi. Mary Ann Fisher related that her brother, William, suffered what she termed a "nervous breakdown" while returning West from a stint attending high school in York, Pennsylvania, where he had lived with relatives for a period of time after having difficulty as a senior at Fairhaven High School in Bellingham. Charles Fisher traveled to Madison, Wisconsin to fetch his ailing son, who lived in an infirmary in Bellingham for up to a year. It began a two-year process in which William Fisher "pulled himself out of it," but not without struggle. While he recuperated, the Fisher's son devised his own vegetarian diet. "He'd walk around the streets of Bellingham eating carrots and celery," Mary Ann Fisher recalled. The year of William Fisher's debilitation is uncertain. He later enrolled at Bellingham Normal, moved on to the University of Washington and Columbia University for graduate degrees, and taught at the University of Montana for 30 years. He died in 2002 after an accomplished educational career that "paralleled my Dad's most closely," Mary Ann Fisher said, although the oldest Fisher son, Charles, who moved on to Stanford University, a teaching career in Political Science at New York City College, and later a staff position for the United Nations, seemed to have inherited Charles Fisher's administrative abilities the most, she added. Mary Ann Fisher Transcript, 13.

⁴⁹ Mary Ann Fisher Transcript, 14.

which, for faculty, administrators and students, seemed idyllic. The campus in its early years served as an interesting melting pot, as many of the students were children of first-generation American immigrants. The school balanced its aggressive curriculum with a



The Bellingham Normal School's 1936 football squad poses in front of the campus administration building, now known as Old Main. (Campus History Collection, Special Collections, Western Libraries Heritage Resources, Western Washington University).

broad range of social activities, many centered on outdoor recreation, such as skiing, hiking and sailing. Students gathered in the gymnasium at 4 p.m. every Friday for "Recreation Hour," actually a 60- to 90-minute dance, usually with live music. Faculty and staff celebrated the spring cessation of the town's damp, blustery winters with an annual waterfront salmon bake at Post Point, on Bellingham Bay, with chef duties assumed by Professor Elden A. Bond, who would become a longtime friend of the Fisher

family.⁵⁰ The Fishers also kept a family dwelling at Olga, a small community on nearby Orcas Island, part of the scenic San Juan Archipelago. “We often went swimming, fishing, played tennis, cards, board games and gathered (along with other young people summering at Olga) to enjoy beach fires in the evenings,” Mary Ann Fisher recalled. The family sometimes stayed at the cabin for extended periods of time while school was not in session; Charles Fisher joined them on weekends, arriving by “mail boat.”⁵¹

Fisher seemed, throughout the period, to be a man thoroughly in his element. His educational mission, approachable manner and other traits made him unusually popular for a campus administrator, among both faculty and students. “I shall never forget that man as long as I live,” recalled Leona Sundquist, a longtime college biology instructor. “He was very creative and imaginative. He had a philosophy of life and of education that of course prompted him to come here to begin with, and to get a school started that would be second to none in the country. And a campus school where [younger] children would learn, and that would be an example of the best teaching that was available at the time. He was a *daring* man.”⁵² Fisher, in spite of some ongoing challenges, seemed to be realizing his life’s dream of mixing academia with parenting in a pleasant environment

⁵⁰ Mary Ann Fisher describes these barbecues as “native style,” but describes salmon baked “clam-bake” style by wrapping whole salmon in seaweed and burying them beneath days-long bonfires on the beach, to be unearthed and consumed after being slow-baked. “The digging up and unwrapping of the salmon seemed to me almost a sacred ritual,” she recalled. Mary Ann Fisher Transcript, 3.

⁵¹ Mary Ann Fisher Transcript, 3. Charles Fisher’s affection for the San Juan Islands led him to investigate, and later initiate, a partnership in marine studies with the University of Washington’s research facility at Friday Harbor on San Juan Island. The Bellingham school later established its own marine research institute at Shannon Point, near Anacortes, Fidalgo Island. It remains in operation.

⁵² Leona Sundquist, interviewed by Robin Probst, Dec. 7, 1970, reel-to-reel tape recording, box 29, folder 2, Rogan Jones Papers, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies.

that included strong social connections to the broader Bellingham community, his daughter remembered:

He was a wonderful father and family man. Perhaps he did somewhat ‘spoil’ all of his children but we never in the least lacked for love from both our parents, their attention when we wanted and needed it ... My dad wanted us to enjoy our lives, though not often to be really ‘frivolous.’ We were all very close. There was never any favoritism shown by our parents. As the only girl with three brothers, I was treated completely as an equal.

I never could understand some people saying CHF was ‘so dignified’ (that) they were almost afraid to be around him. He was totally approachable to me and those who knew him well. He loved a good joke (never missed a chance to fool us on the first of April) and had an infectious laugh, though he didn’t really come out with it a lot. He loved Christmastime — being of pure German ancestry that was typical ... He didn’t really have an active hobby, except walking, and that after much persuasion by my mother, a great walker. The college ‘to be the best,’ his community leadership with the YMCA, the Community Chest, and his family life, fully filled him to satisfaction ...

Dad would often go back to his office on campus in the evenings. A few times when I had occasion as a student to be at Old Main in the evenings, I would see CHF walking slowly alone, sometimes meet him (not by appointment) on the narrow, outside walk close around the front of Old Main. I knew he was planning, dreaming how to make the college the finest possible. I think his spirit still lingers there sometimes.⁵³

Part of that dream was an expanded physical campus befitting his school’s altered mission. Consulting with a team of well-known architects who had worked to build what prove to be lasting structures and parks in nearby Seattle, Fisher developed a 25-year physical plan for the campus. The most striking initial step was the school's "dream library," an imposing, Romanesque structure that opened in 1928 with a collection of

⁵³ Mary Ann Fisher Transcript, 10.

40,000 books and files.⁵⁴ At the same time, Fisher plunged ahead with a dramatic re-writing of the school's once-limited curriculum. Fisher's faculty clearly was on-board with this constant state of refinement. The school's 10- to 12-member faculty curricular committee, chaired by psychology professor Irving Miller, in 1931 set forth the principle that curricular development "should make possible an education that is liberal in spirit, interpretive of life, and enriching in its social and aesthetic culture."⁵⁵ The minimum requirement for liberal arts courses was further raised that year, with approval of the state Board of Education. Introduction to Contemporary Civilization courses increased to 30 hours; additional credits were set aside for elective courses in the arts and sciences. Students now took a majority load of pedagogical courses only in their third (at the time, final) year.⁵⁶ In 1933, when the state of Washington, lobbied heavily by Fisher and others, granted permission for the school, by now known as Bellingham Normal, and its sister institutions to begin offering four-year baccalaureate degrees, Fisher's school was already poised to do so. Two dozen students graduated in August of that year with Bachelor of Arts in Education degrees. The Normal had become "a college in fact, if not in name."⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Heather Weaver, "That We Shall Increasingly Become a Real College": *Western Washington College of Education as an Ideal in the Making: 1923-1939*, 2003, Heritage Resources, Special Collections, Western Washington University, 2.

⁵⁵ De Lorme, 1993, 236, citing Western Washington University, Curriculum Report, Jan. 14, 1930, Western Washington University Archives.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Weaver, 3.

The distinction is particularly impressive given the challenges of the Depression era in which it came. Many students lacked money for basic living expenses, and no reserves to purchase food or clothing, recalls longtime librarian and instructor Miriam Mathes. “Remember, these were hard times,” she said of the early 1930s. “We on the faculty would give students clothes before we were really through with them ourselves so they could attend class. There were girls with one pair of shoes who had to take turns coming to classes for lack of clothing. We were more concerned ... that students were clothed or fed than anything else. It was just a case of survival.”⁵⁸ Faculty members earned \$2,000 to \$3,000 per year for working 11 months, but many were forced to settle for substantially less during the Depression years. In fact, by 1933, the same year that the Normal began offering four-year degrees, the economic impact of the Depression was threatening the very continuance of higher education in Washington state. Outgoing Governor Roland Hartley, in his last message to the Legislature in 1933, called for the closure of two of the state’s three normal schools. Incoming Governor Clarence Martin, a conservative Democrat, later belayed that order. But the tradeoff was drastic cuts, across the board. Budgets for salaries at all state schools were slashed by 20 percent, with an additional cut of about 16 percent scheduled for the Bellingham faculty and staff the following year.⁵⁹ Fisher also ordered a reduction in faculty from a previous high of 73

⁵⁸ Miriam Mathes taped interview, Nov. 17, 1970.

⁵⁹ The actual salary reductions, as reflected in faculty paychecks, is uncertain. Additional budget documentation gathered from public sources by the Committee on Normal Protest as it investigated Fisher in 1934-1935 showed figures from a budget submitted to the state legislature reflecting pay cuts of about 25 percent between the years 1930 and 1934. Fisher’s own salary, according to this document, dropped from \$7,000 to \$5,250 over the same period. “Figures Taken from Governor’s Budget,” Bellingham Herald collection on Charles H. Fisher, box 1, folder 6, Bellingham Herald collection on Charles H. Fisher, Center

instructors in 1925-26 to 62 for 1933-34.⁶⁰ Reducing his own salary by a commensurate amount did not ease the ire of some faculty members let go, including one, a history professor named Pelagius Williams, who would claim he was fired for his conservative political bent. In the short term, however, Fisher managed to maintain his campus program, and even put final touches on his curricular makeover. His last major curricular changes were made in 1935.⁶¹

Fisher's distinctive system may not have been unique, but it was decidedly rare for its time, particularly in Depression-era America. Similar curricular schemes during this era were found only at St. John's College, Teacher's College at Columbia University, and the University of Chicago.⁶² Bellingham Normal's structure thus came to be viewed as a national model. H.A. Brown, president of the noted Illinois State Normal University, as early as 1931 had anointed Fisher as the nation's top teacher's college president, praising the school's curriculum for combining "liberal education for the teacher and professional preparation in a wonderfully excellent manner." He added: "I hear this

for Pacific Northwest Studies, Western Libraries Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.

⁶⁰ Hicks, *Western* at 75, 36.

⁶¹ In summary: Electives were no longer allowed in the first year of study, and would be limited exclusively to liberal arts courses through the second year. This provided a two-year course of study with no formal teacher training at all, for students so-inclined. Graduates who planned to teach left Bellingham with at least half of their teacher-training requirements met by survey courses in liberal arts (geography, mathematics, psychology, science literature, history and the fine arts, for example), the rest consisting of a mix of teaching courses and additional liberal arts electives. The plan also allowed a four-year degree to be earned by students with no plans to teach, and provided transfer flexibility for others.

⁶² De Lorme, 2000, xv.

discussed wherever I am among educators."⁶³

From this position, Fisher became a key voice in ongoing debates over the nature and roles of U.S. teacher training colleges, and over higher education in general.⁶⁴ By the mid-1930s, the most controversial of these arguments played out in the short-lived social-protest journal, *The Social Frontier*, edited by progressive educational reformer, and avowed socialist, George S. Counts of Columbia's Teacher Training College. Counts, although apparently not acquainted with Fisher personally, echoed the Bellingham

⁶³ Letter, H.A. Brown to Charles H. Fisher, June 30, 1931, Western Washington University Archives. The direction Fisher established for Bellingham Normal represented the leading edge of a broader trend in U.S. higher education. Educational leaders had struggled since the late 1800s to devise a curriculum more suitable for a young, rapidly expanding democracy than coursework for long-established "classical" education favored by institutions in Europe. An initial, arguable overreaction toward specialized courses had produced a plethora of elective courses so broad and diverse that a more-standardized curriculum of general education for the "liberal arts" soon was seen as necessary. In the first decade of the twentieth century, the trend to boil down liberal arts to what was considered a "general education" spread from Eastern institutions such as Harvard, Bryn Mawr, Amherst and Columbia to newer institutions in the West. Fisher's system at Bellingham provides a notable example in this evolution; the fact that he managed to insinuate the scheme onto the structure of a pre-existing teacher-training school makes it more noteworthy. De Lorme, 1993, 237, citing William C. Devane, *Higher Education in Twentieth Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), 6-7. It should be noted that the educational reformers who served to light Fisher's ideological path had foreseen this very development. John Dewey as early as 1904 had predicted that normal schools would evolve into institutions granting bachelor's degrees. Weaver, 3, citing John Dewey, "The Relation of Theory to Practice in Education," 1904, in Merle L. Borrowman (ed.), *Teacher Education in America* (New York: Teacher's College Press, 1965), 170. Further, to enhance their standing and to compete with colleges and universities, teacher-training schools in the early twentieth century saw the need to present a "unified front" by forming professional associations of accreditation to establish curricular standards. By the late 1920s, the American Association of Teachers Colleges (AATC) had emerged as the authority. Fisher's Normal School applied to the AATC for accreditation in 1933, but the board initially denied it, citing insufficient numbers of teachers with master's degrees. Full accreditation came in 1936. The following year, in a move reflecting his growing national prominence, Fisher was named to the AATC's Accrediting Committee as the representative of the western United States. Weaver, 7.

⁶⁴ The primary debate in the 1920s had pitted scholars in a "professional" camp against others espousing a more "academic" curricular route. The professional view was represented by a group of Missouri educators and the Carnegie Foundation in a faction known as the Missouri-Carnegie group, which advocated training limited to traditional pedagogy. Ideologically, the professional group saw learning as "focused," while academicians viewed it as "open-ended." Fisher clearly favored the latter approach, but still set out to establish a curriculum that would combine the better parts of both worlds, producing students developed "first as individuals, second as teachers," Weaver, 9-10.

educator's thoughts on a broad-based, liberal-arts teacher-training evolution as being essential to produce teachers with "mellow wisdom, imaginative vision, and a driving educative zeal."⁶⁵ Counts, like Fisher, insisted that this sort of intellectual curiosity was essential to make "the educational profession function adequately in realizing a new American society equal to modern economic and cultural opportunities."⁶⁶ Fisher in fact recommended a Counts article in *The Social Frontier* bearing these words — and endorsing the broader role of liberal-arts teacher training as essential to societal progress --to faculty members at a meeting on June 26, 1935.⁶⁷ That same spring, the progressive zeal of Counts, et al, seemed to lurk in Fisher's own words in his "Message From the President" in the student yearbook, which danced very near the edge of a statement of political philosophy:

We all go through life seeing little, knowing little, and understanding little. Where is the wise one who can solve by day or night the greatest conundrum of the present time: Why in the midst of so much plenty is there so much want? In the sixth year of a so-called depression we seem to be making no progress in our ability to take the abundance that we can produce and distribute it for the benefit of all the people. One well-known American thinker says that our civilization will succeed or fail according to our ability or inability to handle abundance. Civilization should be able to guarantee to all of us economic security, political and civil liberties, and lasting peace. Only by education can we hope to find a means of inquiring into these problems and perhaps of finding the answers.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Weaver, 11, citing George S. Counts, "Break The Teacher-Training Lockstep," 1935, in Merle L. Borrowman (ed.), *Teacher Education in America* (New York: Teacher's College Press, 1965), 222-223.

⁶⁶ Counts, "Teacher-Training Lockstep," 1935.

⁶⁷ "Minutes of the Faculty of the Washington State Normal School," June 26, 1935, Western Washington University Archives, Bellingham, WA.

⁶⁸ *Klipsun*, 1935, WWU Special Collections, 11.

It should be noted here, given the political controversies to follow, that Fisher diverged sharply from Counts and other members of the social reconstructionists in at least one critical way: Perhaps owing to the largely conservative political climate in his adopted hometown of Bellingham, Fisher largely endeavored to avoid mixing politics and curricular matters.⁶⁹ Never one to shrink from a spirited political argument at meetings of the Bellingham Rotary or the local, males-only "Hobby Club," Fisher would let his political persuasions as a New Deal liberal become publicly known after his tenure at the college. But during his tenure he generally steered clear of discussing pure politics in interviews or public settings, unless he was explaining or defending the appearance of political figures at campus events.⁷⁰ While Counts battled over ideology in national publications, Fisher let his curricular innovations do most of his talking. News accounts

⁶⁹ The social reconstructionist movement was launched by Counts, et al, in 1932 at a convention of the Progressive Education Association, at which Counts first shocked, but later rallied, teacher participants with fiery rhetoric about freeing America from the restrictive reins of capitalism and unleashing a free society in which poverty and want would be banished forever through the application of science. "The new society, built on the foundation of a socialized economic system, would release people from pecuniary worries and thus allow them to grapple with higher intellectual, moral, and esthetic problems. To achieve this goal, he suggested that it would be necessary to indoctrinate students about the evils of capitalism and the social values upon which it depended. Indoctrination, he maintained, will take place regardless of what the teacher does; why not, therefor, use it as a means to 'check and challenge the power of less enlightened or more selfish purposes.'" C.A. Bowers, *The Progressive Educator and the Depression: The Radical Years*, (New York: Random House, 1969), 15, citing George S. Counts, "Dare the School Build a New Social Order?" *Progressive Education*, IX, 4 (April, 1932), 259, 261, 263.

⁷⁰ Fisher must have known that Counts, with whom Fisher shared some educational philosophies, possessed no such reservations. The Columbia professor, a contemporary associate of famed progressive historian Charles A. Beard, was an acknowledged socialist who had publicly advocated unleashing the skills of public school teachers to overthrow the capitalist system. Because of this, Counts at the time was locked in a public ideological battle with American conservatives who labeled him a seditious radical. His most-prominent critic, newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst, in fact made Counts public enemy number one in a 1935 smear campaign that would create a manufactured, short-lived, national Red Scare on U.S. campuses in 1934-1935. By contrast, Fisher – at least before he was drawn into debates over the nation's political affairs himself by a local conservative group echoing Hearst's bluster, seemed to draw his own politically "progressive" line at the edge of campus.

from the era indicate that the college president, in public talks, focused primarily on his own obsession with the key role education plays in a free society – and would increasingly play in the emerging society he envisioned. At a PTA Convention on May 3, 1934, Fisher extolled a public, free educational system from kindergarten through college, making "available to every child in the state educational opportunities consistent with the principles of equality and justice, and adequate to meet his needs in a democratic society." Fisher concluded that: "controlling the work of the schools should be a moral purpose, which is expressed in a democratic philosophy of life, which should be to us and our children a passion; yes, almost a religion."⁷¹ And he did not settle for merely turning the pedagogy/liberal-arts balance at his school on its head. He saw that transformation as the mere beginning of what would become an ongoing series of transformations: The only effective curriculum for an increasingly complex American society undergoing mechanization, urbanization, waves of immigration and scientific advancement, he believed, was one that would continually evolve. A liberal-arts focus provided that key flexibility. It also provided every emerging public school teacher with a core concentration of knowledge deemed vital to function in a democratic society — with sufficient flexibility to allow specialized training in a chosen field, be it teaching or something else.⁷²

⁷¹ *The Bellingham Herald*, May 4, 1934. With this rhetoric, Fisher seemed to be more closely aligned with reformist, but not revolutionary, educators such as John Dewey, who believed teachers should inspire students to use their own collective intelligence as the guide to social action, rather than straight indoctrination by a partisan teacher who purposefully identified with the nation's working class, as favored by Counts. See Bowers, *The Progressive Educator and the Depression*, 100.

⁷² De Lorme, 2000, xv.

The state of Washington, perhaps unwittingly, helped formalize that direction. In 1937, state education officials finally acknowledged the advanced state of education in the state's teacher schools by dropping the increasingly anachronistic "Normal" titles from their official names. Bellingham State Normal School became Western Washington College of Education — finally, official acknowledgment of the "real college" Fisher had envisioned since his arrival 14 years before.⁷³ As the nation and region began to emerge from the Depression, the young college's enrollment — and physical size — continued to grow.⁷⁴ Fisher had won an important battle for the intellectual and academic direction of his institution. But several years before the honor of the name "college" was bestowed upon it, evidence suggests the influential president had already begun to worry whether the academic successes racked up "on the hill" in his adopted town were known — let alone understood or appreciated — by the decidedly blue-collar Bellingham community that lay at its feet.⁷⁵ Fisher was not disconnected from the town; the opposite appears true. Through his first decade of service, he served as an American Red Cross chairman, president of the Bellingham Community Fund charity, and as chairman of a city zoning commission. He was an active member of two Bellingham Presbyterian churches, and

⁷³ Message From the President, *Klipsun*, 1937, WWU Special Collections, 28.

⁷⁴ New Deal programs initiated during this period included some student financial aid, which likely blunted what otherwise would have been further reductions in student enrollments, which bottomed out at 1,170 in 1933-34, but recovered to 1,962 in 1938-39. Hicks, *Western at 75*, 49.

⁷⁵ Charles H. Fisher, April 19, 1939 letter to W.A. Brandenburg, president of State Teachers College, Pittsburg, Kansas, WWU Archives, Fisher Case Files. Fisher recalled that he had been warned about Bellingham's "ultra-conservative" political climate before he took the job in 1923, and in fact was advised by some academics to turn it down because of a "divided community." He went on to suggest that the two long-serving presidents preceding him in office also had left for reasons either specifically, or indirectly related to the political climate in the town.

also belonged to the Rotary Club, the Bellingham Hobby Club, and the Twentieth Century Club.⁷⁶ One contemporary historical account even named him part of the “business establishment” that generally controlled Bellingham.⁷⁷

But by the early 1930s, some of his associates could already sense growing tension between Fisher and townspeople.⁷⁸ Some of this discord, brewing largely out of public view, was due to regionalism – local distrust of a brash Easterner settling in and presuming to tell lifetime Westerners how to behave, one contemporary observed. “He found out when he got here that lots of people coming from the East, people in the West are rather suspicious of them at first,” Miriam Mathes recalled. “Mr. Fisher came from the East. He brought faculty from the East.”⁷⁹ Beyond this, Fisher’s own personality came into play. Never known to suffer fools or withhold a deeply held opinion, Fisher

⁷⁶ Mitchell, 13. Fisher’s church membership would become the source of some controversy in 1935, when charges were brought against him. From his early days in Bellingham, Fisher’s family had worshipped at First Presbyterian, the city’s oldest church of that denomination. However, along with fellow Normal school employee Pelagius Williams, a faculty member, revoked his official membership in the church Session after a controversy over the hiring of a new pastor, Leo Totten, of Great Falls, Montana, described by a minority in the church as a “fundamentalist” preacher. Fisher continued to attend the church periodically, even after being suspended as a member, but never was involved in church leadership again. Leading the church for a second time, beginning in 1930, was the Rev. John Robertson Macartney, who would serve as a key member of the Committee on Normal Protest, which sought Fisher’s dismissal in 1935. Macartney left for a position in California in the summer of 1936. Keith A. Murray, “Centennial Churches of Washington’s ‘Fourth Corner,’” Occasional Paper #20, 1985, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.

⁷⁷ Mitchell, 13, citing Lloyd Spencer and Lancaster Pollard, *A History of the State of Washington*, (New York: The American Historical Society, 1937), 455, and a private interview with Dr. William Fisher, Seattle, Sept. 10, 1970.

⁷⁸ Mitchell, 13, citing private interview with Ethel Church, Secretary to the President of Western Washington College of Education, 1930-1957, Bellingham, Sept. 18, 1970. As an example, Church told the author that Fisher “put pressure” on business owners to contribute to the Community Fund, and that he “should have been less demanding and more tactful.”

⁷⁹ Miriam Mathes taped interview.

came off as unduly brash to some townspeople, who detected a sense of arrogance exacerbated by Fisher's "lack of tact," a label that soon would be hung around his neck, for posterity, by the state's governor. "He put the school on the map, without any doubt," Mathes said. "He was known all over the country for his leadership in education. He was not a modest man, though. He *knew* he was good, and he let other people know it."⁸⁰

On campus, among friends, those traits were seen as qualities – a sign of the unflinching vigor and conviction the campus community admired in its chief. So enamored was the college on the hill with its leader and his mission, which meshed with their own, that few faculty or students fully appreciated at the time how the man might be viewed any other way by the community at large. Ultimately, the tight-knit nature of the campus community would only add to a sense of physical and ideological separation between town and gown in Bellingham, a city where "progressive" meant radically different things to different people. "We were sort of a 'tightly bonded college community on the hill,'" Mary Ann Fisher acknowledged. "That is not to say we felt aloof, must-apart from the rest of the town, because there was constant mingling with town groups and individuals through many cultural, social, etc. channels. But the workplace bonds were strong and loyal – almost 'to a man and woman,' between my Dad, our family, his colleagues, and their families."⁸¹

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Mary Ann Fisher Transcript, 14.

It never occurred to any of them that those same bonds could be interpreted by others as walls concealing nefarious secrets.

Chapter 3

Depression-Era Politics and the “Would-Be Nero of Bellingham”

The man who would hold the reins of conservative political power in Whatcom County for decades in the first half of the 20th Century – and who would become the chief nemesis of Charles Fisher’s progressive-education mission — was a native Midwesterner, Frank Ira Sefrit. Born August 29, 1867, in Knox County, Indiana, to Moses L.B. and Eleanor McDonald Sefrit, the future newspaper editor had little formal education, but grew up steeped in the culture of newspapering.¹ In 1879, before his 12th birthday, he began carrying papers and working in the office of his father’s newspaper, the *Washington Daily and Weekly Gazette*. In 1892, his father’s death left the newspaper in the hands of sons Frank and Charles G. Sefrit. Both were destined for a life in the newspaper business.² Eventually acquiring skills as a reporter, Sefrit worked as a freelancer for various U.S. newspapers from 1890 to 1898.³

A self-described “lifelong Republican” who was active in an Indiana Lincoln League organization of young Republicans, Sefrit also mixed newspaper work with

¹ Biographical notes typed by Sefrit for *Bellingham Herald* editors for the purposes of Sefrit’s eventual obituary included no mention of formal schooling. “Biographical Notes: Frank I. Sefrit,” Jan. 21, 1930, box 1, folder 2, Bellingham Herald collection on Charles H. Fisher, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Western Libraries Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.

² Obituary, “Death Closes Long Career of Frank I. Sefrit,” *The Bellingham Herald*, May 28, 1950.

³ “Biographical Notes: Frank I. Sefrit,” Jan. 21, 1930, box 1, folder 2, Bellingham Herald collection. See also “Death Closes Long Career of Frank I. Sefrit,” *The Bellingham Herald*, May 28, 1950. Sefrit’s newspaper obituary referred to him as a “star reporter,” and stated that he had covered the Galveston, Texas flood of 1900, the San Francisco earthquake of 1906, and other major national news events. Sefrit’s earthquake coverage was published in Salt Lake City. (See: “Ruined City Will Rise Again,” *The Salt Lake Tribune*, April 22, 1906.) It is not made clear in the obituary where Sefrit was employed during the Texas flood coverage.

official government business as a young man. While still connected to the Indiana paper, he was appointed postmaster in Washington, Indiana, eight miles from his birthplace, by the William S. McKinley administration in 1898, and reappointed by Theodore Roosevelt after McKinley's assassination in 1901. Sefrit resigned the post in 1903, "at the insistence of [McKinley political appointee] Perry S. Heath,"⁴ to move with his wife of 12 years, Ethel, and a growing family to Salt Lake City, Utah. There, he became associate editor, and later general manager, of the *Salt Lake Tribune* and its sister publication, *The Evening Telegram*. In Salt Lake, the Sefrits raised three children, Charles, Irene and Ben.⁵ Sefrit's early Utah career marked the beginning of a lifelong, peripheral connection to the power of politics and public offices, which Sefrit appeared to revel in manipulating from the outside, as a journalist. His first presidential vote was for a "personal acquaintance," Benjamin Harrison, in 1888; his last was for Thomas E. Dewey in 1948.⁶ Sefrit, who would become a political kingmaker in his adopted hometown of Bellingham later in his life, served as the Second Washington Congressional District's delegate to the Republican National Convention in Chicago in 1920.

As manager of the Salt Lake newspapers, Sefrit was described as being "active in politics" and likely helped organize the American Party, which actively opposed local and national political activity by leaders of the Mormon Church. The party, functioning

⁴ "Biographical Notes," box 1, folder 2, Bellingham Herald collection. Heath (1857-1927), was a newspaperman, political writer, Republican National Committee Secretary and party emissary who served as U.S. assistant postmaster general from 1897-1900. He was active in the 1896 William McKinley presidential campaign. Perry S. Heath Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁵ Sefrit married the former Ethel Leonard in 1891 at Washington, Ind. Charles and Irene were born in Indiana; Ben was born in Salt Lake City.

⁶ Sefrit obituary, *The Bellingham Herald*, May 28, 1950.

from 1904 to 1911, was also known as the “Anti-Mormon Party,” as it existed primarily as a counterbalance to political influence of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It was spearheaded by U.S. Sen. Thomas Kearns, a Park City mining and railroad magnate, who claimed friendship with McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt. In October, 1901, Kearns acquired the newspapers managed by Sefrit, who dutifully defended Kearns’ political viewpoints in the *Tribune*’s pages, often attacking the LDS-controlled newspaper, *The Deseret News*.⁷ In doing so, Sefrit became entangled in an internal Republican political battle between publisher Kearns and Utah’s junior United States senator, Reed Smoot, an LDS church apostle.⁸ Smoot in January, 1905 used his influence to convince the Utah State Legislature to elect a new candidate, former Republican Congressman Alexander George Sutherland,⁹ to replace Kearns in the Senate. Outraged over the ouster, which he attributed to LDS control over Smoot, Kearns helped organize

⁷ Dean L. May, *Utah: A People's History* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987), ISBN 978-0-87480-284-9), 162; Jeffrey D. Nichols, *Prostitution, Polygamy, and Power: Salt Lake City, 1847–1918* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002) ISBN 978-0-252-02768-0), 137–138.

⁸ Smoot’s LDS affiliation became a national story shortly after his election in 1903, largely because of ongoing controversy over the church’s position on plural marriage, which it had officially renounced in 1890. The 1904-1907 Senate “Smoot Hearings” weighed whether Smoot could faithfully uphold a constitutional oath while simultaneously adhering to the principles of the religious order. A majority of committee members recommended his disqualification for office, but the full Senate defeated the recommendation in 1907. Harvard S. Heath, “The Reed Smoot Hearings: A Quest for Legitimacy,” *Journal of Mormon History*: Vol. 33: Iss. 2, Article 1, <http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/mormonhistory/vol33/iss2/1>. See also M. Paul Holsinger, “For God and the American Home: The Attempt to Unseat Senator Reed Smoot, 1903-1907,” *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (July 1, 1969): 154–60.

⁹ Brigham Young Academy-educated Sutherland, an Episcopalian, attorney, early organizer of the Utah Bar Association, and former Utah State Senate Judiciary Committee chairman, served as a Utah senator from 1905 to 1917. He was appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1922 by President Warren G. Harding, and would become one of the conservative “Four Horsemen” instrumental in striking down portions of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal legislation. He retired from the court in 1938. Clare Cushman, 2013. *The Supreme Court justices: illustrated biographies, 1789-2012*. See also http://www.pbs.org/wnet/supremecourt/capitalism/robes_sutherland.html

the American Party to wreak revenge. The party between 1905 and 1911 controlled city governments in Ogden and Salt Lake City, fading in subsequent years. But the long-running Smoot controversies provided a grand opportunity for the young Sefrit to hone a witty, acerbic, and effective editorial voice. They also provided a fertile playing field for Sefrit to wield the power of his newspaper position by injecting himself directly into the dispute at hand, beyond his journalistic role as either a chronicler of facts, or dispassionate editorial voice. In this case, Sefrit's specific foe was the Mormon Church, which he portrayed literally as an incarnation of evil, threatening the very stability of the nation. The church, Sefrit wrote to Indiana Sen. Albert J. Beveridge, during the Smoot Hearings, "has taught treason to its people since it came to this valley."¹⁰ Playing on public revulsion for polygamy, Sefrit called church leaders lecherous old men given to wild sexual passions, asking the senator: "Would you wish to introduce your daughter or your friend to men as callous to all that is decent in society as the ecclesiastical associates of Reed Smoot?"¹¹

The eventual calming of the Smoot affair, and the demise of the American Party, roughly coincided with Sefrit's decision to move on from Utah. He began seeking employment in another Western location, preferably near sea level, for what he publicly described as health reasons, around 1910.¹² Although family members say he had

¹⁰ Frank Sefrit to Albert J. Beveridge, Jan. 1, 1906, Beveridge Papers, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Cited in Holsinger, "For God and the American Home," 155.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² In a hagiographic profile of Sefrit, writer J.L. Burton Lewis states that Sefrit left Salt Lake "because of a nervous breakdown which was attributed to the high altitude." "Story of Life and Works of Frank I. Sefrit as Seen by Visitor," *The Bellingham Herald*, May 28, 1950, reprinted from *Washingtonia*, no date supplied.

intended to ultimately settle in California, Sefrit, after a brief stop in Portland, Oregon, found, instead, an opportunity in Washington state. There, Col. Alden J. Blethen, the fiery publisher of *The Seattle Times*, owned two Bellingham newspapers, the *Evening American* and *Morning Reveille*. These papers, survivors of multiple newspaper consolidations in the area in preceding decades, competed vigorously in the young, growing town against *The Bellingham Herald*. A Bellingham business syndicate, headed by E.W. Purdy, was seeking to buy the two Blethen-owned papers; Sefrit was hired as a go-between consultant, to evaluate the businesses and potentially broker a deal. He did so, and the papers wound up being consolidated by the new owners with *The Bellingham Herald*, owned by conservative publisher Sidney Albert “Sam” Perkins of Tacoma.¹³

Sefrit was hired by Perkins to manage the entire *Bellingham Herald* operation as of Nov. 11, 1911.¹⁴

A more-likely scenario is presented in a family letter written by Ben Sefrit and passed down to his own children. In the letter, recounting his father’s early career, Ben Sefrit states that his father had been suffering from severe kidney-stone attacks. But he depicts the stated health concerns as a face-saving ruse to cover an ideological split with the Kearns family. Ben Sefrit recounted that his father, after the death of benefactor Thomas Kearns, had been pressured by Kearns’ sons to support new federal legislation pushed by Utah mining interests, which Sefrit saw as contrary to the public good. Frank Sefrit, his son believed, “would not compromise his honor,” nor would he “editorially back an interest that he considered was not beneficial to the public.” Frank Sefrit received a warm sendoff from the entire newspaper staff in Salt Lake City, and was presented with a gold watch by fellow employees, Ben Sefrit recalled. Ben Sefrit, “To My Sons Barney and George,” circa 1970s; provided to the author by George Sefrit in April, 2016.

¹³ Versions of these events differ. Bellingham Herald Company records indicate Sefrit was hired by Alden Blethen to evaluate the properties. Ben Sefrit’s memory was that his father was hired not by Blethen, but by Perkins, the eventual owner, and was rewarded with a management job for preventing Perkins from being “swindled” by Blethen. Ben Sefrit letter, 3. In any case, Sefrit turned a temporary assignment into a permanent job by facilitating the sale to a new owner who coincidentally needed an experienced newspaper executive to manage the Bellingham publications.

¹⁴ Perkins, the owner and publisher of the *Tacoma Daily Ledger* and *Tacoma News* as well as daily newspapers in Olympia, Everett and Chehalis, had purchased the Bellingham paper, whose roots trace to 1890 as the *Fairhaven Herald*, in 1903. In recognition of the consolidation of the four local communities into a single town of Bellingham, he changed the name to *The Bellingham Herald* the same year. After the

Sefrit's Power Source: Publisher S.A. "Sam" Perkins

The hiring of Sefrit by Perkins created a powerful alliance that would last for four decades. Perkins' established practice of managing a small media empire by mixing newsgathering with political deal-making was consistent with the American newspaper industry of the era. And it was a glove-like fit with Sefrit's approach to running local newspapers. The businesses dealt news to the public, but operated on dual currencies of cash and political influence. Perkins, a partner largely hidden, but hardly silent, in most of Sefrit's journalistic, community and political endeavors, was a self-made, wealthy businessman and national Republican Party insider from Tacoma, Washington. The son of a Congregationalist minister, Perkins (born May 6, 1865, in Boston, Mass.) began his business career as a travelling salesman, hawking pots and pans in rural Iowa. He worked other odd jobs to pay his way through business school, later becoming a licensed pharmacist.¹⁵ Working as a salesman for a Chicago-based drug firm, Perkins as a young man headed west, arriving in Tacoma on his 23rd birthday in 1888. There, he met businessman William Bonney, and the two formed a drug store partnership, Bonney and Perkins. The business succeeded briefly, but ended with an economic panic of 1893.

consolidation of the *Morning Reveille* and *Evening American* in 1911, the former continued to operate as Bellingham's morning paper, with *The Herald* published in the evenings. On March 15, 1927, the *Reveille* was closed, leaving *The Herald* as the city's only daily newspaper. "*The Bellingham Herald*," McClatchy Company records, cited in U.S. Department of the Interior, Bellingham Herald Building National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 10.

¹⁵ Paul O. Anderson, "Sam Perkins, Lad Who 'Came West,' Is Successful Publisher," *The Seattle Times*, May 1, 1955.

Perkins, after working various odd jobs to pay off debts from the venture, eventually found work with the Republican Party. He served as personal secretary of Mark Hanna of Ohio while Hanna ran McKinley's 1895 presidential campaign. Hanna, who owned *The Cleveland Herald*, likely served as Perkins' introduction to the newspaper business.¹⁶ After McKinley's election in 1896, Hanna was promoted to General Secretary of the Republican Party. Elected to the U.S. Senate in 1897, he brought Perkins along as his personal secretary, schooling him in the ways of national politics. Perkins himself would later go on to hold multiple key seats on the Republican National Committee.

In 1896, Perkins married Otilie Walther, whom he had met on the campaign trail, in St. Paul, Minnesota. Determined to settle and raise a family in Tacoma, Perkins purchased *The Tacoma Evening News* in 1898 for \$18,000, financed by his friend Chester Thorne, President of the National Bank of Commerce. He acquired the *Tacoma Ledger* the following year. The business grew, alongside his family of four children, one of whom, S.A. Perkins Jr., died from spinal meningitis at age 7. By the time Sefrit took over *The Bellingham Herald* in 1911, Perkins owned seven newspapers around Washington's Puget Sound region, with central offices in Tacoma. Not surprisingly, the papers' editorial positions reflected Perkins' direct connection to the Republican Party. While Perkins' active role within the GOP waned as he focused on his newspaper enterprise, his influence within the party did not diminish; it might have actually increased through high-level connections. In 1911, Perkins, who by now owned and maintained a luxurious

¹⁶ Ibid.

yacht, the 120-foot *El Primero*, served as a seafaring tour guide on Puget Sound for Republican President William Howard Taft.¹⁷ The boat would famously play host in later years to Presidents Theodore Roosevelt, Warren G. Harding and Herbert Hoover. Perkins would boast of being on a first-name basis with all of them.¹⁸ Perkins eventually sold his newspapers in Tacoma and other Puget Sound cities, but continued his active role in the daily affairs of his remaining properties, in Bellingham and Olympia, until his death at age 90 in 1955.¹⁹

In keeping with the newspaper publishing tradition of the era, Perkins demonstrated little concern that his active political partisanship might impugn the journalistic endeavors of his small regional newspaper empire.²⁰ He communicated frequently with Sefrit via personal meetings, or by mail, about not only Bellingham

¹⁷ Taft, apparently unaware of Perkins' actual first name, repeatedly referred to Perkins on the trip as "Sam," a nickname that would stick. Perkins famously won the yacht in a 1911 poker game from its original owner, Chester Thorne of Tacoma, WA. The restored yacht *El Primero* at the present day is once again based in Tacoma and still plies the waters of Puget Sound. "El Primero's Long Voyage Home," *The News Tribune*, June 18, 2014.

¹⁸ "Sidney A. Perkins, Herald Publisher, Passes In Tacoma," *The Bellingham Herald*, Oct. 31, 1955, box 6, folder 2, Bellingham Publishing Company records, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham WA. Perkins pared his news empire in 1918, selling *The Ledger* and *The News* to a competing Tacoma newspaper owner, Frank L. Baker. Baker merged his evening *Tribune* with *The News*, and continued to publish the morning *Ledger*. Newspapers were not Perkins' sole profit center. He also served as president of the Alaska-Mexico Transportation Company and chairman of the board of Standard Gypsum Co. See also, "S.A. Perkins, Publisher, Dies at 90," *The Seattle Times*, Oct. 31, 1955.

¹⁹ By the time of his death, Perkins had published *The Bellingham Herald* for more than a half-century. His heirs maintained ownership until a 1967 sale to Federated Publications, which merged with a national media chain, Gannett Co. Inc., in 1971. *The Bellingham Herald*, McClatchy Company Records.

²⁰ Longtime Bellingham newsman Hal Reeves, who worked for *The Herald* and other local newspapers in the 1920s and 1930s before moving on to a career at KVOS radio/TV, recalls the Perkins Press newspapers as "very biased politically." Perkins "played politics to the hilt," he said, with "hidebound Republicanism" on display. However, that was the norm, nationally, at the time, he added. Hal Reeves, undated recorded interview (circa 1970), box 29, folder 5, Rogan Jones Papers, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Bellingham, WA.

newspaper business, but strategies related to local, state and national politics.²¹

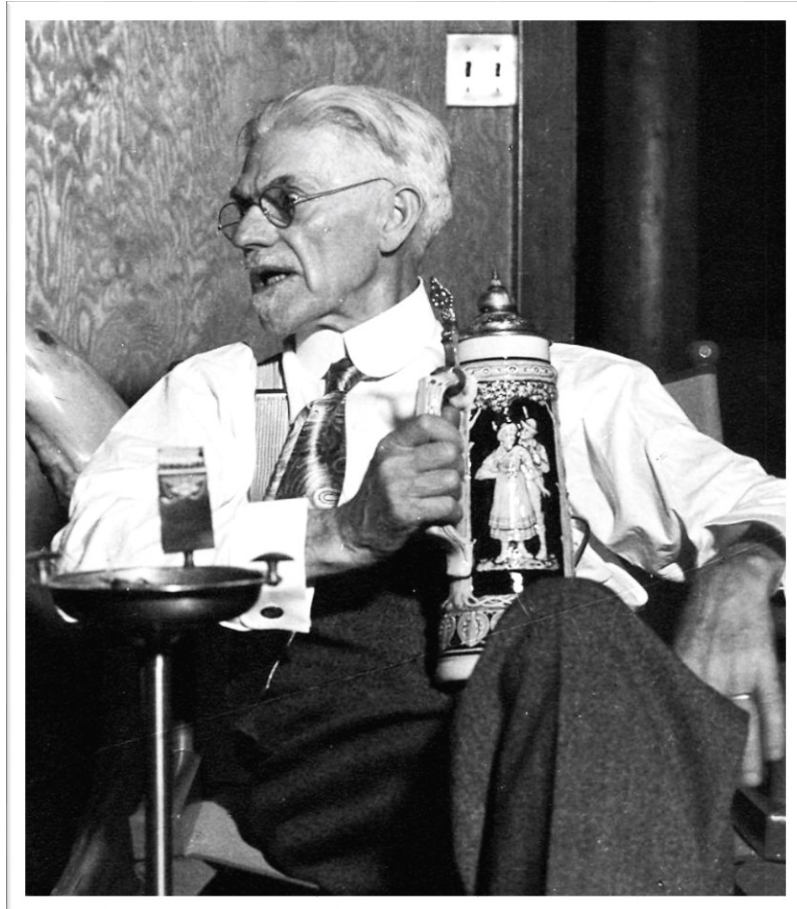
Politically, they were a good match, with Perkins' eventually learning to trust Sefrit almost implicitly on political matters. This provided Sefrit with ample room to maneuver not just as a gatekeeper of public information, but as an imposing Bellingham political figure. "Sefrit was extremely powerful. He was very strong-willed," recalled Hobart Dawson, a former Bellingham City Attorney and Superior Court Judge who learned, first hand, about Sefrit's political influence when he first ran for public office in 1933, as a Democrat. "He wielded a strong influence in the picking of political candidates for the Republican Party. I believe that his experience was such that he expected to exercise some control over things."²²

Examining the role that the Perkins-Sefrit alliance played in Bellingham in the first half of the twentieth century is critical to the Charles Fisher story because it helps illustrate the stark battle lines and distinctively vindictive politics in the city during Fisher's entire presidency of the local college. Those battle lines were unusual, even for that era, in the degree to which they were so thoroughly defined by media ownership groups. "The history of Bellingham for the first four decades of this century is inexplicably entangled with the 'newspaper wars,' and the continuing furious animosity of its leading characters, whose connections meshed intimately with local, state and

²¹ Frank I. Sefrit and Charles A. Sefrit to Sidney A. Perkins, 1930-1934, box 1, folder 1, Associated Press v. KVOS, 1930-38, Bellingham Publishing Company records.

²² Judge Hobart Dawson, taped interview by Mary Peebles, Nov. 19, 1970, box 28, folder 5, Rogan Jones Papers, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies.

national politics,” a state legal historian observed in 1989.²³ This battle can be traced to the beginning of the century, when leading businessmen formed a coalition, the Bellingham Bay Improvement Company, or BBI, to acquire property and establish



Frank Ira Sefrit, never known to shrink from a fight, ran The Bellingham Herald – and, some would argue, Whatcom County conservative politics – from the same office for nearly four decades. (Whatcom Museum.)

businesses to make way for the speculated arrival, in Bellingham, of the transcontinental railroad. Partners in that venture included publisher Perkins, via his community proxy, Sefrit. The BBI’s political foes included, at least initially, Blethen of *The Seattle Times*, whose *Reveille* and *American* were managed and edited throughout the first decade of the

²³ Alan L. Gallagher, “The Fighting Judge,” *Washington State Bar News*, Nov., 1989, 15.

1900s by a vituperative, left-wing provocateur named Leslie H. Darwin.²⁴ During his tenure, Darwin, who seemed to share Sefrit's sense of glee in publicly attacking the character of politically opposed powerbrokers, regularly accused BBI leaders and supporters of improprieties, driving several out of town. The progressive Darwin faction's political alliance initially included county Grange members, Democratic superior court Judge T.T. Hardin, and county Prosecuting Attorney Frank Bixby.²⁵ All of them would tangle with Sefrit and his BBI allies in local political squabbles over the coming two decades. The Darwin forces soon gained an additional, influential advocate – private attorney and future superior court and state Supreme Court Justice William H. Pemberton, a sharp-minded Quaker known for his progressive politics and passionate crusades for workers' rights. Darwin used his newspaper platform to promote Pemberton's election to multiple judgeships throughout the 1920s; Pemberton used Darwin as a connection to local citizens, and as a way to publicize his causes.

Darwin, the outspoken liberal editor, lost his editorial voice temporarily after the assimilation of the Blethen Bellingham papers by Perkins' *Herald*.²⁶ But he never strayed

²⁴ Sefrit in 1933 stated that his long-running feud with Darwin began with his own arrival, in 1911, in Bellingham to assess the Blethen newspapers. The purchase was initiated by city businessmen specifically to rid the town of the "villainous policies" of Darwin, Sefrit said. Two decades later, Sefrit publicly accused Darwin of trying to "job" the purchasers by falsifying a list of assets, which Sefrit claimed to have discovered and corrected. "Darwin has never overlooked an opportunity to 'gaff' the editor [Sefrit] since that time, and his rage reached the limit when the editor persuaded the governor to dismiss Darwin as fish commissioner." Editorial, "And There's A Reason," *The Bellingham Herald*, Dec. 16, 1933.

²⁵ The ranks would increase dramatically with the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1932, leaving Darwin and friends as the leaders of an unprecedented upswell of political liberalism in Bellingham.

²⁶ Darwin returned to the Bellingham newspaper scene in 1922, running his own liberal-slanted paper until 1929, when he sold it to another local owner. A condition of the sale was that Darwin stay out of newspapers in the city for "a stated period." "Jones Drew Fat Salary, Darwin Charges," *The Bellingham Herald*, Aug. 24, 1939.

from his political power base, serving as a political appointee of Governor Ernest Lister – at the time, a rare Democrat elected to a statewide office – as state fisheries commissioner while remaining based in Bellingham, then the state’s fourth-largest city. Throughout the 1910s, Darwin’s political allies, Pemberton and prosecutor Bixby, slugged it out over issues of the day, such as national Prohibition.²⁷ Bixby and Pemberton, in fact, helped convict an agent of Perkins for possession of liquor; *The Herald* responded by actively campaigning for Bixby’s disbarment.²⁸ The political feud divided the community for decades.

Sefrit seemed to thrive in this environment. The cantankerous editor and business manager wasted little time after his arrival in Bellingham before mixing it up with the local power structure. He quickly became known for his propensity to publicly take on politicians or civil servants with whom he disagreed, often pushing the limits of fairness even in the eyes of local judges. The decade after Frank Sefrit’s arrival in Bellingham became the Wild, Wild West in terms of openly hostile warfare between the town’s newspapermen and public officials of various stripes.²⁹ The skirmishes unfolded in

²⁷ Another frequent point of contention was the establishment of public power utilities – a development opposed by private business groups, and extolled by progressives.

²⁸ Gallagher, “The Fighting Judge.” In 1920, Sefrit’s paper also went after Pemberton — for defrauding Whatcom County by using its equipment and manpower in an attempt to drain Lake Terrell, north of Bellingham, to turn the swampy area into productive farmland. The allegations likely cost Pemberton reelection to his Superior Court judge position.

²⁹ Sefrit was not alone among local journalists in his open coercion for the purposes of politics – or his company’s well-being. Reporters, editors and city officials from this era in Bellingham recall in oral histories that it was commonplace for newspapers of all political persuasions to use potentially damning information gathered by reporters to extort the purchase of advertising in their publications from potential story subjects – or even convincing them to drop out of political races. Leslie Darwin was convicted of extorting ad sales from a furniture vendor, and fined \$250, by a local court in 1910. “Bellingham Editor Fined \$250 On Libel Charge; Man Refused To Sign ‘Ad’ Contract,” *Tacoma Times*, May 6, 1910.

newspaper pages and court rooms, where a string of actions filed by politicians upset by the antics of *The Herald* prompted vigorous counter-defenses by attorneys employed by publisher Perkins.³⁰ Sefrit was repeatedly charged and occasionally found guilty of libel and other offenses, but always managed to win a reversal in higher courts.

In 1913, Pemberton, then a Superior Court Judge, found Sefrit guilty of libel for an editorial in the *Sunday American-Reveille*. The editorial ridiculed prosecutor Bixby for what Sefrit saw as soft treatment of a confessed local rapist, Walter Fulcher. The conviction, and its accompanying sentence of 10 days in jail and \$850 fine, was overturned on appeal by the state Supreme Court in December, 1914.³¹ Sefrit in 1915 was similarly cleared of a contempt-of-court conviction, including a 10-day jail sentence, pronounced by Judge Hardin after a 1913 Sefrit editorial accused prosecutor Bixby,

Although the judgment was overturned on appeal, Darwin's reputation as a "blackmailing publisher" was well-established, suggested Hal Reeves, a reporter who worked for Darwin in the 1920s. "The stories had to be colored for him," Reeves said. I was brought up in a different school of journalism. I'd write them straight. He blackmailed advertising." Hal Reeves interview, Rogan Jones Papers.

³⁰ In a remarkable assertion first made public herein, Frank Sefrit's son Ben, a longtime *Bellingham Herald* reporter and editor, claimed in a 1970s family history written to his sons (see above) that Sefrit often won these political battles literally by cheating: He hired the Burns Detective Agency to dispatch agents, disguised as telephone repairmen, to bug the offices of local judges, the prosecuting attorney, and Leslie Darwin, all of whom for some time had offices in the same building as *The Bellingham Herald*. Between 1911 and 1914, Ben Sefrit recounted, Sefrit employed a phalanx of transcriptionists to eavesdrop and produce written transcripts of the daily activities and conversations of his chief political enemies. "Every word had to be taken down in shorthand, which required a number of operators and was very expensive," Ben Sefrit recalled. The inside information was used to combat 10 libel suits against Sefrit, including the first criminal libel suit filed in state history, Ben Sefrit stated. He maintained, in fact, that material from a bugging transcript proving collusion between county judges, the prosecutor, and Darwin, was presented in camera to Judge Hardin – himself a victim of the bugging – during a trial, prompting an "ashen" Hardin to declare a mistrial. The bugging eventually ceased when political battles waned and the expense became too great for *The Herald* and its owner, Perkins, who approved the activity, to bear, Ben Sefrit recalled. There is no independent verification of his tale of Frank Sefrit's subterfuge. "To My Sons Barney and George," Ben Sefrit letter, 4.

³¹ "Libel Case Overturned In Highest Court," *The Bellingham Herald*, Dec. 12, 1914.

Judge Hardin and Darwin, by then the state fisheries commissioner, of colluding to establish a “working agreement” to protect Darwin from prosecution for refusing to appear before a grand jury.³² The cases, along with others, gave Sefrit the confidence to boast that his high-level political connections made him essentially immune from prosecution for misconduct as a newspaper editor.³³

These increasingly toxic disputes spilled, on occasion, into full view of the general public, as Sefrit enthusiastically did battle with the local entrenched political establishment. In the autumn of 1913, with one of the above-referenced court proceedings in process, Hardin marched into the offices of Sefrit’s *American-Reveille* and loudly challenged the scrappy editor to a duel to the death, “with knives, revolvers, daggers, derringers and other weapons,” according to a report in Sefrit’s own newspaper.³⁴ “Either

³² “F.I. Sefrit Was Not Guilty of Contempt, Is Ruling,” *The Bellingham Herald*, March 10, 1915. Hardin ruled that the “contemptuous” editorial “tended directly to obstruct the performance of the duties of the grand jury.” See also “Jail Sentence of Ten Days Imposed By Hardin,” *The Bellingham Herald*, undated newspaper article (circa 1915), box 1, folder 11, Bellingham Herald collection.

³³ Sefrit, during FCC hearings over *The Herald*’s application for a radio-station license in the mid-1930s, would bristle at the suggestion by Darwin, et al, that he had been “seven times indicted for criminal libel of the leading officials and citizens of Whatcom County.” Actually, Sefrit wrote to attorneys, “I was indicted four times, libeling the then prosecuting attorney Frank Bixby, and once for some statute having to do with interfering with the courts. The records will show ... I was never arraigned on either of these cases ... To say that I was seven times tried for libeling leading officials and citizens was certainly stretching the truth pretty far when there was only one person involved and that was a public official whose misconduct at the time we severely criticized.” Sefrit to (attorney) J.C. Trimble, June 18, 1935, box 1, folder 3, Bellingham Publishing Company records. Sefrit’s remarkable appellate record might have been aided by yet another previously unknown, inside political advantage. In the same family letter recounting his father’s use of a detective agency to bug the offices of political opponents, Ben Sefrit described an elaborate system by which his father (who Ben Sefrit recalls being tried for libel closer to 10 times) repeatedly was tipped off about arrest warrants after guilty verdicts in grand jury proceedings by a friend in the Whatcom County sheriff’s office. Sefrit and *The Herald*’s attorney would immediately flee Bellingham, taking a boat or train to Seattle to avoid arrest, then travel on to Olympia to seek injunctive relief from a friendly appellant judge who was aware of the alleged crooked nature of Whatcom County’s legal system, Ben Sefrit claimed. “This went on many times,” he wrote. Ben Sefrit letter, 3.

³⁴ “Judge Seeks Duel with Editor Sefrit,” *Bellingham American-Reveille*, Sept. 19, 1913.

of these weapons, he said, would enable him to prove his prowess,” the article stated.

“But the editor respectfully declined.” The article continues:

The editor [Sefrit] professed to be a law-abiding citizen and said he felt there were better ways to settle any personal difficulties than a resort to the “field of honor.”

“You will have to change the policy of your paper,” declared the irate judge, “or I’ll kill you like I would a snake.”

“If you change your demeanor, there will be no criticism of you. You have brought this trouble upon yourself,” responded the editor.

“You are a character assassin, and a criminal,” shrieked the judge, “and I serve notice on you that I’ll make this a personal matter, damn you ...”

Judge Hardin nervously sought comfort in his side coat pocket and the editor suggested that it was not necessary for him to arm himself – that the judge was a much larger man, physically, and should not require fire arms ...

“Yes,” he replied. “I have a gun, but I did not get it for that purpose. In fact, I’ve got three guns, and I’ll use them too, damn you.”

The editor thought one was sufficient for the average man.

“You’ve been publishing things about me – dirty insinuations, that are damn lies,” declared the gentle-dispositioned superior judge. Asked what had been said that was not a positive truth, the judge said there had been many things.

“Name one of them,” demanded the editor.

“You come over to my office and I’ll show you,” was the reply.³⁵

Fortunately for all involved, the duel never commenced. A jury investigating the entire legal proceeding later admonished Sefrit for his churlishness, but also Judge Hardin for challenging Sefrit to “mortal combat.” By the end of his second decade at the helm of *The Bellingham Herald*, Sefrit, it seems clear, feared almost no one in Washington state politically. He was broadly viewed as the one person in Whatcom County no sane person wanted to count as an enemy. Yet his choices and even the severity of his responses to political situations clearly were subject, at least to some

³⁵ Ibid.

degree, to the approval of Perkins. The Tacoma publisher traveled to Bellingham four or five times a year for personal meetings; the two also met regularly in Seattle or Tacoma, and maintained a steady stream of letters.³⁶ In these, Sefrit provided details in nearly equal doses to his employer about local politics and newspaper business. By the early 1930s, Sefrit's focus had shifted from old-guard local political enemies – most of whom he by then considered vanquished – to new “radical” activity emanating from the left with the onset of the Depression:

The communists, and other radicals, are planning a huge demonstration against the commissioners Friday. Following this I have been told they will march to The Herald and protest our attitude on the relief program. We are doing everything possible as a community to feed the needy, but cannot pay out cash as the Peoples Council and communists demand. It would bankrupt the county. The principal protest of the radicals is that we do not give them enough space. The better class of citizens think we have given more than is good for the community. I think we have been handling the matter as well as possible. I do not expect any violence.³⁷

Sefrit's missives to Perkins often devolved into sheer political strategizing for ways that “we,” meaning Sefrit and Perkins, could work to support the election of favored conservative candidates, up to and including the highest offices in the country. His legendary demand for complete political loyalty from associates extended to every *Herald* employee. In a letter discussing a kerfuffle involving one of the newspaper's

³⁶ Reporter Hal Reeves also recalled Perkins having an apartment atop The Herald building when it was built in 1928, but rarely recalled him using it. Undated Reeves interview (circa 1970), Rogan Jones Papers.

³⁷ Sefrit to Perkins, Aug. 3, 1932, box 1, folder 1, Bellingham Publishing Company records. Note that these records do not contain responses to letters from Frank or Charles Sefrit, the paper's business manager, from Perkins.

advertising salesmen, Sefrit boasted to Perkins about the lockstep political bent of his workers:

We do not have much friction here. When we get one who does not work in harmony we get rid of him. If we have not established a record on anything else worth while it is on having a loyal force. You may be interested in knowing that of all the force there are but three Roosevelt votes. They are old-time Democrats and I do not blame them for exercising their rights. I think that they, too, would vote for Hoover if I were to request it as of interest to the Herald.³⁸

The editor's firm stance on drawing a line in front of the state's growing cadre of communists was demonstrably tied to his beliefs about labor unions: By 1935, he was convinced that forces of "red radicalism" were back at the helm of local shops.³⁹

The Depression Years in Bellingham

The national depression that began with the stock market crash of October, 1929 kicked off years of economic, followed by political, upheaval in Washington state. Several impacts of the Depression and its jarring effect on the state are unique, and worthy of brief summary here as a backdrop to the political climate in Bellingham throughout the 1930s. The nature of Washington's economy, always heavily dependent upon extractive resources such as massive, seemingly inexhaustible forests of coniferous trees, and prolific runs of wild salmon, initially led influential businessmen and politicians in the state to assume the depression would not be felt in their far northwestern corner of the country at all. A government report, in fact, declared that the regional

³⁸ Sefrit to Perkins, Oct. 21, 1932, box 1, folder 1, Bellingham Publishing Company records.

³⁹ Sefrit to J.C. Trimble, attorney in the Herald radio station license application before the FCC, June 18, 1935, box 1, folder 3, Bellingham Publishing Company records.

economy “largely resembles that of a colonial possession, exporting raw and semi finished materials” while “importing most of the common manufactured articles.”⁴⁰ A semi-independent economy consisting of jobs based on trade, commerce, small manufacturing and professional services coincided with these industries in urban areas containing most of the state’s population.⁴¹ But baseless optimism created by only modest job losses in the months following the stock market crash of 1929 quickly faded as banks and businesses failed, and unemployment surged. The state legislature in 1931 responded with unemployment benefits and attempts to stimulate the economy through a series of public works projects, as well as a state income tax to alleviate property taxes. These measures were vetoed by Republican Governor Roland Hartley, ultimately leading to further bank failures and job losses.⁴² As prices for wheat (a major Eastern Washington crop) plummeted and national, per-capita use of lumber fell by two thirds between 1929 and 1932, Washington unemployment reached record levels. Jobless rates soared to 50 percent or higher in the timber industry.⁴³ Overall, income payments in the state fell by 45 percent by 1933, mirroring the national effects of the Depression; at least one-third of state workers were without jobs in early 1933, with even higher rates in Puget Sound

⁴⁰ Pacific Northwest Regional Planning Commission, *Migration and Development of Economic Opportunity in the Pacific Northwest* (Portland, 1939), 26. Cited by James Gregory in “Economics & Poverty,” *The Great Depression in Washington State*, Pacific Northwest Labor & Civil Rights Protects, University of Washington, 2009, http://depts.washington.edu/depress/economics_poverty.shtml#_ednref1

⁴¹ Gregory, “The Great Depression in Washington State,” 2009.

⁴² Gregory, 2009.

⁴³ Robert E. Ficken and Charles P. LeWarne, *Washington: A Centennial History* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988), 111.

cities such as Seattle and Bellingham.⁴⁴ Extreme poverty became the norm for many Puget Sound residents; others still employed struggled to maintain normal lifestyles.

Bellingham, heavily reliant on depressed industries such as timber and fish canneries was particularly hard-hit by the Depression. Local residents recall literally seeing evidence of their despair in the air: The town's typical smoky skies, a sign of the prosperous industrial work of sawmills, canneries, ships and other industrial plants, went uncharacteristically clear as plants sat idle. Angst from uncertainty and unemployment translated to political unrest. At the Bellingham Rotary Club, business leaders who had been slow to acknowledge the presence of a Depression kept pointing to hopeful signs of its early termination, only to be disappointed time and again.⁴⁵

Even local businesses with a de-facto monopoly on services, such as *The Bellingham Herald*, felt the pain. Sefrit's letters to publisher Perkins during the early to middle years of the Depression are rife with discussions about balancing the books in the face of plummeting advertising revenues. The editor on several occasions discussed canceling some editions of the paper until conditions improved. As the seeming economic death spiral continued, Sefrit on two occasions tendered to Perkins what

⁴⁴ Gregory, 2009, noting that the national comparative unemployment rate was about 25 percent during the same period. See also John Adrian Rademaker, "The Measurement of Occupational Employment and Earnings in the State of Washington" (MA Thesis, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, 1935).

⁴⁵ Keith A. Murray, "The History of the Bellingham Rotary Club, 1917-1981, Occasional Paper #16," Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Western Washington University, 1981, 15. Murray notes that the first recorded mention of the "Depression" at meetings of the Bellingham Rotary was made by Cecil Morse on Feb. 17, 1930. "His solution was the classic one taught in all schools of business at the time – business must reduce fixed costs for a while until the return of prosperity. Morse gave no remedy for a long-term depression, for he had no thought that this one would go on and on and on, for almost 12 years." In 1932, Rotary members continued to denounce proposed New Deal reforms as "radical legislation," until some of the programs began to show promise the following year.

amounted to his own resignation. The first came in 1932, in response to a suggested financial restructuring of the Perkins Press newspaper chain that would have changed Sefrit's status from a stockholding "minority owner" to a simple employee.⁴⁶ Sefrit offered to make a less-graceful exit in 1934, amid rumors that the Perkins Press newspapers might be acquired by the Scripps-Howard newspaper chain. In a private letter, Sefrit asked Perkins whether the deal was going down, and if so, whether he might be able to acquire enough of the newspaper's assets to launch his own newspaper venture competing with his old paper. "I had planned to be out of this nearly two years ago, but business conditions made that inadvisable then," Sefrit wrote to Perkins. "But now a new situation has arisen and I am naturally anxious to know whether our views are in accord. If they are not, substantially, in harmony, let's harmonize them. You and I are travelling toward the end at a rate that is painfully rapid, you know."⁴⁷ The sale did not occur; Sefrit stayed on in his accustomed role.

⁴⁶ Although Sefrit often identified himself on company letterhead as "Vice-President and General Manager," it is not clear what financial stake Sefrit actually held in *The Herald* – if any. In this instance, Sefrit states plainly in a letter to Perkins merely that the *appearance* of a solid financial interest had benefitted him in the business and political realms. "For twenty-one years I have been considered an owner of a substantial amount of stock in the company," Sefrit wrote. "Doubtlessly this has given me more of a standing in business circles ... I am also quite certain that the statement that I am no longer a stockholder would reduce me to the status of a mere employee ... I would be in a very different situation, having been regarded as a minority owner ... This being the case there would be no better reason to give for the change than that I had reached the time when we had agreed that I retire from active management ... I do not want you to interpret this as a desire to desert the property in a time like this. I will do anything in my power to support the *Herald* and continue its standing in this community." Perkins' response is not found in the archive; Sefrit continued to manage the newspaper, citing frustration later in the winter of 1932 over Perkins' apparent unwillingness to make critical decisions on reorganizing the business to adjust to Depression-era economics. Sefrit to Perkins, "Personal," Oct. 14, 1932, box 1, folder 1, Bellingham Publishing Company records.

⁴⁷ Sefrit to Perkins, Feb. 23, 1934, box 1, folder 1, Bellingham Publishing Company records. Sefrit told Perkins in that his thoughts on a competing newspaper were sufficiently secret that he typed the letter himself, and had not even discussed its contents with his son, Charles, the paper's business manager.

Depression-related turmoil in the early 1930s also pushed many Washington residents further toward the fringes of both political spectrums. “It’s probably true that the Depression created some new thinking by many people who were probably more or less conservative by practice, and I think probably it bred some socialists at least, probably a few communists, because of the severity of the depression,” Bellingham Judge Hobart Dawson recalled.⁴⁸ The new thinking quickly became evident at polling stations. Just as it did nationally, the economic cataclysm of the Great Depression created an unprecedented political shakeup in Washington state and the Puget Sound region. The November, 1932 election of Franklin D. Roosevelt, coupled with Democratic majorities in both houses of Congress, brought a Democratic sweep of all six Washington state congressional seats, and the election of Homer T. Bone, a public-power advocate, to the U.S. Senate – only the second state Democrat ever to hold that office.⁴⁹ The 1932 election also brought radical change to the Washington state capital in Olympia, which had been a Republican stronghold since the state’s inception in 1889.⁵⁰ Democrats gained control of both houses of the legislature. With Republican Governor Hartley’s political viability fading along with that of President Herbert Hoover, an Eastern Washington mill owner,

⁴⁸ Dawson interview, Rogan Jones Papers, 1970.

⁴⁹ Washingtonians who had favored Hoover by a margin of 2-to-1 in the 1928 elections voted 57 percent in favor of FDR in 1932. LeWarne and Ficken, *Centennial History*, 113.

⁵⁰ “The condition of the party is perhaps best exemplified by the fact that of 873 members elected to the state House of Representatives between 1914 and 1932, only 72 were Democrats.” Fayette F. Krause, “Democratic Party Politics in the State of Washington During the New Deal: 1932-1940,” (PhD diss., University of Washington Special Collections, 1971), 1. The Senate was even more bleak for the party, with a single Democratic senator serving during the legislative sessions from 1921 to 1931.

former Cheney mayor Clarence D. Martin, a conservative Democrat, was elected governor.⁵¹

Similar upheaval was seen in local races, where the Bellingham mayor's office, the three-member Whatcom County Commission, and most other local seats were occupied – most for the first time in history — by Democrats by spring, 1933.⁵² Judge Hobart Dawson, who would become a member of the upstart Democratic ruling faction, recalled the momentous change: “(A) small group who probably had been pretty much in control of the economy and political life of the community” was swept aside overnight. “It had always been a strong Republican town up to the time that Franklin D. Roosevelt changed the attitude of voters.”⁵³ Editor Sefrit's equal-and-opposite passion was soon on display in one of his editorials, which on the eve of local elections in 1934, the first after the Roosevelt revolution, stopped just short of calling the new Democratic leadership illegitimate:

There is not a leader of the “left-wing” group of the Democratic Party in Whatcom County who does not know they have put up a ticket that would not have a ghost of a chance for public favor in *normal times*. They hope to be swept into office by the magic name of the President. If they succeed in misleading enough of the voters to install these misfits in office, it will be a sorry period for this community while they mismanage the affairs of the county.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Martin in the primary election had defeated a notable Whatcom County figure, William H. Pemberton, nicknamed “The Fighting Judge” by supporters, by fewer than 10,000 votes in an election Pemberton went to sleep on election night believing he had won. Gallagher, “The Fighting Judge,” 19.

⁵² Murray, “History of Bellingham Rotary,” 19. “The Republican city administration was completely wiped out . . . Rotary, of course, was not responsible for the Depression, but in the minds of many unemployed non-Rotarians, they were so much identified with the ‘establishment’ that their prestige took a slump during 1933, the worst year of the Depression.”

⁵³ Dawson interview, 1970.

⁵⁴ Editorial, “Vicious Leadership Threatens County,” *The Bellingham Herald*, Oct. 30, 1934. Emphasis added.

At the state level, Martin's fence-straddling brand of conservative Democratic leadership – he supported New Deal reforms, but consistently felt it necessary to appease fiscally conservative business interests in both parties – created waves from the beginning of his administration. His political honeymoon was short, and the governor soon saw enemies rising from both his right and left political flanks. Opposition on the left, largely from labor union activists, began to include increasing numbers of avowed communists, who urged more radical solutions to intractable unemployment. By 1934, the state's left-wing Unemployed Citizens' League began to make political gains in local elections. And the Commonwealth Builder's Association, inspired by Upton Sinclair's 1934 campaign for Governor of California, also threatened Martin's conservative approach, advocating a state takeover of idle farms and factories for conversion to cooperatives of the unemployed.⁵⁵ The group captured a modest number of legislative seats in the 1934 state election, but not enough to push forward leftist legislation. During the following two years, leftist political groups consolidated under the banner of the Washington Commonwealth Federation (WCF), which steadily broadened its appeal.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ James Gregory, "Politics," *The Great Depression in Washington State*, Pacific Northwest Labor & Civil Rights Projects, University of Washington, 2009, <http://depts.washington.edu/depress/politics.shtml>. See also Krause, "Democratic Party Politics in the State of Washington During the New Deal."

⁵⁶ Gregory, "Politics." The rise of fringe left politics to the fore prompted liberal Oregon journalist Richard Neuberger to opine: "In addition to being the country's storehouse of timber, Chinook salmon, apples and hydroelectric power, the Evergreen state is also the citadel of cockeyed and fantastic politics." LeWarne and Ficken, *Centennial History*, 114.

Over the course of the next decade, the WCF would field candidates from within the Democratic Party, rather than from outside it, gaining seats in the legislature and even Congress that provided impetus for legislation supporting workers' rights, social programs and old-age pensions. The WCF ultimately failed in its bid to foil Martin's reelection in 1936. But it had by then managed to push state politics substantially to the left, well beyond the comfort zone of Martin and his supporters.⁵⁷ The WCF's success made the state a shining example for political activists on both ends of the spectrum: Left-leaning activists saw the state as a national beacon for collectivist progress. Arch-conservatives saw the state as an equally glaring example of political decay that they feared might lead to the unraveling of American democracy.⁵⁸ The state thus occupied its

⁵⁷ The state communist "popular front" movement achieved a level of success beyond its membership numbers, which probably peaked somewhere between 3,000 and 6,000 members in the late 1930s, although accurate numbers are difficult to determine. Gordon Black, "Organizing the Unemployed: The Early 1930s," *Communism in Washington State: History and Memory*, Pacific Northwest Labor and Civil Rights History, The University of Washington, 2002, http://depts.washington.edu/labhist/cpproject/black.shtml#_ednref8. Black notes: *Blood in the Water* (John McCann, Seattle: District Lodge 751, IAM&AW, 1989), a history of the International Association of Machinists Lodge 751, quoted a peak membership in the state of 6,000; Jim West, a Communist Party work in Seattle in the late 1930s, said in a March 2002 interview that membership was "above 3,000" in the state during the decade. Black also notes that a "small coterie" of perhaps seven Communist Party members was present in Bellingham around 1932, only to be upstaged by a new organization called the People's Councils, formed by Bellingham activist M.M. London. The group is described as being similar to the statewide Unemployed Citizens League, formed to hold mass meetings, stage demonstrations, and resist evictions.

⁵⁸ The lingering Northwest anti-Communist political strain was further emboldened by the October, 1930 Seattle hearings of Hamilton Fish III's Congressional Special Committee to Investigate Communist Activities in the United States. Fish warned that communist-instigated labor agitation in the state's timber industry would lead to "strikes, riots, sabotage, and industrial unrest," aimed at an overthrow of the government of the United States. Notably, Fish also warned of the perils of the "Red virus" infiltrating teacher's unions in primary schools and on college campuses. Hamilton Fish Jr., "The Menace of Communism," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, v. 156, July, 1931, 54-61. See also Timothy Reese Cain, "Little Red Schoolhouses? Anti-Communists and Education in an 'Age of Conflicts,'" in Robert J. Goldstein, ed., *Little "Red Scares": Anti-Communism and Political Repression in the United States, 1921-1946*, (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2014), 105-133.

own, unique place in the burgeoning U.S. anti-communist movement of the early 1930s.⁵⁹ Combined with fears produced by the unprecedented national and regional strife of the Great Depression, this created in Bellingham fertile ground for radical leftist movements to reawaken – and for conservative counter forces to seek, with new vigor, to beat them back down. It was against this backdrop of political turmoil, radical hopes and conservative fears, that the citizen-led attack on Charles Fisher’s hilltop teacher’s school would play out.⁶⁰

Bellingham’s Escalating Media Wars

In no place was the ferocity of this clash more evident than in the ongoing – in fact, escalating — Bellingham media wars, which intensified with passions ignited by the Great Depression. Resuming in public the bitter, personal feud that had simmered through most of the 1920s, Sefrit and Darwin locked horns again after the latter’s stint as a gubernatorial appointee in charge of state fisheries affairs concluded. Darwin’s respite from the public spotlight ended with his hiring, in 1933, by a like-minded, progressive

⁵⁹ The 1930s would later be termed by some historians and journalists as “The Red Decade” in Washington state, cementing a radical reputation that had roots dating to the Knights of Labor in the 1880s, and culminating with the failed Seattle General Strike of 1919. (See Ch. 1). In the 1920s, many of the state’s radical leftists fled or went underground during the virulent conservative counter-reaction to the strike, which helped spark the nation’s first broad Red Scare. The Depression brought the moribund movement back to life. James Gregory, “Special Section: Radicalism,” *The Great Depression in Washington State*, Pacific Northwest Labor & Civil Rights Projects, University of Washington, 2009, <http://depts.washington.edu/depress/radicalism.shtml>.

⁶⁰ Murray, “Centennial Churches.” So rancorous was ordinary life in Bellingham during this era that political divisions spilled into church pews. For many years the county was home to competing ministerial associations, divided by “liberal” versus “conservative” doctrinal visions. One of these led to the official separation from the First Presbyterian Church of Charles Fisher and another member concerned about a “fundamentalist” church takeover – history professor Pelagius Williams, who would become an arch opponent of Fisher less than a decade later.

media entrepreneur, Lafayette Rogan Jones, the new owner of fledgling Bellingham radio station KVOS. Darwin's job was to produce and star in a daily show, offering provocative local and national political analysis. The former newspaperman was granted free editorial reign, and took happy advantage.⁶¹ A constant target of Darwin's no-holds-barred political barbs was, predictably, old foe Sefrit and *The Herald*, along with like-minded Bellingham business cronies. Throughout much of the 1930s, city politics thus were dominated by lines of division determined primarily by a person's choice of news vendors. Conservatives flocked to Sefrit's *Herald*; moderate/liberal community members who previously had found a leader in Darwin-edited newspapers joined swelling ranks of fresh New Deal recruits in flocking to the new-media alternative, KVOS radio. Daily beratings by Darwin, their old nemesis, must have particularly incensed Perkins and Sefrit (or "Kaiser Sefrit, the would-be Nero of Bellingham," as Darwin enjoyed calling him on the air):⁶² The newspaper duo had squandered their own opportunity to corner the Bellingham radio news market a decade earlier. A fledgling *Herald*-owned station, KDZR, had failed within two years after its inception in the early 1920s. Rogan Jones purchased KVOS radio, another startup station, in April, 1929 from a bankruptcy receivership. The creditor group for KVOS included two dozen of the city's leading

⁶¹ Darwin's contract with Jones was actually an airtime lease agreement that gave Darwin "entire jurisdiction" over his show's content, with a provision that it could be terminated at any time by either party. Darwin would receive half of all advertising proceeds generated by the show. FCC Examiner's Report No I-309, KVOS Inc. license renewal, box 10, folder 13, Rogan Jones Papers, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Bellingham, WA.

⁶² Leslie H. Darwin, "Newspaper of the Air" broadcast, KVOS Radio, June 21, 1935, box 3, folder 8, Bellingham Publishing Company records.

businessmen – a Chamber of Commerce group that had extended credit to the original owner, Louie Kessler, on two occasions.⁶³ One of the creditors was Frank Sefrit. Jones later said his purchase of the station came after an offer he had made to run the station in a partnership with Sefrit was rebuffed by the leader of *The Herald*. Sefrit told Jones he had run a radio station in conjunction with *The Herald*, that it had made no money, and that he would never be involved in another.⁶⁴

Through fortuitous timing (in terms of political trends), and the provocative entertainment value of the Darwin-Sefrit shenanigans, KVOS turned the station into a financial success.⁶⁵ The daily on-air/in-print fisticuffs quickly spilled over to the courts and then to Washington, D.C., in a long series of legal arguments before federal courts and the Federal Communications Commission. Allies of the two parties arranged themselves, not surprisingly, into groups familiar to any observer of Bellingham's contentious political sphere. And they were given ample opportunities to express their views. With a successful KVOS breathing down their backs, Sefrit and publisher Perkins were quick to regain interest in the viability of the radio medium. In 1934, they filed papers with the fledgling Federal Communications Commission to start their own radio station. KVOS owner Jones issued a dog-whistle call for political allies, and longtime

⁶³ "Facts About Sale of KVOS," *The Bellingham Herald*, Dec. 2, 1934.

⁶⁴ "AP Case 4," box 7, biography and correspondence, Rogan Jones Papers. See also p. 5, Rogan Jones affidavit, *Associated Press v. KVOS, Inc.*, U.S. Western District Court, Northern Division, Nov. 27, 1934, box 10, folder 11, Rogan Jones Papers. Jones testified here that he had purchased the radio station "when it was financially, technically and artistically bankrupt."

⁶⁵ *The Herald* suddenly took the viability of local radio very seriously, with newspaper officials confiding in documents filed over radio station licensing that they saw radio as a future threat to their very existence as a news source. Licensing suit correspondence, 1936-37, box 10, folder 12, Rogan Jones Papers.

foes of Sefrit came running to line up in opposition. With broad community support from anti-Sefrit forces that now included the legal acumen of William Pemberton, practicing once more as a private attorney, Jones launched an aggressive campaign to squash *The Herald's* license request.⁶⁶

The resulting spring, 1935 licensing proceedings included five days of hostile questioning of Sefrit and his supporters in a Bellingham hearing by attorney Pemberton, who quickly disabused *Herald* supporters of any notion that obtaining the license would be simple. The proposal at first had seemed a formality: Sefrit and Perkins' well-established company had promised a station filled with community news and public-service programming, and unlike KVOS, no overt political commentary. But the aggressive Jones/Pemberton campaign to scuttle the license application complicated the FCC's task. Affidavits from hundreds of local residents and notable public figures were introduced in additional hearings that unfolded in the spring of 1935 in Washington, D.C. Much of the Bellingham business community, city service clubs, and real estate and farming groups lined up to vouch for *The Herald's* worthiness as a new purveyor of radio news.⁶⁷ Governor Martin and other influential power brokers signed on to the request. But recently elected Bellingham Mayor Burleigh E. Hanning and two county commissioners, J.W. Austin and Jacob S. Smith, requested intervenor status in the license application. So adamant were they about shooting down a new *Herald*-owned radio

⁶⁶ Pemberton through most of these proceedings was assisted locally by his son, Joseph.

⁶⁷ "Correspondence re: hearing on proposed radio station, 1934-35, box 1, folder 4 and "Materials for Federal Communications Commission Hearing," box 1, folders 11-12, Bellingham Publishing Company records.

station that they drove across the country to warn the FCC against providing Sefrit an additional editorial platform. The man was far from an unknown quantity, they told the Commission; his track record suggested he would operate a radio station with the same close-minded, monopolistic partisanship with which he had run *The Herald* for two decades.⁶⁸

Testimony from Pemberton's witnesses included the incendiary claim that Sefrit had urged the Bellingham Chamber of Commerce to purchase \$350 worth of shotgun shells, tear gas bombs and other explosives to be stored in the Bellingham police station as an arsenal against striking dock workers in 1934, with the intent to "shoot down the strikers."⁶⁹ Sefrit, represented at the East Coast hearings by his son, Charles "Chick" Sefrit, then *The Herald's* business manager, dismissed this claim as "utter nonsense."⁷⁰ But in the FCC hearing room, the Darwin forces successfully depicted Sefrit as an oft-indicted, editorial loose cannon with a vested interest in maintaining an ill-gotten monopoly on Bellingham news. The sudden revival of *The Herald's* interest in a radio station, they argued, was a thinly veiled effort by Perkins' *Herald* to put KVOS out of

⁶⁸ "Petition to Intervene, in re Application of the Bellingham Publishing Col, Oct. 17, 1934," submitted to FCC by Mayor Hanning, box 1, folder 12, and by the Board of County Commission of Whatcom County, box 1, folder 10, Bellingham Publishing Company records.

⁶⁹ Associated Press teletype article, May 23, 1935, box 1, folder 4, Bellingham Publishing Company records. The spring, 1934 International Longshoremen's Association strike shut down ports from California to Puget Sound, culminating in a general strike in San Francisco. Violent clashes were numerous.

⁷⁰ Frank Sefrit to (attorney) J.C. Trimble, June 18, 1935, box 1, folder 3, Bellingham Publishing Company records. Letters from Sefrit to his superior, publisher Perkins, from this time period indicate a growing concern that the 1934 West Coast longshoreman's strike might turn into a general strike in Bellingham. "I do not look for much trouble here, but the police forces are prepared for it and a citizen's committee is active," Sefrit wrote. "There is talk here of a vigilante committee to mop up the communists." Frank Sefrit to Perkins, July 1, 1934, box 1, folder 1, Bellingham Publishing Company records.

business. Doing so would reestablish, through “criminal conspiracy,” *The Herald’s* long-running news monopoly, Pemberton charged. Sefrit and his cronies would thus be able to do by coercion what they had finally failed to do at the ballot box: “revive the old reign of terror” backed by collusion within the political and judicial establishment they formerly had controlled.⁷¹ The trio of public officials told the FCC that Sefrit’s paper for 23 years “has served only the big power trusts and the big business institutions of the city like the banks ... and other concerns seeking to manage and control the affairs of this county for their own selfish interests rather than the interest of the community as a whole.”⁷² Sefrit dismissed the testimony as petty, “pure moonshine,” amounting to little more than character assassination by a “small group of political adventurers under the leadership of Darwin and Pemberton.”⁷³ The argument largely came down to which of the two parties, each slinging copious mud at the other, was more credible.⁷⁴

⁷¹ “Petition to Intervene” and “Statement of Facts, Intervenor’s Rebuttal Brief,” and other documents, Application of the Bellingham Publishing Co., Federal Communications Commission, July 29, 1935, box 1, folders 10-12, Bellingham Publishing Company records. Sefrit’s political influence in the city was deemed so strong that he controlled the actions even of some fearful Democratic politicians, slapped by Darwin and others with the pejorative label, “Sefrit Democrats.” Rogan Jones would explain: “The worst defamation in the history of Whatcom County will be shown to be the title of ‘Sefrit Democrat.’” Jones to Senator C.C. Dill, Feb. 28, 1936, box 10, folder 12, Rogan Jones Papers.

⁷² Ibid. The papers also charge that *The Herald* had seen a drop in circulation by half and advertising by “about two-thirds” due to Sefrit’s alleged character-assassination tactics.

⁷³ Frank Sefrit to J.C. Trimble, June 18, 1935, box 1, folder 3, Bellingham Publishing Company records. A subsequent Herald editorial opined that such spurious charges by Darwin revealed his true nature as a “common curbstone liar of the rankest type.” Undated editorial manuscript, box 1, folder 10, Bellingham Publishing Company records.

⁷⁴ KVOS owner Rogan Jones, who witnessed the hearings, believed the critical point was the examination of Darwin, particularly his answer to a single question: “Did you, except in quoting the public record, ever call anybody [on a radio broadcast] a: skunk, crook, pervert, immoral, perjurer, grafter, etc. etc.? using about a dozen of Sefrit’s overworked appellations. Darwin quietly answered: ‘I never did, because my motto has been to discuss the public acts of men and never to say a thing that would cause a man to hang his head in shame before his wife or child.’ It is my belief that that question settled the fate of the Herald.”

Testimony in the case included reams of vitriol published by Sefrit in *The Herald*, and equally vituperative counter-punches thrown over the air by Darwin, who used witness statements from the hearings to turn up the heat on Sefrit even farther. “Mayor Hanning was asked by Judge Pemberton as to Sefrit’s reputation in Bellingham,” Darwin told listeners. “Mayor Hanning replied: ‘I think the majority of people in Bellingham think Frank Sefrit is probably the biggest liar in the whole world.’”⁷⁵ Months later, Darwin repeated an oft-told story about condemnation of Sefrit by Senator Homer T. Bone: “Do you understand why United States Senator Bone stated that he could not understand why a just God would strike Ananias dead for lying – and let Frank Sefrit live?”⁷⁶

In November, 1935, John P. Bramhall, a hearing examiner for the FCC, finally denied *The Herald’s* license application. He later suggested to Sefrit’s legal team that testimony about their client’s relentless personal attacks on local power brokers via his newspapers constituted “a bad situation locally” that gave the FCC pause in replicating over public airwaves.⁷⁷ In Bellingham, a gleeful Darwin celebrated by playing the song “Who’s Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?” on the air “10 or 15 times a day for the better part of a week.”⁷⁸

Rogan Jones to Catherine Jones, May 22, 1935, licensing suit correspondence, box 10, folder 12, Rogan Jones Papers.

⁷⁵ Leslie H. Darwin, “Newspaper of the Air” broadcast, June 17, 1935, box 14, folder 7, Rogan Jones Papers.

⁷⁶ FCC Examiner’s Report No I-309, KVOS Inc. license renewal, box 10, folder 13, Rogan Jones Papers.

⁷⁷ J.A. Matthews to Frank Sefrit, Nov. 5, 1935, box 1, folder 3. *The Herald’s* attorney surmised: “Privately, I think politics worked our undoing. I have not doubt that Senator Dill ... secretly pulled the political strings against us.” Rogan Jones Papers, “AP Case 4.”

⁷⁸ Rogan Jones Papers, “AP Case 4.”

The ruling provided nary a pause in the radio-station political imbroglio. Sefrit and Perkins responded by mounting their own aggressive, public/private campaign to have Jones' license for KVOs revoked when hearings for its renewal commenced in 1936.⁷⁹ This time, city figures lined up to testify about the moral fiber and community-mindedness of the upstart radio team of Darwin and Jones. The proceedings proved every bit as contentious, resulting in an initial denial of the license-renewal application by an FCC hearing examiner in October, 1936.⁸⁰ With the station's very existence in peril, the state's congressional delegation was drawn fully into the fray. After months of shifting alliances, threats, and suspicions and accusations of duplicity, a compromise, of sorts, emerged. Jones, agreeing to a private arrangement crafted by his paid legal ally, former Washington Senator Clarence C. Dill, reluctantly conceded to demands from Democratic Congressman Monrad C. Wallgren.⁸¹ He agreed in August, 1937, to drop Darwin's show to save KVOs.⁸² (Darwin might have made the decision easier by becoming so angry

⁷⁹ The station's license application had been made in November, 1934, under the provisions of the federal Radio Communications Act, passed the same year. The FCC considered more than 2,000 typewritten pages of affidavits in the case. FCC Examiner's Report No I-309, KVOs Inc. license renewal, box 10, folder 13, Rogan Jones Papers.

⁸⁰ Such recommendations were not unusual at the time; license revocations by the full FCC board, however, were.

⁸¹ Jones and Wallgren would forge a complicated political history. Wallgren had defeated the radio station owner in the Democratic primary election for a Second District Congressional seat in 1934. Jones later charged Wallgren with threatening to destroy his radio station by interfering with the FCC relicensing unless Darwin, who had roundly criticized Wallgren on the air, be fired. But the two subsequently became friends, and in 1945, Jones would serve briefly as newly elected Washington Gov. Wallgren's director of finance, budget and business. "AP Case 4," box 7, correspondence, Rogan Jones Papers.

⁸² Jones charged during the proceedings that Wallgren himself, and possibly other Congressmen, had an interest in launching their own competing radio station in Everett, 60 miles south of Bellingham. He coordinated letter-writing barrages to Congressmen, suggesting "the very future of the Democratic Party in Whatcom County" was on the line if KVOs was "muzzled" by a failed license renewal. Box 7, correspondence, Rogan Jones Papers.

about the license proceedings that he became vitriolic on the air to an extent that shocked even his defenders.)⁸³ The license for KVOs was renewed on a provisional basis later that year.⁸⁴ Sefrit and Perkins had lost a media battle, but could claim a victory in a long-running personal vendetta against the irascible Darwin.

The hotly contested radio dispute later would be cited by many in Bellingham as the progenitor of a conspiracy to fire Charles Fisher. The assumption was that Fisher and his liberally inclined Normal School's faculty, being politically aligned with Darwin and Jones, drew Sefrit's ire by backing the wrong horse in the radio race. That specific claim, in fact, was made on more than one occasion in radio broadcasts by Darwin, who directly linked the two events.⁸⁵ Adding to this suspicion was the timing: The proposed *Herald* radio station's application hearings were ongoing when Sefrit and his committee filed formal charges against Fisher in April, 1935. The historical record, however, suggests Fisher and the Normal's trustees somehow managed to remain neutral – at least officially

⁸³ Licensing suit correspondence, 1936-37, box 10, folder 12, Rogan Jones Papers.

⁸⁴ The critical role of the firing of Darwin in breaking the political logjam over license renewal was never acknowledged publicly. Former Sen. Dill told Jones before the decision was handed down that he had spoken to FCC members about the "importance of your taking Darwin off the station. Of course, that cannot be made officially a part of the record, but it should have some influence, nevertheless, because that has been one of the things that they have always wanted you to do." The station was given a provisional license until full approval was finally granted in May, 1940. C.C. Dill to Jones, Aug. 9, 1937, box, folder 12, licensing suit correspondence, 1936-37, Rogan Jones Papers.

⁸⁵ Leslie H. Darwin "Newspaper of the Air" KVOs Radio, notarized broadcast transcript, June 21, 1935, box 1, folder 9, "Post-Hearing news," Bellingham Herald collection. Darwin's take is that "the two Democratic members of the board" (unnamed), refused to back *The Herald's* license application. "Little could President Fisher ... have dreamed that the application of the Herald for a license to operate a radio station would result in his being tried ... for abetting and propagating atheism. Yet that is what has seemingly occurred."

— in this squabble.⁸⁶ Fisher later would point to the long-running, Sefrit-Darwin media battle as evidence of the open ideological warfare in Bellingham that gave rise to the campaign against him. But in numerous, ex post facto analyses of his own demise, he never mentioned the radio station squabble itself as a direct contributor. That is not to suggest that the radio tussle lacked any political connections with the anti-Fisher movement. Future combatants in the Fisher scandal also were involved in the radio dispute, some of them intimately. As KVOS attempted to rescue its radio license in 1936, radio station owner Jones also connected the Fisher and KVOS cases in a letter to U.S.

Senator C.C. Dill:

Rumor has it that several subpoenaed persons [in the initial 1936 KVOS license-renewal hearings] have wired protesting lack of opportunity to testify. Quite aside from the fact that those who testified were evidently given cumulative opinion testimony, the fact remains that one witness shouting for a chance is Dr. [D.H.] McLeod. Dr. McLeod is a tenant in the Herald Bldg whose rent is seriously in arrears. Likewise, he is one of five who joined Sefrit in an attempted ousting of Dr. Fisher of the Bellingham State Normal School. This abortive effort is looked upon locally as a disgraceful event.”⁸⁷

The final settlement of the radio dispute would leave a lasting mark on U.S. media law. In a separate but contemporaneous legal confrontation, Sefrit and Perkins in

⁸⁶ In a report compiled by for print publication and for their attorneys’ use in responding to claims against them by the Darwin/Jones forces in the FCC licensing squabbles, Frank and Charles Sefrit scoffed at an on-air radio claim that the Committee on Normal Protests attack on Fisher was prompted by his stance on the licensing debate. Their account: Fisher and the Normal’s board of trustees had held a special meeting in Mount Vernon to discuss the matter, and were transported to the meeting in a car driven by Charles Sefrit. Trustees Kirkpatrick and Saunders agreed to support *The Herald’s* application, but trustee Branigin balked. Rather than make public a split recommendation, *The Herald* dropped the matter. “The Bellingham Publishing Company felt that it was quite possibly asking too much to have a non-partisan board such as The Normal board enter into this radio controversy unless it could be unanimous with them,” the document states. “Dr. Fisher’s participation in this endorsement was merely in an advisory capacity and at the time he showed a favorable interest.” Box 1, folder 10, Bellingham Publishing Company records.

⁸⁷ Jones to C.C. Dill, Rogan Jones Papers, FCC Licensing Correspondence, 1936-37. McCleod was a listed member of the Committee on Normal Protest, which filed formal charges seeking Fisher’s dismissal.

1934 had compelled the Associated Press to sue KVOS for copyright violation — a result of Darwin’s enthusiastic, daily “news pirating” of printed material, and enthusiastic urging of listeners to eschew the newspaper. *The Herald* and the AP obtained a restraining order on Darwin, who, on KVOS’s thrice-daily “Newspaper of the Air” programs, regularly read aloud portions of the daily paper, taking great delight in offering for free public consumption the news that *Herald* subscribers would otherwise get only by paying – and receiving many hours later. The radio news shows also offered content from the Blethens’ *Seattle Daily Times* and the Hearst-owned *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, both also distributed in Bellingham. In December, 1934, a federal district court sided with KVOS, establishing a national precedent. The ruling allowed radio news operations to legally repeat stories written and reported by newspaper reporters, de facto “agents” of the Associated Press, on their radio shows immediately after publication.⁸⁸ Sefrit seethed. And as preparations were made to appeal the ruling, which ultimately would be decided in the favor of KVOS at the U.S. Supreme Court,⁸⁹ Sefrit turned his attention to another

⁸⁸ Jones, in a legal broadside filed in the case, scoffed that the radio station had little need to “pirate” Associated Press news from *The Herald*, as most of it was “old, stale, sketchy and uninteresting to the average radio audience.” Rogan Jones affidavit, *Associated Press v. KVOS, Inc.*, U.S. Western District Court, Northern Division, Nov. 27, 1934, box 10, folder 11, Rogan Jones Papers.

⁸⁹ Forces for AP and newspapers prevailed in the U.S. circuit court of appeals. Jones, drawing some legal funds from a national broadcasting group, appealed. In the 1936 Supreme Court case, *KVOS, Inc. v. Associated Press*, the radio station, represented by Pemberton, prevailed by what amounted to a technicality over a jurisdictional question: the AP, Pemberton successfully argued, had failed to provide a concrete assessment of monetary damages inflicted by having its news read on the air, partially because it operated as a news cooperative. As Rogan Jones later explained: “(T)he Supreme Court kicked the case out of the first open door, which in every lawsuit is a question of jurisdiction.” Rogan Jones to Sol Taishoff, Broadcast Publications, Inc., Jan. 13, 1937, box 10, folder 12, Rogan Jones Papers. In spite of its murky nature, the unanimous ruling essentially overturned a prior verdict in *AP v. International News Service*. Rather than lead to the destruction of the Associated Press, as AP attorneys had warned, it paved the way for the sale of news material from the likes of AP to radio stations across the country, putting radio news on an equal footing with printed media.

pressing local endeavor – investigating longstanding rumors of unseemly, “un-American” activities on the college campus below Sehome Hill.

The embattled editor, engaging in daily communication with his team at the FCC hearings in Washington, D.C., seemed to relish the opportunity to engage in a political battle with familiar opponents, at home, on a field of play he could better control. “Just keep your nerve and do not let those boys rattle you,” he wrote on May 21, 1935, to his son Charles, representing company interests in D.C. “Whatever you do keep our case on the high plane. I am going before the Normal trustees Wednesday evening and when this is out of the way I think I can then clear up some matters that have been long deferred.”⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Frank Sefrit to Charles Sefrit, May 21, 1935, box 1, folder 4, Bellingham Publishing Company records.

Chapter 4

Red-Scare Roots Blossom: The Committee on Normal Protest

Personality conflicts and squabbles between college presidents and local townspeople and public officials in the school's hometown are common; Charles Fisher's tenure in Bellingham was no different. Within five years of his arrival from Pennsylvania, small groups of Bellingham citizens were imploring college trustees to replace him. In 1928, representatives of four such groups buttonholed Governor Roland H. Hartley, a Republican serving from 1925 through 1932, during a visit to Bellingham, expressing their displeasure about Fisher's recently renewed three-year contract.¹ The group, according to an account in Sefrit's *Bellingham American* newspaper, consisted of some members of the local ministerial association, the Ku Klux Klan, and the Junior Order of United American Mechanics, or JOUAM. The latter group was a nativist, anti-Catholic forerunner of the secret, similarly nativist, Daughters of America organization.² The ministers presented Hartley with a petition, signed by approximately 20 local pastors, asking for reconsideration of Fisher's contract. Additional petitions were rumored to be

¹ The group might have been emboldened by Hartley's bold move, only two years prior, to remove five of the seven members of the Board of Regents at the University of Washington. Hartley replaced them with trustees who summarily placed the university president, Henry Suzzallo, a political foe of the governor, on a "leave of absence" from which he never returned.

² "4 Dissatisfied Groups Protest to Gov. Hartley," *Bellingham American*, June 15, 1928. The OUAM was founded in Philadelphia amid the anti-alien riots of 1844-45, to protest the hiring of cheap foreign labor. "The Nativist Orders," Phoenix Masonry, http://www.phoenixmasonry.org/masonicmuseum/fraternalism/jr_ouam.htm. The implied connection here of early anti-Fisher forces to the spinoff group Jr. OUAM/Daughters of America stands as the first indication of the presence of an organized, conservative women's group active in the campaign to oust Fisher; similar women's organizations would play a critical role in amassing "evidence" of alleged seditious activity by the college president during the succeeding decade.

in circulation by the Klan and JOUAM. Further, the newspaper reported, Fisher's continued tenure was opposed by homeowners near the campus, who "charge discrimination in the making up of the list of homes eligible to receive students as roomers and boarders during the school year."³ Yet another group of anti-Fisher townspeople comprised "friends of certain instructors who had served at the Normal for a long time, but who have been let out since the present head has come here," according to the newspaper.⁴ No action had been taken by the governor or his staff, the article concluded, and none was likely before the coming fall statewide election. "However, it is conceded he [the governor] holds the whip hand over the situation through his power to appoint and discharge trustees."⁵ The article went on to speculate about an upcoming opening on the three-member board of trustees, and its possible political ramifications. The following day, the newspaper turned up more details: A representative of the JOUAM indicated that the group had assembled a committee to investigate the complaints about Fisher's school "not being conducted in accordance with American principles," but a JOUAM "investigation" had found the charges unsubstantiated. That information reportedly was relayed to Governor Hartley.⁶ The newspaper also reported that the ministers' opposition to Fisher was broader than originally suggested, with "all

³ For most of its early history, the college had no on-campus housing. Most students lived in rooming houses adjacent or nearby. Owners of these buildings had counted on the rooming business for their livelihood for as long as two decades.

⁴ "4 Dissatisfied Groups Protest," June 15, 1928.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ "Ministers Opposition Retention Pres. Fisher To Become Statewide," *Bellingham American*, June 16, 1928.

but a few” county pastors signing an anti-Fisher petition.⁷ One minister expressed hope that dissatisfaction over Fisher might become a statewide campaign issue in the approaching governor’s race. But no evidence exists that any of the local complaints about Fisher at this time turned into formal complaints to college trustees, let alone the governor.

That honor would await Sefrit and his Committee on Normal Protest, which probably did not become active until sometime in 1934. By then, the political turmoil created by the Depression, marked by increased anti-communist crusading at the local and national levels, made it easy to attract new recruits, organized under a common banner of super-patriotism. Sefrit proved to be the spark of combustion. His decision to publicly take on the head of Bellingham Normal was, to some extent, a political departure.⁸ Sefrit had been a strong public supporter of the “old,” pre-Fisher Normal, in general terms, from the editor’s first days in Bellingham. He had defended the institution in editorials when it was attacked for various transgressions, even during Fisher’s early tenure, through the 1920s. Sefrit also urged the community to defend the school against overzealous cutbacks during the early years of the Great Depression.⁹ And the editor

⁷ Ibid. The ministers complained that numbers of students from the Normal had dropped in their congregations.

⁸ The school’s name was the Washington State Normal School at Bellingham until 1937, when the state recognized its status as a four-year, degree-granting institution by renaming it Western Washington College of Education.

⁹ See for example, “State Normal Menaced,” editorial, *The Bellingham Herald*, Nov. 28, 1934, in which the newspaper scolded “business and property” interests for being “indifferent” to budgetary threats to the college, urging them to oppose a simmering state plan to perhaps shutter one or more of the state’s three Normal schools.

seemed to have at least tolerated Fisher's dynamic approach to educational curricula for the first decade of his employment on campus. Whether a single event, or a series of events, prompted a reversal in this stance in the early years of the Depression is unclear.¹⁰ But one incident, to be long remembered by Fisher, seemed to provide a springboard to Sefrit's activism. It involved a laid-off history professor, Pelagius Williams.

Williams was a veteran history instructor and, at least for a time, a member of the same First Presbyterian Church that Fisher attended before migrating to Bellingham's St. James Presbyterian.¹¹ He was one of a dozen faculty members laid off during Depression-related budget cuts in 1932-33, after it became apparent that previous, drastic faculty salary reductions had been insufficient to make ends meet.¹² Williams remained in Bellingham after losing his job. He also remained infuriated by his dismissal, insisting that he had been let go because of the conservative political leanings of his wife, who was active in the local chapter of the conservative women's group Daughters of the American Revolution.¹³ Other faculty members from the same era, even those expressing strong support for Fisher, recalled that the president's layoffs and callback policies left him open to charges of favoritism. In announcing the layoffs, Fisher said faculty members would be rehired when economic conditions improved. "But he didn't do so in all cases,"

¹⁰ An increasingly public feud between the two men had been suggested as early as 1933, according to a 1939 *Time* magazine article that recounted a hostile encounter between Fisher and Sefrit at a meeting of the Bellingham Hobby Club "six years ago." The incident is described in more detail in Chapters 5 and 6. "I'm Agin You," *Time* magazine, July 10, 1939, 42.

¹¹ Keith A. Murray, "Centennial Churches of Washington's Fourth Corner: Occasional Paper #20," 1985, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Bellingham, WA.

¹² "Different Organizations at Bellingham Sought to Control Normal's Policies," *The Seattle Star*, June 24, 1939.

¹³ *Ibid.*

recalled Moyle Cederstrom, an English professor. “He took this opportunity to get rid of what he considered dead wood on his faculty. Also the charge was made that some people were not laid off in order of seniority. This may have been true. At least two or three were not rehired and stayed on in town, probably because their roots were down here, and weren’t able to get other jobs. These individuals became a focal point for the anti-Fisher agitation.”¹⁴ A group of Williams’ friends, including Sefrit, invited Fisher to a meeting, presumably to discuss the Normal’s finances. They pressed Fisher to reinstate Williams, “despite the fact his rating as a teacher was not high.”¹⁵ Fisher balked, but offered to take the matter to college trustees. The board refused to reopen the case. In retribution, Williams’ wife, well-connected with conservative groups statewide, organized a letter-writing campaign to Governor Martin to protest Fisher’s alleged radicalism. “Such letters did shower down upon Olympia,” Seattle newspaper reporter Clark Squires later surmised, “and they were read.”¹⁶ In a deposition of Fisher, taken in 1936, amidst the KVOZ Radio legal imbroglio, by attorney William Pemberton, Fisher recalled the earlier days of the campaign against him:

I refused to do some things that Mr. Sefrit and some men associated with him wanted me to do. I couldn’t do what they asked me to do. I wouldn’t do it, and I

¹⁴ Moyle Cederstrom, interviewed by Gary Harrod, Nov. 20, 1970, box 28, folder 6, Rogan Jones Papers, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham WA.

¹⁵ “Different Organizations at Bellingham,” *Seattle Star*, June 24, 1939. Sefrit referred to a similar instance himself in a 1933 editorial, in which he acknowledged having “petitioned” Fisher to retain a worker the previous summer. Editorial, “And There’s A Reason,” *The Bellingham Herald*, Dec. 16, 1933.

¹⁶ Different Organizations at Bellingham,” *Seattle Star*, June 24, 1939.

think he [Sefrit] used this method of making these charges against me to get back at me. I am sure there was a great deal of personal element in it.¹⁷

Fisher expanded his thoughts on the roots of the conspiracy to remove him:

On the other hand, I think that what he was doing, because he represents these reactionary forces of the community, I think that he represented a movement which was going on all over the country against so-called radicalism among labor and in educational institutions, and I think what he was doing here was just a part of that national movement. He may or may not have been honest in that respect, I can't say.¹⁸

Sefrit's direct, hands-on involvement with the small group of townspeople aligning against Fisher began immediately in the wake of the Williams incident. In the days and weeks after being forced from office, Fisher several times referred to the incident as the starting point to his persecution. The most eloquent description is found in a 1939 account shared with an academic colleague:

The controversy with the editor of the Bellingham Herald started when I refused to reinstate Pelagius Williams of the History Department. The editor of this paper has exercised control in the community for thirty years, and has earned a reputation in these years of getting any man whom he cannot control.

William J. Kaigler, Chairman of the Americanization Committee of the American Legion, is a fanatic on the subject of radicals. This man Kaigler, with several other men who are known to be members of the Ku Klux Klan have been very active in "red baiting."

Pro-America, a group of Republican, fanatical and reactionary women, have indulged in criticism of our Americanism. Some fundamentalist preachers have

¹⁷ "Mr. C.H. Fisher, Direct Examination by Mr. Pemberton," undated deposition, box 1, folder 7, Bellingham Herald collection on Charles H. Fisher, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Western Libraries Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA. In handwritten notes in the margin next to the deposition section saying, "I couldn't do what they asked me to do," the possessor of the document, presumably Frank Sefrit, has handwritten, "The Williams Affair." Note: Though undated, this deposition by attorney William Pemberton, based on its content, likely was taken sometime in 1936, in relation to the KVOS FCC relicensing application. It contains references to documents received by Fisher in January of that year.

¹⁸ Ibid.

joined in with these groups charging that the faculty lead students astray in religion. The teaching of evolution is sufficient ground for this charge.

Bellingham is known in the state as an ultra-conservative city in its political, social and religious outlook ... The community has for a generation been divided into cliques by two newspaper men [Sefrit and Darwin] who have carried on a personal and political feud. When I considered the position at Bellingham, I was advised against accepting it because of a divided community which did not stand back of the institution and its administration.¹⁹

In the same letter, Fisher went on to describe his understanding that all three presidents preceding him at the Normal had left at least partially because of the relative toxicity of Bellingham's political environment. He sensed the same longstanding forces were responsible for his own downfall:

What some of my friends predicted would happen is about to happen in my case ... It looks as though I would be forced to leave the presidency because of a minority group that has brought pressure on the Governor ... If these people succeed in this, it will mean that the most reactionary forces in Bellingham and in the State of Washington will have had their way in controlling a higher education institution.²⁰

Sefrit, however, consistently maintained that it was never his idea to engage in career mortal combat, as it were, with the college president. Although his efforts to reinstate his friend Williams had been fully rebuked by the college — something to which Sefrit clearly was not accustomed — he repeatedly insisted that he agreed to head

¹⁹ Fisher to President W.A. Brandenburg, State Teachers College, Pittsburg, Kansas, April 19, 1939, Fisher Case Correspondence, Vice President for Enrollment and Student Services, Accession 74-1, Box 36, Western Washington University Archives. Kaigler was a Bellingham Police detective sometimes described as a "fingerprint expert." He was known to be active in political causes, and rumored by Seattle's leftist press to be a member of the Ku Klux Klan. Kaigler allegedly had "run ... out of town" a Unitarian minister, Ernest M. Whitesmith, in a previous Bellingham political spat. Kaigler also was accused of organizing a picket line in front of the Leopold Hotel to protest a visit by International Longshoreman's Association leader Harry Bridges, presumably during the West Coast dockworker's strike of 1934. "Bellingham In Grasp of Tory Clique: Editor Heads Ruling Faction," *Washington New-Dealer*, July 20, 1939.

²⁰ Fisher to W.A. Brandenburg, WWU Archives.

the Committee On Normal Protest only at the request of others. This claim became public record during the contentious 1934-35 FCC licensing hearings over Bellingham radio station KVOS and another station proposed by Sefrit's Bellingham Publishing Company. Testimony in those proceedings included a charge by the Leslie Darwin/KVOS group that Sefrit's attacks on Fisher were inspired primarily by the college president's refusal to support *The Herald's* application for a license to operate its own radio station. But the reality was far more pedestrian, Frank Sefrit and his son Charles Sefrit told their attorneys in a statement produced to rebut the Darwin charges:

The charges filed against Dr. Fisher of the Normal School were based on findings developed by 16 different organizations in Bellingham, under a committee. Representatives of all the patriotic organizations, women's clubs, and anti-Communist groups, representing in cross section a large portion of the citizenship of Bellingham, investigated the Normal school activities and filed the charges. Mr. Frank Sefrit was merely chosen as chairman of that committee.²¹

It's unclear how honest that assessment really was, given the emotionally charged series of accusations and counter-accusations in the FCC proceedings – a de facto trial of Sefrit and *The Herald's* public standing — that surrounded it. Sefrit by this time clearly had developed his own, strong dislike for Fisher's politics, as evidenced by stray comments at public encounters.²² At the same time — perhaps as the result of ongoing

²¹ Untitled affidavit, Sefrit responses to KVOS radio broadcast accusations, box 1, folder 10, Bellingham Publishing Company records, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA. The reference here to “16 different organizations” cooperating to form the Committee on Normal Protest is unique. Existing records indicate participation by citizens belonging to fewer than a half-dozen community groups.

²² “It was common gossip,” recalled Vaughan Brown, Bellingham Postmaster from 1934 to 1939. Sefrit said in so many words that he was against Fisher, and when he was against anybody, well, they didn't last in Bellingham.” Vaughan Brown, interviewed by Don DeMarco, Nov. 19, 1970, box 28, folder 7, Rogan Jones Papers.

research about campus activities by the Fisher committee — Sefrit began making it clear, in newspaper editorials, that he was growing weary of what he saw a steady stream of “un-American” guest speakers on the Normal School campus just up the hill.

“Sometime, somewhere, somehow we (being optimistic) expect to hear or read about a professional lecturer going about saying a good word for the Constitution, the American flag, the basic system on which America has made unexampled progress in the last 150 years, and the common sense of the American people,” Sefrit wrote in a May, 1934 editorial. He went on to cite a recent lecture at Bellingham Normal by Alfred M. Bingham, in which the leftist intellectual declared “to several hundred young people whose fathers are able to keep them in school only by the grace of the ‘profit system,’ that the country should abandon its capitalist economic structure.” The Normal School, the editorial declared, “appears to be rather widely used as a sounding board for uplifters who think little of the American system as we understand it.”²³ Later during the same month, Sefrit in an editorial hailed a scheduled appearance at the Normal of a speaker he considered acceptable: former state American Legion officer Reno Odlin. The conservative Seattle banker, Sefrit wrote, might serve as a lone voice against the campus “pied pipers leading students in a wild ecstasy of complaints against the institutions of our government.” The editorial continued:

Unfortunately, the students of the Bellingham Normal have been drugged with these un-American nostrums for several years, with little or nothing of a proper antidote. The critics of the institutions of our government have been so numerous that public complaint is very general. It may be justifiable to say the youth of the colleges and schools of higher learning have a right to hear “both sides.” But they do not get both sides. They get the “reds” and the “left wingers” almost

²³ Editorial, “Our Guest Speaker Reformers,” *The Bellingham Herald*, May 4, 1934.

exclusively, simply because those who make up the programs are themselves animated by the un-American impulse. They, themselves, are of that bent of thought.²⁴

Sefrit also had on many occasions publicly warned of what he saw as growing communist influences in Bellingham, particularly in the labor movement. Of particular concern to Sefrit, and other businessmen, was the ominous specter of the contentious May, 1934 longshoreman's strike, in which 15,000 workers struck West Coast ports. The strike reawakened fears of communist-inspired, general strikes, and inspired vigilante organizing in many port cities.²⁵ Yet the specific political influences of Sefrit and his allies on the Committee on Normal Protest had long been shrouded in mystery. The secretive group's ideological underpinnings – and even its full membership roster – were not revealed when it was active, and have remained unknown for eight decades. New light was cast in 2013, when a dusty box of documents was dropped off at a regional Washington State Archives facility near the college campus in Bellingham.²⁶ This

²⁴ Editorial, "Mr. Odlin's Opportunity, *The Bellingham Herald*, May 27, 1934.

²⁵ Sefrit frequently referred to the specter of communist-inspired labor action in letters to Perkins throughout this period. Discussing the possibility that newspaper unions might join a general strike, Sefrit advises Perkins: "If you have not read the July 21 copy of 'Liberty,' get one for a nickel and turn to Matt Wall's "Red Russia." He tells why there is so much strike trouble just now. I have asked permission to reproduce it. The plan was made in April for a [Bellingham] general strike August 16. It may be headed that way, accelerated by the Longshoreman's strike." Sefrit to Perkins, July 14, 1934, box 1, folder 1, Bellingham Publishing Company records. Sefrit's fears over the threatened general strike matched those of U.S. corporate heads elsewhere. An "anti-communist panic" among U.S. corporate elites in the wake of the longshoreman's strike and San Francisco General Strike created pressure on Congress to pass the National Labor Relations Act. Business elites in other cities literally stocked up on arms preparing for a possible Bolshevik revolution. Peter Phillips, "The 1934-35 Red Threat and the Passage of the National Labor Relations Act," *Critical Sociology* 20, no. 2 (1994): 27–50.

²⁶ Bellingham Herald collection on Charles H. Fisher, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Western Libraries, Heritage Resources, Bellingham, WA. The files were discovered in a cardboard box in the basement of *The Bellingham Herald* building in circa 2001 by Aaron Joy, a writer and amateur historian who worked in *The Herald's* news library. Joy, fearing the collection would be thrown out, as had other

collection, now public, appears to be the day-to-day working files of Sefrit's Committee On Normal Protest. It sheds long-missing light on the membership and motivations of the group, revealing a conspiracy against Fisher more organized, more meticulously planned, and orchestrated by a larger group, than previously known.²⁷

Frank Sefrit's Private Files

The newly discovered files, likely maintained for years in Sefrit's private office, leave little doubt that Sefrit was the group's leader – and chief strategist.²⁸ These files contain, essentially, the types of materials one would expect to find in the possession of a group working to collect evidence on, and then publicly “expose,” a person or persons through guilt-by-association charges of un-American or communist influences. Included are pamphlets, statements of purpose and other materials describing the positions of numerous organizations leading the growing anti-communist movement in the U.S. in the late 1920s and early 1930s. One example is a pamphlet titled, “Combating Subversive

archival materials, by the newspaper's new ownership group, removed the documents for safekeeping. “I knew the end was near and it seemed too valuable and too ignored,” Joy recalled. “Literally an inch of dirt was on it.” Preparing to move out of state, Joy in 2002 entrusted the documents to a friend, Bellingham psychiatrist Joseph Lenz. Lenz donated the collection to the regional archives as he prepared to move out of state himself, in July, 2013. Aaron Joy, email correspondence with the author, Aug. 18, 2014. See also, Administrative Notes, Bellingham Herald collection.

²⁷ There are numerous indications that the files were never meant to be made public, even after Sefrit's death. The first file in the collection, for example, contains background biographical information on Sefrit, for his obituary, clearly designated as private in a note to *Herald* editors. Further, the files contain names and identifying information about committee members who otherwise had maintained anonymity throughout the Fisher campaign – and long afterward. An additional clue is that some documents in the collection contain information that Sefrit specifically refuted, or even denied the existence of, in later public pronouncements and newspaper articles.

²⁸ Former *Bellingham Herald* employee Joy, who discovered the documents in the newspaper building's basement, said that these documents were separate from all other news files maintained in the company's news library, accessible to newspaper reporters and other employees. Aaron Joy, email correspondence with the author, Aug. 18, 2014.

Activities in the United States,” published by the Chamber of Commerce of the United States. The introduction warns that:

Wide dissemination of subversive literature; open advocacy of communist principles by some of the *instructors and lecturers in our educational institutions*; active efforts to supplant American labor organizations by subversive groups; acts of these latter groups in initiating and prolonging strikes accompanied by violence; efforts to incite disloyalty in the Army and Navy – these and other similar activities are part of a determined plan to accomplish the overthrow of the present social and economic order of the United States.²⁹

The files also contain research and articles from a broad variety of published sources about the creep of global communism, ranging from a lengthy article detailing the operation of the Red Army to position papers outlining the degree to which the global communist movement was intertwined with activities and goals of Jews or trade laborists. Also in the files are more than 100 newspaper and magazine stories, relating to communism, the Normal school, and other matters, clipped from newspapers and magazines in Bellingham, Seattle, and beyond, throughout the early 1930s. Especially noteworthy are clipped editorials from the Hearst-owned *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, penned either by the Seattle editorial staff, or publisher Hearst himself, detailing the growing red menace across America in the mid-1930s.³⁰

²⁹ “Combating Subversive Activities In the United States,” Chamber of Commerce of the United States, box 1, folder 6, Bellingham Herald collection on Charles Fisher. Emphasis added: The phrase “instructors and lecturers in our educational institutions” is underlined in the pamphlet.

³⁰ Box 1, folder 11, Bellingham Herald collection. The collection also contains original newspaper clippings and other documents about Charles Fisher’s political career long after he left Bellingham in 1939, including a 1948 letter from an investigator for the Albert Canwell Joint Legislative Fact-Finding Committee on Un-American Activities, thanking the Sefrits for submitting materials related to Fisher in anticipation of the “Canwell Committee” hearings in Seattle.

Much of the correspondence in the files consists of letters between Sefrit and others involved in the Fisher matter. This includes several exchanges between Sefrit and Normal trustee Verne Branigin, an attorney from nearby Mount Vernon, Washington. The earliest of these letters, dated June 25, 1934, is an attempt by Branigin to persuade Sefrit to cease editorials and growing criticism, already “more or less public,” about alleged anti-American activity at the school. “These matters have been taken up and discussed at our board meetings,” Branigin wrote. “We have endeavored to ascertain if there is any unpatriotic influences or un-American propoganda being insinuated into these programs, or in the class rooms, and fail to find where there has been anything other than a portrayal of current history, daily and without bias or prejudice.” Branigin closed by writing, “We have nothing, that I know anything about, to bring about the heated criticism. However it is, it will be our endeavor to avoid further unfavorable impressions.”³¹

An interesting subtext to the Fisher case is found in a Sefrit letter to his counterpart newspaper manager at the *Daily Record*, located in Ellensburg, a small town in Kittitas County, central Washington state. In February, 1935, Sefrit informed the *Daily Record's* J.C. “Cliff” Kaynor that “There is a little nest of young Communists in the Bellingham State Normal School and we who still believe in red blooded Americanism are going to try to purge that institution from these influences if it is possible to do so.”³²

³¹ Branigin to Sefrit, June 25, 1934, box 1, folder 3, Bellingham Herald collection.

³² Sefrit to J.C. Kaynor, Feb. 20, 1935, box 1, folder 3, Bellingham Herald collection. Kaynor and Sefrit had been friends for two decades, often teaming up on various political causes through a statewide Republican Newspaper Editor's group for which both served as officers.

Sefrit told Kaynor that on the previous December 11, the Normal's Social Science Club had invited to speak at a campus meeting "one of the most shameless Reds from Seattle," who proceeded to make attacks on government, and proclaim that the Pilgrims were a group of horse thieves.³³ The speaker, Sefrit said, "asked the body to send a protest to the prosecuting attorney of your county urging that officer to dismiss some Communist offenders who had been arrested there and protest the prosecution."³⁴ Sefrit asked the editor to contact the county prosecutor to ascertain whether the telegram indeed was delivered. Kaynor responded with a letter two days later, confirming that Kittitas County Prosecutor Spencer Short had received a telegram sent Dec. 12, 1934, from Bellingham, stating: "We demand dismissal of all charges against Roslyn Mine Defendents [*sic*]. Social Science Club, Bellingham State Normal."³⁵ Kaynor went on to describe the "horrible mess" surrounding the area coal-mine strike: "The attacks and assaults reached a dirtyness [*sic*] which could not even be mentioned in a newspaper. Vile language, women urinating in men's faces while latter were held down by other women ... It was an armed camp, with the fighting between two groups of miners, one just more radical than the others. Communist workers, lecturers and writers all were located in Roslyn before and after the trouble."³⁶ Three months later, when Sefrit's committee appeared before the

³³ Ibid. The speaker is identified in witness affidavits in Sefrit's files as Merwin Cole. See J.F. Adams, "To Whom It May Concern," May 14, 1935, box 1, folder 7, and "Notes on an address given by Merwin Cole of Seattle, Dec. 11, 1934," box 1, folder 5, Bellingham Herald collection. The latter memo, based on the prior, is presumed to have been written by devoted Fisher opponent Alma (Mrs. George) Jenkins.

³⁴ Ibid. The workers were laborers who had engaged in a strike against the Roslyn Coal Co. in Kittitas County, near Ellensburg.

³⁵ Kaynor to Sefrit, Feb. 22, 1935, Bellingham Herald Collection.

³⁶ Ibid.

Normal's board of trustees, the illicit meeting and telegram incident would be offered as key "evidence" of communist activity on campus.

In April, 1935, while the committee was ramping up its work, Sefrit penned a letter to longtime Normal Trustee Dr. W.D. Kirkpatrick, whose medical office was in Sefrit's own Herald Building. Sefrit noted an upcoming board meeting at which faculty members' annual contracts would be considered. He seized the occasion to plant a seed:

Personal to you, I am aware that charges are being prepared to be filed against President Fisher and several members of the faculty alleging subversive activities, disloyalty and unbecoming conduct. You, perhaps, have heard some rumblings to this effect. I know that these charges will be very serious and I believe that they can be sustained. My own activities for the present have been to restrain certain persons from public action that might be very harmful to the Normal. I have advised that these matters be frankly presented to the Board of Trustees in the hope that wholesome action can be taken without a public revelation of misconduct. My sincere hope is that the school can be protected and avoid the possibility of a general black-listing of the Normal such as has taken place in other parts of the United States where nonAmerican activities have been exposed. The first time you have an evening that you can give to me I will reveal to you, in confidence, some of the things that are embraced in the aforesaid charges, but I am sending this note to you today as a suggestion that you postpone giving contracts until a later meeting.³⁷

Other material in the files consists of lists, memos, handwritten notes, inventories and other organizational documents of a group preparing to present a detailed, de-facto legal case against Fisher – backed up by a thick packet of what they considered to be damning evidentiary exhibits. Among these documents are dozens of articles picked and retyped from the Normal' student newspaper, *The Northwest Viking*. Most of these

³⁷ Sefrit to Kirkpatrick, April 16, 1935, box 1, folder 3, Bellingham Herald Collection. No response from Kirkpatrick is evident in the files. The board of trustees did not act upon Sefrit's request to delay faculty contracts. The editor here appears to be using publicity about the contemporaneous, William Randolph Hearst-inspired red scares at other U.S. campuses as a veiled threat of what might happen in Bellingham should Fisher remain in power.

contained student reviews and commentary on contemporary books and other treatises, most dealing with U.S. history or current political trends. Highlighted on several occasions were news items about students attending meetings of “seditious” organizations, such as the National Council for the Prevention of War, which the committee labeled a “radical Pacifist organization.” Another article detailed a personal interview by two students, conducted in Charles Fisher’s office, of Jennie Lee, a Scottish socialist former member of Britain’s House of Commons. Lee, the article states, “defended her stand on socialism” by telling the students that “... it is capitalism which makes us all the same. Socialism gives people more personal possessions and encourages the development of individual personality.”³⁸ Lee also gave the audience at her Normal School assembly a rave review, saying it compared well with other American audiences. “I don’t know whether you were interested or just had the facility for looking interested,” she said. Other articles chosen by the committee from the student paper included editorial musings on the existence of God, the rise of fascism, the fight to curb Reserve Officer Training Corps activities on campuses, and the ongoing red-baiting antics of Hearst newspapers. “At the present time he [Hearst] is indulging in red-baiting on a par with that of Goebbels,” the paper editorialized. “This he uses as a mask for the most virulent attack ever to be launched against academic freedom in this country. Not all instructors have

³⁸ “Lee Tells English Idea of Americans; Defends Socialism in Viking Interview,” by Thon and Jones, undated news clipping, *The Northwest Viking*, retyped by committee, box 1, folder 10, Bellingham Herald collection.

taken it lying down. *Social Frontier*, representing the more radical teachers, retaliates by devoting the entire February issue to a discussion of Hearst and his role.”³⁹

Notably, the collection also includes a copy of a 21-page handbook of the Student League for Industrial Democracy, an activist group of obvious concern to the committee members, who underlined in the document numerous passages about L.I.D. recruitment and strategy.⁴⁰ Handwritten notes on the back of the handbook connect the document to Normal students Gordon Millikan and Rose Works, successive presidents of the school’s Social Science Club. The files also contain leaflets, newsletters and other publications of the Ku Klux Klan. Little of the of the group’s work, however, seemed to involve direct Klan involvement in the Fisher campaign. The committee’s files contain only a general brochure outlining the KKK’s stance on national issues and a single copy of a Klan newsletter. The newsletter focuses on the organization’s national push to outlaw private (particularly Catholic) schools – a controversy in which the local KKK chapter had been

³⁹ Undated news clipping, *The Northwest Viking*, retyped by committee, box 1, folder 10, Bellingham Herald collection. The article demonstrates that Columbia University’s George S. Counts, the editor of the socialist-leaning, fledgling academic journal, *The Social Frontier*, clearly was a presence in the collective awareness of the campus community, even though he never was known to have set foot there.

⁴⁰ The Student L.I.D., the second incarnation of the national League for Industrial Democracy, was the activist student group that would become Students for a Democratic Society in 1960. Obtaining the 22-page handbook in question is an example of the cloak-and-dagger work the committee fancied itself to be engaged in: The document contains handwritten notes from an unidentified person explaining that the document had been obtained by a “friend” of student Rose Works, current president of the Normal’s Social Science Club. The provider of the document warns that the committee should be prepared to return it quickly if need be: “Not to do so would expose to CHF [Fisher] your source of information.” Another handwritten note on the document states: “The Social Sciences Club of the Bel. Normal is the real chapter of the Students L.I.D.” (The handbook itself states that L.I.D. chapters formed on some hostile university campuses had been forced to organize under more general names. One of those listed as an example is “Social Science Club.”) “Handbook of the Student League for Industrial Democracy,” box 1, folder 5, Bellingham Herald collection.

heavily involved in Whatcom County in the preceding decade.⁴¹ The KKK had remained active in to some degree in the county for a decade or more after its popularity had waned elsewhere in the Pacific Northwest.⁴² Eyewitnesses reported multiple sightings of burning crosses atop Sehome Hill, a large knoll directly above the college campus, at various times throughout the 1920s and early 1930s. One witness to such an event was Ralph Neil, a Normal student body president in 1939, who related that the “horrifying” sight, witnessed as he walked to school during his freshman year, remained upsetting to him into his old age.⁴³ Even though the Klan appears to have had faded as a local political

⁴¹ “Terrific Attack on Ohio Public Schools, *The Klan Courier*, Nov. 1934, box 1, folder 4, Bellingham Herald collection.

⁴² Large Klan gatherings were common in Whatcom County during the same decade, and more than 700 Klan members marched in a May 15, 1926 parade through downtown Bellingham in a display that included a parade float carrying hooded Klansmen. The primary target of local Klan ire in this period was the Catholic Church, which vociferously opposed an ill-fated, Klan-promoted 1924 measure, Initiative 49, that would have required all state children to attend public schools. In 1929, the Bellingham Klan hosted the Washington State KKK annual convention, which included an address by Mayor John A. Kellogg, who presented Klansmen with a key to the city. Bellingham City Attorney Charles B. Sampley was described by *The Bellingham Herald* as a “prominent Klansman,” and the group thrived to some degree throughout the decade. The organization appeared to wane, however, by the early 1930s. Its office in the Long Building in downtown Bellingham, opened in 1926, closed by 1932, amid speculation that some members may have shifted their allegiance to a competing extremist group, the William Pelley-led Silvershirt Legion, which maintained a chapter in rural Whatcom County burg, in 1937, another in Bellingham in 1938. Beyond the publications found in the Sefrit files, no other historical record of Klan influence in the anti-Fisher campaign has emerged. “The KKK by that time had reached its zenith, and was dropping,” recalled Vaughan Brown, Bellingham Postmaster from 1934-1939. Vaughan Brown interview, 1970, box 28, folder 7, Rogan Jones Papers. For Whatcom County Klan history, see Gabriel S. Mayers, “The Ku Klux Klan in Bellingham, 1900-1935,” *Journal of the Whatcom County Historical Society* No. 2, no. October 2001 (n.d.), and Trevor Griffey, “The Strongest Chapter in WA: Bellingham’s KKK,” from *The Washington State Klan in the 1920s*, Seattle Civil Rights & Labor History Project, University of Washington, 2007, http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/kkk_politicians.htm. For an examination of the rise and fall of the Klan in Whatcom County in the 1920s, and an analysis of local media coverage of the organization, see Ryan Kuttel, “Preserving Public Morality: The Ku Klux Klan of Washington and their Anti-Catholic School Bill,” unpublished paper, Dec. 3, 2000, Western Libraries Special Collections, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA. For Silver-shirts history in Washington State, see Karen E. Hoppes, “William Dudley Pelley and the Silvershirt Legion: A Case Study of the Legion in Washington State, 1933-1942,” (PhD diss., The City University of New York, 1992).

⁴³ Ralph Neil, interviewed by Adele Seltzman, Nov. 27, 1970, reel-to-reel tape recording, box 28, folder 6, Rogan Jones Papers.

force by the time of the uprising against Fisher, the committee might have viewed the organization as a future partner to curb what they saw as communist influences. In a spring, 1935 article appearing in a national Presbyterian newsletter, the Rev. John Robertson Macartney, pastor of Bellingham's First Presbyterian Church — and by then an active member of the Committee on Normal Protest — warned of the imminent spreading of communism around the globe. In the article, Macartney recalled a report from the editor of a religious periodical in Kansas, of a shocking display of overt communist loyalty by passengers on a ship leaving New York Harbor. On the ship's deck, passengers led by a "Jew and a Negro," had sung "Third Internationale, the official hymn, the battle cry, of international Communism ..." Macartney wrote. "Both the Jew and the Negro had their arms raised throughout the song."⁴⁴ The same seditious spirit, he warned, was increasingly evident in the "insidious propaganda" infiltrating American institutions. "We paid comparatively little attention to it until now with the rush of a tempest it is upon us," Macartney wrote. The article concluded: "And more recently still, an incident has occurred in this community [Bellingham] which indicates the presence of Communist activity in our educational institutions. We are not making any brief for the Ku Klux Klan; however it may be that in the immediate future there shall be a distinct sphere of usefulness for the Klan along certain lines."

At the heart of the actual "evidence" of untoward campus activities in the Sefrit files are a number of notarized, eyewitness reports of citizens who had attended

⁴⁴ John Robertson Macartney, "Liable To Blow Our Hats Off," *The Presbyterian Banner*, April 4, 1935, box 1, folder 6, Bellingham Herald collection.

assemblies, speeches and other “radical” events on campus, then turned over their findings to the committee. Supplementing these were copious lists of dozens of notable figures, deemed “radical” by the committee, who had spoken at mandatory assemblies on campus in the previous several years. Most of their typed biographies were marked by a hand-scrawled “RED” label.⁴⁵ Similarly, authors of books found on shelves of the school library, and deemed improper by committee members, were grouped under five categorical headings: “Communists, Socialists, Atheists, Un-American Pacifists, or Free-Love Champions.”⁴⁶ Biographical information about the authors and speakers, establishing their “red” credentials, came from a variety of sources, including congressional reports and privately published findings of professional red-baiters, some of whom then enjoyed national reputations in super-patriot conservative circles.

The resulting work product, essentially a long list of annotated biographies, mimicked the format and style of national red-baiting provocateur Elizabeth Dilling’s immensely popular, thinly researched book, *The Red Network*.⁴⁷ That book, in fact,

⁴⁵ As an example, Fred Shorter, former pastor of Pilgrim Congregational Church in Seattle, is described as delivering a baccalaureate speech at the Normal in June, 1933, at which he “attempted to compare Karl Marx with Jesus Christ. He is a well-known radical agitator.” “Persons Who Have Addressed Assembly, Bellingham State Normal,” box 1, folder 5, Bellingham Herald collection on Fisher.

⁴⁶ Examples in a “Pro-Soviet and Free Love” authors list: “John Strachy: Notorious English Red. Upton Sinclair: Noted American Red. Samuel D. Schmaulhausen: Noted Red, free love advocate and atheist. John Dewey: Radical, pro-Soviet, Atheist. Teacher of Communism. Once a reputable author and teacher.” The list ends with a notation: “Few, if any, books exposing un-American activities have been found in the Normal Library” Box 1, folder 5, Bellingham Herald collection.

⁴⁷ Elizabeth Dilling, *The Red Network: A Who’s Who And Handbook of Radicalism For Patriots* (Chicago: Published by the Author, 1934). The book identified 460 communist-controlled public or private organizations and 1,300 politicians, intellectuals, writers, journalists, entertainers and others as “red.” Its title appears in several places in notes among the Sefrit documents, such as the above-referenced Student L.I.D., handbook, upon which is written: “See LID, Red Network, for this organization.” “Handbook of the Student League for Industrial Democracy,” box 1, folder 5, Bellingham Herald collection. Fisher kept a copy of the book in his desk as a reference to enforce a new policy by the trustees, after the charges filed

appears to have been source material for some of the red-credential biographies assembled by the committee and presented as “evidence” to college trustees. Other sources for biographical information named by the committee included the *American Labor Year Book* and *American Labor Who’s Who*, as well as official reports of the New York State “Lusk Report” and the numerous hearings of the House Special Committee on Communist Activities presided over by Hamilton Fish III.⁴⁸

The foot soldiers in this complex project – as noted by the Sefrits themselves in their legal files, as noted above — included numerous behind-the-scenes members of local super-patriot women’s groups – the Daughters of the American Revolution, the American Legion Auxiliary, and eventually, a newer conservative women’s group, “Pro-America.” Other male volunteers were connected to a group that served as an additional driving force in the effort: the “Americanization Committee” of the local American Legion.⁴⁹ Still others – in fact, the smaller core of men forming the “face” of the

against Fisher in 1935, to avoid inviting speakers at the college who were listed in the book. “Persons Listed in ‘Red Network’ Couldn’t Talk At Fisher’s College,” *The Seattle Star*, June 28, 1939.

⁴⁸ Additional sources of information listed in the files included: literature and data sheets from Fred Marvin, national secretary of the American Coalition of Patriotic Societies; reports from Francis Ralston Welsh of Philadelphia, “long a patriotic research authority on subversive activities;” documentary files of the Advisory Associates, Chicago; data furnished by the Better America Federation of California; and “other reliable sources.” “Persons Who Have Addressed Assembly: Bellingham State Normal,” box 1, folder 5, Bellingham Herald collection.

⁴⁹ Bellingham police officer William Kaigler, chairman of the Americanization Committee of the local American Legion, was an outspoken critic of Fisher who publicly lambasted the president at a meeting of a business group, the Washington Club, in spring, 1938. “Persons Listed in ‘Red Network’ Couldn’t Talk At Fisher’s College,” *The Seattle Star*, June 28, 1939. The inclusion of groups such as Daughters of the American Revolution and the American Legion Auxiliary in the anti-Fisher campaign is consistent with anti-communist activities of both groups, nationally, during the same period. The American Legion, then one million members strong, was described by the American Civil Liberties Union as a group ‘superseding even the Ku Klux Klan in intolerance and active repression.’ Women’s affiliate groups of these national bodies “emphasized patriotism in schooling and among children, thereby focusing their efforts on issues traditionally associated with and entrusted to women.” Timothy Reese Cain, “Little Red Schoolhouses?”

committee — were businessmen, physicians, ministers and property owners. One committee member who would sign the formal charges against Fisher and appear at the hearing before trustees, Solomon Blanton Luther, was a self-described Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan who appeared to have a less-than-active role in the effort, at least in terms of research and communications by the committee that are evident in Sefrit's committee files.⁵⁰ Others were not volunteers at all, but employees of Sefrit in some capacity. Unlike the contemporaneous red-scare escapades being orchestrated personally by fellow newspaperman William Randolph Hearst, Sefrit seemed to draw a line at involving his own reporters in activities that might be construed as misrepresenting the newspaper, or even “spying” on college activities.⁵¹ There was one exception: The files contain an affidavit from Sefrit's youngest son, Ben, then a reporter at the newspaper,

Anti-Communists and Education in an “Age of Conflicts,” in Robert Justin Goldstein, ed., *Little Red Scares: Anti-Communism and Political Repression in the United States, 1921-1946*, (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2014), 108.

⁵⁰ Luther, described in Sefrit's notes only as a significant downtown real estate owner, left no trace of involvement in the committee's work in the newly discovered archival files, beyond putting his name to the charging document delivered to Normal trustees in April 1935. While Luther's presence on the committee, and his self-professed KKK affiliation, have long been reported by media as evidence of organized, active Klan participation in the anti-Fisher effort, Luther's name appears nowhere else in primary documents connected to the case. Luther's official status with the KKK, if any, in the mid-1930s is unclear, as no Whatcom County KKK records from that period are known to exist. Census and other records indicate Luther, born in 1889 in North Carolina, served as a Sergeant in the U.S. Army Air Service in World War I. He later moved to Bellingham to live at 212 Grand Avenue with his uncle, Thomas P. Luther, who owned several properties in downtown Bellingham, which later were managed by S. Blanton Luther. The properties passed to Blanton Luther upon his uncle's death in 1933. One of the downtown buildings, at 115 West Magnolia Street, still bears the Luther family name.

⁵¹ Hearst's national red scare erupted as a response to a general strike that grew out of the West Coast longshoreman's strike of 1934 in his home base of San Francisco. Reporters at Hearst newspapers across the country during the same year were ordered to pose as students at U.S. colleges, hoping to bait professors into making provocative statements that then could be twisted into “evidence” of communism on campuses in sensational, front-page news stories. Milton Mayer, “The Red Room,” *The Massachusetts Review* 16, no. 3 (July 1, 1975): 520–50. Much of the product of these “investigations” was reprinted in the Hearst-owned *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*.

attesting to witnessing an address by pacifist speaker J.J. Handsaker on campus, as well as other allegedly nefarious campus activities, such as the posting of foreign-travel brochures to destinations such as Russia on school billboards by the company Intourist.⁵² A substantial number of documents in the collection also chronicle the April 10, 1935 address in Bellingham of nationally known peace activist Kirby Page. The address, like others, was transcribed in its entirety by a court reporter, apparently at Sefrit's behest, then notarized and filed away.⁵³

Other helpful hands in the campaign against Fisher brought their own motivations: Several women, often referred to derisively as "she-devils" by faculty members and other community members, found in the committee a useful outlet for revenge on Fisher for perceived slights.⁵⁴ The women closely followed Fisher's every move for years, attending his school's weekly assemblies, shadowing him to meetings of a city zoning commission on which he briefly served, and maintaining what bordered on

⁵² "The poster was similar to those I have seen exposed by a Seattle newspaper," Ben Sefrit reported. "Statement of Ben H. Sefrit," box 1, folder 7, Bellingham Herald collection.

⁵³ Many other transcriptions and documents intended to be introduced as exhibits in the Fisher matter similarly bore the stamp of a notary public. Sefrit also hired court reporters and others to listen to and transcribe daily KVOS Radio broadcasts from 1934 to 1937. These were also notarized to establish their authenticity. This collection is archived in the Bellingham Publishing Company records. Additional KVOS news transcripts — raw copies that include handwritten editing notes, presumably from host Leslie Darwin — are found in that collection and in the Rogan Jones Papers at the same archive, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Bellingham, WA.

⁵⁴ The "she-devils" reference is made by numerous witnesses, but appears in a tape-recorded interview of former faculty member Miriam Mathes, taped interview by Jackie Lawson, Nov. 17, 1970, box 28, folders 4 and 7, Rogan Jones Papers. (The 1970 recordings of contemporary witnesses to the Fisher affair were made by members of a Western Washington University journalism class, presumably taught by a KVOS employee working as an adjunct instructor.)

surveillance of the college president's public life.⁵⁵

Perhaps the most-active of these, identified in many documents and newspaper articles only as "Mrs. Jenkins," was Alma M. "Mrs. George A." Jenkins, whose property at 429 Normal Drive in Bellingham was in a neighborhood targeted for expansion by the growing school in the 1920s. The couple, among the last holdouts, sold their land to the college in 1929 after an extended negotiation that apparently left Alma Jenkins with a thorough distaste for Fisher's management style.⁵⁶ Alma Jenkins devoted countless hours to hounding Fisher from that point forward.

Another woman widely credited with being an anti-Fisher "she-devil" was Catherine Montgomery, a founding Normal School faculty member who worked as Supervisor of Primary Grades at the Campus School. Montgomery, after butting heads with Fisher over various matters for years, resigned in 1926, vowing on her way out the door of a trustees meeting that she "would do all in her power to defeat the work of the President."⁵⁷ Montgomery's stance against Fisher became well-known. "She was very

⁵⁵ Without providing a name, English professor Moyle Cederstrom described one of the disaffected female employees as a "self-appointed spy" obsessed with documenting "subversive" activity on campus. "Even after I came here in 1935, she would attend student and artists' lectures, and sometimes even regular classes if she could get in, and take notes on what was being said, then turn her notes over to anti-Fisher forces downtown." The description fits Jenkins and disgruntled former faculty member Catherine Montgomery, who some former faculty members said attended some events together. Cederstrom interview, 1970.

⁵⁶ Other property owners in the neighborhood during this period had complained vociferously that the Normal School's expansionist surge, which included acquiring properties by purchase or condemnation, bordered on bullying. Specifically, while reimbursing land owners for property, it stripped them of vital income renting out rooms to students. The Jenkins couple, which had owned a number of properties adjacent to the school when it was developed, held out against this push until 1929, when they sold their lot-and-a-half for \$24,000. The house, utilized briefly as a boarding facility, was demolished in 1931 to make way for campus expansion. Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Bellingham State Normal School, March, 1929, Western Washington University Archives & Records Center.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

bitterly against him,” said former Bellingham Postmaster Vaughan Brown. She had been let off [placed on leave] ... when on vacation. I imagine she could probably muster considerable sentiment among the women’s organizations.”⁵⁸ Other faculty members of the era offered similar observations in oral histories, recalling Jenkins’ borderline-obsessive hounding of Fisher – and her sometimes shockingly abrasive arch-conservatism. Longtime history professor Keith Murray recounted a campus address by civil rights activist Walter Francis White, executive director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), at an assembly at which Montgomery made a comment that produced audible gasps in the room. “He [White] was denouncing lynchings,” Murray recalled. “And she said, ‘I think a few lynchings keeps the niggers in their place.’” Murray said White responded: “Well, Madam, one of the good things about America is that we can disagree.”⁵⁹ Montgomery’s role in aiding in Fisher’s demise is not well-documented; her name does not appear in the Sefrit files, although her status as a bitterly disaffected ex-faculty member is made clear in college records.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Vaughan Brown, interviewed by Don DeMarco, Nov. 19, 1970, box 28, folder 7, Rogan Jones Papers. Another Bellingham businessman of the era, Bill Follis, gave a similar account of Montgomery, saying she frequently shadowed Fisher to public zoning commission meetings and sat in the front row, taking notes. “They were very antagonistic against him,” Follis said of the aggrieved female opponents of Fisher. Bill Follis, interviewed by Jim Diedrick, Dec. 1, 1970, box 29, folder 5, (cassette tape), Rogan Jones Papers.

⁵⁹ Florence M. (Smith) Lowe, interviewed by Keith Murray, Dr. James W. Scott, and Jim Moore, August 1988, box 3, folder 6, Series I, Transcripts and Summaries, Western Washington University Centennial Oral History Project Records, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Bellingham, WA, 46-47. The comment comes from an exchange between interviewer Murray, then a professor emeritus of history at Western Washington University, and interview subject Lowe, a 1935 graduate of Bellingham Normal School, as they are reminiscing about persistent opponents of President Fisher. The date of the assembly in question is not known; White served as head of the NAACP from 1931 to 1955.

⁶⁰ Fisher placed Montgomery on indefinite leave of absence in 1926, prompting her to request a personal hearing with the board of trustees. At a board meeting on Dec. 23, 1926, chairman W.D. Kirkpatrick, preemptively informed Montgomery that the president “must have people working for him who co-operate

The most active woman in the group, however, appears to have been Jenkins, who would become a witness in Sefrit's presentation of charges against Fisher to the Normal trustees. Her most significant field report was an account of making her way into a meeting of the above-referenced Social Science Club in Edens Hall on Dec. 11, 1934.⁶¹ According to Jenkins' account of the meeting, Merwin Cole, a communist organizer from Seattle, addressed the group about numerous injustices being carried out around the country, including 32 people "shot in the back by special police" at a recent [presumably longshoreman's] labor demonstration in San Francisco. He warned against the rise of vigilante justice, and "begged" students to join labor in the fight against capitalist abuses. The movement already was underway 85 miles to the south, Cole said. "We have a thriving organization in Seattle," he said. "It may make history. I hope so. Whenever anything happens, 'they' raise a 'Red' scare, when there isn't a 'Red' within twenty miles! There usually IS one, though. (Laughter)."⁶²

Cole, according to Jenkins, then discussed with the students the Roslyn, Kittitas County, miner's strike and subsequent prosecution of mine workers, about six months

and support his policies." Montgomery then "made a lengthy statement in which she showed conclusively [*sic*] that she and the President could not work together. She said that she did not want to be reinstated because she did not care to work with the President." Minutes of the Board of Trustees, December 1926, Western Washington University Archives.

⁶¹ "Notes on an address given by Merwin Cole, of Seattle, December 11, 1934, in the Club Room of Eden's Hall, Bellingham Normal School," Box 1, folder 5, Bellingham Herald collection. While this report is unsigned, other documentation indicates it is the first-person account of Alma Jenkins, who attended the meeting. The Normal School trustee's response to the charges from the Committee on Normal Protest also identify Jenkins as the eyewitness at the meeting, reporting that she had been "tipped off" about a controversial speaker. "Minutes of the Hearing Conducted by the Complaint Committee," box 1, folder 8, Bellingham Herald collection.

⁶² "Notes on Address Given by Merwin Cole."

prior. Cole described the legal system prosecuting the strikers as a farce, the process rigged by local business interests. He described one of the prisoners, Milton Caris, as a defenseless, 16-year-old boy. Cole urged the club members to send telegrams to the persecuted, young communists in Ellensburg, expressing sympathy, and to the prosecuting attorney to protest the persecution of “Communist prisoners.” The request, said Jenkins, was met with a show of hands, in agreement, by five students (of 35 present) indicating they would do so.⁶³ In a separate account, student Florence (Smith) Lowe, recalls being invited to the same meeting, or a very similar meeting, by a classmate, Einar Larson, another officer in the Social Science Club. “I met them [Larson and friends] around school,” she said. I was working in the library and so on, and they asked me and someone else to go to a meeting. My goodness, we got there and were amazed. I never had anything farther to do with it, and I don’t think he had any success with forming a [communist] group. Certainly, President Fisher didn’t know about it! It was just something that nobody was interested in.”⁶⁴

Other work product of the anti-Fisher committee was more pedestrian – letters back and forth to Normal officials and other state educational leaders to ascertain, for example, whether the Bellingham School’s enrollment, which dipped during the Depression, was sagging worse than its two peer state institutions. (At issue here was Sefrit’s charge that Fisher’s unpopularity was having a direct impact on enrollment at the

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Florence M. (Smith) Lowe, interviewed by Keith Murray, Dr. James W. Scott, and Jim Moore, August, 1988. Lowe said she thought the sum total of communist-inspired students on campus at the time was “about three people. It was just something that nobody was interested in.” In addition to Larson, she named a student organizer named William Pierron.

institution. Fisher and trustees responded that the dip was more likely caused by changing state standards for teacher certification.) Some outgoing communiques were simple attempts to verify committee members' suspicions that a particular author or speaker was, indeed, "red," in the eyes of people consulted in the home cities of those in question. Also present were numerous communications with former students and faculty members attempting to document rumors about various tiffs involving Fisher over his tenure. A few of these bore fruit that Sefrit deemed worthy of including in his laundry list of transgressions; most did not.⁶⁵

Sefrit synthesized all of this information and, eventually, discussed with committee members a specific strategy. The cache of documents made public in 2013 makes this strategy clear for the first time. The group would present a prosecution-style case in a private hearing to the board of trustees to demand Fisher's ouster, backed up by substantial "exhibits" proving the case. If or when the board failed to dispatch Fisher, the offensive would be redirected to the state capitol in Olympia. Governor Martin, Sefrit believed, would peruse all the evidence and testimony, see the board's malfeasance in failing to act upon it, and use this as justification to replace the entire board with new trustees willing to fire Fisher.⁶⁶ A note jotted by Sefrit spells out the scheme:

In my opinion, the following procedure should be taken: 1. Send the copy of the [hearing] transcript to Governor Martin so that he may look it over and get a

⁶⁵ For example, the committee's attempts to solicit stories from alumni about alleged misconduct of Fisher or faculty members resulted mostly in letters describing a few commonplace grievances and disagreements, but little presentable evidence of "seditious" activity.

⁶⁶ Washington state law at the time gave the governor full authority to appoint and remove board members without a hearing for malfeasance, or any other reason. Changing the law would become a focus of Fisher and his defenders after his departure in 1939.

general impression from it. If I am not mistaken, he will be convinced from the statements made and attitude of the Board of Trustees that they were attempting in every way to defend Fisher and were unwilling to have facts disclosed that would [illegible] light on the whole situation. This will be a basis upon which to defend his action in creating a new Board.⁶⁷

Sefrit's broader strategy, outlined in the same memo, included submitting to the governor the same evidentiary exhibits presented to the board of trustees, including: Clips from the Northwest Viking student paper; a list of "radical" speakers "who have appeared upon the assembly program in the past three years, and their ratings by *The Red Network* and other sources; and a list of "radical" books found in the library and recommended for reading by school staff. Next, Sefrit recommended including in the package of materials to be sent to the governor a full roster of committee members who levied the charges. As written:

Frank I. Sefrit, Manager Bellingham Herald
 Mrs. C.X. Larrabee, Civic and Religious Leader
 Dr. McCartney, Ministerial Association
 Dr. McLeod, former Commander of American Legion Post and representative from the Elks Lodge
 Mr. Victor Roth, Representative from the American Legion
 Mrs. Max Davis, Representative from the American Legion Auxiliary
 Dr. Tom Chandler, retired teacher, former member of the University of Kansas Regents and Supt of the Kansas School for the Blind
 A.W. Deming, V. pres, Pacific American Fisheries
 Frank Brooks, leading businessman and civic worker
 Blanton Luther, one of Bellingham's largest business district property owners
 Mrs. Tom Chandler, representative of Bellingham D.A.R.

⁶⁷ Untitled notes, cursive, box 1, folder 5, Bellingham Herald collection. It is clear that these notes, though undated, were written after the Normals trustees issued a written response to charges laid out at the May 22, 1935 Fisher hearing: They contain notations citing pages and lines from that hearing's transcript, produced six weeks after the hearing, of points Sefrit intended to make with the governor to pursue his plan. The handwriting appears to match Sefrit's cursive on other documents bearing his name, and their content strongly suggests that he, as head of the committee, is the author.

P.E Healy, former Secretary of Chamber of Commerce ⁶⁸

This undated list of 12 names, compiled at least six weeks after the filing of official charges against Fisher, doubles the previously known list of committee members willing to submit their names to the governor.⁶⁹ It also incorporates support for the committee's activities by two true pillars of the community: Deming, an officer with one of the city's primary industries, the massive Pacific American Fisheries cannery in Fairhaven, and Frances Payne (Mrs. Charles X.) Larrabee, a wealthy, well-known, highly respected philanthropist and socialite. Larrabee, known for her decades of civic activism and charity, had helped establish many Bellingham civic institutions, including the city's YWCA chapter and its landmark building. She also had continued to operate her husband Charles's business empire, which included real estate development, railroads, fisheries, land speculation and mining, for two decades after his death in 1914. The Larrabees owned the statuesque Hotel Fairhaven, in which they lived for many years, and built the large, Carl Gould-designed estate now known as Lairmont Manor in the city's upper-crust, seaside Edgemoor neighborhood. Twenty acres of family owned waterfront property on scenic Chuckanut Bay was donated in 1915 to the state, and became Larrabee State Park, Washington's first.

⁶⁸ Untitled notes, cursive, box 1, folder 5, Bellingham Herald collection. The names appear here exactly as written. The last name of John Robertson Macartney is misspelled in the document. The list was followed by the notation: State to the governor that the Board ... made a transcript of the hearing and wrote their 'findings' with no reference to the facts brought out or to the evidence submitted in form of 'exhibits.' An additional note directed: "Submit Mrs. [Alma] Jenkins affidavit describing Fisher's verbal attack on her including his statement of 'liar.'" Sefrit made several references to this incident in the documents. Details surrounding this alleged incident remain unclear. Untitled notes, box 1, folder 5, Bellingham Herald collection.

⁶⁹ Ibid. A letter accompanying the official charges submitted to the board of trustees would be signed only by Sefrit, Macartney, Healy, Luther, McLeod, and Brooks.

While it is potentially perilous to assume an active role in the Fisher campaign by Frances Larrabee based solely on the presence of her name on a roster, her family did have reasons to be uniquely interested in any rumored communist uprising at the local Normal school: One of the Larrabee family's oldest Washington state business holdings, dating to 1904, was the Roslyn Cascade Coal Co., located in the same Kittitas County fields struck by a newly formed union, the Western Miners of America, in 1934. The strike, and subsequent crackdown against workers, created the violent picket-line clashes described above by Sefrit's editor friend in Ellensburg. It also sparked the passions of a young Seattle communist agitator seeking solidarity with Bellingham college students at a meeting of the Social Science Club in Edens Hall on Dec. 11, 1934.⁷⁰ In addition, while existing historical accounts of Frances Larrabee's life indicate a lifelong affiliation with the Republican Party, she is remembered as a "hot supporter," during the 1930s, of conservative Democratic Governor Clarence Martin, who ultimately would order Fisher's removal.⁷¹ Mrs. Larrabee also was a noted organizer of at least five women's groups in

⁷⁰ In an unusual alliance, the existing union, the United Mineworkers, sided with management during the violent strike of 1934. Mrs. Larrabee's son, Charles, was president of the Roslyn-Cascade Coal Company during the strike, when the Committee on Normal Protest became active in 1934-35. He testified on behalf of *The Herald's* radio-station licensing application filed with the FCC in Oct., 1934; attorneys for Rogan Jones noted the advantages that would flow to Larrabee family holdings in Whatcom County with revival of local political control by "political henchmen of the Bellingham Publishing Company." "Statement of Facts, Intervenor's Rebuttal Brief," box 1, folder 9, Bellingham Publishing Company records. See also Larrabee business records, 1890-1991, Larrabee family papers, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham WA.

⁷¹ "Larrabee, Frances Payne (1867-1941): Community Builder and Consummate Clubwoman," HistoryLink.org Essay 8603, http://www.historylink.org/index.cfm?DisplayPage=output.cfm&file_id=8603. The article notes that when Mrs. Larrabee died at age 74 in June 1941, *The Bellingham Herald*, in a front page eulogy, stated that "Probably no other woman in the Northwest worked more diligently and consistently for the civic and general good than Mrs. Larrabee."

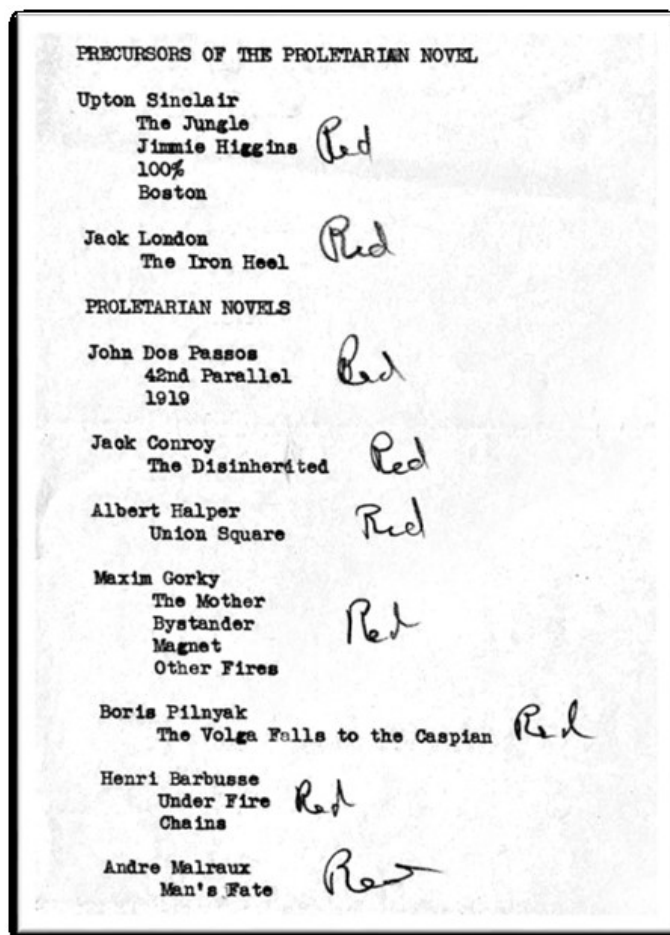
Bellingham. In the late 1930s, one of these was a new conservative group, “Pro-America,” some members of which were active in the anti-Fisher campaign.⁷² The national Pro-America group was described as “a national organization of Republican women pledged to uphold the Constitution of the United States, with its American traditions and ideals, and to combat all destructive influences which will imperil the sacred heritage of liberty bequeathed to us by our forefathers.”⁷³ Frances Payne Larrabee served as the chapter’s founding president. Her presence on any committee seeking to dislodge Fisher would have provided a significant boost in political muscle, particularly if she already had the ear of the governor.

In his desire to unseat Fisher, Sefrit, it seems safe to say, now had ample political firepower at its disposal. His group represented some of the leading power brokers – and

⁷² “Chapter Organized: Mrs. C.X. Larrabee President of Pro-America Unit,” *The Bellingham Herald*, Feb. 6, 1939. The handwritten date on the article, contained in a clip file about the Fisher case in WWU Archives, may be in error. The story could not be located on microfiche editions of *The Herald* for that date, nor on surrounding days. It seems probable that the group, cited by several sources as being influential in taking up the fight against Fisher in the late 1930s, was organized earlier than the year of his departure. The article indicates 25 founding members, including officers Mrs. Thad McGlenn, vice president; Mrs. William Healy, secretary; Mrs. Laurence Ellis, treasurer, and Mrs. Frank Burghoffer, publicity chairman. The latter officer was an outspoken Fisher opponent who attempted to spread word of his “sedition” to conservative national organizations statewide. Box 1, folder 3, Bellingham Herald Collection.

⁷³ *Ibid.* The new local chapter was assisted by members of the Seattle Pro-America chapter, formed in 1932, which claimed 600 members at the time. The Seattle visitors told the Bellingham women that the group was “sweeping the country,” and was formed partially to protect women’s large investments in America’s collective wealth, including a claimed 40 percent of national real estate, 65 percent of private savings, and 44 percent of utilities stocks. Historian Michelle M. Nickerson describes the Seattle-based Pro-America as an “anti-New Deal” and “anticommunist” women’s organization that would set the stage for similar Cold War groups. Michelle M. Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012), 76.

most enthusiastically self-motivated citizens – in the state’s fourth-largest city, at a time when no governor relying on a fragile political coalition could afford to turn a deaf ear.



Frank Sefrit's committee combed through college library books, assembling lists of "Red"-tainted materials. (Bellingham Herald collection on Charles H. Fisher, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Western Washington University.)

The fact that much of Sefrit’s evidentiary arsenal, real and imagined, was kept from public view was in keeping with the editor’s historical *modus operandi* of melding deft, behind-the-scenes political manipulation with daily newspaper journalism that allowed politics to inform its coverage. Outwardly reluctant but inwardly agreeable to a captainship of the anti-Fisher forces, he set about writing the list of charges that would

come to define, rightly or wrongly, Fisher's legacy at his beloved Normal school, soon to become Western Washington College of Education. Formulating the thoughts that would form the basis of his oral attack, Sefrit in early 1935 found time between his dueling roles as newspaper editor, courtroom plaintiff and defendant, and committee chairman, to type a lengthy essay. It summarized his concerns about Fisher's reign at the local college, and about unsettling trends in education, morality and government nationwide.⁷⁴ His comments are notable in that they place America's public-school teachers in the same critical role as defenders and protectors of American democracy during troubled times as had Fisher's writings of the same era, albeit for radically different reasons:

Now, why do we have agitation for teacher's oaths laws? Is it not because teachers in large numbers in colleges, universities and Normal schools are teaching or encouraging the teaching of subversive doctrines against the government that supports them? Is it not that this menace to the youth has awakened the public to the dangers of these communistic-socialistic propagandists? Patriotic America [*sic*] teachers should help clean up the "reds" of their membership, for if this is not done the teaching bodies will be liable to fall under the suspicion attaching to so many institutions of learning today. Boards of education will be scrutinizing teacher's schools to see with of them are recruiting stations for the pinks and reds.

Red agitators in America demand free speech for the purpose of tearing down the government whose laws guarantee free speech. And they do it while holding up as an exemplary system the Government of the Soviet which denies free speech and free assemblage ... The right of the people *peaceably* to assemble does not mean to assemble and threaten government instrumentalities. One cannot be a loyal American and a communist or a communist sympathizer or defender.

Millions of young men and young women of America, now attending many of the colleges, universities and teachers' training schools, are being wrongfully injured

⁷⁴ The untitled and undated typed essay, reproduced only in part here, is labeled at its end, in handwriting, "Written by F.I.S. for use in Fisher hearing at Normal." Many of the themes presented here became, almost word for word, part of Sefrit's oratorical flourishes before the board of trustees on May 22, 1935, and are evident in the transcript of that hearing. Untitled, typewritten notes ending with above notation, box 1, folder 5, Bellingham Herald collection.

and permanently influenced by insidious teachings in classroom and assembly. They know so little about their own government that they fail to grasp the meaning of subversive teaching until they themselves are enlisted in a battle against their own country.

Ask the average student the sources of our national life and the vision of our forefathers and he will tell you about the Boston Tea Party and the Battle of Bunker Hill. But he knows much about Soviet Russia.

Many colleges and universities are now under investigation for communist activities. In some colleges, especially those training teachers, loyal teachers are aiding in purging the schools of the reds. They do it as a matter of self protection as well as patriotism. School boards are taking note of radical colleges and refusing to hire teachers therein trained.⁷⁵

The manuscript then turned its focus to local matters:

While department of justice officials were deporting Strachy, Dr. Fisher was entertaining Strachy's lieutenant (Miss Lee) and introducing her generously to inexperienced boys and girls at the Bellingham State Normal. And what an impression she made! (See Viking) ...

Mothers and fathers of many of the students have made great sacrifices to send their son or daughter to the Normal. They are entitled to have the minds of these young people safeguarded rather than poisoned by the virus [*sic*] of these organized international socialists, pinks and reds...

Dr. Fisher's encouragement of the Red pacifists is an affront, if not an insult, to the fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, wives and children of every American who has borne arms in his country's behalf. It is likewise an offense to every American who cherishes the memory of the great Americans who have led and supported the soldiers of our various wars. It is not true peace these radicals are striving for. They want America to disarm so as to lessen resistance to those who would overthrow American institutions. Dr. Fisher, from a school that is sustained by taxes, encourages those who would break down the very instrumentalities that make this taxation possible.

The reputation and honor of the Bellingham State Normal can only be preserved by ridding the institution of those who are foes of the American system of government. It is basely unfair to the many loyal teachers of the Normal that their situations are being jeopardized by the enervating, devitalizing, subversive policies of a handful of radicals led by the President of the institution and by the

⁷⁵ Ibid.

president of the present student body. For if there is not a ridding of the Bellingham State Normal of those persons the school will cease to exist. It will cease to exist because parents will not risk placing their children under the shadow of a radical administration.⁷⁶

After a series of additional statements about the spread of communism, and about specific incidences on the Normal's campus, Sefrit's essay turned to the heart of the matter of his dispute with Fisher, and with "progressive" education writ large:

Suppose an enemy, making war upon this country, were to demand an opportunity to place its recruiting agents in our educational institutions, and demand this on the grounds of free speech, would we tolerate this? And yet, when a protest is made against these agents and preachers of un-American doctrines . . . in this country they at once appeal to the Constitution on the grounds that it guarantees free speech and freedom of assembly. It is not a question of freedom of speech. No government can extend its rights to those would destroy it.

There is a vast difference between explaining an idea in economics or sociology, and advocating it. A teacher should be competent to explain such things. Why employ, or invite proponents of an idea and leave with the student uncontroverted exparte statements of the propagandist? Why should foreigners be invited here to preach their own ideas of government when these ideas clash with American ideals and foundations? . . . If it is all right and proper to place on the library shelves for student use books by radicals and freelovers and atheists, why should not at least an equal number of books be available that counteract and expose these influences?⁷⁷

As these notes indicate, the disparate ideologies and world views of forces represented by Fisher and Sefrit — several turbulent decades in the making — had finally neared a collision point in Bellingham.⁷⁸ The impact would be resounding when the

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ "At that time, there was a group of people who thought that anybody who didn't belong to the conservative wing of the Republican party was just automatically a communist," recalled Vaughan Brown, city postmaster from 1934 to 1939. "I remember a float in a Republican parade one time that had a big sign on it: 'All Democrats are communists.'" Vaughan Brown interview, Rogan Jones Papers.

Committee on Normal Protest filed ten official charges against Charles Fisher on April 10, 1935, with the only acceptable remedy being his removal from office.

Chapter 5

“Court” In Session: May 22, 1935

Like most other elements of the Fisher case, the most-telling glimpse into the clashing world views possessed by the college president and his political foes would play out in private. A list of 10 “charges” against Fisher finally were heard at a May 22, 1935 quasi-trial, witnessed only by Fisher, a half-dozen of his accusers, a court reporter, and the Bellingham State Normal School’s three-member board of trustees. For more than 75 years, the official record of this proceeding – closed to the public and press at the behest of Frank Sefrit, Fisher’s primary accuser, with acquiescence from Trustees – was lost. Students of the Fisher case were left to imagine what transpired at the hearing using the only records available – the pre-hearing letter listing the 10 official charges against Fisher by the Committee on Normal Protest, and the Board of Trustees’ written response to same, issued about a month later. Not until 2013, when a complete, typed (original) transcript of the nearly five-hour meeting made its way to a Bellingham public archive did the full proceeding come into public view.¹ This document, the only known copy of

¹ See Chapter 3 for details of the provenance of the files. The original transcript at the Center for Pacific Northwest Studies is the only known copy. But some or all of the document, titled “Minutes of the Hearing Conducted by the Complaint Committee, May 22, 1935,” might have later been made by another active red-baiting party, this one sanctioned by the Washington state legislature. Among the correspondence in the *Bellingham Herald* collection on Charles H. Fisher is a letter from W.J. Houston, an investigator with the state of Washington’s Albert Canwell Un-American Activities Committee Hearings, conducted in Seattle in summer, 1948. In the letter, Houston thanks Sefrit for providing the committee with materials related to Charles Fisher, who almost a decade after his firing was called as a witness before the Canwell Committee to discuss his role with the allegedly communist affiliated Washington Pension Union. The Houston letter specifically cites as evidence “a handbook of the Student League for Industrial Democracy, Minutes of the Hearing Conducted by the Complaint Committee, and miscellaneous papers.” Houston wrote: “The information was of considerable value, and we have made copies of pertinent parts for future reference.” The materials, provided to an Investigator Pomeroy during a visit to Bellingham, were returned to Sefrit by the Canwell Committee. W.J. Houston to Frank I. Sefrit, March 16, 1948, box 1, folder 3, Bellingham

the transcript typed by court reporter Marion Doty of Mount Vernon, Washington, offers intimate insight into the ideologies of Fisher’s accusers – and a rare, vivid illustration of the president’s strategy to defend himself.

At the hearing, trustees heard a long, verbal assault on Fisher – mostly carried out by Sefrit – that expounded upon 10 formal charges levied against the college president, and “evidence” to support them, in a voluminous April 30, 1935 package from Sefrit’s Committee on Normal Protest. An introductory letter to the charges, along with a separate package of supporting materials, was sent to board chairman W.D. Kirkpatrick, who also was the board’s longest-serving member– and, according to Frank Sefrit’s son, Ben, a close personal friend and personal physician of Frank Sefrit.² Three additional copies of the complaint were attached, according to a letter from Sefrit, who wrote in part:³

I will say to you personally that this organization is a very representative one and you, of course, know all of the members of the committee signing the complaint.

Herald collection on Charles H. Fisher, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Western Libraries Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.

² Ben Sefrit notes the long history between his father and the board chairman in a letter, “To My Sons Barney and George,” written from memory sometime in the 1970s and provided to the author by George Sefrit in March, 2016. Ben Sefrit states in the document, a rough history of his own father’s important role in Bellingham history, intended to be passed down through the family, that Kirkpatrick was one of his father’s “most intimate” friends, and part of a group of friends who loved to hike and climb in the nearby Mount Baker National Forest. The two men also had taken trips together to Alaska as guest of E. B. Deming (brother of Committee on Normal Protest member A.W. Deming) and his company, Pacific American Fisheries. The Fisher case ultimately would challenge the friendship, Sefrit notes. “Dr. Kirkpatrick was taken in by Fisher and would not believe that he had Communist leanings,” Ben Sefrit recalled.

³ “PERSONAL,” Sefrit to W.D. Kirkpatrick, April 30, 1935, box 1, folder 3, Bellingham Herald collection. Sefrit’s letter also noted that he would be happy to share his own materials on identifying communists: “I have also two copies of National Republic containing articles on ‘Enemies Within Our Gates’ which I think you would like to read before a hearing. If you desire these or any additional matter touching subversive activities in colleges, universities and normal schools I have considerable matter on these points.

Our general committee is composed of twelve persons, all of whom understand the importance of privacy of this hearing as they are staunch friends of the Normal. Most of the general committee, in all probability, will attend the hearing.

It is our desire to conduct the hearing in the most orderly fashion possible and to avoid unnecessary personalities. I shall endeavor to cooperate with you in the fullest degree to the end that only material matter and material witnesses be used.

I trust that you will use your best efforts to secure an early hearing which I am sure will prevent certain public action which we could not direct or control.⁴

The cover letter accompanying the general charging document began:

Gentlemen: We respectfully request that you set an early date for hearing complaints against the administration of the Bellingham State Normal School and of activities of President Charles H. Fisher, several members of the faculty and members of the student body that are calculated to seriously and permanently injure the institution. These complaints are specifically enumerated herein. It is our desire that the hearing be not open to the public, or publicly announced, and that those attending be limited to persons who will present the complaint, to a few representatives of the group sponsoring this complaint, to a few necessary witnesses, and to those against whom complaints are herein lodged, together with such persons as the board may desire to attend. Persons uninvited or not summoned, and all reporters, should be excluded from the hearing.

It is furthermore our suggestion that a competent stenographer – preferably a court reporter – be employed to make a record of the hearing, the expense thereof to be shared by complainants and the board. This seems advisable both for the purpose of avoiding dispute as to the testimony, and for use in any proper subsequent action; and that three copies of the proceeding be made – one for the board, one for ourselves, and one for Governor Martin in the event of disagreement and an appeal is deemed advisable by either party or parties hereto.⁵

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid. It is not known whether Fisher or the Trustees objected to the closed meeting; no evidence of discussion of the matter is found in the transcript. Sefrit's files on the Fisher case, included in the cache of documents that became public in 2013, contain correspondence between Sefrit, Vern Branigin and court reporter Marion Doty in the weeks after the hearing; Sefrit requested an update from Branigin on the production of a transcript, of which the two sides ostensibly had agreed prior to the hearing to produce three copies. Branigin responded that the board of trustees "does not care" for one, but would pay the court reporter for her services. Sefrit then arranged for Doty to produce a copy for him, Sefrit paid \$36.45 for the transcript on July 9, 1935. (This presumably is the original, typed copy found in the same set of documents in 2013.) Sefrit to Marion Doty, July 9, 1935, box 1, folder 3, Bellingham Herald collection. Approximately ten months later, a *Bellingham Herald* article about the hearing process, presumably

The letter makes it clear that the anti-Fisher committee was prepared to carry its action forward to the governor – and perhaps to court, and to make all its charges public should the trustees not accede to its demands to remove Fisher from office. Bad publicity resulting from an insufficient result, the group said, might lend credence to calls to close the school – a Depression-era suggestion already made at the state level, to save money:

This complaint is hereby filed in the interest of the Bellingham State Normal with a sincere hope that the proposed hearing will forestall and prevent action of a public character, including court procedure, that might seriously injure the institution, and possibly encourage the agitation for the closing of one of the three Normal schools. A Hearing, conducted in orderly fashion, with a grouping and sifting of various accusations now current, should acquaint your board with such facts as will permit you to determine whether corrective measures are warranted.⁶

The letter characterizes Fisher's Normal school as part of a multi-layered communist plot to overthrow the government of the United States:

It is the sincere belief of this group that Bellingham State Normal is one of a large number of educational institutions of the United States that are being used as recruiting stations for agents and friends of the United Socialist Soviet Republic [*sic*]to foster, encourage and spread subversive doctrines with an intent to overthrow this government. We believe that well known agents of this conspiracy have been invited to address students here, have caused to be placed subversive literature in the hands of students and teachers, have encouraged the forming of at least one Socialist-Communist organization among students, and that this conspiracy has been encouraged by President Fisher and several members of the faculty ...

authored by Sefrit, confirms that after being rebuked by the college, committee members contacted Doty directly about a transcript, and “were told that the stenographic notes had never been taken out of shorthand ... Eventually, and at considerable expense, the Citizen’s Committee secured the first and perhaps only verbatim copy of the proceedings.” “Both Sides of the Question,” *Bellingham Herald*, May 2, 1936. That copy, now in state archives, is marked by occasional handwritten notes, presumably written by Sefrit, preparing the transcript for use as evidence against Fisher and the trustees in later communications with Governor Clarence Martin. Whether Martin ever reviewed the transcript, or received a copy, is unknown.

⁶ Sefrit to Kirkpatrick, April 30, 1935, Bellingham Herald collection.

We further believe that the conduct of President Fisher in antagonizing influential bodies here, and in needlessly antagonizing individuals, has lessened respect for the administration and caused many to withdraw or withhold their support from the school.⁷

The letter explains that attached to the complaint would be three sets of “exhibits,” which board members could review to become familiar with facts and context surrounding charges to be brought forth at the hearing. To wit:

1. This exhibit is a detailing of over fifty (50) anti-American organizations that have been represented officially before the student body in recent years. These are among the most active of the subversive organizations now working in this country and systematically invading colleges, universities and Normal schools.
2. This exhibit contains extracts from patriotic writings that aim to sound a warning against subversive doctrines and activities. You will glean from these very readable extracts definitions of “Socialism,” “Communism” and purposes of these reds, radicals, and Communist-directed Pacifists. If either member of the Board would care to go further into this line of reading, we will supply more material.
3. This exhibit contains a few clippings from the Normal Viking which will show that the virus of the radical teaching and propaganda has reached some of those who prepare material for that student publication. A full file of the Viking has been withheld from this committee. We request that the exhibit containing the Viking clippings be brought to the hearing as this is the only one now available to us and we will ask that it be made part of the record.⁸

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid. These exhibits are not in evidence in the archives of Western Washington University. Presumably the source material for the exhibits includes materials found in the Bellingham Herald Files on Charles H. Fisher, which were made public in 2013.

The letter then provides the committee's intended witness list, requesting the presence of students and faculty members (none of whom were called into attendance by Trustees).⁹

The Committee on Normal Protest then lists its charges against Fisher, under the subheading:

“ITEMS OF COMPLAINT DETAILED:”

The following are subjects of complaint which we now file and ask that there be given opportunity to produce evidence thereof:

1. Numerous executives and members of subversive organizations, and of free-love, atheistic and un-American pacifist organizations, have been invited to address the student body during recent years, while pro-Americans have not appeared on invitation in assembly. The character and activities of these subversive and un-Christian speakers have not been revealed to the students.
2. There has been what appears to be a studied avoidance of having Christian leaders address the student body, though many able ministers and civic and business leaders have been willing to participate in assembly programs, while some lecturers who have appeared have spoken flippantly [*sic*] of Christianity, and have condemned the American economic life.
3. No patriotic meetings or assembly exercises tending to foster patriotic feeling, love of country or respect for American institutions, have been held. The Flag is seldom displayed on campus.
4. An anti-American organization has been formed by a group of students and its meetings are held on the campus. It has been addressed by a notorious radical who is president of the Young Men's Communist League of Seattle. In a fiery address he assulted [*sic*] those charged with enforcing law, referred to Pilgrims as “horse-thieves who come over on the Mayflower,” and advised the club to protest the trial of murderous Communists. This advice was accepted and telegrams were sent to the Judge and Prosecuting attorney demanding dismissal of the prisoners. This student organization circulates the League of

⁹ The list includes Fisher, a member of the library staff (preferably Mabel Zoe Wilson), faculty members Edward J. Arntzen, Nora B. Cummins, Herbert C. Rudnick, C.C. Upshall; and students Gordon Millikan, Rose Works and Ralph Chenenberger, Editor of *The Viking*. “You are not to understand that in requesting opportunity to examine members of the faculty, or of the student body, that we will file charges against either of these at this hearing,” Sefrit wrote. “Their examination will have for its primary purpose the affirming or denying of certain matters touching administration and misconduct.”

Industrial Democracy literature which demands student control of the schools and colleges. The organization continues to hold meetings on the campus. (See *Viking* Clippings).

5. The *Viking*, student newspaper, rebukes newspapers and magazines that warn the public against subversive activities, and recommends books and magazines containing assaults upon the home and American social customs. It also advises resistance to military training in the schools. (See *Viking* clippings).
6. Members of the faculty and President Fisher have sponsored or encouraged subversive speakers. Attendance of students to a meeting of a recent radical-pacifist lecturer was encouraged by President Fisher, his meeting was advertised on the Normal bulletin boards, and from the platform of the assembly. On this occasion a well known pacifist made contemptuous remarks about two great peace-loving Presidents of the United States, and President Roosevelt, and was not rebuked for his shameless allusions.
7. Decline in attendance is traceable in large measure to the loss of public faith in administration of the Normal.
8. The strife-breeding attitude and ungentlemanly conduct of President Fisher shows that he is temperamentally disqualified. This misconduct has lowered respect for the institution, and threatens its security, if not its very life.
9. Students' funds have been misapplied and to no wholesome benefit of those who contribute those funds.
10. Lack of support for President Fisher by large numbers of the alumni, as is revealed by incidents that will be related, is a serious hindrance to the growth and prestige of the Normal.

The letter concludes:

Members of this group have with some difficulty persuaded some accusers of this administration misconduct to refrain from public action that might do great injury to the Normal, and, for this reason, we respectfully request that the time for the Board Hearing be set at the earliest possible date. We suggest further that it be held at the Normal. On two days' notice we will make an appearance,

Respectfully,
 Frank I. Sefrit, Chairman
 John Robertson Macartney

P.E. Healy
Blanton Luther
D.H. McLeod
Frank N. Brooks

Committee on Normal Protest¹⁰

The Hearing Commences

Having absorbed this information, trustees entertained representatives of the group on the evening of May 22, 1935, in the school administration building, later known as Old Main. The private meeting began with a brief discussion of procedure, including what “witnesses” might be called by Sefrit, who opened the meeting by claiming to possess the purest of intentions:

I want to explain to you that as far as members of the committee are concerned, we are trying to come here with absolutely clean hands, void of as much prejudice as can be escaped in presenting a matter of this kind. I did not engage in this thing until the situation arose that made me feel, after talking with some of the others, that it was going to be very difficult to avoid a public action, and my interest in this institution goes back twenty years unbroken, without any clash, until about a year and a half ago, and under those circumstances I wish you would feel that it is not a personal matter as far as we are concerned.¹¹

¹⁰ Ibid. Multiple copies of this letter of charges exist in various historical archives. Some contain very minor differences, suggesting they are earlier drafts. The text here taken from college archives: “Fisher case: Letter of complaint to the Board from Sefrit, April 30, 1935,” President’s Office, Accession 77-30, box 3, Western Washington University Archives. This presumably is the official copy delivered to the Board of Trustees on behalf of its chairman, Vern Branigin. Note: Based on the board of trustees’ subsequent response, it is apparent that not all Committee on Normal Protest members who signed the complaint attended the hearing. Absent from the meeting was letter-signer P.E. Healy, a Bellingham Chamber of Commerce official. And present on behalf of the Committee on Normal Protest were retired Kansas teacher Tom Chandler and businessman A.W. Deming, neither of whom signed the official complaint. Also note that in its written response to the charges, the Board of Trustees, on its own volition, identified Blanton Luther (full name: Solomon Blanton Luther) as “Grand Dragon, Ku Klux Klan,” and Rev. J.R. Macartney as “Presbyterian.” Neither designation is included in the original letter sent to the Trustees. Also note: The last name of John Robertson Macartney is misspelled throughout the transcript and the board of trustees’ response to charges. It has been corrected in both instances in this chapter for purposes of historical accuracy.

¹¹ “Minutes of Hearing Conducted by the Complaint Committee Before the Board of Trustees of the Bellingham State Normal School, May 22, 1935,” box 1, folder 8, Bellingham Herald collection on Charles

Sefrit and Kirkpatrick sparred over the calling of witnesses, with the board chairman making it clear no students or faculty would be called; Sefrit objected, calling their presence “vital,” particularly in establishing details of the December 11, 1934 meeting of the school’s Social Science Club, referenced in the charges against Fisher. “We believe we are prepared to say that the Social Science Club is a local name for the League of Industrial Democracy which is a highly (if I may use the term) ... “Red” organization.”¹² The group, Sefrit charged, “... is devoted not only to the promotion of subversive activities in this country, but that it attempts to take away from the trustees of the various educational institutions, control of those institutions themselves, and put that control largely in the student body.”¹³ Sefrit proceeded to describe material from the L.I.D. organizing manual, including the suggestion that students in colleges not open to such organizations might mask the group’s identity through aliases such as a “Social Science Club.”¹⁴

Sefrit then proceeded to describe the address made to Social Science Club members by communist organizer Merwin Cole. He described Cole as president of the Young Men’s Communist League of Seattle, “one of the most radical organizations on

H. Fisher, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Western Libraries, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.

¹² Minutes of Hearing, 3.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ The L.I.D. manual, according to handwritten notes accompanying it in Sefrit’s files, the Bellingham Herald Collection on Fisher, was “borrowed” from student Rose Works by an acquaintance, apparently without her knowledge. (See Chapter 4.)

the Pacific Coast among the young people.”¹⁵ At the meeting, attended by about 30 students, Cole implored Normal students to intervene in pending legal action following a coal miner’s strike in Roslyn, Kittitas County, Sefrit charged. The strike, Sefrit added, had prompted conduct so offensive that it could not be repeated, “especially the misconduct of women over there.”¹⁶ He then presented evidence, including a copy of a telegram sent from Bellingham, that Normal students had, indeed, sent telegrams about the matter to officials in Kittitas County. It was uncertain whether Fisher knew about the matter, but no one had been reprimanded in its wake, Sefrit charged. “We think it was reprehensible,” he said.¹⁷ Sefrit went on to describe some of Cole’s more-notorious alleged activity in Seattle, detailed in Seattle newspaper articles that described an affiliation of 21 communist groups organized there:

Branigin: Does it say that one of those 28 [*sic*] affiliated groups had anything to do with the Bellingham students?

Sefrit: No. The purpose of presenting it was to show the character of the man brought to address this club, and that the club acted upon his suggestion.¹⁸

Sefrit said the group wanted a list of official members of the Social Science Club, which he said was kept intentionally small, under L.I.D. guidelines, to avoid undue suspicion. The meeting, he said, was attended by “thirty-some” students, but the six members who had raised their hands in agreement to protest the Roslyn miner’s strike prosecutions constituted a majority of actual club members. Members of the club

¹⁵ Minutes of Hearing, 3-4.

¹⁶ Minutes of Hearing, 4.

¹⁷ Minutes of Hearing, 5

¹⁸ Minutes of Hearing, 6.

frequently posted clippings from “radical newspapers” that told of “radical activities” on school bulletin boards, he said. Sefrit said the club’s past president, student Gordon Millikan, when asked in public about inviting a Seattle communist organizer to a club meeting, at first denied it. He later recanted and admitted the club had hosted Cole, Sefrit said. Long after that meeting, the club, later headed by fellow student Rose Works, continued to discuss “radical, revolutionary subjects,” Sefrit charged.¹⁹ “We are positive that it is a near Communist, or Marxian Socialist, organization that is maintained on the campus, and with the knowledge of the administration, the President of this school,” Sefrit said. “I will later on ask Dr. Fisher to try to explain that away.”²⁰

President Fisher, asked by Kirkpatrick if he would like to respond, was cut off by trustee Branigin, a practicing attorney, who suggested he wait until all the charges were aired. “If President Fisher wants to make any explanation to these gentlemen he can make it, and if he does not, I am not asking him to be subject to any examination,” Branigin said. “I don’t know that we have the authority to put Mr. Fisher in the position of answering on the spot without preparation, accusations of this and that and the other thing which may come up at this particular hearing. However, it may be ... beneficial all around for him to do so.”²¹ Sefrit objected, suggesting it would be unfair for Fisher to explain matters to the board later, without his accusers present. Branigin held firm:

¹⁹ Millikan presumably had dropped his leadership of the Social Science Club after being elected student body president.

²⁰ Minutes of Hearing, 7.

²¹ Minutes of Hearing, 8.

I am not in favor of having you put Dr. Fisher or any of the faculty on the stand and asking them inquisitorial questions on matters that they probably are not prepared to meet ... Your charges are generalities in almost every count, with one or two exceptions, and the particularities of these accusations ... are wholly speculative as far as we are concerned.²²

Sefrit continued to press for a response from Fisher about his knowledge of the Social Science Club meeting, prompting Branigin to produce a prepared statement from the trustees about the incident. The board's position on one of the most-controversial charges against the president was read aloud by Branigin:

During the fall quarter of 1934, Merwin Cole, a young Communist, spoke to the Social Science Club in the club room of Edens Hall. It was learned that Merwin Cole was active in the Y.C.L. (Young Communist League). This young fellow was invited to speak to the Social Science Club without the knowledge of the faculty advisor, Mr. T.F. Hunt, or the President of the School. The information that this had happened was gotten through a reference that had been made to it in The Bellingham Herald. As soon as it was known, the President investigated the occurrence and called the officers of the Social Science Club to his office. The officers of the club made a complete statement regarding the affair, and told of other speakers whom they had planned to invite. They were given to understand by the President that such an occurrence could not be repeated, and the officers of the club agreed not to invite any more Communist speakers. This information was conferred to the Board of Trustees, and at an informal discussion the Board of Trustees made it clear that if such an occurrence were repeated, drastic action would be taken against those who were responsible.²³

Branigan then added his own thoughts:

I might say in addition to the Exhibit, that the instructor, T.F. Hunt, was severely reprimanded for not being present at the meeting, and for not knowing in advance – that he was supposed to know in advance and OK the program and speakers at this club. Now I recall personally that in company with Dr. Kirkpatrick and Mr. Saunders that I told the president that if anything of this kind occurred again, that the students would suffer expulsion from the school.

Sefrit: Was there an investigation made of the character of this organization?

²² Minutes of Hearing, 9.

²³ Minutes of Hearing, 10-11.

Branigin: Yes. We were given to understand that this was a club that had been in existence for some time, that it was in the nature of a society such as the literary societies in schools of this kind, of that branch of the students who were taking subjects along that line, or interested in it.²⁴

Sefrit demanded to know whether Branigin believed the club to be a literary society, and whether he had seen the handbook of the Student L.I.D. Branigin said he was finished discussing the matter, at which point Sefrit fired the same questions at Fisher. Fisher said he had read the handbook, supplied to him by trustee Kirkpatrick.

Sefrit: Do you believe that an organization of that kind should be maintained on this campus?

Fisher: No, I do not, and there is no such organization here, absolutely not.²⁵

Fisher acknowledged to Sefrit that “students to whom you refer have made a considerable effort to have a local unit of the L.I.D., which we have forbidden.” The Normal’s student club, he said, thus was not aligned with any national organization.

Sefrit: What information have you on that?

Fisher: I have it directly from them.

Sefrit: Do you regard that as absolutely final?

Fisher: I think they are telling me the truth.

Sefrit: Don’t you know that the policy of these people is denying these things when they are accused of it?

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Minutes of Hearing, 12.

Fisher: I don't think these students would deny that to me, I am sure they would not. I have it from them that there are five students – I have their names – who are members, who took out membership in the L.I.D.²⁶

Fisher, pressed for the student's names, listed Millikan and Works, then only one other student, Wilson Waylett, whom he said had paid membership fees for the national L.I.D. organization. The group responded by sending literature.

Sefrit: And [they] distribute it at the Normal?

Fisher: They get it among themselves; I don't know what they do with it.

Sefrit: You cannot say they do not distribute it?

Fisher: I am making an explanation. I am not here to be questioned by you or any other of your committee. I am willing to make some explanation; I am not going to subject myself to a series of questions.²⁷

Branigin attempted to cut off the increasingly contentious exchange, to no avail.

Fisher: I know these students are individual members and don't have a unit organization, and as a result they have no standing with the national organization because they have not elected officers of their local L.I.D. They are in poor standing with the national organization; they have no local unit, no officers, and they didn't want a student strike ... I know that to be true.

Sefrit: But the knowledge that you have comes from them, is that it?

Fisher: Certainly ... I think they would be willing to go into court and say what they have said to me – under oath.

Sefrit: Would you believe, man to man, a denial of that kind from the person who would send such telegrams as that to a prosecuting attorney and judge of the court?

Fisher: You know they are young students lacking in experience, and they were very easily misled at that meeting that they had on December 11, but they have seen their mistake about that; they would not do such a thing again, I am sure they would not. They had all sorts of plans, they were going to have all sorts of

²⁶ Minutes of Hearing, 12-13.

²⁷ Minutes of Hearing, 13.

speakers; they were going to have a miner from the Roslyn mines. They told me a whole list of speakers. They haven't used one of them because they were forbidden to have them.

Sefrit: I don't want to argue with you. I thought you would answer frankly questions that were put to you.

Fisher: I will make explanations, but I am not going to be subjected to questioning. I don't think you have legal authority to do that.

Sefrit: We come here as friends of this institution to try to clean up a situation that we think is serious, and that is the only reason, and we feel we should have absolute cooperation on that. I think if I were in your position, I ...²⁸

Once again, Branigin attempted to intervene, Telling Fisher and Sefrit, "I think we will have to call a halt on this phase of the examination." The two men paid no heed; Sefrit next suggested that a quid pro quo was in effect, with Fisher buying the cooperation of one of the Social Science Club students by helping him get elected to the office of student body president.

Sefrit: Let the record show the refusal of Dr. Fisher to answer reasonable questions touching his administration, because that is the thing that is at stake.

Fisher: I want it put into the record that I will answer any questions to the authorities to whom I am responsible, and that is the Board of Trustees of this institution and the Governor of the State.

Sefrit: This request for a hearing before the Board of Trustees was to obviate a court action in which a witness can be compelled to attend and answer questions properly presented to him. We think it is very significant that following this meeting with Gordon Millikan, who was president of that organization, had entertained the Communist here personally, he should be elected president of the student body of this school. We hold it to be a very unwholesome influence over the students of this community, because it is publicly and widely known that he is one of this small group of L.I.D. members. Rose Works, who is also a member of the L.I.D. here and operating through the Social Science Club, wrote a number of communications in *The Viking*, the student paper, supporting the Smith Bill that

²⁸ Minutes of Hearing, 14-15.

was introduced in the last legislature, forbidding military training in the schools ... We believe that is subversive, and if that sort of program were carried out in the United States it would destroy the armed forces of this country.²⁹

Sefrit then asked trustees and Fisher who officially “censored” *The Viking* for the school. Fisher responded that the duty fell to its faculty advisor, with Fisher available for additional consultation. Fisher said the Rose Works article about the Smith Bill was never brought to his attention, but that he reviewed *Viking* material “several times a month.” Sefrit said articles from the student paper would be admitted into the record, and noted that student contributors were particularly critical of some articles in *The Saturday Evening Post*, of “the Hearst publications and of the McFadden publications, and others that are at the present time devoting themselves very earnestly to an exposure of subversive activities in the United States.”³⁰ Fisher countered that the newspaper was highly rated by groups including Columbia Press of Columbia University: “I think if our students were to speak they would say that our paper is altogether too conservative; that we restrict them too much,” he said. “They complain bitterly that we hold them down too much, and restrict them too much compared to the way they are treated in other school papers, and I know that is true. We do it to avoid criticism in the community.”³¹

Sefrit: Criticism from whom?

Fisher: Well, from a certain group of people.

Sefrit: Who?

²⁹ Minutes of Hearing, 15-16.

³⁰ Minutes of Hearing, 17.

³¹ Ibid.

Fisher: Well, represented by this group here very largely.³²

Trustee Kirkpatrick then interjected with a question for which Sefrit clearly was prepared: “Do you believe in freedom of the press?” Sefrit responded, “Absolutely.” A discussion ensued:

Kirkpatrick: Wherein, then, does a paper of this kind require suppression?

Sefrit: Let me read into the record this as our opinion of the freedom of the press and of all free speech. Justice Story thus defines the constitutional right of free speech: “Every man shall have the right to speak, write and print his opinions upon any subject whatsoever without fear of restraint, so always that he does not injure any other person in his right, person, property and reputation; and so, always, that he does not thereby disturb the public peace, or attempt to subvert government.”

During all the years that have intervened since this celebrated ruling of Justice Story, no one has thought of contending that the right of free speech went farther than laid down in that ruling; and certainly no person publicly contended that under the Constitution one had the right to advocate the subversion of the government. Now, however, there are organizations like the American Civil Liberties Union that say the right of free speech extends to treason, sedition, and even the opposition to military training, conscription and exercise of police powers against organized opposition to law.

I think that is a very perfect definition of free speech, and when a demand is made to have the right to speak in such a manner as to incite people against the government, then if that is permitted the government permits them to destroy itself, and that is a principle that cannot be tolerated anywhere because no government could exist that extended the right of free speech to the extent of sedition and treason, and it should not be done in this country, and should not be tolerated in this country. Suppose an enemy making war upon this country were to demand an opportunity to place its recruiting agents in our educational institutions, and demanded this on the grounds of freedom of speech, would you tolerate this? And yet, when a protest is made against these agents and preachers of un-American doctrines, and they are forbidden audiences in this country, they at once appeal to the Constitution on the grounds that it grants free speech and freedom of assembly. It is not a question of free speech; no government can extend its rights to those who would destroy it. That is our position on free speech, and I think it is absolutely sound; and of all places it is our feeling that if

³² Ibid.

that is liberalized to the point that it is in this *Viking*, published by this student body, then it is a matter that should be rebuked.

Now the committee is prepared, if the trustees desire to have further information on it, to show that the endorsement that was given by Columbia University to the *Viking* is an endorsement from the Reddest, most un-American educational institution in the United States, and notorious for encouraging just this kind of activities. That is the record that has been supported by Congressional investigations ... and by a number of other active American organizations that are devoting themselves to an exposure of this attempt to Sovietize this country.³³

Sefrit then turned his attention to what he considered another prime slice of evidence against Fisher: the preponderance of Columbia University-educated faculty at the school:

I wish to bring the attention of the trustees to this fact, that when President Fisher became president of this institutions there were three graduates of Columbia University here; that in reducing the force here and making changes, for some reason special favoritism has been given to graduates or those who attended Columbia University, and that there is at present out of a faculty of fifty-eight members, twenty-six Columbians. We are also prepared to show that President Fisher attended Columbia University and that his son at the present time is a student at Columbia University. There will be, a little later, supplements on that, and we think it ties into this program fairly well.³⁴

Sefrit shifted his attention to individual faculty members, describing questions he would have asked them about their respective roles in bringing controversial speakers, such as Kirby Page, to campus or other city venues. “Our opinion,” Sefrit said, “is that those men have given encouragement to subversive influences in this city.” Sefrit also said he had intended to question librarian Mabel Zoe Wilson about the selection process

³³ Minutes of Hearing, 18-19.

³⁴ Minutes of Hearing, 20. An analysis of the Normal School annual catalog for the year 1934-35 indicates that Sefrit’s number was roughly correct; Fisher did not dispute the number of Columbia-connected faculty, but said on many occasions that such a preponderance would not have been unusual at any teacher-training college of that era, given Columbia’s role as the preeminent graduate-level teacher’s college in the nation.

for library books. Fisher responded that book orders come from individual academic departments. Sefrit responded:

There is no thought by the committee that Miss Wilson had any personal initiative in doing this. We would like to have asked her who suggested the purchase of books by Bertrand Russell; by Kirby Page; by Maurice Hindus; by George Sylvester Counts; by John Strachey, recently deported from this country; by Ella Winter; by Maxim Gorky; by William Clark Trow; Upton Sinclair; John D. Passos; Jack Conroy; Abert Halper; Boris Pilnyak; Andrew Malrux; Henry Barbusso (the world's most noted Red). Late books by John Dewey since he became a radical; Samuel D. Schmalhausen. We contend that these books should at least be very carefully censored and that students of the Normal should have their attention called to books that will in a sense counteract the teachings of these radicals and free lovers, fascists and agnostics, so that they may not have an ex parte understanding of subjects such as are taught.³⁵

Fisher reiterated that the books were ordered by faculty, adding: "And they are such books as appear in every college and university library in the United States. Sefrit pounced:

We don't dispute that fact, but it is not a sufficient answer to say that someone else, or some other institution, is placing before students a great number of this subversive, this un-American, free love, atheistic literature unless an equal amount of literature is placed before them under similar circumstances, with similar recommendations that they read this counteracting matter.³⁶

Fisher responded that, in the wake of the charges, he personally had examined not only the library's catalogue, but also records of book checkouts by students. "You would be surprised at the varied amount of reading, and that there is not an over-balance of this radical literature (as you call it) being read in this school," he said.³⁷

³⁵ Minutes of Hearing, 22.

³⁶ Minutes of Hearing, 23.

³⁷ Ibid.

Sefrit then resumed his line of questioning about faculty members who he claimed were involved in “radical” organizations. For example, instructor Nora Cummins, he said, had attended a convention of The National Council for Prevention of War in Seattle. Sefrit wondered if she was aware of the “un-American and unsavory reputation of the active people in it.” It was one of many such groups, he said, that drew hapless subjects into the ranks by professing to be opposed to war, using an admirable emotion as a guise to mask their underlying Marxism. “(I)t is not peace they are seeking; they are seeking to enervate this country so that when the time comes for this great mass action there will be no army or no navy, or a very weak one; a very small police force, if any; no state constabulary, and they even oppose the training of Boy Scouts,” Sefrit said. “I don’t believe that Miss Cummins would be a member of that organization if she knew that. If she would, and does know, she is not fit to be a member of this faculty.”³⁸

Sefrit at this point attempted to introduce, as a witness, longtime Fisher nemesis Alma Jenkins. Branigin responded curtly: “We have all heard Mrs. Jenkins’ statement. It took two or three hours of our time.” Undaunted, Sefrit continued to argue for Jenkins’ presence, suggesting: “I think everybody ought to keep his mind open.” Kirkpatrick fired back: “I always thought I was a good American citizen before tonight.”³⁹ Sefrit, apparently sensing that the trustees’ were losing patience, quickly shifted subjects again, this time to the charge that Fisher had a long track record of opposition from ministers in

³⁸ Minutes of Hearing, 24.

³⁹ Minutes of Hearing, 25.

the community. He turned the floor over to Rev. Macartney, who said he had been a “friend” of the school since 1905.

Macartney said he appreciated the fact that Fisher sent him and other pastors an annual list of incoming students, along with their religious affiliations. However, he said, “...there has come to exist a gulf, seemingly impassable, between the religious forces and churches of Bellingham and Whatcom County, and our Normal School, where there ought to be the closest harmony and cooperation.”⁴⁰ Macartney said he understood that the teaching of religion, per se, in a state institution was impermissible under the state Constitution. “(B)ut on the other hand, if Roman Catholicism, Christian Science, Calvinism may not be taught, neither should fascism, communistic fascism, agnosticism and non-belief be taught under the high sounding names of ‘economic freedom’ and ‘hearing all sides of the question.’ There is a very widespread impression abroad in the community, and in the state, that such is the case,” Macartney said.⁴¹ Macartney said the belief about Bellingham Normal in religious communities was that “there are some excellent and Godly teachers on the faculty, and also some who go out of their way to ridicule the Bible and sow doubts in the minds of our young people.” Students who came to the school as active Christians were dropping out once in college, Macartney said. The fact that this might also happen at colleges elsewhere made it no less problematic, he added. This “poisoning” of young minds against religion was causing some parents to think twice about sending their children to Bellingham, he said, and it was easy to see

⁴⁰ Minutes of Hearing, 27.

⁴¹ Ibid.

why: Library books were placed within reach of impressionable minds with no regard to counseling about the “danger lurking within them,” Macartney said. And school activities such as alpine hikes were routinely scheduled for Sundays, competing with church services. Worse, a “radical clergyman” had addressed a baccalaureate service and compared Jesus to Karl Marx, he said. “These subtle attacks, hammered day after day into the plastic minds of the young people coming to our schools, have disastrous effects,” Macartney insisted.

Fisher asked Macartney if his administration had ever failed to cooperate with ministers. Macartney said no. Fisher emphasized that drawing students to church, by legal mandate, was a church, not a state, responsibility. “This state is very strict in sectarian matters; it draws a hard-and-fast line in matters sectarian, and we can’t even read the Bible, etc., in the schools of this state,” Fisher said. “That was unknown to me before I came to the West. We were always in the habit back East of reading the Bible every day in school; but you can’t do it here. It is absolutely forbidden.” Given this legal restriction, “I am inclined to think that the failure is theirs [the churches], not with us,” he said.⁴² After a discussion of the relative failure of a local YWCA Chapter in town, a break ensued as Alma Jenkins was, in fact, produced as a witness.

Jenkins said her own trouble with Fisher began when the school attempted to condemn property owned by her and her husband adjacent to the growing campus. A specific lot needed to build the Normal’s new library was condemned, and the couple settled on a compensation in court. But rancor between the parties grew over negotiations

⁴² Minutes of Hearing, 31.

for another Jenkins property, also adjacent to campus, that was home to a girls' boarding house. She then attempted to explain her role as a self-appointed watchdog over school affairs. Jenkins acknowledged attending "a great many things" at "her home school" over a period of 20 years. She recalled being asked by Fisher to leave a lecture on campus, apparently in 1929. "This was the first time I was told I could not attend an open assembly," she said.⁴³ She considered taking legal action against Fisher for his "assault" upon her, she said, but was talked out of it by friends. Jenkins added that she was willing to be questioned about facts surrounding the case, and emphasized that she remained a friend of the Normal, and hoped its problems could be solved without undue publicity.

Reverend Macartney, the pastor of the Presbyterian Church in which Fisher still was officially enrolled as a member, then took the floor once more, producing a May 23, 1928 letter from the Whatcom County Ministerial Association to the Junior Order of United American Mechanics when that group had joined with other conservatives in a previous, failed attempt to unseat Fisher.⁴⁴ The letter largely repeated the concerns Macartney had already expressed about Fisher, concluding with the statement that "today there aren't more than 25 percent of the students attending church services as compared with five years ago." The letter was signed by every minister in the county, "save three," Macartney said.⁴⁵ Fisher noted that a copy of the letter had been given to Governor

⁴³ Minutes of Hearing, 34. It is not made perfectly clear, but the minutes suggest Jenkins was asked to leave a lecture by pacifist J.J. Handsaker on campus in 1929.

⁴⁴ See discussion of this organization, Chapter 4.

⁴⁵ Minutes of Hearing, 36. Macartney said three clergymen had not been asked to sign "as a courtesy:" the Rev. James Wilson, who was president of the Bellingham School Board; a Rev. Squires, who had a rooming house in connection with the Normal School; and the unnamed pastor of the Congregational

Roland Hartley at the time, and that a two-page letter in response that he had sent to the county Ministerial Association had been well-received. “That matter has been settled long ago,” he said.

Discussion turned again to YWCA and YMCA activities, with Sefrit grilling Fisher about why the groups had not been more successful with students. Sefrit told the board that struggles of both organizations were examples of a community-wide pattern of dissatisfaction with Fisher that extended beyond the immediate concerns of the Committee on Normal Protest. Fisher, he suggested, had a track record of angering members and leaders of local institutions well beyond the borders of his school. As a further example, he described what he called Fisher’s snubbing of Dr. E.T. Mathes, the school’s first president, by failing to invite him to address the student body. Sefrit produced a statement from Mathes’ wife, who said that the only time the couple had even attended an alumni banquet under the “Fisher regime” had been when they were invited by personal friends, not the current president.⁴⁶ Sefrit and Fisher resumed their verbal jousting.

Sefrit: He feels that he has been snubbed, and he wonders why.

Fisher: He has not been deliberately snubbed.

Sefrit: Why didn’t you invite him?

church presently attended by Fisher. (This was an apparent reference to the Rev. Dwight C. Smith, who later would write a letter to Governor Martin passionately defending Fisher and urging his retention. See Chapter 6.)

⁴⁶ Minutes of Hearing, 41.

Fisher: Mr. Mathes and I are the best of friends and always have been. I have had many visits and conversations with him. There are just some people that are trying to make capital out of it.

Sefrit: Why didn't you?

Fisher: I can't tell you why. It is just something that happened. There was no intent, or purpose in it.⁴⁷

As the argument dragged on, Branigin finally seized the floor and reported that at the last alumni banquet he had attended, Mathes was there and spoke for at least 30 minutes. The former president, Branigin said, was "lionized by all that were present and given a grand ovation, and the feeling between the faculty and Mr. Mathes and the alumni seemed to be very cordial, indeed."⁴⁸ Further discussion about Mathes and numerous alumni picnics and dinners ensued, at which point Branigin again expressed his frustration. "Go ahead with your story and let's get it over with," he told Sefrit. "It is getting late."

Sefrit continued to press the cause of discontent among alumni, some of whom were said to believe Fisher failed to give sufficient credit for the school's success to his predecessors, specifically Mathes. Trustee Kirkpatrick interjected that most of this sentiment was stirred up by one person, former faculty member Catherine Montgomery, whom he said had been communicating with alumni, "trying to create trouble" because she had been "dismissed for cause, and will not recognize that fact." Sefrit responded:

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Minutes of Hearing, 42.

“That is very likely true ... but it is another one of those things that shows the growing organization against this administration.”⁴⁹

Sefrit, once again shifting gears, next turned his focus to perceived tensions between Fisher and fellow parishioners at his former place of worship, First Presbyterian Church, over issues of “fundamentalism” that arose during the church’s recruitment of a potential pastor, Leo J. Totten, from Montana.⁵⁰ Fisher explained that he had been in Great Falls, Montana, investigating a site for a potential new normal school, and as a favor to his church, investigated Totten’s ministry there, concluding that it had been a “failure.” He warned his own congregation of this, but the church hired Totten anyway. “I could have saved them from that trouble,” Fisher said. “That is what I tried to do ... It took them four years to find out what I knew and tried to tell them.”⁵¹ Not long after that, Fisher resigned from his position on the church board, “to make way for somebody who was in sympathy with the policy of the church.” The Fisher family, after trying out a local Congregational Church, settled at St. James Presbyterian, which they had attended regularly ever since, Fisher said.⁵² Sefrit said there had been “reports” that Fisher’s inquiries about Totten in Montana never actually happened. “There are all kinds of

⁴⁹ Minutes of Hearing, 44. Sefrit also offered here that he had never spoken to Montgomery, and declined requests to have her make a statement at the hearing.

⁵⁰ Macartney was pastor of the same church from 1905-1914. Totten was named pastor in 1927 and left three years later after a rocky tenure. The church then convinced Macartney to return to Bellingham and resume his pastorship there in January, 1931. Keith A. Murray, “Centennial Churches of Washington’s Fourth Corner: Occasional Paper #20,” 1985, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Bellingham, WA.

⁵¹ Minutes of Hearing, 45.

⁵² Ibid.

statements about me, things that I never say,” Fisher responded. “I can’t help that.” He provided more details of his contacts in Montana, what the people he contacted said about Totten (who had since been hired, but already moved on, from the Bellingham church) then asked: “Everything I reported turned out to be true in Bellingham, did it not?”⁵³

Sefrit ignored the question and moved on, asking Fisher about his association with a professor Kinneman, a faculty member hailing from Fisher’s home region of Westchester, Pennsylvania. Kinneman had been dismissed from another college in 1927, Sefrit charged, for “seditious teaching.”

Sefrit: You had him here?

Fisher: I had him twice; would be glad to have him again. When I got him he was at Normal, Illinois, in good standing.

Sefrit: He had been dismissed from one of those schools for sedition?

Fisher: Yes, much to his credit. Thousands of people feel that way. It was just a small group that brought that about. He was a very fine teacher. I would be glad to have him anytime.”⁵⁴

Sefrit at this point turned his focus toward what might have sparked his involvement in the Fisher affair in the first place: The Pelagius Williams dismissal. This subject would produce one of the most-heated exchanges in the lengthy hearing, which by now had reached its midpoint. “The Williams case has been referred to as one of the reasons we are here with this protest,” Sefrit allowed. He said Williams had been a faculty member for about nine years, with a salary of \$3,600 per year. Sefrit said he knew

⁵³ Minutes of Hearing, 46.

⁵⁴ Minutes of Hearing, 46-47.

Williams from “relief work” in the community, before the state and federal governments had taken up the same role. Sefrit said that when Williams’ dismissal became known, he and others beseeched Fisher to save at least part of Williams’ employment, largely out of concern for the relief efforts. He continued:

So the Doctor [Fisher] came before a committee composed of Major Brooks, Mr. A.W. Deming, Henry Schupp and myself, and asked him why Pelagius Williams could not be retained. His statement was something to this effect: that it was necessary to reduce the force, and he regarded him as the least efficient of the members of the faculty. The question was then asked of Dr. Fisher, why he regarded him as the least efficient ... and he [Fisher] said, “Well, I discovered that I had made a mistake when I employed that man. I discovered I had made a mistake three weeks after he was employed.” Then Dr. Fisher was asked if he ever called Mr. Williams’ attention to any of his shortcomings; he [Fisher] said he had not. “Did you ever visit his classroom?” He said he had not. “You never criticised [*sic*] him or attempted to improve his work at the Normal?” He replied he did not. Now this question was asked, “And you still retained him, knowing he was inefficient, for nearly nine years, which cost the state of Washington about \$33,000 or \$34,000. Why did you do that?” He [Fisher] said, “You know how these things are, you just let things slide along.”⁵⁵

Sefrit went on to say that Fisher and Williams, before the dismissal, had been on “intimate terms,” and any problems Fisher had with Williams’ teaching could easily have been addressed, had Fisher simply made an attempt:

We think that is a very reprehensible thing, and that the dismissal of Pelagius Williams was not because of his scholastic ability, but because he had been given particular publicity in this work that he was doing, and because Mrs. Williams is a very active Daughter of the American Revolution, which for two years had been complaining about the so-called “sympathy for subversive activities in this Normal by Dr. Fisher.” That is the belief of this committee, and is the belief of a great number of people, and I can assure you that as far as I am concerned it had nothing to do with this investigation.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Minutes of Hearing, 48-49. All of the men at the meeting about Pelagius Williams would later be identified as members of the Committee on Normal Protest: Deming and Brooks in Sefrit’s files and papers filed with the Board of Trustees, Schupp by a state auditor visiting campus in 1935 and relaying information about the Sefrit committee back to Olympia. See Chapter 6.

⁵⁶ Minutes of Hearing, 49.

Sefrit, however, moved quickly to downplay the role of the Williams incident in his own motivation for leading the Committee on Normal Protest, shifting the focus to Fishers' own alleged lack of tact in public settings. Specifically, he recounted a statement made by Fisher at a meeting of the Hobby Club, a local social club of which both men were members:

The thing that caused me particularly to take an interest in this was a statement that Dr. Fisher made in the presence of a number of other gentlemen when they were discussing the activities of various governments, and the apparent downfall of a number of governments, Dr. Fisher said: "The Soviet Republic is the only stable government in the world today." When I heard that, I wondered could there be anything to these statements about Dr. Fisher being sympathetic to these subversive activities. I began checking on this thing and I came to the conclusion that Dr. Fisher was "taken in" a number of years ago when George S. Counts of Columbia University came out here, and went to other institutions across the country, and one by one he picked off the professors and presidents of these institutions and filled them full of this Russian virus, and I can show you the statement of a professor of the Teacher's College in Wisconsin in which he admits that it was George S. Counts that got him off on the wrong trail."⁵⁷
Fisher: Where did I make the statement that the Soviet Republic ...

Sefrit: Don't you remember making that statement?

⁵⁷ Minutes of Hearing, 50. It is worth noting that Sefrit's assessment of Counts and other "social reconstructionist" educators, largely centered around Columbia University, came at a time when that group was near its extremist peak in terms of its views on the complex interplay of class struggle, education and national recovery. Counts had, in fact, traveled to Russia in 1929, and had come away impressed at the degree to which communist leaders were committed to using schools as "an instrument of social change." By the summer of 1935, Counts was seen by some political observers as occupying a space on the political spectrum even farther left than card-carrying American communists, whose national membership peaked around the same time. In subsequent years, however, any suspicion that Counts supported a communist-style revolution in America would be doused. By late 1936, the controversial educator was locked in a battle with communists over control of American Federation of Teachers New York Local 5. Counts increasingly came to see the "united front" of liberal and labor forces as unworkable, and, in the wake of purges of prominent educators in Russia, he became a strident anti-communist within the ranks of teacher's associations. Counts in 1937 resigned as editor of *The Social Frontier* to campaign for, and win, the presidency of the American Federation of Teachers, running on an anti-communist platform, in 1939. This rapid and significant evolution is indicative of the passions and fluidity of political thought among American liberals of the era. C.A. Bowers, *The Progressive Educator and the Depression: The Radical Years*, (New York: Random House, 1969), chapters 2-5.

Fisher: I certainly do not remember making such a statement. I might have said that it was one of the stable governments of the world, because it had been going fifteen or seventeen years and I thought that was fairly stable for a government.

Sefrit: You were very much heated, and you said that the Soviet government is the only stable government in the world today; that was your statement. I can support that by five or six, or eight or ten men who heard you say it.⁵⁸

Fisher: You fellows in that Hobby Club, you are so conservative that I say things sometimes just to see how you react. We were talking about investments in the Hobby Club; we are not supposed to discuss those matters outside [the club] at all. It must not be held against me, anything I say in that club, because that is one of the cardinal principles of the club.⁵⁹

Sefrit: You remember saying that?

Fisher: I remember saying something like that. I don't remember saying that exact statement. Some man asked about where he would invest money, if he had any money to invest; well, right out of the box I said, "You can invest in Soviet gold bonds, one of the most stable governments in the world, that they have never repudiated a debt." And that is absolutely correct. That quite shocked the club that evening. The club likes controversy more than anything else; they have all sorts of arguments and debates. I didn't think I was saying anything to be held against me.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Sefrit appears to be referring to the incident made famous in a *Time Magazine* article of July 10, 1939, recounting an exchange between Fisher and Sefrit over the stability of the Soviet government at a meeting of the Bellingham Hobby Club. (Fisher himself makes the connection to the Hobby Club during the hearing; this goes undisputed by Sefrit.) *Time* reported that at the end of the exchange, Sefrit told Fisher, "I'm agin you, and I think you know what that means." The magazine reported that the incident marked the beginning of the crusade by Sefrit, who it said enjoyed the local nickname "Little Hearst," to unseat Fisher. "I'm Agin You," *Time Magazine*, July 10, 1939, 42. Sefrit in a 1939 unpublished letter to the magazine would deny any knowledge of the incident, and accuse *Time* or its source of fabricating the matter. He repeated that claim in a subsequent *Bellingham Herald* editorial. Sefrit's reference to the Hobby Club incident here lends credence to the notion that he never intended for the hearing transcript to be made public.

⁵⁹ The gentleman's club had roots to early Bellingham, with "always a fair sprinkling of college professors in it, professional men, doctors, lawyers, some businessmen," recalled former Bellingham city attorney and judge Hobart Dawson. "It started with the thought that, every month, one of the members would give a talk, theoretically on a hobby. Often it'd be quite controversial. The rule was that whatever you said at a Hobby Club meeting never went any farther than the four corners of the room. No personalities should develop ... It was easy to get an argument in the Hobby Club." Judge Hobart Dawson, taped interview by Mary Peebles, Nov. 19, 1970, box 28, folder 5, Rogan Jones Papers, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA. Note that Sefrit would use the "off-the-record" nature of the club to bolster his claims four years later, both publicly and in a private letter to *Time*, that the incident did not occur, and if it had, would never have been made public by members.

⁶⁰ Minutes of Hearing, 50-51.

Without responding, Sefrit again switched subjects, raising the argument that Fisher's behavior was causing Bellingham Normal to fall behind its peer institutions in enrollment. Sefrit said the decline in total enrollment between Fisher's arrival in 1923 and the present day had been roughly 50 percent, compared to a 32 percent decline at the state Normal School in Ellensburg, and a similar number at the Normal School in Cheney. Enrollments at state colleges in Pullman and Seattle, meanwhile, had increased over the same period, Sefrit said. Fisher said the figures were out of context, and that state agencies required different figures derived from different formulas. He acknowledged, however, a reduced number of degrees granted over the period, and said that change had been made intentionally, to adjust to rising standards for teacher training in the state and nation:

Absolutely, that is the way we wanted it. You don't say a thing about standards and quality, do you? And you don't say we were turning out students with the one-year [teacher-training] course who were not fit to teach at all. Now they have to remain three years. We have turned this institution from a glorified high school, which it was when I took charge of it, into a four-year-college type of institution with national recognition; recognized as one of the best schools of its kind in the United States.

Sefrit: By whom?

Fisher: By authorities; by people professionally equipped to do that.

Sefrit: Who?

Fisher: By the [ac]crediting committee of the American Association of Teacher's Colleges – by their appointed committee to do this very thing. And for the last three years, more years than that, we have submitted our reports to them, and two years ago we were [ac]credited as a four-year teachers' college. We have one of the best ratings in the United States. Our rating is far above Ellensburg and Cheney. You ought to know that, too ... If you want a glorified high school ... that is not the trend of the times today. The trend of the times is for better

preparation. We are in line with that trend. We have built up a fine institution on a foundation which is ready to go. It is going to build up its enrollment on the right basis.⁶¹

Sefrit then moved on to the alleged lack of Christian speakers on campus. Of 88 speakers known to have visited from 1932 to 1934, only a single minister, the Reverend Fred Shorter of the Pilgrim Church of Seattle, had been invited, Sefrit charged. Shorter, Sefrit said, was notorious for having posted on church walls “Soviet murals, big, loud, flaming Russian posters.”⁶² Sefrit next read a lengthy account of Shorter’s alleged troubles in Seattle, leading to his ouster as a pastor of the church. Fisher noted that a local minister was invited to every annual baccalaureate service, and that those names obviously had been left off the list of campus speakers provided to Sefrit.

Sefrit: You had Dr. Sedgewick.

Fisher: Yes, sir, of the University of British Columbia.

Sefrit: He is rated as one of the radicals of British Columbia.

Fisher: That is nonsense.

Sefrit: I have that information. He is not a “red,” but a radical.

Fisher: I think the best commencement speaker we have had here was Dr. Sedgewick, head of the English Department in the University of British Columbia – a magnificent speaker. There wasn’t a radical comment in his speech here. I have had him here a number of times since.⁶³

⁶¹ Minutes of Hearing, 52. In the transcript, a writer presumed to be Sefrit has underlined the words about Bellingham Normal faring better than state peer institutions, and written in the margin, “Not so.”

⁶² Minutes of Hearing, 53.

⁶³ Minutes of Hearing, 55-56. Sedgewick, an educator from nearby Vancouver, B.C., spoke on campus six times between 1932 and 1939. See Appendix I for a list of speakers and speakers’ bureaus employed by the college during the time period in question.

Sefrit pecked away at the broader subject of the roster of invited speakers. The list, he charged, included 22 speakers who “are members of either some well-known subversive organization ... or an atheist organization, or a free-lover organization.” The only person who had spoken about U.S. Constitutional principles, Sefrit said, was Seattle banker and American Legion stalwart Reno Odlin, “and he was not invited by you.” A discussion of other politically inclined speakers ensued, before trustee Branigin asked: “Wasn’t Senator [Robert] LaFollette [Jr.] on your program?”

Sefrit: LaFollette is an outstanding socialist, isn’t he?

Fisher: I don’t know that you would classify him that way. The people of Wisconsin think enough of him to elect and reelect him. You see, we take all this Constitution, American government and patriotism for granted; these young people have had this taught them twelve years in public schools. We can’t do much with them after what the public schools have done with them; even though we wanted to make radicals of them, I don’t think we could. They get all their ideas of patriotism and Americanism before they come here. Their fundamental ideas are fixed, and they can’t be changed.

Sefrit: You do change them.

Fisher: We don’t try to change them.⁶⁴

Sefrit switched topics yet again, grilling Fisher about the Intourist foreign travel posters on campus, suggesting they were part of the president’s affinity for all-things Russian. He called Intourist a “Soviet organization that is inducing American teachers to come to Moscow, where a summer session program was under the charge of George S. Counts.” Sefrit again insisted Counts had addressed Bellingham students; Fisher flatly denied it, saying Counts had taught briefly at the University of Washington, under since-

⁶⁴ Minutes of Hearing, 57.

deposed President Henry Suzzallo, but had never been to Bellingham Normal to his knowledge. Fisher seized the opportunity to defend the value of foreign travel in higher education, for both faculty and students.

Sefrit: Why are the Russians so anxious to get these teachers over there?

Fisher: They are not going to make communists out of American teachers; they have too much intelligence to do that. They can't be fooled as easily as that. You certainly credit them with having ordinary intelligence, don't you? And being able to discriminate?⁶⁵

Continuing with the general discussion of speakers, Fisher established that guests were chosen by a faculty committee with which he consulted. Many candidates were drawn from a pool provided by professional speaker's bureaus.⁶⁶ Sefrit began peppering Fisher with questions about specific speakers, asking for the specific rationale in inviting them. Fisher countered that the range of speakers illustrated the importance of enlightening students by bringing to them prominent people who represented rapidly changing political, cultural and social values. As an example, he chose controversial speaker Alfred Bingham:⁶⁷

Fisher: He is a son of former Senator Bingham of the State of Connecticut. He is a fellow that represents a good deal of means and family connection, and he has seen fit to differ with his father radically on economic and social questions. Therefore, he is a phenomenon in the United States. He is typical of a great many young men like him who represent wealth and family, who are breaking away from the old order of things, and that is a very significant phenomenon.

Sefrit: What do you mean by the "old order?"

Fisher: Things as we had them up to 1929.

⁶⁵ Minutes of Hearing, 59.

⁶⁶ See Appendix I.

⁶⁷ Bingham spoke on campus on May 1, 1934. See Appendix I.

Sefrit: He is opposed to capitalistic government?

Fisher: At any rate he discussed with us “economic fallacies,” and it was perfectly harmless. We didn’t think much of his speech.

Sefrit: “Fairy tales?”

Fisher: Yes, that was it. “Economic fairy tales.”

Sefrit: Bingham is the editor of “Common Sense,” and is identified with communistic organizations in this country. Favors negro social equality, complete disarmament and abolishment of military training, and he is a member of the Friends of the Soviet Union, was arrested for radical activities, and is the author of “Economic Fairy Tales.” What can students get that is much benefit to them from him?

Fisher: He represents a type in this country that is very interesting. All these young rich fellows who are going away from the old moorings, you know, to something else, and those represent a good deal of the third party movement, this farmer-labor federation that is developing in the Middle West. As students, we think we have a right to know about these interesting developments throughout the United States.

Sefrit: You don’t think it is propaganda he is bringing here?

Fisher: He certainly did not put over any propaganda with our students. We would not tolerate any sort of propaganda in our school assembly.⁶⁸

Several other speakers were discussed, with Fisher disputing Sefrit’s labeling of many as being “radical.” Sefrit said research justifying the label came from the Hamilton Fish Jr. Congressional Committee and the Lusk Report of New York. Fisher shot back: “I would think anything that Fish had anything to do with would be biased.”⁶⁹ Sefrit pressed on, asking for Fisher’s rationale for inviting former Scottish socialist politician Jennie Lee, editor/writer/playwright Floyd Dell, peace activist Handsaker, Indian newspaper

⁶⁸ Minutes of Hearing, 61-62.

⁶⁹ Minutes of Hearing, 62.

editor (and Mahatma Gandhi associate) Syud Hossian, author Samuel B. Schmalhausen, and pacifist minister Kirby Page. The latter activist, whose recent appearance in Bellingham (not on campus) seemed to have particularly irked Sefrit, prompted a lively discussion about the merits of pacifism, and how it related to Sefrit's charges of sedition. It began after Fisher pointed out that Page had been lecturing all over the Northwest, not just in Bellingham.

Sefrit: I will admit all of that. He is going to some of the best institutions in the country.

Fisher: He is entitled to his views same as we are. If he wants to be a pacifist, isn't he entitled to be one? As a Christian minister he bases it on Christianity. Wasn't Jesus a pacifist? Why are you people so alarmed about communism? It hasn't a chance in this country.

Sefrit: Do you think that part was harmless when he said he would control the Supreme Court by appointing enough members in it?

Fisher: A lot of good Democrats are talking about that. It would be perfectly legal to do it that way ...

Tom Chandler:⁷⁰ I can't believe that it would be legal and orderly to appoint men to the Supreme Court that were committed to overthrow the Constitution before they were appointed.

Sefrit: We believe if these facts were made public here it would ruin this school; absolutely ruin this institution. That is our feeling about it. We would not want to have it made public.

Fisher: Then you would ruin practically every school in the land. You would close up almost all of the schools in the country.

Sefrit: One of the most radical schools in this country is the Columbia University that you are so proud of; Vassar College, Smith College, University of Chicago and Wisconsin University.

⁷⁰ The transcript identifies the speaker here only as "A member of the committee." A notation in the margin, presumably written by Sefrit, connects the quote to "Tom Chandler." Minutes of Hearing, 66.

Fisher: You are going to close up some of the best schools in the United States. What about Harvard?⁷¹

Sefrit said Harvard was not in quite the same “red” class. Fisher responded: “The mistake I made is in not bringing a number of conservative speakers, and if I wanted to make radicals, then I would bring a lot of conservative speakers.” He cited the appearance of Reno Odlin as an example of a conservative speaker whose ideas were roundly rejected by the campus community. Sefrit repeated his assertion that the school had an obligation to “counteract” radical ideas by bringing in conservative speakers for balance.

Fisher: We have a pretty high standard of speaker.

Sefrit: Those subversive organizations have the smartest men behind them that you could find.

Fisher: There has not been one speaker spoken in our Assembly that has come with the idea of putting over some propaganda. I will make that statement under oath in court.

Sefrit: Why do your faculty members contact them when they come here?

Fisher: Because they are interesting.

Sefrit: Sure. That is where they are sowing the seed.

Fisher: Why don't you give these men and women credit for ordinary intelligence? ... The implication seems to be that we are not good Americans. I think we are.⁷²

⁷¹ Minutes of Hearing, 66.

⁷² Minutes of Hearing, 67.

Sefrit at this point began to build to his conclusion, suggesting that the only reasonable solution to the problems he had outlined was the removal of Fisher, and perhaps several faculty members.

Sefrit: (W)e believe sincerely that there can be no recovery of public sentiment favorable to this school that commands the unity of the community here under the present arrangements. We believe there has got to be a housecleaning. We are satisfied that Dr. Fisher cannot restore confidence because he has lost the confidence of the community, and without that a great many of the very best friends of the Normal School, going back many years, will not extend their support.

Fisher: What do you mean by that?

Sefrit: Encourage people to come here and try to counteract some of the things that are being done here.

Fisher: We have all the students that the present faculty can take care of. The enrollment has gone up 20 percent this year and we have promise of a good summer school.

Sefrit: Don't you want the friendship of the people of this community?

Fisher: We have had. You only speak for a very small group.

Sefrit: That is where you don't understand this community.

Fisher: I understand it better than you do. I don't believe you are in touch with the community.

Sefrit: You are in touch with a lot of people that I don't care to be in touch with.

Fisher: I have hundreds and thousands of friends in this community that will come to my support.⁷³

The discussion turned briefly to Fisher's previous participation in a city planning commission charged with writing proposed zoning ordinances. Sefrit characterized it as a

⁷³ Minutes of Hearing, 68.

means for Fisher to seek vengeance against local property owners, such as Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins, who had held out over the school's expansion plans. Fisher, conversely, called the zoning plan a "public service" that put Bellingham "ahead of our time" in a planning effort that was opposed by "big interests" represented by Sefrit's *Bellingham Herald*. The newspaper, he charged, had attempted to sabotage the committee's work.

Sefrit: Right or wrong, there is opposition here that you cannot break down, and there is suspicion in this community that your idea about that planning proposition was to punish some of these people.

Fisher: That was never my thought ... you attribute a lot of things to me on hearsay. You could not prove these things in court. I would love to go with you into court with an attorney on all these matters, and see how far you would get.

Sefrit: Do you think it would be good for the institution to do that?

Fisher: No, I don't think it would. Except for that, I would love to do it – so would this faculty – and have this thing out once and for all. I think I could whip you in court on every question.⁷⁴

Sefrit complained again about being stymied by the inability to call faculty and students as witnesses. Trustees responded that the hearing had been held in accordance with their own expectations for the proceeding. "I understood that we would not have any more time tonight than to hear this complaint; that if we were to bring in all these witnesses, we could not get through tonight," interjected trustee Saunders. "And it looks like that was pretty good judgment. It is after eleven now."⁷⁵ Sefrit complained that his case, because of restrictions imposed by the board, had been made in a "scattered way," and that any follow-up gathering of evidence by trustees should be made with a

⁷⁴ Minutes of Hearing, 69-70.

⁷⁵ Minutes of Hearing, 71.

committee member in attendance. “It is certainly unfair to ask for our case when we don’t know what yours is,” he said.

Trustee Kirkpatrick, a longtime friend of Sefrit and the board chairman, spoke up. He produced a letter from faculty member Lynus Alonzo Kibbe, one of the Normal School’s most-senior instructors, after Kirkpatrick had recently run into the veteran faculty member on a Bellingham street, and inquired about Fisher’s leadership.⁷⁶ Kirkpatrick’s decision to produce the letter at the hearing, and enter it into the record in its entirety, constituted a stern rebuke of the charges against Fisher by his longtime friend, Frank Sefrit. In the letter, Kibbe cited 18 years’ experience at the school, as well as rock-solid, patriotic American credentials, and stated that he had never seen un-American propaganda at campus lectures or assemblies, nor noticed any dangerous propaganda. “I believe that there is much less extreme radicalism at the Bellingham State Normal School than in most colleges and other similar institutions throughout the country,” he wrote. “Present economic conditions naturally cause unrest among young people, but I believe that there is no occasion for alarm where they learn to take responsibility and think carefully for themselves.”⁷⁷

A brief discussion about the taking of a teacher’s loyalty oath by professor Upshall, a native Canadian with U.S. citizenship, ensued. Fisher used the occasion to return to Sefrit’s point about the preponderance of faculty members trained at Columbia

⁷⁶ Kibbe, a professor of education, held a Master of Arts degree from Columbia University. Annual Catalog, 1934-35, Washington State Normal School, Bellingham, Washington, WWU Archives & Records Center, Bellingham, WA.

⁷⁷ Minutes of Hearing, 71-73. The full text of the letter, a strong defense of Fisher’s administration, is contained in Appendix II.

University. “I have always taken a good deal of pride in that,” he said, calling Columbia “the outstanding training teacher institution in the United States.” Sefrit shot back: “They were trained by George S. Counts.” Fisher responded that “as many as four-fifths” were never even in classes taught by Counts, who was a professor of education and sociology, not a program head, at the college. “A few of them were, a very small percentage, because he is in a special field where a lot of our people would not have any work at all. He is in the field of Sociology.”⁷⁸ Sefrit responded that the committee believed that only “three or four” of the Bellingham faculty were not “absolutely loyal Americans.”⁷⁹ He then made a seemingly bizarre transition into additional alleged behavior by at least one faculty member that simply could not be revealed without risking violent retribution from the community:

If I were in a position to reveal to you what I know about it, you would be astonished to know some of the things that have taken place in this town in the last few months. I would reveal it to Dr. Kirkpatrick just as a guaranty of good faith, but I am in such a position that I can’t do it here. I think if it were revealed in a public way there would be two or three murders in this town within a week.⁸⁰

Sefrit declined to offer further explanation.

⁷⁸ Longtime professor Miriam Mathes, decades later, later laughed at the notion that faculty members such as she, who had taken classes taught by Counts, became committed communists: “All I can say is, it didn’t brush off on me in the least!” The notion of indoctrination “just seemed ridiculous,” she said. Miriam Mathes, taped interview by Jackie Lawson, Nov. 17, 1970, box 28, folders 4 and 7 (reel-to-reel tapes), Rogan Jones Papers.

⁷⁹ Minutes of Hearing, 75.

⁸⁰ Minutes of Hearing, 75-76. Sefrit did not elaborate. For years after Fisher’s departure from Bellingham, Sefrit would tell friends and associates that he possessed other, more-nefarious “evidence” of malfeasance by the college president. But aside from sparse notes on a single alleged dalliance between a former faculty member and a student, (which had already been reported in his newspaper) no trace of such evidence is found in his own files, or in any other documentation surrounding the case. Sefrit’s “if-you-only-knew-what-I-know” statements about Fisher were consistent with his *modus operandi* in raising public suspicion about opponents in other civic tussles throughout his career as a newspaperman.

Trustee Saunders, attempting to clarify the committee's overall demands, asked Sefrit to confirm that he believed that the only way to solve the alleged crisis in community confidence in the school would be to remove the president and several members of the faculty.

Sefrit: I am satisfied there has to be a change in the head of the institution, and there will be.

Fisher: I am sure if you can bring it about that there will be.

Sefrit: You know why, don't you?

Branigin: I don't think we care to indulge in any personalities.⁸¹

Sefrit then questioned Fisher about what he suggested was autocratic control of the college, evidenced by his alleged failure to allow anyone else to speak for the Normal. "You have so many irons in the fire that you don't look after the institution," he said. Fisher responded that he worked "day and night" to run the college and maintain a community presence, through leadership activities at the local American Red Cross chapter, the YMCA and other organizations. Saunders at this point addressed other members of the committee in attendance. He asked if they concurred with Sefrit's contention that the only solution to their complaints was Fisher's removal, or if they thought a change of course in composition of campus speakers could get the community past "this hard spot." Several spoke, for the first and only time in the hearing:

Dr. McLeod: My opinion is that the trouble has been done and it will take a change.

⁸¹ Minutes of Hearing, 76.

Blanton Luther: I am frank to say that I share Mr. Sefrit's opinion one hundred percent. I feel very definitely that something must be done to straighten out the difficult situation.

Tom Chandler: There has been something wrong, or this thing would not have come to a head. The student body seems to feel there are teachers here that are teaching more strongly than an institution ought to, and that the Soviet government must come to this country. And we know that there are paid instructors from Russia entering the school. George Counts was a graduate from the university in Kansas where I was a trustee for fourteen years. I know him very well. He is probably the outstanding advocate of the Russian system of government for America, in Columbia University at this time. He is reported to be the head of the Teacher's College of Columbia University, where so many advanced teachers get their final preparations.

Saunders: You believe it will take a movement as drastic as has been suggested, to tone this institution up?

Chandler: I do.

Saunders: Is that your opinion, Doctor?

Macartney: I think there comes a time when a minister stays too long in one place, and I suppose the same is true of the head of an institution like that ... There is a great, seemingly impassable gulf between the religious workers of Bellingham and the northwest section here, and the school. Whether you can build a bridge across it and regain that confidence, I don't know.⁸²

With that, the private hearing on Charles Fisher before the Bellingham Normal School's Board of Trustees concluded.⁸³ In spite of the intense drama involving two of

⁸² Minutes of Hearing, 78-79.

⁸³ Fisher recounted in a later deposition that the hearing ended at approximately midnight. See "Mr. C.H. Fisher, Direct Examination by Mr. Pemberton," undated deposition, box 1, folder 7, Bellingham Herald collection on Charles H. Fisher, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA. At the end of the transcript, typed by court reporter Marion Doty, is an appended letter, written by Leo Totten, the Presbyterian Minister discussed during the hearing, to Rev. Macartney. The rambling, undated letter from Totten, then minister of Ledgerwood Presbyterian Church in Spokane, WA, provided a sordid end to the only official record of the proceeding. It was a pointed, personal attack on Fisher, who Totten claimed "brought in both teachers and speakers who were rank perverters of all truth, educational and religious." In the letter, Totten claims – while offering no evidence — that Fisher was forced to leave his previous job in Bloomsburg, Pa. because of similar untoward behavior. Totten in the

the city's most-prominent citizens, no mention of it was made in *The Bellingham Herald*, or other news publications, in its aftermath. Few Bellingham citizens even knew that it had happened.

Within a month of the hearing, Trustees responded in writing, in a detailed missive written by attorney Branigin, and later distributed at least somewhat publicly.⁸⁴ The response amounted to a full exoneration of Fisher, and went a step beyond, praising his performance in trying circumstances – namely, the poisonous political atmosphere in Bellingham – that would have foiled lesser leaders. The board's most significant finding on Sefrit's presented "evidence" was that, while Mrs. Jenkins' account of the student Science Club meeting with a Seattle communist organizer had been verified by the board of trustees, neither Fisher nor the club adviser had known about the meeting. The faculty advisor had been reprimanded, and all involved students were "called to account," and agreed that no similar activity would take place in the future, lest they be expelled. The board's most powerful exoneration of Fisher came in the response to Charge 8, the "strife-breeding" accusation against Fisher. To this accusation, Branigin responded:

letter also repeats Sefrit's claim that Fisher had never contacted church members in Montana to evaluate his ministry there. But the letter suggests Totten himself, via Macartney, was Sefrit's primary source of that information. Totten concedes in the letter that he has "not been able to find the letters that definitely proved those statements, and some others."

⁸⁴ "Findings of the Board of Trustees of Bellingham State Normal School in Answer to the Charges Made by Frank Sefrit, Editor, Bellingham Herald, Against the Administration of the School, May 22, 1935," file on Fisher case records, Accession 94-12, Box 1, Western Washington University Archives. The full text of the letter is contained in Appendix III. The document is dated only, "May, 1935." (In a *Bellingham Herald* article a year later, the author, presumably Sefrit, states that the Committee on Normal Protest did not receive the trustees' response for a full month after the hearing. "Both Sides of the Question," *The Bellingham Herald*, May 2, 1936.) An earlier typed version of the findings, mailed to the claimants, is identical in text, but contained several spelling errors of names that are corrected in the version referenced here from university files, marked "COPY" at its top.

We find that strife breeding is most prolific in the environ of this school. That turmoil and trouble in the affairs of life in this community reaches into every phase of its civic life. That it is torn by animosity, personal grudges and grievances, and political enmities too numerous to mention. That the institution is first berated over the air by one faction and attacked by newspapers by the opposite faction; that it is attempted to be controlled; its employees and teaching personnel dictated to by organizations and people without any regard to the efficiency and the welfare of the institution. That if President Fisher has developed a temperamental attitude with respect to this and that conflicting interest, it is the natural result of treatment accorded him and the institution which he represents. We recognize the fact that the President must be tactful. We have talked these matters over repeatedly and with all due respect to the opinions of the complainants we cannot be severely critical of a personality capable of standing on his own two feet in this community.⁸⁵

The board concluded by calling Fisher an “able and conscientious administrator” who had fostered an environment of mutual cooperation among faculty, staff, students and most of the community. With those words, trustees appeared to have slammed the door, firmly, on the well-organized attempt to unseat Fisher. More than a year after the hearing, Fisher, being deposed by attorney William Pemberton for a hearing in the FCC licensing dispute between *The Bellingham Herald* and KVOX Radio, said he considered the matter fully closed. Pemberton, referring to the written rebuke of Sefrit, et al, offered by trustees, asked Fisher: “That was the end of the whole matter, was it?” Fisher replied: “Yes sir. Nothing more was done. And that reply, drawn up by the lawyer member, was signed by all of the members of the Board of Trustees. I have a signed copy right here in my hands. And that was the end. I have never heard anything of the matter since.”⁸⁶ But the hearing would prove to be more of a beginning than the end of the political campaign

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ “Mr. C.H. Fisher, Direct Examination by Mr. Pemberton.”

that ultimately would doom Fisher. Behind closed doors, the political maneuvering, and forwarding of facts of the case to the office of Governor Charles Martin, appeared to only intensify after the hearing.

The trustees' response to the charges suggests that Fisher was reprimanded, at least unofficially, for allowing a small group of students to explore membership in a radical national student group. So Fisher moved forward with his work with newfound caution – and a reawakened passion for the value of his work as an educator. Letters written after his firing, as well as statements made to faculty in the months immediately following the hearing, indicate Fisher after the hearing indeed kept a closer watch on his back. But they also suggest he came to believe more fervently than ever that well-rounded teachers were critical for the preservation of American democracy during a period of growing local and national political extremism.

From the time of the hearing, Fisher would be more circumspect about inviting any campus speaker who might be even fancied a “Red,” even keeping a copy of *The Red Network* in his office desk for reference.⁸⁷ And over the course of the next year, crusades against supposed Reds on other U.S. campuses – most of them “exposed” by the ginned-up campaigns of publisher William Randolph Hearst – would flame up and ultimately fizzle, with few actual victims claimed. Most were relegated to the status of historical footnotes to the broader national Red Scare still to come. But Bellingham's own “Little Hearst,” well-trained in the art of the political long game, kept an ever-close watch over

⁸⁷ “Persons Listed in ‘Red Network’ Couldn’t Talk at Fisher’s College,” *The Seattle Star*, June 28, 1939.

Fisher's Bellingham Normal.⁸⁸ Most of his Fisher-related activities in the months immediately after the hearing were carried out privately, presumably in communications with Governor Martin. But Sefrit's growing dislike for Fisher, and especially all he appeared to stand for, could not remain bottled up for long.

⁸⁸ "Mr. Sefrit was a scrapper," said Judge Hobart Dawson, a contemporary and frequent political opponent. "He wouldn't give in. He wouldn't give up. If he had his mind set on something, he would try to accomplish it." Judge Hobart Dawson, taped interview by Mary Peebles, Nov. 19, 1970, box 28, folder 5, (reel-to-reel recording), Rogan Jones Papers.

Chapter 6

Rising Red Tide and a Doomed Presidency

Anti-communist crusader Frank Sefrit's shadowy campaign to rid Bellingham of state Normal School President Charles Fisher did not remain quiet for long. Sefrit, who later would maintain that he had been asked, in private, after the May, 1935 hearing to cease overt action against the president, did so for some time, but soon decided that dictum did not apply to coverage of school affairs in his newspaper.¹ In December, 1935, seven months after the secret hearing, Sefrit publicly chafed over a college appearance of nationally known author and editor Norman Hapgood, who had given a campus address titled, "Is National Recovery an Illusion or a Reality?" In what would become an infamous, front-page editorial headlined "Enlightening American Students," Sefrit harrumphed the day after the speech: "Citizens who have complained about the number of officials of radical, Communistic, atheistic and free love organizations who had been invited to address the student body of Bellingham State Normal, were assured several months ago that the practice would be discontinued. Unfortunately, the practice continues."² The front-page editorial, drawing from research compiled by the Committee on Normal Protest (then still unknown to *Bellingham Herald* readers), detailed Hapgood's alleged seditious political activity, criticizing his address in a tone similar to Sefrit's barrages at the May 1935 Fisher hearing. Sefrit opined via *The Herald*:

¹ The contention is found, among other places, in Sefrit's 1939 letters to *Time Magazine*. See below.

² Editorial, "Enlightening American Students," *The Bellingham Herald*, Dec. 6, 1935.

Hapgood's address here was not constructive. It was a coarse political harangue, interspersed with contemptuous remarks about noted public men, belittling two former presidents, Coolidge and Hoover; uncalled-for slurs at the old-age pension movement headed by Dr. Townsend, and a noticeable favoring of the program of the brain-trusters at Washington. The address was a clear waste of the students' funds, and interesting only in its commonplace assaults upon the business and public men of the types that have made this country great ... In the name of decency, how long are such things to be permitted in a tax-supported institution?³

Sefrit's public barrage against Hapgood marked a new, post-hearing phase in the conflict with Fisher – one in which the editor began to more freely unleash his editorial voice both to prosecute the college president and to espouse his broader, increasingly aggressive anti-communist political stance. Sefrit's writings – and Fisher's reactions to them, mostly in private settings – further illustrate the broad outlines of the growing gulf between the two men, which mirrored a broader gulf between passionate ideologies in Depression-era America: Sefrit and like-minded anti-communists saw any exposure of allegedly fragile young minds to “radical” political thought as equating to endorsement and/or indoctrination, if not conspiracy to inculcate. This exposure was believed to be especially egregious in a public, taxpayer-supported institution. Fisher found that notion comical, repeatedly reminding all who would listen that his students, indeed, all educated Americans, were savvy enough to study a broad range of political and religious thought and make smart choices – well within the confines of the existing pluralist democratic structure. This fundamental difference in world view was in vivid display when Sefrit

³ “Enlightening American Students,” *Bellingham Herald*. The editorial, followed by a testy exchange between Hapgood and Sefrit — contained, along with numerous other material collected in the committee's files after the hearing — is a clear indication that the committee did not waver in its monitoring of campus events after the May 22, 1935 hearing.

occasionally engaged in direct exchanges with “radical” U.S. cultural or political figures whom he associated with Fisher. His editorial about Hapgood was quickly assailed by Hapgood himself, who fired a letter in response the following week. In this missive, Hapgood shrugged off what he called Sefrit’s “misrepresentations” about his public life, describing himself as a mainstream moderate liberal. “Anybody who was at the very meeting on which you comment knows that I spoke *against* extremes,” he wrote.⁴

Hapgood’s letter continued:

A far bigger question ... is implied in your editorial. If I understand it, the main point is that free discussions should be left to privately endowed universities, like Harvard and Stanford, Yale and Chicago, and that institutions supported by the state should shut off conflicting opinions as completely as they are excluded in Russia, Germany and Italy. A few years ago, when Dartmouth was criticized because W.J. Bryan spoke there, President Hopkins replied in effect, with a laugh, “If the students wish to hear Trotski [*sic*] it is all right with me.”

I imagine [that] young men brought up under Hopkins, who will trust truth to conquer error, are safer in their future wrestling with ideas than are those who are never allowed to hear two sides of any question, but dwell in a perpetual kindergarten, or perpetual despotism ...

If you ever happen to go to Walla Walla, I suggest you find out what happened to me there, shortly before I was at Bellingham. Not only was the college warned ahead, by pink circulars, that I was out to destroy our constitution and our government, but the whole population was warned ...

The college naturally, being of the opinion that truth is not an invalid, just laughed; it was much more notable that the Chamber of Commerce, most of the members of which usually cast votes different from mine, received me with such cordiality, and seemed to agree with my opening remark that so long as

⁴ Norman Hapgood to Frank Sefrit, Dec, 15, 1935, copy of letter contained in Fisher case records, President’s Office, Bound Documents Compiled by C.H. Fisher, Accession 94-12, Box 1, Western Washington University Archives, Bellingham, WA. Also see “Attack on Fisher Resumed When Norman Hapgood Spoke at Bellingham College,” *The Seattle Star*, June 24, 1939.

Americans are not afraid of full, open and free discussion, just so long they will be free.⁵

Public references to troublesome appearances at the college faded from front-page view for a time following the Hapgood spat, but Sefrit's dogged pursuit of Fisher did not. Once in possession of the typed transcript from the May 22, 1935 hearing, Sefrit set about marking it up and jotting notes about his intended use of the document to demonstrate to Governor Martin the malfeasance of Bellingham Normal's trustees. They had, in his mind, heard ample evidence of seditious activity fomented, or at least tolerated, by Fisher. The hearing, and trustees' subsequent bold response, was Sefrit's evidence that they had failed to act accordingly. Thus, the transcript became his primary exhibit. Sefrit's notes indicated that he planned to send Martin either a full copy of the document, or at least an extensive set of excerpts, along with lists of "radical" speakers and books found on campus. The same files contain numerous handwritten notes jotted by the editor as he combed through the hearing transcript line by line, making small corrections when he saw them, and separately jotting down what he saw as inconsistencies or misstatements made during the hearing.⁶ Most of these notes were either clarifications or embellishments of Sefrit's own oratorical flourishes, or quotes from trustees — particularly Branigin, the most outwardly passionate Fisher defender — that Sefrit

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Untitled handwritten notes, Bellingham Herald collection on Charles H. Fisher, box 1, folders 5 and 7, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA. For instance, Sefrit noted that Fisher had alternately professed to "know everything that goes on" at the school, but somehow did not know of the appearance of a communist recruiter at the Social Science Club meeting until it supposedly was brought to his attention many weeks later.

believed demonstrated their unwillingness to keep an open mind, or conduct a fair hearing. Additional notes from Sefrit outline his own response to most of the points made by trustees in their written response to the charges.⁷ It remains unclear if, when, or how,



Washington Governor Clarence D. Martin, center left, with Bellingham State Normal School President Charles Fisher, center right, and the graduating class of 1933 in front of the campus administration building. (Campus History Collection, Western Libraries Heritage Resources, Western Washington University.)

these materials were submitted to Martin. But numerous press accounts, as well as a small number of known, surviving letters between Martin and constituents, indicate that members of the Committee on Normal Protest, or like-minded associates, continued to

⁷ Ibid. Here, Sefrit disputes Fisher's contention that campus speakers are the purview of a faculty committee; that dissatisfaction with Fisher was limited to a "very small number" of alumni; that enrollment declines were consistent with other peer schools, etc.

barrage Martin with complaints about Fisher in the years following the hearing. The same sources confirm that citizens from Bellingham – aligned both for and against Fisher — visited the governor in Olympia on several occasions. But no written record of these meetings is known to exist in the governor’s archival files.⁸

When the long-simmering Sefrit/Fisher spat finally did erupt into the public, the source was hardly surprising: The vehicle was the long-running, vitriolic spat between *The Herald* and local radio station KVO5. In spite of their rather broad circulation after Fisher’s actual firing in 1939, the board of trustees’ official responses to the charges levied by Sefrit’s group in 1935 had still not been publicly released a year after the Fisher hearing.⁹ But copies of the document soon made their way into the hands of Sefrit’s chief media nemesis, KVO5. There, acerbic commentator Leslie Darwin took great delight in regaling radio audiences with the pointed rejection by trustees of all 10 charges levied by Sefrit’s group – and in the inherent, indirect admonishment of Sefrit himself. Darwin, not surprisingly, attributed the entire anti-Fisher campaign to the president’s supposed refusal

⁸ The Governor’s official state records are contained at the Washington State Archives in Olympia; his personal papers are archived at the Washington State University Library in Pullman, WA. Martin appears to have preserved few, if any, records of the Fisher matter for posterity. “The Governor apparently conducted an informal Star Chamber proceeding, listening only to the plaintiffs,” faculty member Arthur C. Hicks concluded in an account of the Fisher firing in *Western at 75*, the school’s official history of the period. Arthur C. Hicks, *Western at 75* (Bellingham, WA.: Western Washington State College Foundation, 1974). Other media accounts include references to “Silver Shirts” activists picking up the anti-Fisher cause after Sefrit’s group supposedly faded into the background in 1935. But no evidence of this is evident in archival records. Sefrit himself, without providing specifics, would claim that other activists picked up the fight against Fisher after he and his committee were told to stand down after the 1935 Fisher hearing. He made the claim privately to editors at *Time* magazine, and publicly in a newspaper editorial, detailed below.

⁹ This was in keeping with the board of trustees’ clear intent, demonstrated by their consent to hold the Committee on Normal Protest’s hearing on Fisher in private, to keep the matter as quiet as possible for as long as possible.

to support *The Herald's* application for its own radio station – a charge which, based on presently available documentation, seems without merit.¹⁰ In any case, the trustees' written rebuke of Sefrit and his group's charges eventually – and unsurprisingly, given the scorched-earth nature of those proceedings — made its way into depositions and other filings for the ongoing KVOS radio station relicensing hearings before the Federal Communications Commission.

Sefrit, incensed by what he saw as public insult to injury already privately meted out by school trustees, finally went public with his own, highly selective version of some of the events that had transpired on campus the previous year. On April 29, 1936, almost a year to the day after delivering his charges against Fisher to trustees, Sefrit's newspaper published the first of five consecutive, daily reports about the Fisher case in a non-bylined editorial-page column, "Both Sides of the Question." In the first, the paper introduced the topic by lashing out at Darwin and the trustees for soiling the reputations of Bellingham Normal, and the town itself, by airing the school's dirty laundry on public airwaves. The missive began by repeating one of the most provocative quotes from the trustees' written response to the Fisher charges:¹¹

"Turmoil and trouble in the affairs of life in this community reaches into every phase of its civic life ... it is torn by animosity, personal grudges and grievances and political enmities too numerous to mention."

This is a section of a paragraph in the document that station KVOS began broadcasting last June, and filed with the Federal Communications Commission

¹⁰ See discussion of the radio station licensing as it related to Fisher in Chapter 4.

¹¹ "Both Sides of the Question" was a standing feature apparently containing short opinion pieces. It carried no byline; based on the writer's intimate knowledge of the events preceding the Fisher hearing – some contained only in notes written to trustees by Sefrit – it seems likely that Sefrit himself was the author.

in Washington, D.C. last September. This paragraph refers to the people of Bellingham. The document in which it appears is signed by three members of the Board of Trustees of Bellingham State Normal School.¹²

The *Herald* article went on to say that The Normal had always been cherished by the community that created it. It then described – in vague terms and with no mention of members’ names – the formation of the anti-Fisher committee and filing of charges against the president.¹³ The article accused the trustees of leaking to KVOS what he said should have been a private response to the charges, specifically to embarrass Sefrit and committee members. The board’s spirited, written response to the Committee on Normal Protest’s charges, the newspaper said, was provided “presumably by the Normal authorities themselves, to Station KVOS, where it was read repeatedly over the air ... enough to make a laughing stock of any community, to say nothing of the citizens who had made their protests in good faith.”¹⁴

The next day, a follow-up article continued *The Herald’s* version of the tale. It noted that the administration of the Normal had been subject to “severe criticism” for many years before citizens finally took action by demanding the hearing. “At various times, these charges have been considered so seriously that formal petitions have been prepared and filed,” it said.¹⁵ The article then provided the first public admission by Sefrit’s newspaper that the matter had been pushed to the governor’s office:

¹² “Both Sides of the Question,” *The Bellingham Herald*, April 29, 1936.

¹³ This apparently was the first acknowledgement of the committee’s existence to appear in the pages of the newspaper published by its chairman, Frank Sefrit.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ “Both Sides of the Question,” *The Bellingham Herald*, April 30, 1936.

In the winter and spring of 1935, these criticisms again became acute and widespread, centering now upon the alleged un-American doctrines promulgated by the school. An effort was then made to contact the Board of Trustees informally and present to them matters of which they seemed unaware. It was thought that a sincere expression of opinion would be appreciated and understood. But this effort failed.

The governor of the state was approached, still informally and unofficially. From this high source came certain information, given in confidence, which cannot be divulged at this time. But there also came the suggestion that a committee of Bellingham citizens meet with the Board of Trustees in conference on the matters concerned. From this joint meeting, it was hoped there would come a fair understanding and a wise adjustment of difficulties. The governor advised reasonable secrecy in order to be consistent and just to all concerned and in the interest of the Normal as an institution.¹⁶

Thus, *The Herald* indicated that the activities of the secretive Committee on Normal Protest, at least in broad terms, carried the tacit endorsement of Governor Martin. The next day's newspaper contained a third installment, detailing the committee's formation and activities:

The Citizens' Committee formed to confer with the Board of Trustees of the Normal School was kept as consistently small as possible. It included representatives from patriotic and religious organizations, and business and civic leaders in this community. When complete it seemed to be a fair cross-section of the civil thought and leadership of the town.

Three meetings of this committee were held, and as a result of the deliberations a letter was sent to the Board of Trustees ... April 30, 1935.¹⁷

¹⁶ Ibid. Note that the author, presumably Sefrit, does not divulge, in the first public relating of this process, that the Committee on Normal Protest demanded Fisher's resignation as the only acceptable settlement of grievances. It is unclear what the "certain information" from the governor to the committee, might have been. But it now seems possible that Sefrit might have been referring here to rumors of a growing financial scandal at the college, detailed in Chapter 7.

¹⁷ "Both Sides of the Question, *The Bellingham Herald*, May 1, 1936.

The article went on to describe the rough outlines of the letter of charges, noting that “a copy of this entire letter is obtainable. It would be printed in full here if space permitted.”¹⁸

The following day, May 2, brought chapter 4, in which the newspaper for the first time provided scant details of the May 22, 1935 Fisher hearing, over which the paper’s own editor had presided – a fact which, remarkably, still was not acknowledged by *The Herald*:

The meeting of May 22 was a long session, but it was not satisfactory. It seemed impossible to reach the basis of understanding and adjustment that had been hoped for. The verbatim report of the proceedings will probably be published shortly. In the meantime, a few excerpts will give the gist and general tenor of the evening.¹⁹

The article then quoted, from the hearing transcript, the opening statement of Sefrit (“We are trying to come here with absolutely clean hands”). Sefrit, however, was nowhere identified by *The Herald* as the speaker; the term “committee chairman” was used instead in all references to the person addressing the trustees. The article then recited some of the back-and-forth between the chairman (Sefrit) and trustee Branigin over who might be called to testify. The article continued: “When the evening closed the Citizen’s Committee felt that they had made little or no progress.”²⁰ The article also recounted the trustees’ agreement to produce a stenographic record of the meeting, and their agreement to respond to the charges in short order. Such was the extent of the reportage of the

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ “Both Sides of the Question,” *The Bellingham Herald*, May 2, 1936.

²⁰ Ibid.

lengthy, passionate Fisher hearing by the newspaper of record in Bellingham – a publication whose own general manager/editor had levied the charges and dominated discussions over the fate of the local college president.

The next day's *Herald* brought chapter 5 in the creatively constructed saga, deriding trustees' responses to the charges:

The answer of the Board of Trustees of the Normal School to the Citizens' Committee came, not in two weeks as suggested, but a month later. On the morning of June 20, the chairman of the Board of Trustees presented the trustees' answer. It was a typewritten document of three pages that denied every charge made by the committee, and exonerated and upheld, apparently carte blanche, the administration and personnel of the Bellingham Normal School.²¹

The board's sloppy citation of the hearing "transcript" in its written findings, *The Herald* maintained, suggested impropriety, given that the board had never actually ordered its own copy of the transcript. The anti-Fisher citizens' committee itself "tried in vain for six weeks to get a copy of it," the article states. "Eventually, at considerable expense, the Citizens' Committee secured the first and perhaps only verbatim copy of the proceedings."²² Only by comparing the transcript, the original letter of complaint, and the "mass of evidence" accompanying it could one fully appreciate the gravity of the Fisher matter, the unnamed author declared. Judging the case "without the accompanying data and evidence, is to preclude any clear or reputable understanding of it." Further, the article stated, shifting its focus to KVOS, "To read it over the air, or file it without its accompanying evidence, is to present an inexcusable half-truth." Committee members

²¹ "Both Sides of the Question," *The Bellingham Herald*, May 3, 1936.

²² See the discussion in Chapter 4 of Sefrit's actions in securing what likely was the only copy of the hearing transcript, produced by court reporter Marion Doty of nearby Mount Vernon after she contracted with Sefrit to produce the document.

had kept their vow of silence, yet now had been vilified not only in Bellingham, but before public officials in Washington, D.C., the newspaper charged. Because of this, “the Bellingham citizens feel that they are released from their pledge of silence. The time has come when the only thing to do is tell both sides of the question. The article concluded with a barely disguised threat of further agitation:

Out of the entire strange proceedings have come many important results, but three are especially obvious:

- 1) The effort for co-operation between the Citizens’ Committee and the school officials failed completely.
- 2) The attempt to make a quiet and unobtrusive adjustment of unfortunate conditions became instead a garbled broadcast that was carried across the entire country, even to the nation’s capital.
- 3) The situations against which the committee made complaint have continued apparently unchecked and apparently increasingly flagrant.

Through the whole, confused tangle of events, a quaint old maxim of the years comes to mind: “Nothing is ever settled, until it is settled right.” This matter has not yet been settled.²³

The Scandal Gets a Broader Audience

The message from Sefrit could not have been more clear: The gloves, in terms of public exposure, were coming off. And Fisher, sensing that support among his college trustees was beginning to slip under the continued onslaught, appeared to have received said message loud and clear. Recognizing that the threat to his job had not diminished, Fisher soon abandoned his previous keep-quiet strategy and began to ring alarm bells among likely political allies about his potential firing — beyond the confines of

²³ Ibid.

Whatcom County and Bellingham. Within weeks of Sefrit's "This matter has not been settled" remark, the feud erupted into public view in Seattle, 90 miles to the south. On June 4, 1936, a banner headline in *The Seattle Daily Times* blared: "NORMAL HEAD'S OUSTER ASKED." The newspaper reported that a campaign to oust Fisher had been



The Fisher case gained regional attention in June, 1936, when The Seattle Daily Times reported rumors of an attempt to oust the president. (Bellingham Herald collection on Charles H. Fisher, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Western Washington University.)

“revealed” that day at the state capitol in Olympia, where the three-member Normal School board of trustees had conferred with Governor Martin. Fisher told the newspaper he was not allowed to attend the meeting, but was well aware of a movement by “reactionary groups” that had been pushing for his dismissal for some time.²⁴ (Trustees, the newspaper said, denied that the meeting with Martin dealt with Fisher’s job status.) Notably, speaking in defense of Fisher in the article was his son, William, who said the board still supported his father, but that “reactionary” groups continued to press the case

²⁴ “Foes Attack Bellingham President,” *The Seattle Daily Times*, June 4, 1936.

with Martin. Speaking out about the dispute appeared to have the desired effect of rallying sympathetic political forces to strike a preemptive blow against Fisher's firing: The same *Times* article reported that the Seattle Central Labor Council had voted unanimously to telegram Martin, protesting any possible plans to dismiss Fisher, a national leader in progressive education.

The embattled president thus seized the occasion to cast the campaign against him as a purely opportunistic political ploy by right-wing reactionaries to goad Governor Martin – in need of conservative support for an autumn, 1936 reelection battle for an unprecedented third term — into firing Fisher. “It is significant that pressure should be brought on the governor just before an election,” the college president told *The Times*. “These reactionary groups are taking advantage of a situation and putting the governor in a hole. He appointed the trustees.”²⁵ Fisher added that six members of the community groups aligned against him had visited Martin two weeks prior, and that six other citizens “representing the school” had also recently met with Martin on Fisher's behalf. From this point forward, developments in the Fisher story would increasingly be chronicled by media organizations in the Northwest, and beyond.

One exception was the newspaper whose staff knew, by far, the most about the imbroglio: *The Bellingham Herald*. Bellingham's daily newspaper during this period limited its coverage of the saga largely to follow-ups after stories created by an increasingly curious Seattle press corps had already appeared. The paper did, however, keep the general subject of the imminent, local threat of communism very much alive in

²⁵ Ibid.

the minds of readers. On June 4, 1936, *The Herald* devoted a half page to the text of a lengthy recent sermon by local pastor John Robertson Macartney.²⁶ “No one with his eyes open can possibly deny that the spirit of Communism is abroad in the land to an alarming extent,” the preacher warned his Presbyterian flock, and *Herald* readers. “The scourge of this age is atheistic Communism.” It was up to each parishioner to preserve the very soul of the nation, he said: “During the last war we were told that we were fighting to make the world safe for democracy. I am inclined to think that, primarily at least, we shall have to fight to make the United States safe for ourselves.”²⁷ *Herald* readers were not informed that Macartney was a key member of the secretive Committee on Normal Protest.

While much of the direct communication to Governor Martin about Fisher’s tenure appears to have disappeared from state archives, a few examples of political pressure applied by constituents survive in other collections. In April, 1937, Bellingham policeman, longtime Fisher foe and American Legion stalwart William Kaigler sent the board of trustees a copy of a missive he had sent to Martin, congratulating the governor (whom he admitted he had not voted for) on being re-elected in 1936. Kaigler repeated his earlier calls for Fisher’s ousting. In the letter to Martin, Kaigler indicated that he had been a member of the above-referenced group of previously unidentified Fisher opponents who met with the governor about the Fisher affair in Olympia a year prior: “I wish to remind you sir, that when the conference was held in your office last year

²⁶ Not identified as such by *The Herald*.

²⁷ “Red Menace Subject of Patriotic Appeal,” *The Bellingham Herald*, June 6, 1936.

pertaining to a change in the head of the Bellingham Normal School, you wished not to commit yourself; or so you intimated at the time,” Kaigler wrote. “Realizing that you would be quite busy, due to election, the session of the Legislature, etc., nothing has been done in the matter out of respect for your wishes.” Kaigler then continued:

Now, Governor, you once stated in a letter that you thought I was sincere in my efforts to keep down radicalism, especially in our schools. I am still sincere in this work that brings nothing but sticks and stones from certain quarters, and have been urged by a great number of citizens, who have become incensed by recent happenings at the school, to press the matter further. In other words, we do not wish to have a lot of adverse publicity as far as the city and the Governor are concerned, but we do desire action. The citizens know of no one else to whom they can turn except myself in whom they can rely to press the matter towards its culmination and not have a lot of undue publicity on it in the papers and over the radio. We have placed our confidence in your sound judgment and desire to do what is right as you see it. I am sure that if you and the Board had time to put on the matter, that you would see things in the same light as we.²⁸

In the attached cover letter to board chairman Kirkpatrick, Kaigler left no doubt that he had maintained contact with the governor specifically to encourage immediate action by the board against Fisher. “I realize, Doctor, that you are in an embarrassing position in this matter,” he wrote. “But I am also convinced that you are a well meaning and clear thinking individual who if you are convinced things are not as they should be in this case ... will act accordingly. There is no doubt that a change should be made at this time and I believe you will do what is right.”²⁹

²⁸ Kaigler to Martin, April 19, 1937, Fisher Case Records, President’s Office, Board of Trustees, Accession 77-30, box 3, Western Washington University Archives.

²⁹ Kaigler to Kirkpatrick, April 19, 1937, Fisher Case Records, President’s Office, Board of Trustees, WWU Archives.

But the governor received communiques in support of Fisher, as well.³⁰ One of the more eloquent, written more than a year after Kaigler's missive, came from a local Congregational pastor, Dwight C. Smith, in whose church Fisher had taken Sunday-service refuge. Smith told the governor he had watched Fisher be "violently opposed" by a small minority group for more than a decade, while the vast majority of Bellingham residents admired his educational leadership. Smith described the opposition group as an assemblage of jilted ex-employees, irate property owners squeezed out for school expansion, and arch-conservatives who began by complaining about the teaching of evolution. He continued: "I am sure you will agree that no institution of higher learning in this state could expect to function if its department of science must be run to suit such prejudices." The participation of the Ku Klux Klan, he wrote, "seemed only to further evidence that the opposition to him [Fisher] might be far less important than it was vocal." The anti-Fisher movement gained new strength after the 1932 election of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Smith surmised. "It does not make sense for people to oppose President Fisher because they dislike Franklin Roosevelt, but there can be little doubt that there is such a direct connection." Opponents of the administration for varied reasons had opportunistically applied the "red" label as a matter of convenience – with possible dire

³⁰ Copies of a number of supportive letters from friends, peers and colleagues are found in a packet of documents Fisher prepared for American Association of University Professors investigators, then left for archival purposes after his dismissal. See Fisher Case Records, President's Office, Correspondence, Accession 94-12, Box 1, WWU Archives.

long-term consequences, Smith wrote. “The future would be dark indeed if our potential school teachers were not encouraged to think for themselves.”³¹

While this war of words raged behind the scenes, Fisher, hoping to coalesce support to save his job, next turned to educational peers both near and far. While his “lack of tact” in dealing with the broader Bellingham community had left him vulnerable in the world of state politics, his close personal bonds with students and faculty had engendered almost-unanimous support within the more-intimate confines of his campus. Here, he was viewed less like a controversial political combatant and more like the father figure of an extended family. The president throughout 1937 worked to build this support among faculty members, who also had reluctantly begun to accept that what seemed a decisive victory over the Sefrit forces in the spring of 1935 had been largely illusory.³²

In doing so, Fisher became increasingly strident in his belief that the liberal-arts curriculum taught at his college, and a handful of peer institutions, was vital to protecting American democracy against rising foes he now branded as “fascist.” He believed his own predicament presented an all-too-real example of the stakes. In early 1937, Fisher

³¹ Dwight C. Smith, Pastor, First Congregational Church, Bellingham, to Gov. Clarence Martin, Nov. 26, 1938, Fisher Case Records, President’s Office, Correspondence, WWU Archives.

³² Faculty members had remained loyal to Fisher even in the face of salary reductions of 35 percent in 1933 and an additional 15 percent in 1934, and other austerity measures necessitated by the economics of the Great Depression in the early 1930s. W. T. Laprade and A. J. Carlson, “Academic Freedom and Tenure: Western Washington College of Education,” *Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors* 27, no. 1 (February 1, 1941): 48–60, doi:10.2307/40219179. Further, the faculty in 1935, just before the filing of formal charges against Fisher by Sefrit’s group, had unanimously honored their president for his “untiring and effective efforts in behalf of fair and satisfactory salary adjustments.” The faculty also had sent the Board of Trustees a resolution of “deep appreciation” for its “thorough, fair and judicious investigation” of the Sefrit group’s charges. Minutes of the Faculty of Washington State Normal School, May 14, 1935 and June 26, 1935, Western Washington University Archives.

traveled to New Orleans to attend the American Association of Teachers Colleges (AATC) convention, where his work at the newly renamed Western Washington College of Education was honored by peers with an appointment to the AATC's Western U.S. accrediting committee.³³ While there, Fisher took in a lecture from progressive education champion John Dewey, who spoke on "Democracy and Social Change." Fisher enthusiastically recounted the event to faculty upon his return.³⁴ A month later, Fisher again met with faculty, to read "at considerable length" from a new book, *The Teacher and Society*, published by the John Dewey Association.³⁵ In May, Fisher again called his faculty's attention to national education and politics, reading "at some length" from a *Harper's* magazine article that had impressed him, "Can the Schools Save Democracy?"³⁶ In the article, Midwestern author and educator Avis D. Carlson, echoing the calls of social reconstructionist educators, bemoaned the state of public education, particularly its failure to produce a citizenry well attuned to rapidly changing political and economic realities:

This whole question of citizenship and Democracy is an old one. From the Founding Fathers, with their keen disagreement over the capacities of the common man, straight down to George Counts and Charles Beard, the more thoughtful Americans have always perceived that the quality of citizenship must be vastly higher in a Democracy than in other forms of government, that if the common man is to have power he must be taught to live up to his obligations

³³ The school had begun granting four-year degrees three years earlier; the name change lagged behind in the Washington state legislature. Faculty members said blame for the delay fell on Governor Martin, who feared that the name change would lead to criticisms of a bloated educational system with "five state universities." Minutes of the Faculty, March 12, 1935.

³⁴ Minutes of the Faculty of Western Washington College of Education, March 9, 1937, WWU Archives.

³⁵ Minutes of the Faculty, April 13, 1937.

³⁶ Minutes of the Faculty, May 11, 1937.

instead of letting himself become one of a rabble. In all that long discussion the voice of the schoolmaster has been prominent.³⁷

Carlson, surveying the evolution of U.S. public education, cited in the article the post-World War belief that schools “must become a little world in which the children should learn to act like citizens.” That gave teachers, she concluded, a “vested interest in citizenship somewhat akin to the vested interest of the medical profession in health. None of them had any foreboding of how uncomfortable it would presently make them.” She lamented the disturbing onslaught of popular support for “first-class rabble-rousers” who would presume to interfere with schools, noting the irony that “people who had supposedly been trained to live in a Democracy would leap wholeheartedly to throttle the expression of new or different points of view.” Every “red” hunt, she continued, “has left an emotional scar upon the better sort of teachers, for it proves their failure to inculcate tolerance, one of the first principles of democratic citizenship.”³⁸

She called for an aggressive approach to teaching social studies to achieve that end, ultimately producing, for a nation increasingly active on the world stage, young democrats in the same way communist schools were efficiently creating communists, and fascist schools created young fascists. “If we are to produce democrats who understand their own problems, we must allow teachers to approach those problems without too many gloves,” she wrote. This included acknowledging both the “failures and the

³⁷ Avis D. Carlson, “Can the Schools Save Democracy,” *Harper’s Monthly Magazine*, April, 1937. Carlson’s statements about teachers assuming the role of agents of social change are consistent with the philosophy of Counts and other contemporary social reconstructionists.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 530.

achievements of Democracy.” Carlson’s connection of the opening of young minds with the saving of the republic might have spoken directly to the embattled Fisher:

A future citizen has a right ... to know about the tensions and conflicts and indecisions racking modern society. And he has a right to be introduced to the political and economic philosophies which various countries and individuals are advocating as ways of reducing those tensions and conflicts: yes, to the bogey “isms” which frighten some of his elders half out of their senses. How can we really teach Democracy without explaining its points of difference from Communism and Fascism?³⁹

These field reports from conventions and recommending of articles that reflected his views on larger societal issues were as close as Fisher had come, to date, to publicly espousing purely political views in conjunction with his job.

Faculty members grasped the weight of Fisher’s message, and his own predicament. Both took on new urgency in May, 1937, when the trustees neglected to renew Fisher’s expiring contract. Faculty at this point decided to eschew Fisher’s cautious advice that they remain officially on the sidelines to protect their academic integrity. On May 14, 1937, respected faculty member Irving Miller, who headed an important standing committee on curricular revisions to promote Fisher’s liberal-arts goals, passed along to Fisher a copy of a letter taking the unusual step of requesting a direct meeting with college trustees to make a case for Fisher’s retention. “In spite of your unwillingness for the faculty to take action, they have felt that to sit quietly by and merely watch events take their course was hardly the part of real men and women,”

³⁹ Ibid., 535.

Miller wrote.⁴⁰ The attached letter to trustees made it clear faculty were acting on their own, without the consent, let alone urging, of Fisher. “In view of the fact that the re-election of President Fisher was postponed for one month, we assume that pressure has been brought to bear upon the Board,” the letter stated. “We take the matter of the re-appointment of President Fisher so seriously that we can no longer be restrained from resorting to the unconventional procedure of asking the Board of Trustees to give us a hearing through a committee of the faculty.” Fisher, Miller added, enjoyed the “wholehearted cooperation of the entire Faculty and of the student body ... This cooperation is so outstanding that it is in itself a distinction.” The college, he continued, had risen to among the top institutions of its kind in the country. “We think that any interruption of the capable leadership which has produced this result would be very unfortunate.”⁴¹

The Ax Falls

But over the course of the next year, trustees clearly began to pursue their own agenda – one which, in hindsight, clearly did not include retaining the school’s current “capable leadership.” On September 28, 1938, the three men traveled to Olympia to meet with Governor Martin. During that meeting, trustees by all accounts agreed with Martin abruptly terminate the president by the end of the 1938-39 academic year. The following week, Fisher himself traveled to Olympia to a meeting with Martin. Details of this meeting were not publicly disclosed until nearly a year later in an account, mostly likely

⁴⁰ Miller to Fisher, May 14, 1937, Fisher Case Records, President’s Office, Board of Trustees, WWU Archives.

⁴¹ Miller to Board of Trustees, May 14, 1937, Fisher Case Records, President’s Office, Board of Trustees, WWU Archives. The correspondence file contains no reply from trustees.

provided by Fisher, published in *The Seattle Star*. The newspaper reported this account of the meeting:

[Fisher] told the governor that the trouble started in Bellingham and he named individuals and organizations whom he considered responsible for it.

“I begin to see they have a good deal of influence in this office,” Fisher told Martin.

“Well, we’re not influenced that way,” the governor replied.

“What is wrong then?” Fisher asked. “Certainly not the board of trustees. We’d still get along if it were not for the pressure from the governor’s office.”

The report is that the governor got “pretty sore” at that.

“I don’t think there is any undue influence,” he said. “I’ve got just one answer: You have been up there 15 years, and in that time, like men in all these institutions, you get opposition, and I think it’s time for you to move on.”

“I cannot accept that explanation,” Fisher said. “This is a very small opposition. I can count the leaders on the finger of one hand almost. We are a progressive state and we have a progressive institution. But I’m not a radical. If I’d classify myself, I’d say I’m a moderate liberal.”

“Well, we’ll do all we can to help you get a job at the University [of Washington]. It will pay as much as you get now.”

“How do you know the university wants me? How do they know I’m prepared to do what they may want of me? I don’t know as I want to get a job that way.”

“Mark that off,” the governor said, turning to his secretary. “That’s out of the picture.”⁴²

On October 11, trustees reconvened on campus, called Fisher away from a faculty meeting, and delivered the news: They had reached an agreement with the

⁴² “Fisher Refused U.W. Post Nine Months Ago When It Was Offered by Martin, *The Seattle Star*, July 3, 1939. The account roughly squares with Fisher’s recounting of the meeting from other sources, but includes more detail about Martin’s responses. See specifically Fisher’s Nov. 28, 1938 letter to the AATC’s Charles Hunt, described below.

governor. Fisher was to leave his job by the end of the summer session of the following, 1938-39 school year. They gave Fisher no reason for his dismissal. An investigator from the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), who would travel to Washington state in September, 1939 to conduct what stands as the most-thorough investigation of the Fisher firing, later reported that the official minutes from that contentious Fisher meeting had been scrubbed of any mention of the president's change in employment status. The original minutes of the October 11, 1938 trustees' meeting contained the following paragraph, subsequently deleted:

Agreement between the Board of Trustees and Governor Martin

The chief purpose of this special meeting was to discuss with President Fisher the outcome of a meeting with Governor Martin in Olympia, on Wednesday, September 28, 1938. After some discussion President Fisher was asked if he would resign from his position and he said he would not submit a resignation. President Fisher was told that for his own protection the Board would be willing to give him a contract to the end of this school year. President Fisher replied that he has had no contract since September, 1937. He preferred to go without a contract. President Fisher was then given to understand that an agreement had been made between the Board of Trustees and Governor Martin that he was to leave the presidency at the end of the [1938-1939] school year in June or August, whichever time was most suitable for him.⁴³

The AAUP report explained the deletion thusly: "In letters dated November 16 and 17, 1939, Dr. Kirkpatrick, the Chairman of the Board, and Mr. Branigin, the Secretary of the

⁴³ Laprade and Carlson, 56. The AAUP report notes that investigators' queries to trustees about reasons for Fisher's dismissal produced from trustees only "indirect references to the charges made by Mr. Sefrit in 1935." Trustees Kirkpatrick and Branigin would provide more-detailed accounts of these events later to AAUP investigators. See Chapter 7.

Board, acknowledge their signatures on this document and explain the deletion of the paragraph on the grounds that “it was embarrassing to all concerned.”⁴⁴

Three days after the impromptu Board meeting with Fisher, Kirkpatrick wrote to inform Governor Martin that the trustees had done their best to reach a “complete understanding” of the timing of Fisher’s termination. Alas, “Mr. Fisher would not submit his resignation, and the Board said it was better on the whole for both the school and himself if it was clearly understood that he should leave the presidency at the end of the [1938-39 academic] year. It was understood that no publicity should be given to this agreement.”⁴⁵ Below the signatures on the letter conveying this message, an addendum of undetermined date was typed: “The last sentence of the second paragraph seems to imply that Mr. Fisher agreed to leave the presidency at the end of the school year. President Fisher made it clear to the Board of Trustees that he has not agreed to anything. What he said was that he understood the agreement had been reached between the Governor and the Board of Trustees.”⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Laprade and Carlson, 57. Note: Branigin’s full explanation of the editing of the minutes dated Nov. 16, 1939, is found in AAUP archives, and suggests that the “embarrassing” quote was taken somewhat out of context by AAUP investigators. See Chapter 7. The Nov. 16, 1939 response from Kirkpatrick referenced in the report is not found in the AAUP archives.

⁴⁵ Kirkpatrick to Martin, Oct. 14, 1938, Fisher Case Records, Vice President for Enrollment and Student Services, American Association of Teacher Colleges Accreditation Committee, Accession 74-1, Box 36, Western Washington University Archives. The meeting, and the letter to Martin, would not become public until reported in *The Seattle Star* more than 10 months later, after Fisher’s fate had been sealed. More than two years after the meeting, Kirkpatrick, in a communication to the AAUP, would insist that Fisher himself was to blame for his firing, and that the governor exerted no influence. See Chapter 7.

⁴⁶ Ibid. In its June 30, 1939 report, *The Seattle Star* concluded that the letter’s tagged-on line about Fisher’s emphatic refusal to admit he had resigned originated as part of a submission made by Fisher himself to AAUP investigators. Given the letter’s location among other documents known to be submitted to AAUP investigators (it also appears in the copy in the AAUP archives on the case) this explanation seems correct. However, because the original letter is not in evidence in state archives of Gov. Martin, it is not possible to determine whether the copy sent to him included this passage. Either way, the undated notation indicates,

The trustees' abrupt about-face on Fisher in the autumn of 1938 came as a shock to faculty members, who, on the very same day Fisher learned of his dismissal, delivered to trustees a prepared letter expressing "unanimous confidence" in their president. The faculty, a letter to trustees noted, "think that a change in the present administration because of local political pressure would tend to disrupt and demoralize this institution as a whole, both as concerns students and faculty. They consider the school to be responsible to the people of the whole state, not merely to the community of Bellingham, let alone a small disgruntled political minority."⁴⁷ Showing increased frustration with the lack of redress by college trustees, they soon reached out to peers off campus to help bring the Fisher story further into the public light.

Investigations: Justice, or a Self-Inflicted Wound?

With Fisher left hanging by a thread, faculty members' concerns quickly turned to the question of whether to seek formal investigations into Fisher's pending firing by outside agencies with an interest in protecting academic freedoms. On Oct. 18, 1938, faculty members appointed a committee charged with contacting the American Association of Teachers Colleges, the school's accrediting agency, to suggest an agency inquiry into ongoing assaults on the college by community members. A resolution suggesting such was sent to the AATC the same day.⁴⁸ The next day, hoping to turn the

strongly, Fisher's objection to the notion that he left his job in any way that might be construed as voluntary.

⁴⁷ Richardson, et al, to the Board of Trustees, Oct. 11, 1938, Fisher Case Records, President's Office, Bound Documents Compiled by C.H. Fisher, WWU Archives.

⁴⁸ Minutes of the Faculty, Oct. 18, 1938.

tide at home, faculty members created a “public-relations committee” to meet with prominent members of opposition groups in the community.⁴⁹ At a subsequent meeting in November, the committee was instructed to solicit meetings with the board of trustees and the executive committees of the Bellingham Chamber of Commerce, Pro-America, and other local organizations believed to be fomenting the attacks on Fisher. The purpose of the meetings was to “ascertain what the specific criticisms of the administration are and to refute them if untrue.”⁵⁰ In the months that followed, the committee attempted to do so, with “disappointing results.”⁵¹

Around the same time, faculty member Arthur C. Hicks, a member of the faculty public-relations committee, reported to colleagues that he also had contacted the American Association of University Professors, which did not have an active chapter on the campus, about its own possible investigation of political interference. The group responded that it frequently dealt with such cases involving administrators, not just faculty, and that “abuses in the fields of tenure and academic freedom had been quite numerous during recent months.”⁵² By this time, the wheels already were churning with the AATC. But members of that group’s accrediting committee held differing views on the wisdom of placing themselves between warring factions in Bellingham by authorizing

⁴⁹ Minutes of the Faculty, Oct. 19, 1938

⁵⁰ Minutes of the Faculty, Nov. 29, 1938

⁵¹ Hicks, *Western at 75*, 57. See also Minutes of the Board of Trustees, February, 1939, WWU Archives. The latter source documents a report from the faculty public-relations committee on a meeting with members of the Americanization Committee of Bellingham’s American Legion Auxiliary. It provides no details of the meeting.

⁵² Minutes of the Faculty, Nov. 29, 1938.

a formal inquiry. On November 10, faculty wrote directly to AATC Secretary Charles W. Hunt to again inquire about an investigation of what clearly seemed to be a violation of the AATC's Standard XII, which prohibited outside political interference in member institutions.⁵³ The letter cited "constant pressure from certain extremely vocal groups in the community that have aimed to dominate the school by using political pressure to attain their own ends." That pressure had now produced a Board of Trustees request for Fisher to resign, they said. "It seems clear that Governor Clarence D. Martin has been influenced by misrepresentations of conditions here."⁵⁴

On November 16, an AATC representative issued a decidedly noncommittal response. The group agreed that an investigation seemed necessary, but emphasized that conducting one put the organization in a precarious position because it might appear the group was simply defending Fisher as one of its own members. "Of course, we know President Fisher well," the AATC's Hunt wrote to faculty. "He is a member of our Accrediting Committee. His administration at Bellingham has been widely held to have been professional and intelligent, with fine results for the school."⁵⁵

⁵³ Standard XII of the AATC's accrediting standards reads in part: "The appointment of administrative officers and faculty members and the determination of educational policies should be governed by professional considerations. Political factors should not be permitted to interfere with the efficiency of an institution." "AATC Report of the Fisher Case," *School and Society*, March 30, 1940, Vol. 51, No. 1318, 420-422. The newly adopted standard was noted by the college board of trustees in April, 1937. Minutes of the Board of Trustees, April 21, 1937, WWU Archives.

⁵⁴ C.C. Upshall, et al, to Charles W. Hunt, Nov. 10. 1938, Fisher Case Records, Vice President for Enrollment and Student Services, AATC Teacher Education Accreditation Committee, WWU Archives.

⁵⁵ Charles Hunt, AATC, to C.C. Upshall, Nov. 16, 1938, Fisher Case Records, Vice President for Enrollment and Student Services, AATC Accreditation Committee, WWU Archives.

Fisher, meanwhile, kept up his own pressure for AATC action. In a Nov. 28 letter to colleague Alonzo F. Myers of NYU, a fellow member of the organization's accrediting committee, the embattled Fisher reiterated that exposing Washington state's violation of accreditation Standard XII was critical, and could provide a useful precedent in establishing how to respond to such violations. "If the case at Bellingham is not a violation of Standard XII, then I confess I think we had better abolish the standard and forget it," Fisher wrote. He continued:

If the investigation should be made, I have plenty of evidence to submit that I think would be startling to any investigating committee. I have been fighting off the wolves almost single handed for the past five years and during this time I have prevented the opposition from accomplishing their purpose. The opposition has certainly gotten the Governor on their side, and the Governor of this state has the power to carry out his intentions.

My case is almost a duplicate of the case of the case of Dr. [Henry] Suzzallo at the State University [University of Washington]. You will recall the ruthless dismissal of Suzzallo about ten years ago by [Roland] Hartley, who was then Governor of the state. In my case the method used is not quite so ruthless.⁵⁶

On the same day, Fisher directed similar sentiments to AATC head Hunt, providing further background on the campaign against him, and detailing the governor's puzzling reaction to it. Fisher said the situation had simmered for five years, but that "once each year there has been an outbreak on the part of the opposition, and this fall, when it was not expected, the outbreak occurred with unusual force." College trustees, Fisher wrote, were firm in their insistence that he leave, but wanted to give him time to secure another position before announcing the move:

⁵⁶ Fisher to Alonzo F. Meyers, NYU, Nov, 28, 1938, Fisher Case Records, Vice President for Enrollment and Student Services, AATC Accreditation Committee, WWU Archives. Suzzallo was ousted by regents installed by Gov. Hartley primarily for that purpose in 1926.

The present Board of Trustees has stood by me for the past five years, but recently the Governor had a meeting with them at the State Capital and it looks as though now they have weakened. I think they fear they would be fired if they did not grant the Governor's request. The Governor has pursued the Board for the past three years to make a change in the presidency and the Board has constantly put him off. Recently the Governor has brought so much pressure upon the Board that they no longer feel they can put him off.

Within the past few weeks I had an interview with the Governor about this matter and I want to report on this interview: I told the Governor that the whole matter started with a small group of individuals in Bellingham, several of whom were dropped from the faculty, who have worked incessantly to get even with me. Another was a newspaper editor of the extreme reactionary type; and there were a few other men and women who represent ultra-patriotic organizations who indulge in considerable red baiting. The Governor of course denied that he was subject to pressure from such groups ...

Then I asked the Governor what the real trouble was, and he said that he had but one answer, that is that I have been president of the institution for fifteen years and that in this time some opposition had developed around me and now it was time to move on. I told him that no reputable educator would accept his point of view. I expressed the idea that when a man had a record of success in the position of president it was the business of the Governor and the Board of Trustees to defend him against any opposition.

I am inclined to think that any investigation of this case will produce abundant evidence to show that Standard XII has been violated. From a personal standpoint, I am concerned that my own professional standing shall not be impaired. I need some advice from my colleagues, and shall look to the Accrediting Committee at our next meeting to give me helpful advice.⁵⁷

In January, 1939, as Fisher continued to work to salvage his job – or at least protect his professional reputation – he filled out paperwork for a “Study on Administrative Stability,” conducted by R.L. West, president of the State Teachers

⁵⁷ Fisher to Charles W. Hunt, Nov. 28, 1938, Fisher Case Records, President's Office, Bound Documents Compiled by C.H. Fisher, WWU Archives. A Dec. 10. 1938 reply from an AATC Accrediting Committee Chairman Charles C. Sherrod indicated the group would take up the matter at its next meeting in January, 1939.

College of Trenton, N.J. The survey form asked for names and dates of service for all college presidents since 1900, including the reason for termination of their services. In the blanks, Fisher made the following notations about the school's long, rocky relationship with its own town:

Edward T. Mathes (1899-1914): Change in Governor. Local, individual and political pressure.

George W. Nash (1914-1922): Left of his own volition but local interference weakened his position.

Dwight B. Waldo (1922-23): Returned to Kalamazoo.

C.H. Fisher (1923-1939): Removal is threatened by Governor.⁵⁸

On a succeeding page, the questionnaire asked: Would you call the situation in your college in regard to tenure of administration and faculty stable or unstable? Fisher responded: "Decidedly unstable." Asked to provide a reason, Fisher wrote: "Local Board of Trustees of three members appointed and removable by Governor. Too much centralized power in hands of Governor."⁵⁹

In February, 1939, while the political recriminations of the Fisher matter continued to swirl behind closed doors, the president got the rare opportunity to confront an accuser head on at a Bellingham public event. At a late January meeting of the Washington Club, a group of city businessmen, Fisher's alleged transgressions had been recounted once more by policeman and American Legion stalwart Kaigler. At the group's next weekly meeting, on February 3, Fisher took to the podium and, in his first detailed

⁵⁸ "Second Study on Administrative Stability," Fisher Case Records, Vice President for Enrollment and Student Services, AATC Accreditation Committee, WWU Archives.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

public response to charges of sedition, fired back. A KVOS radio broadcast from the same afternoon recounted the event, which it said occurred before an “overflow crowd”:

Dr. Fisher pointed out that he had been aware for a long time of the gossip against the college; that on several occasions he had asked Kaigler for specific charges against the institution. Once he asked Kaigler to specify his objection to a certain textbook; he had asked which of the two volumes was un-American, which page, which paragraph. He [Kaigler] had no answer – no bill of particulars and thereafter classed the objection as another bit of gossip aimed at weakening the reputation of the institution.

With reference to the charge of subversive speakers, Dr. Fisher said that he had been asked never to invite a speaker to the college who was listed in the so-called book, *The Red Network*. He went on to explain that he would be unable to invite to Bellingham such men as [Idaho] Sen. Wm. E. Borah, Sen. Morris, William Filene of Boston, and Dr. Glenn Frank. The crowd laughed when reminded that [ousted University of Madison-Wisconsin President] Glenn Frank was a good Republican.

Warming to the subject as the crowd swung to appreciation of his position, Dr. Fisher pointed out that the college actually cost the taxpayers of Bellingham about \$2,500 a year while its payroll alone was over \$25,000 a month, to say nothing of the money spent for materials and supplies, plus the very large amounts spent by around a thousand students. In closing, he bespoke the cooperation of business men and citizens generally to the end that the school, which brings culture, educational facilities and business to the community, should have support of the community, in spite of the nagging of a few. He received enthusiastic applause of the large crowd when he finished his over-time speech.⁶⁰

With community buzz lingering over the event a day later, one businessman in attendance, H.C. Banner of the Bellingham office of New York Life Insurance Company, wrote Fisher to urge that the president make his case in a similarly forceful, public way in other local settings:

I wish to compliment you on a very excellent and comprehensive talk before the Washington Club Friday noon. To those un-prejudiced, your talk was very convincing and made a most-favorable impression. To those unfriendly and

⁶⁰ KVOS Radio news transcript, sent from Rogan Jones, KVOS Radio, to C.H. Fisher, Feb. 6, 1939, Fisher Case Records, President’s Office, Correspondence, WWU Archives.

biased, they came under the category of my mother's oft observation – "Those convinced against their will, will hold the same opinion still."

However, my object in writing you is not to compliment but to say you have a duty to perform. This injustice to yourself and in fairness to the institution of which you are the head. The un-American charge has gone long enough unchallenged. You should if possible appear before the American Legion and other organizations and champion your stewardship and the fine institution which means so much to this community.

Most of our people so far are only listening, with opportunity to hear the maledictions of your personal enemies. Their accusations have been long and undermining. Passive resistance may be all right but it is better to go down fighting. Further, mostly people are fair or disposed to be fair – so, give them a chance to be fair. Your enemies have gone on unchallenged already too long. Spike their guns one by one. Follow them to their lair – drag them out in the open

...

After hearing your address yesterday, I personally am convinced of not only your capability, but of your patriotism and good citizenship.⁶¹

Momentum from Fisher's talk to the businessmen translated into belated community action on his behalf. Less than two months after the Washington Club meeting, a committee of businessmen traveled to Olympia to plead Fisher's case to Governor Martin. Members were listed as Hugh Diehl, Carl Lobe, Harold Wahl, John L. Hogberg, and C.H. Barlow.⁶² No record of this meeting, beyond the names and the date, exists in state archives. But faculty members later heard a report from a citizen's committee, presumably the same group, about a meeting with the governor. Committee members were unable to convince the governor to relate specific charges against Fisher. But members came away with several impressions:

⁶¹ H.C. Banner to Fisher, Feb. 4, 1939, Fisher Case Records, President's Office, Correspondence, WWU Archives.

⁶² "Committee of Business Men from Bellingham Who Went to See the Governor, April 3, 1939, Fisher Case Records, President's Office, Correspondence, WWU Archives.

- 1) That President Fisher should have courted the Governor's favor more actively.
- 2) That the Governor believes that heads of institutions should be changed rather often.
- 3) That Western Washington College of Education could have been built up into a much larger institution.
- 4) That this action is not strictly local, but is part of a state-wide move to rid institutions of so-called radicals.⁶³

Sensing that Fisher was running out of options, faculty members, after months of deliberations and other delays, on Feb. 14, 1939 finally voted unanimously to formally request a full investigation by the AATC, focusing on possible violations of Standard XII.⁶⁴ Five days later, a similar formal request was made to Ralph E. Himstead, general secretary of the American Association of University Professors, the group with which faculty member Hicks had previously initiated contact.⁶⁵

On April 18, 1939, faculty members heard a report about a meeting a week earlier of the Board of Trustees, called to mull the possibility of outside investigations by the two groups. "The members of the Board were disturbed and worried," minutes of a faculty meeting state. "They were apparently reluctant to dismiss President Fisher.

⁶³ Minutes of the Faculty, April 18, 1939

⁶⁴ Minutes of the Faculty, Feb. 14, 1939. C.C. Upshall, et al, to Charles Hunt, Feb. 15, 1939, Fisher Case Records, President's Office, Board of Trustees, WWU Archives.

⁶⁵ C.C. Upshall, et al, to Ralph E. Himstead, AAUP, Feb. 20, 1939, Fisher Case Records, President's Office, Board of Trustees, WWU Archives. The faculty sent copies of the requests to trustees, suggesting that instructors had lost faith in the board of trustees' ability to rule fairly on Fisher's employment: "It was the feeling of the faculty that the best interests of the College would be served by having outside organizations make an impartial study of our problem here." C.C. Upshall to W.D. Kirkpatrick, Feb. 21, 1939, Fisher Case Records, President's Office, Board of Trustees, WWU Archives. Hicks, meanwhile, had started the process of establishing an AAUP chapter on Western's campus, in case that was a necessary precursor to an investigation.

Instead, they wished him to resign. He refused to resign on the ground that no sufficient reason for his resignation had been offered. The Board suggested that if he would not resign, the Board might be compelled to do so.”⁶⁶ The same day, faculty members were told that, as part of a preliminary AATC inquiry, President W.A. Brandenburg of Pittsburg (Kansas) State Teachers College had traveled to Washington state to meet with principles in the Fisher case. Brandenburg had met with Governor Martin on April 17. “All that he was able to learn from Governor Martin was that President Fisher was unable to satisfy his opponents in Bellingham,” faculty minutes state. The same day, Brandenburg met with college trustees in Mount Vernon: “The outcome was similar to that of his conference with Governor Martin.” Further investigations by both the AATC and the AAUP now appeared likely, the faculty learned.⁶⁷

This preemptive visit by Brandenburg, due to what appeared to be a miscommunication, would prove a likely inadvertent, but significant, blow to whatever dim hopes Fisher might have had to salvage his job. After his brief visit and cursory inquiry, Brandenburg described the Bellingham situation to colleagues as “intolerable.”⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Minutes of the Faculty, April 18, 1939.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Fisher, ironically, might have contributed to Brandenburg’s conclusion about the intractability of the battle with the Sefrit forces by statements he made to the visiting educator after his visit. In a follow-up letter to Brandenburg, Fisher recounted the long roots of the fight for his job, beginning with the Pelagius Williams dismissal (see Chapter 4). In the same letter, Fisher held up Governor Martin, not the community of Bellingham, as the primary problem, emphasizing how out of step Martin was with Washington’s other political leaders. “The State of Washington is liberal and progressive as shown by all elections since 1932,” Fisher wrote, adding that in the fall of 1938, state voters elected a liberal U.S. senator and six liberal Congressmen. “Every member of the State’s representation in Washington, D.C. is out of accord with the Governor of the State ... The Governor has been elected twice with the assistance of Republicans, and is today the representative of the conservatives and reactionaries of both parties.” Fisher to President W.A.

He apparently believed that conceding an irreparable rift between Fisher and the community might be the best way to help Fisher slide into a new job, with similar salary, in the Education School at the University of Washington.⁶⁹ Brandenburg, however, apparently did not know that the UW job offer was for a one-year position – an outcome Fisher had already summarily rejected. But Brandenburg’s words about the intractability of the fight over Fisher would be used repeatedly by apologists for the board of trustees – including Sefrit, and indeed, the board itself – to lend legitimacy to the forcing of Fisher from office.⁷⁰ This fact was lamented by Fisher in subsequent communications to peers at AATC-member institutions – especially after Brandenburg suggested to colleagues that the AATC might be best served by staying out of the ugly fight in Bellingham altogether. On May 3, 1939, Fisher wrote to George A. Selke, president of the AATC’s accrediting committee, discussing Brandenburg’s recent visit. Fisher wrote that he had received a letter from Brandenburg that stated:

“I can really see nothing to be gained by an investigation or inspection by the American Association of Teachers Colleges. There is no question about the standing of your school, and has not been for years. There is nothing about the President that needs investigating or inspecting. No matter what amount of investigating and inspecting the Association did, I do not see how they could combat these forces of which you speak. I think they would be only the more

Brandenburg, State Teachers College, Pittsburg, Kansas, April 19, 1939, Fisher Case Records, Vice President for Enrollment and Student Services, Correspondence, WWU Archives.

⁶⁹ “Fisher Should Be Given a Public Hearing, Declares Bellingham Business Man,” *The Seattle Star*, July 6, 1939. The article quotes a letter from Brandenburg to Fisher asking: “If you were tendered a position at the university carrying a salary of \$4,000 to \$5,000, at least something in line with like members of the faculty there, couldn’t you be happier in such surroundings and freed from the hazards of ... administrative responsibility? For myself, I feel sure I could.”

⁷⁰ Ibid. The article states: “Board members point to Brandenburg’s attitude as justification for their stand. They assert there is no question about President Fisher’s professional standing.”

antagonistic and would probably double their efforts to embarrass, and ultimately get the president out.”⁷¹

Fisher asked Selke whether that meant there would be no AATC investigation at all:

It may be that President Brandenburg is right: that nothing would be gained by an investigation. I think that President Brandenburg has made it clear to me that he is thinking of what is best for me personally and my future welfare ...

As we see it, it is not the business of the Association to combat the opposition at Bellingham, or to try to save the position of the president, but rather to find out if a standard of accreditation has been violated.

If the case at Bellingham is not a violation of Standard XII, then I would be at a loss to know what would constitute a violation of this standard ...

The Board of Trustees has made several efforts to get a resignation from me, and each time I have refused. Only two weeks ago, I told them that under no circumstances would I resign because I had heard no reason advanced why I should resign. I told them that if I left the presidency, they would have to drop me, and they would have to give reasons for doing it.

The only thing that has worried the Board of Trustees up to date has been the possibility of an investigation. Last evening, when a committee of the faculty on public relations had a conference with the Board of Directors of the Chamber of Commerce, an investigation was referred to and it was the only thing that seemed to make an impression on these men.⁷²

On May 10, 1939, the AATC made its official response to the faculty’s request for an investigation, saying, in essence, that it would remain on the fence. The group again expressed its concern about appearances of conflict, given that university presidents in the organization would in effect be investigating one of their own. “To appear to be protecting presidents if they have been notified that their services are not desired by the

⁷¹ Fisher to Selke, May 3, 1939, Fisher Case Records, Vice President for Enrollment and Student Services, Correspondence, WWU Archives. The letter from Brandenburg to Fisher, cited in this communication, is not in evidence in the WWU Archives.

⁷² Ibid.

local authority is to enter an area of controversy which the Association is not prepared to deal with effectively,” the AATC’s Hunt wrote. The letter closed with a vow that the group would “continue its active interest in the situation.”⁷³

The political dilemma presented here to Fisher, his faculty, and the accrediting organization, was clear: An investigation by a group such as the AATC might be the only means to formally establish that the governor and board of trustees had acted improperly by violating the accreditation group’s Standard XII on political interference. But any investigation highlighting that violation might lead to the school being stripped of its accreditation, at least temporarily.⁷⁴ Further complicating the matter was the fact that, when defenders of academic freedom began reacting with revulsion as news spread of Fisher’s firing, most focused their ire not simply on the governor, but on the Board of Trustees — thus the institution itself. (This anger became more intense with the passage of time as trustees and Martin stubbornly refused to bow to calls from media and much of the public to explain their action.) A notable example of such ire, and its potential consequences to the university, is a scathing broadside issued by famed historian Charles A. Beard, responding to a June 28, 1939 editorial about the ongoing Fisher case in *The New Republic*. Beard, an intellectual comrade of George S. Counts and other educational reconstructionists at Columbia University, said it was encouraging to learn that the state’s

⁷³ Hunt to C.C. Upshall, May 10, 1939, Fisher Case Records, Vice President for Enrollment and Student Services, Fisher Case Correspondence, WWU Archives.

⁷⁴ Selke made this clear to Fisher in a letter on May 10, 1939, advising his friend to accept the position at the University of Washington. (It is unclear whether Selke knew the appointment was a temporary position.) Selke to Fisher, May 10, 1939, Fisher Case Records, Vice President for Enrollment and Student Services, Correspondence, WWU Archives.

Congressional delegation and others had demanded a reopening of the “star-chamber political proceedings” and were calling for a fair hearing by a “competent tribunal.” But, he continued:

Petty politicians in the state of Washington may say that it is none of our business, but if the college is to be reduced to the level of a Klan Konvention, men and women of influence in American education can easily see to it that the college wears the correct brand of the Kleagle and receives the “credit” that goes with such an institution of “learning.” In outcome the college may survive as a known and marked nest of goose-steppers under the eye of a drill sergeant, but it cannot pursue such tactics and expect anybody outside the Ku Klux Klan and Silver Shirt cliques to view its education seriously. It is not too late for the trustees to take stock of themselves. If they have any real evidence against Dr. Fisher, let them give him an open hearing and produce it.⁷⁵

Faculty members, understandably sensitive to such rhetoric aimed squarely at their institution, acknowledged the risk of investigations to their treasured school’s standing. But ultimately they decided that exposing what they saw as a gaping hole in the governance of Washington state higher education was a more critical concern. Fisher concurred. It was also clear that he hoped such an investigation might clear up lingering misinterpretations of the campus situation resulting from the earlier visit of the AATC’s Brandenburg.⁷⁶ Other Fisher peers involved in the AATC soon began pushing inside that organization for an investigation, as well. NYU’s Myers, urging Selke to pursue a formal

⁷⁵ “The Case of Dr. Fisher,” Letters, *The New Republic*, July 12, 1939.

⁷⁶ Fisher to Selke, June 9, 1939, Fisher Case Records, Vice President for Enrollment and Student Services, Correspondence, WWU Archives. Fisher wrote: “President Brandenburg tried to be fair to a fellow administrator but apparently he accepted what Governor Martin and the Board of Trustees told him and made no further investigation. He concluded that the situation was hopeless and that there was nothing I could do about it and that it was to my personal interest to give up the presidency and accept a position at the state university. Ever since President Brandenburg was here, the board has been quoting him in defense of what they are doing ... President Brandenburg tried to render me a real service by impressing up on the governor and Board of Trustees that they had an obligation to help me find another position and he was fooled into thinking that I would be offered a permanent position at the University of Washington at an attractive salary.”

inquiry, dismissed concerns about appearance of fairness in protecting a colleague as irrelevant. Myers argued that it was clear, by this time, that Fisher's job had already been lost. But the issue of political interference in an institution of higher education still loomed large, Myers believed: "We still have to deal with the issue of political interference. Unless the faculty has specifically requested that the investigation should not be made, I feel that we must go ahead."⁷⁷ Other academic peers followed suit, and momentum for an official inquiry continued to build.

While this fight continued behind the scenes, public pressure from faculty and other groups on the board of trustees only increased, as the campus, in the words of faculty member Hicks, "seethed with indignation."⁷⁸ When trustees finally agreed to meet with a faculty committee, the atmosphere was tense. "They discussed the situation, pro and con, in a very lengthy fashion," biology instructor Leona Sundquist recalled in a 1970 oral history interview. "They finally appealed to *us* for a solution to the problem. Silence settled over the entire group. Finally, I got to my feet and said: 'Why don't you give President Fisher a three-year contract?' With that the president of the board sprang to his feet and said: 'That cannot be, because there has been a gentleman's agreement ... with the governor of the state to terminate President Fisher's term in office.'"⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Alonzo F. Myers to George A. Selke, June 22, 1939, Fisher Case Records, Vice President for Enrollment and Student Services, Correspondence, WWU Archives.

⁷⁸ Hicks, *Western at 75*, 57.

⁷⁹ Leona Sundquist, interview by Robin Probst, Dec. 7, 1970, box 29, folder 2, (reel-to-reel tape recording) Rogan Jones Papers, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.

At the same time, Fisher was engaged in negotiations, of a sort, with his counterpart at the University of Washington, L.P. Sieg. The two presidents had begun communicating in the wake of Governor Martin's offer to create a UW faculty job for Fisher if he would "go quietly" from the Bellingham school. Sieg later told AAUP investigators that on May 15, 1939, he had reiterated to Fisher that "if a major disturbance was created through the severance of his position at Bellingham, our Board of Regents could not consider making an offer." Sieg followed up with a May 27 letter to Fisher, which concluded: "In view of the publicity that has come out, I fear that there will be no chance of my making any recommendation to the Board or the Board acting favorably even if I did make such a recommendation in the matter we discussed."⁸⁰ In hindsight, it became clear that what little chance the proposed University of Washington appointment ever had of allowing Fisher a peaceful transition from Bellingham to Seattle was blown up by the tempest that erupted in the short time between those two communications – specifically, the public announcement of Fisher's dismissal.⁸¹

Fisher's Firing Goes Public

Any pretense of behind-the-scenes efforts to ease Fisher out of office was abandoned after May 23, 1939, when trustees announced publicly that Fisher's tenure at the college would end by the conclusion of the school's summer session. The next

⁸⁰ Neither the memorandum from Sieg recounting his conversation with Fisher nor the May 27 letter are in evidence in WWU archival records. AAUP investigators Laprade and Carlson cite both in their report, 57. Fisher passed the Sieg letters along to AAUP investigators by attaching them to his written history of his firing. See above and Appendix V.

⁸¹ Media accounts suggested the UW job offer was rescinded after Fisher failed to resign, forcing the trustees to go public with his dismissal; Fisher said in numerous communications that he had never considered accepting the offer.

morning, the president's plight was front-page news in Seattle and beyond. The political backlash was instantaneous. Fisher, described by newspaper reporters as "nationally recognized as one of the foremost educators in his field," had been dismissed at the personal direction of Governor Martin, Democratic State Senator Mary Farquharson told the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*.⁸² The newspaper quoted Farquharson as saying Fisher's firing had been discussed between the governor and school trustees as early as the preceding October, and that the firing would be investigated by the American Association of University Professors. Fisher bluntly told the P-I reporter: "I have not resigned, and I have not given up."

The Seattle Daily Times on the same day focused on the collision of politics and academia in Bellingham, reporting that Fisher blamed his dismissal on a city political clique that wanted to control the college. "Heads of the institutions of higher learning in this state are in politics, whether we like it or not," Fisher told *The Times*. "We try to do a professional job, but we are forced to do a political job, without a politician's weapons."⁸³ In Bellingham, *The Herald* also quoted a defiant Fisher as reiterating that he had not resigned: "If there is any impression gone out that I did, it is incorrect."⁸⁴ Trustee Branigin, in the same *Herald* article, noted that "it is our intention to injure Mr. Fisher and the college as little as possible and on that account we haven't gone into the details as

⁸² "Bellingham Normal Head Discharged, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, May 24, 1939. The newspaper in the same article repeated rumors from the University of Washington that Fisher had been offered a post for \$5,000 a year (his approximate salary in Bellingham) if he "accepted his ouster in good grace."

⁸³ "Fisher Blames Political Clique," *The Seattle Daily Times*, May 25, 1939.

⁸⁴ "Fisher Asserts He Did Not Resign Position," *The Bellingham Herald*, May 24, 1939. This article also refutes the suggestion made by Ben Sefrit, to his family members, that Fisher had resigned under the pretense of health concerns. See footnote 38, Chapter 7.

to the reasons for his discharge. I am not authorized to make any statement.” This marked the beginning – or perhaps continuation of – a policy of stony silence surrounding the matter, shared by trustees and the governor. This attempted news blackout would prove to have the opposite effect, fanning the flames of resentment over the action in coming weeks.

News of the firing sparked a rapid-fire series of public reactions. On May 25, student body President Ralph H. Neil, after a mass meeting of most of the approximately 800-member student body, sent a formal demand for Fisher’s retention to Governor Martin. Neil blamed Fisher’s problems on “a campaign conducted by a minority group opposed to what they assume to be his policy.”⁸⁵ Students insisted that Fisher remain in office until charges against him could be fairly investigated. Faculty met on the same day, reiterating that support for Fisher was unanimous, and voting to release a resolution in support of Fisher that had been approved by faculty on May 15. The resolution, to be mailed to all alumni, local public school teachers, and parents of current students, noted that it would be “exceedingly difficult” to find an equal successor to Fisher after the president was fired because of political pressure.⁸⁶

Fisher traveled to Seattle and, in a meeting with supporters, vented his anger over what he considered a betrayal by trustees. He told an audience that his ousting was purely politically motivated. “The charge has been made there that I am a radical,” Fisher said. “They have also charged members of the faculty with being radicals and say that we

⁸⁵ “Bellingham Students Score Fisher Ouster,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, May 26, 1939.

⁸⁶ “Resolution of the Faculty,” Fisher Case Records, President’s Office, Correspondence, WWU Archives.

foster radicalism among students. I publicly answered these charges at a businessmen's luncheon some time ago and refuted them to the satisfaction of 95 percent of those present, and 90 percent of the people of Bellingham do not believe these charges are true."⁸⁷ The same news reports, however, repeated the previous assertions from the AATC's Brandenburg that the Bellingham situation had become "intolerable." Additional news accounts turned to concerns about the school's precarious academic standing in the wake of the growing Fisher scandal.⁸⁸ Governor Martin, pressed for an explanation, remained silent.

Pressure from regional opinion leaders grew. In a May 27 editorial, the Hearst-owned *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* lashed out at Governor Martin, demanding that he live up to a vow made after taking his oath of office on Jan. 11, 1933: "I pledge that so long as I am governor I will use the full power of the executive office to prevent any materialistic or reactionary force from laying a damaging hand upon our educational systems."⁸⁹ Public-school teachers statewide expressed fears that Martin's action might serve as a green light to similar red-scare witch hunts on their own campuses. "Already there are well-founded rumors that some twelve of the best teachers at the college are

⁸⁷ "Fisher Says Ousting Due to Politics," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, May 25, 1939.

⁸⁸ "Educators Hit Ousting of Fisher," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, May 25, 1939. The article quotes state Superintendent of Public Instruction Stanley Atwood as saying that the manner in which Fisher was removed might result in a stripping of Western Washington College of Education's accreditation. Such an occurrence, other educators said, would be a "severe blow which would be damaging to the state's educational prestige throughout the country and would work injury to graduates and students." Graduates, Atwood said, might lose their automatic certification to teach in other states, and students transferring elsewhere might find their credits unacceptable.

⁸⁹ Editorial, "The Fisher Case," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, May 27, 1939.

slated to go next,” a special bulletin of the *The Washington Teacher* warned. “Like-minded people with this reactionary minority are already attacking the administration at the University of Washington.”⁹⁰

At the end of the week of the announcement of his firing, Fisher responded with a detailed public statement that stands as the most complete accounting, in his own words, of the campaign against him:

The controversy in which I find myself, and which is not of my own choosing, has been going on for over six years, ever since the political upheaval in the state and nation in 1932. The charge has been made by a small group in Bellingham that I am a radical. This group has also charged members of the faculty with being radicals, and they say that we foster radicalism among students. The charge is made that the President, and members of the faculty, have sponsored or encouraged subversive speakers. A few months ago at a business men’s luncheon in Bellingham, I publicly answered these charges and refuted them to the satisfaction of all but a few of those present. I believe it is fair to say that 90% of the people of Bellingham do not believe that these charges are true. The students who have been in attendance at this institution in recent years, and who are as wholesome a group of young Americans as can be found in any college in the land, would unanimously say these charges are not true. This false propaganda has gone out from Bellingham and has been spread through the state by a small minority group.

Those responsible for this false propaganda have made a determined effort each year for the past six years to force me out of the presidency of the College. For five years they worked upon the Board of Trustees but without success. Until last September, the Board of Trustees stood firmly back of me and the faculty. On September 28, 1939, the Board of Trustees was called to Olympia to meet with Governor Martin. At that time an understanding was arrived at that ... I was to leave the presidency of the College at the end of the present year.

The Board of Trustees on numerous occasions have expressed hearty approval of the administration, the fine cooperative spirit of the faculty and the students, and the high standards of the College. At no time has there been any charge made by the Board of Trustees or Governor Martin regarding my administration of the affairs of the College.

⁹⁰ Undated “Special Bulletin,” *The Washington Teacher*, Fisher Case Records, President’s Office, News Clippings 1934-1939, Accession 94-12, box 1, WWU Archives.

The faculty and I have worked together for sixteen years doing the best professional work of which we are capable in the education of young people and the preparations of teachers for the state. In contrast to our professional attitude, we have been informed that it is the opinion of the Board of Trustees and Governor Martin that an institution that is tax supported is a political institution, and that the president holds a political job. Moreover, it was stated that the president of this institution should not expect to hold the position for any length of time, not over ten years. I have been told that I have done unusually well to hold the position at Bellingham for sixteen years.

So long as the Board of Trustees and Regents in the higher institutions of the state that are appointed and removable by the governor of the state, just so long as will we have insecurity and instability in the administration of these institutions. In the case at Bellingham, the Board of Trustees numbering only three members apparently believed that if they did not carry out the Governor's wishes their resignations would have been called for, or when their terms expired, they would not have been reappointed.

These Boards of Trustees and Regents of the higher institutions could be larger in number, appointed for longer terms, and subject to removal only after a hearing in court. Moreover, these Boards of Trustees and Regents should be appointed from various groups in our state so that they would truly represent all of the people of the state. It may be that these Boards of Trustees and Regents should be elected by the people. The people of the state of Washington need to change the administration of higher education to prevent a small minority group from controlling their institutions of higher learning.⁹¹

On June 2, 1939, the growing chorus for a fair hearing for Fisher received a boost from a letter of protest to Governor Martin from every member of the state's Congressional delegation. "So far as we have been able to determine, his work as an educator is held in the highest esteem by fellow academicians," the Congressmen's letter stated. "We are advised that the Trustees have failed to state the reasons for President

⁹¹ "Statement of C.H. Fisher, President, Western Washington College of Education, Bellingham, Washington, May 27, 1939, Fisher Case Records, President's Office, Correspondence, WWU Archives. Note that the Washington State Legislature, in 1933, had passed new legislation allowing the governor to remove regents or trustees only in cases of "misconduct or malfeasance." The bill was later amended to apply only to the state's two large research universities, the University of Washington and then-Washington State College. It was vetoed on Jan. 24, 1934 by Gov. Martin, who said: "The people speak through their Governor." Laprade and Carlson, 55.

Fisher's removal. Everything in connection with the entire proceedings appears to be shrouded in a cloak of secrecy. We feel that such conduct by one of the high educational bodies in our State is not consistent with the principles of educational democracy, which President Fisher exemplified during his long career in office." The letter called on Martin, "as a fellow Democrat," to take whatever steps were necessary to rectify "what we believe to be a grave injustice."⁹²

Fisher's firing ultimately was denounced by a broadly diverse group of political organizations, ranging from the Bellingham Industrial Union Council and the Whatcom County Democratic Central Committee to the Farmer-Labor Unity Conference of the Yakima Valley and the Thirty-Second District Democratic Women's Conference.⁹³ Labor groups such as the state Unions Council called on "all labor, church, civic and fraternal organizations in the state to 'rise to [Fisher's] defense as a defense of the liberties of free Americans."⁹⁴ Throughout the summer, meanwhile, Frank Sefrit's paper, *The Bellingham Herald*, repeatedly noted that Fisher had been booking guest-speaker slots at various left-

⁹² John M. Coffee, et al, Sixth District, United States Congress, to Gov. Clarence D. Martin, June 2, 1939, Clarence Daniel Martin Papers, 1896-1954 Washington State University Libraries, Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections, Pullman, WA. The letter is co-signed by fellow congressmen Warren G. Magnuson, Mon C. Wallgren, Martin F. Smith, Knute Hill, and Charles J. Leavy.

⁹³ "Fisher Dismissal Again Protested," *Seattle Star*, June 19, 1939. "Martin Censured for Fisher Ouster," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, June 16, 1934. The Unions Council continued to monitor events on campus, going so far as to send a letter to Fisher's replacement, Wade Haggard, urging him to refrain from accepting the job until after the "subversive forces" and "hidden government" of Bellingham were exposed. "... (T)his body urgently requests that you decline acceptance of the position ... until such time as the case of the People vs. the Martin Political Machine is aired in public." George Lane, executive secretary, Bellingham Industrial Union Council, to W. Haggard, Aug. 19, 1939, Committee B, AAUP General Historical Files, box 1 (box UP0037), Special Collections Research Center, Gelman Library, The George Washington University, Washington, D.C.

⁹⁴ "Democrats to Talk Fisher Issue," *The Bellingham Herald*, May 27, 1939.

wing organizations to make his case for reinstatement – a fact that only added to the newspaper’s certainty of his seditious activity.⁹⁵

Even the York, Pennsylvania *Gazette and Daily*, in Fisher’s hometown, weighed in on the far-away incident, protesting in an editorial that “Governor Martin has put himself in an untenable position by allowing himself to be used by Sefrit and his super-patriotic followers. The issue is one of academic freedom ... [which] is just as much a matter of concern to the people of Pennsylvania as if had happened in our own backyard. These un-American actions have a way of spreading rapidly.”⁹⁶ More national headlines about the case were made by I.F. Stone, assistant editor of *The Nation*. Stone, in a telegram to Howard G. Costigan, executive secretary of the Washington Commonwealth Federation, declared: “Use of Klan, Silver Shirt, reactionary pressure in the progressive state of Washington to force its most distinguished educator out of office is news of national importance and the fight to keep him in his job will find nation-wide support.”⁹⁷

⁹⁵ “Washington Radicals Are Seeking More Light On Educational Matters,” *The Bellingham Herald*, Aug. 6, 1939. The article described Fisher’s scheduled address to The Worker’s Alliance, “an organization which has been found to be dominated and lead [*sic*] by leading Communists throughout the country.” The article concludes: “Doubly interesting, too, is the fact that the retiring prexy thinks it will be in the interest of the local educational institution to spend his closing days as head of the school helping the Columbia college united fronters help make the world safe for democracy!” Other Bellingham foes of Fisher were similarly charging that the radical nature of those coming to the president’s defense constituted further evidence of his guilt. In a reply to an inquiry by active Fisher opponent Nell (Mrs. Frank) Burghoffer, a spokesman for the Patriotic Research Bureau in Chicago labeled the AAUP as a red organization which surely would defend its comrade Fisher in any investigation. Further, he wrote, “The fact that the Washington Commonwealth Federation has taken up the cudgels in behalf of Dr. Fisher leaves no doubt as to his left-wing standing.” N.E. Hewitt to Mrs. Frank Burghoffer, June 9, 1939, Bellingham Herald Collection on Fisher, Box 1, folder 3, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.

⁹⁶ *The Gazette and Daily*, York, Pa., June 27, 1939.

⁹⁷ “Editor Condemns Fisher’s Ousting,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, June 9, 1939.

On June 12, college alumni released the text of an open letter to Martin, demanding that the board of trustees make public its reasons for firing the president.⁹⁸ The same day, Sefrit weighed in with a *Herald* editorial, suggesting all the hoopla was misguided, and fomented by left-wing dupes who were fed mistruths from Fisher himself. “No injustice is being done President C.H. Fisher,” Sefrit wrote. “President Fisher was fully informed of the reasons. He has known for a long time that his resignation would be acceptable.” Trustees had “most generously” held off announcing the ouster to give Fisher time to find another job, he suggested. The editorial cited the spring, 1938 Brandenburg visit as further proof that Fisher’s continued tenure would be “impossible.” Trustees, Sefrit wrote, had long known the situation was “intolerable, and could end only in a change. But it has been deemed unnecessary, if not unwise, to make public the underlying causes. There has been no withholding of the reasons from President Fisher.”⁹⁹ Suggesting that “political cliques” led to Fisher’s demise was unfair to those who put the school’s welfare first, Sefrit continued. Fisher had been given reasonable grounds for his firing, but failed to address concerns “largely through his own blundering actions and unyielding temperament,” the editorial charged. “It is not in the interest of the college nor of Mr. Fisher that the public be given all the facts of the controversy. Nor is this required to make a change – no more than it is required that President Fisher publicly give reasons for change in his faculty. All are public servants and can be dropped for

⁹⁸ “Open Letter Asks Public Airing,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, June 12, 1939.

⁹⁹ Editorial, “The Fisher Controversy,” *The Bellingham Herald*, June 12, 1939.

cause.”¹⁰⁰ The editorial concludes: “If there is a cause for any censure of the governor of the board of trustees it should be because they did not discharge Fisher several years ago. Certainly there were ample reasons for doing so.”

In late June and early July, reporter Clark Squire of *The Seattle Star* became the first area journalist to begin exposing to a broader, regional audience the once-secret roots of the campaign against Fisher. Gaining access to some of the documents created by the case (but not the transcript of the May 22, 1935 Fisher hearing before trustees, which likely was in the hands solely of Frank Sefrit) Squire wrote a series of stories that stood as the most complete accounting of the political tussle up to that time.¹⁰¹ Northwest readers learned, most for the first time, of the 10 Fisher charges and the trustees’ pointed response, as well as many other details of the activities of the Committee on Normal Protest and the subsequent persistent pressure on Martin. The newspaper’s coverage included an editorial that concluded: “The Star believes the people of this state do not want their education system handled by the back-door method by which politics is the hidden hand at the controls.”¹⁰² Another *Star* report quoted an unnamed Bellingham businessman who asked: Why, if Fisher was such a “poison” to the college, would the

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. The “for cause” reference is undefined, but could refer to evidence Sefrit believed he possessed about financial accounting at the school, Fisher’s handling of college layoffs, or any number of other charges Sefrit had levied against the president – but largely failed to share with his own readers – over the previous five years.

¹⁰¹ Squire wrote an article detailing the time and place of the 1935 Fisher hearing, the charges brought forth, and the trustees’ responses – all drawn from the letter of charges and the board’s subsequent written response. But his story includes no direct quotes from the meeting transcript. “Demand for Closed Hearing Revived Efforts for the Ouster of Dr. Fisher,” *The Seattle Star*, June 26, 1939.

¹⁰² Editorial, “Dr. Fisher Entitled to a Public Hearing,” *The Seattle Star*, June 27, 1939.

governor attempt to foist him off on the University of Washington? And further: What had changed with Fisher's situation, and relationship with trustees, between 1935 and late 1938? In response, trustees only repeated Martin's line that Fisher had worn out his welcome.¹⁰³ Faculty members, however, had their own suspicions. "I personally think they were just worn down by community pressures," longtime college librarian Miriam Mathes recounted in a 1970 interview. "They didn't go on record saying any big thing had happened during that year of 1938-39. They were just worn out."¹⁰⁴

National attention to the case continued. On June 28, an editorial in *The New Republic* called the Fisher case "one of the worst cases of infringement of academic freedom in years."¹⁰⁵ The publication quoted Fisher as saying that the governor had been pressured by members of the American Legion, KKK and Silver Shirts, all of whom adhered to the definitions of "red" in Elizabeth Dilling's "psychopathological book," *The Red Network*.¹⁰⁶ In late July, Arthur Eggleston, the *San Francisco Chronicle's* labor analyst, reported from Seattle that Governor Martin "has handed the nation its cause celebre in the field of education for 1939." Eggleston described Martin's quest to get Fisher as "aided by an assorted collection of shirted and gowned night riders, professional pseudo patriots and other individuals and groups whose full part has not been disclosed."

¹⁰³ "Fisher Should Be Given a Public Hearing, Declares Bellingham Business Man," *The Seattle Star*, July 6, 1939.

¹⁰⁴ Miriam Mathes, taped interview by Jackie Lawson, Nov. 17, 1970, box 28, folders 4 and 7, (reel-to-reel recording), Rogan Jones Papers.

¹⁰⁵ "Queer Doings in the Northwest," copy of article from *The New Republic*, June 28, 1939, correspondence, Fisher case records, WWU Archives.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

Fisher, Eggleston noted, had demanded an impartial investigation. “That seems a small thing to ask,” he wrote. “It isn’t, though. It is really asking Governor Martin to blast himself right out of politics. And it is asking him to make it possible for the citizens of Washington to haul out into the light some of the shirted and gowned night riders who blink and run for cover when the plank is lifted.” Eggleston’s conclusion: “The real explanation, political observers here claim, is that Martin, an old line Democrat and minority candidate, rode into office on President Roosevelt’s coattails, repudiated the New Deal soon afterwards, [and] can stay in office only with the aid of those who are not unduly alarmed by an attack on the State’s educational system.”¹⁰⁷

On the Bellingham campus, the tumultuous month of June, 1939 ended with another missive from Fisher to Selke, his AATC peer, reiterating that the organization could no longer hide from the quagmire in Bellingham. The faculty, Fisher wrote, would not withdraw its request for an AATC investigation to document the academic-freedom issues at stake beyond his own fate:

On Thursday May 23 the Board of Trustees gave a statement to the press that I was leaving the presidency of the College in August. Following this, the newspaper men asked me if I was resigning and I told them that I was not resigning. After this statement from me, the newspaper men in their usual way got at the facts and they have been busy ever since keeping the issue before the public. I had thought that the Board of Trustees would not give out any information until August ... They really have no one to blame but themselves for the publicity they have gotten. In spite of the protest which has come from individuals, the liberal press, and organizations of all kinds over the state, it looks as though I shall leave here at the end of August, for I doubt very much if the Board of Trustees is going to change their position. What comment has been made by the conservative press has been negative and they make no effort to defend the Governor and the Board of Trustees. Many persons have expressed

¹⁰⁷ “Washington State’s Conspicuous Case of Professional Patriots Versus Education,” *The San Francisco Chronicle*, July 26, 1939.

themselves to me as of the opinion that my dismissal is the last event in a series of events that has broken the Governor politically.

The issues involved in my case are so much a part of our times that they certainly do not revolve around me personally. The social forces that have clashed in this instance are the same forces that are in conflict all over the country. Out here on the Pacific Coast, the conflict seems to be more acute than in other sections of the country. This is a progressive and liberal state and we have tried to develop an institution that is in harmony with the people of the state. The fundamental question as I see it is, shall a small influential group of fascist-minded reactionaries through false propaganda get control of an institution and thus sabotage the will of the majority?

No one has made an attack on my educational record, not even my worst enemy, who is the editor of the Bellingham Herald and the leader of the opposition in Bellingham. Recently he made this statement in an editorial the other day: "His professional record is not in question."

Now that it is officially settled that I am to leave in August, the American Association of Teachers Colleges in making an investigation should not be charged with trying to protect a president in his position. The sole question in this case is whether Standard XII has been violated ... With [the] power of appointment and removal of trustees and regents, a governor has too much control over higher education. The situation will never be changed in the state until the administrative set-up is changed.¹⁰⁸

The letter reiterated the college's willingness to cooperate in an investigation, but only if it consisted of inquiry by "men of sufficient understanding of the kind of social background necessary for an understanding of this case."¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Fisher to George A. Selke, June 29, 1939, Fisher Case Records, Vice President for Enrollment and Student Services, AATC Accreditation Committee, WWU Archives. "Standard XII" was the designation for the AATC's accreditation requirement that accredited colleges were not subject to political influence or interference. In a May 3, 1939 communication to Selke, Fisher had opined: "If the case in Bellingham is not a violation of Standard XII, then I would be at a loss to know what would constitute a violation of this standard."

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. Fisher clearly was referring here to Brandenburg, to whom he had referred in an earlier passage of the same letter by saying: "Certainly men with the social bias of President Brandenburg should not be on such a committee."

Governor Martin, besieged by media for weeks, finally broke his silence seven weeks after the board's announcement. He said Fisher was dismissed "for the good of the college, and for the good of the people of Washington." Martin, speaking to a *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* reporter, said the matter should now be put to rest. "A change was necessary, and you can bet your life it's final," he said. Fisher, he added, "had been at Bellingham for many years, and the board felt that a change would be beneficial to the school."¹¹⁰ The article went on to describe a series of questions to the governor from State Senator N.P. Atkinson of King County, with responses from Martin, as follows:

Q: Why was Dr. Fisher fired?

A: For lack of tact. A man outlives his usefulness. Fisher had been at Bellingham sixteen years and the board just didn't want him any longer. It was the board's responsibility and they fired him."

Q: Was there an element of politics or academic freedom involved?

A: Not in the least.

Q: You say the board fired Dr. Fisher. Did they act for themselves alone?

A: Well, I did consult with the board about Fisher. After he was fired, he didn't act fair to the board or to me.

Q: How was that?

A: I promised him a job at the University of Washington if he would keep quiet, but he made the statements to the paper about the affair.

Q: Why haven't you made a public statement about the Dr. Fisher case before now?

A: It doesn't amount to much. I consider it trivial.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ "Fisher Ouster Case Closed, Martin Says," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, July 15, 1939.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

The report notes that the governor took “vigorous exception” to Senator Atkinson’s recollection that he had used the word “fired.” Martin also complained that Atkinson, whom he said he did not recognize, had caught him off guard in an informal setting. He told the reporter he had consulted with the board on “many occasions over a period of years.” Martin went on to describe opposition to Fisher which, he claimed, had actually emanated from the political left, circa 1934: “Five years ago, it was the left and radical groups, the so-called progressives from Whatcom County, who came with requests that Dr. Fisher be dismissed,” Martin said. “Now they are the ones protesting that a change has been made.”¹¹²

Martin added that he saw nothing unusual about the college trustees’ reluctance to address reasons for Fisher’s firing. “Other changes have been made in the educational system without the cases being threshed out in the newspapers, and teachers have been dismissed under Dr. Fisher without a controversy between them and himself becoming a newspaper contest,” the governor said. “That the board and this office have remained silent was because we did not believe such a controversy would be good for Dr. Fisher, the school or the state. The board’s records are ample, however, if it should come to a showdown.”¹¹³

¹¹² It is unclear what protests from the political left Martin is referring to here. No news of such protests is evident in local newspapers, nor in the files of the Committee on Normal Protest, which existed primarily to collect information detrimental to Fisher.

¹¹³ No such records of the board related to Fisher’s performance or dismissal are evident in university archives. The recent discovery in Washington State Archives of documents detailing stated concerns, in 1938, about college financial records raises the intriguing possibility that Martin was making an oblique reference here to that still-secret inquiry. See Chapter 6.

Fisher, realizing his job was irretrievably lost, through the summer became increasingly bold about making his case that the state higher education governance system should be overhauled to prevent similar future incidents. Academic freedom itself, he reiterated, was at stake in Washington state. In a June address to college alumni in Seattle, Fisher connected his own predicament with the vital role academic freedom played in the maintenance of democracy. “In a democracy, the ultimate loyalty of educators is neither to political executives, nor to the state, but to the processes of democracy, and science, and to the welfare of society,” he said. “To the extent that the government or state seeks to prescribe what shall be taught, or what shall be the social beliefs of educators, it approaches the dictatorships or the totalitarian state. As I see it, the controversy in which I find myself through circumstances not of my choosing is a part of the struggle that is going on for the defense and advance of democracy. This controversy does not involve me alone, but involves every student, every member of the faculty, and every graduate of the college.”¹¹⁴

Later, speaking at a forum organized by state Senator Farquharson, Fisher reiterated to a Seattle audience that the law allowing trustees and regents to be summarily replaced, without cause, by the governor was outdated. Other states, he said, had a single board of regents managing affairs of all colleges, or trustees and regents elected directly by the people. “It’s a bad setup,” Fisher said. “If a man wants to get along in this state and hold his job, he has to play a political game.”¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ “Fisher Raps Foes; Defends Position,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, June 7, 1939.

¹¹⁵ “Dr. Fisher Hits State System of Education,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, Aug. 7, 1939.

Firing right back at such assertions, Sefrit's *Herald* mocked concerns about academic freedom in yet another editorial:

Freedom to teach whatsoever they like, or to refrain from teaching courses prescribed by boards of education set up by law; freedom to suggest to students any type of reading which may be the fancy of the instructor; freedom to defy those who employ them; freedom to fellowship with subversive and unmoral characters; freedom to belittle, handicap, and even destroy capitalism – these and other utterly indefensible behavior come under the modernistic definition of "academic freedom ...

“Academic freedom” is a term invented and adopted by those who want everybody restrained, save those who see society much as the Russian propagandists. These friends of the Soviet now are busily engaged inoculating the American youth with Marxist ideas of remaking the democracies.¹¹⁶

The controversy only accelerated in the wake of a surprising July account of the scandal in *Time Magazine*. An article on the magazine's Education page, titled “I'm Agin You,” began by recounting the confrontation between Fisher and Sefrit at a meeting of Bellingham's Hobby Club some six years earlier. The report, which carried no byline, told of Fisher's boasting about the relative stability of Soviet bonds.¹¹⁷ The article described the reaction: “The manager of Bellingham's *Herald*, angular old Frank Sefrit, turned fierce eyes on him and barked: ‘That's the most radical statement I have ever

¹¹⁶ Editorial, “Academic Freedom,” *The Bellingham Herald*, July 26, 1939. The AAUP report on Fisher's firing cited the editorial as evidence that “... Mr. Sefrit and his associates lack insight into the meaning of academic freedom and freedom of speech. It is unnecessary to point out to the college and university teachers of America, and to that portion of the public which understands the role of institutions of higher learning in a democratic society, the implications of these sentiments.” Laprade and Carlson, 58.

¹¹⁷ The remark may well have been made in jest, to rile former club members, as Fisher suggested during the 1935 Board of Trustees hearing. English Department head Arthur C. Hicks, a passionate Fisher defender, remarked in 1970 that Fisher “could make this sort of remark with a glint in his eye.” Arthur C. Hicks, interviewed by Monroe McLaughlin, Nov. 20, 1970, box 28, folder 6, (unedited reel-to-reel tape recording), Rogan Jones Papers, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham WA.

heard made in this club.’ Tapping the educator on the chest, he added ominously: ‘Fisher, I’m agin’ you and I hope you know what that means.’”¹¹⁸ *Time* described Bellingham, pop. 30,823, as “a turbulent town long torn by private feuds and political cat-fights,” and Sefrit as a newspaperman who relished the title “Little Hearst.” Relating the tale of Fisher’s battle, the 1935 dismissal of charges, and the governor’s interference, the magazine called the affair “a national education scandal and first-class political battle” likely to have ramifications in 1940 state elections.

Every bit as interesting as the story, which became the subject of ample gossip in Bellingham and beyond, was Sefrit’s reaction to it. The editor, both in private missives to *Time*’s editors and a public address to his own readers, flatly denied the incident ever occurred.¹¹⁹ Sefrit made this point initially in a four-page letter to *Time* editor Henry R. Luce on July 8, 1939, offering his take on the Fisher case in rare detail in a missive denoted as strictly not-for-publication; Sefrit described it as a communique “from one newspaperman to another.”¹²⁰ In it, he called the *Time* report “pure fiction,” labeled Fisher a “common liar,” and said the article was riddled with errors. Sefrit insisted that his committee’s activities had ceased after the May, 1935 hearing, at which point he was privately assured (presumably by the governor and/or one of the trustees) that Fisher’s tenure would end “in a reasonable time.” Sefrit and fellow committee members had been

¹¹⁸ “I’m Agin You,” *Time* Magazine, July 10, 1939, 42.

¹¹⁹ His denials came in spite of his own quibbling over details of the same encounter at the Fisher hearing in May, 1935 – by that time documented in a hearing transcript which he, alone, possessed.

¹²⁰ Sefrit to Luce, July 8, 1939, Committee B, AAUP General Historical Files, GWU. The full letter is contained in Appendix IV.

asked to be patient, and had acted accordingly, he said.¹²¹ The editor maintained that the battle against Fisher had been taken up by others in 1938 after the president angered a local women's group. He insisted that additional, undisclosed reasons for Fisher's firing existed, that Fisher knew what they were, and refused to discuss them. Even so, criticism to Fisher's firing by "radical" leftist groups, many affiliated with the Washington Commonwealth Federation, stood as proof of the president's political leanings, Sefrit maintained. "Bellingham is not in turmoil about this action and neither is the State of Washington," Sefrit wrote. "The only interesting phase about it is that this is perhaps the first case in history where a red army was mobilized to try to keep an unwanted editor in his job."¹²²

In response, *Time's* Fanny Saul wired Sefrit on July 11, 1939, thanking him for his statement and asking if his letter might be published as a response.¹²³ Sefrit responded that he had no interest in further impugning the reputation of the college. He repeated the account of his role in the bringing of charges against Fisher, initially made in the letter to Luce. He emphasized again that after the 1935 hearing, "We were asked to refrain from further action and that request was faithfully complied with." Fisher, Sefrit repeated, had been given specific reasons for his firing, and those reasons "were others than those

¹²¹ Sefrit wrote that he also was informed after the trustees' hearing that Fisher had been admonished not to allow campus speakers listed in *The Red Network* — a dictum by trustees above and beyond anything the committee had asked for.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Telegram, Fanny Saul, *Time Magazine*, to Sefrit, box 1, folder 3, correspondence, Bellingham Herald collection.

involved in charges made by our committee. President Fisher knows this but he makes me the ‘big, bad wolf’ of the entire affair.” If Fisher had been the source for the article, Sefrit wrote “... he fabricated the entire affair. There was no such incident.” Clearly angered by the magazine’s portrayal of him as an angry eccentric, the 72-year-old Sefrit labeled the *Time* piece “an obviously fake story in an effort to belittle me.”¹²⁴

Four days later, amidst much buzz in Bellingham over the national attention, Sefrit doubled down on those assertions in an editorial. *Time*, he told *Herald* readers, “let itself become the victim of a rather clever dissembler.” The magazine “was taken snipe-hunting, and, as is always the case with such adventures, it is ‘holding the bag!’” Sefrit then engaged in a fanciful discussion of what such a statement about Soviet bonds, if, for the sake of argument, had indeed been made by Fisher, might say about the president’s character, or lack thereof: “To loan them money, as President Fisher said he would be willing to do if he had it, would be to further the cause of Communism, with all the horrors that have attended that experiment.”¹²⁵ However, none of that mattered, the editor continued, because the incident “never took place.” In the heart of the editorial, Sefrit shifted gears:

I recall but one time when President Fisher asked a favor of me. That was that we suppress a horrible scandal in the school involving three members of the faculty and a female student of tender years. I did suppress that story, as I have suppressed many others concerning his administration. I did so on the pledge that prompt action would be taken against the offenders. I did this in the interest of the school. I have opposed President Fisher in the interest of the school. It was not a

¹²⁴ Telegram, Sefrit to *Time* magazine, July 12, 1939, Bellingham Herald collection. Sefrit also insisted in the missive that he had never been known as “Little Hearst” in Bellingham.

¹²⁵ “TIME Goes Snipe Hunting,” *The Bellingham Herald*, July 16, 1939.

personal grievance. I gave my reasons to those in authority and in President Fisher's presence.

Most of the things complained about were abandoned. For over four years I have not agitated the movements against Fisher. I did not commence or direct the first complaints against President Fisher's administration. Several years after the first opposition developed I prosecuted complaints as chairman of a committee representing patriotic, religious and civic organizations. I was assured the more serious causes of these complaints would be removed. I trusted those who made that promise. The board of trustees and Governor Martin will verify my statement that I did not pursue our protest further. The last protest was not of my making or of my support. I know, however, the later protests are fully justified.

But I am reliably informed that the board members have not relied upon the matters contained in our complaints to dismiss President Fisher. They have abundant reasons for their action, aside from the numerous protests. They feel they are not required to make those reasons to the public, having frankly stated their views to President Fisher. The board has not been unjust toward him. They have been most generous and most lenient. His defiance of his superiors is most flagrant. It is intolerable, and if the story of President Fisher's misconduct is ever given to the public, I am sure, from facts I possess, there will be no real friends of the college that then will hold with President Fisher.¹²⁶

Applying his own caustic punctuation mark on the *Time* incident, Sefrit, on the same day he produced the editorial, responded to a letter from an Olympia, Washington school board member who had written Sefrit to sympathize about the unwanted national publicity. Sefrit assured the man the incident described in the *Time* article was fabricated. "Politics have nothing to do with the dismissal of Fisher," Sefrit wrote. "He knows this very well, but he is a mental and moral degenerate, and he is doing everything he can to discredit his opponents. While doing so, he also is misleading his friends. It may be

¹²⁶ Ibid. It is unclear what alleged incidence of suppression of a potentially scandalous incident involving college faculty members Sefrit refers to here. The committee's files contain no information about a case fitting this description, and this editorial is the only place an incident matching this description is mentioned in any archival material of the Fisher case.

necessary to go into some details about this fellow, and if that time does come, he will be handled without the gloves.”¹²⁷

Fate Adds to Fisher’s Despair

Adding to what must have been severe strain on the president during the late summer of 1939 was an untimely event that argues the cruelty of fate: The same week that Fisher’s board of trustees announced the hiring of his pending replacement, William Wade Haggard, tragedy struck Western and Bellingham: A massive avalanche just below the summit of nearby Mount Baker claimed the lives of six Western students and faculty engaged in an annual mountaineering expedition. The July 22, 1939 climb of majestic Mount Baker, a 10,781-foot dormant volcano located about 60 miles east of Bellingham, was the 22nd outing of what had become an annual ritual for the campus community. Hundreds of students had made the ascent, a quasi-technical climb, without serious injury. The massive avalanche on the Deming Glacier, below a formation known as the Roman Wall, temporarily trapped all 25 climbers in the group; six could not be located. One climber, 22-year-old student Alice James, was found clinging to life the next morning, but soon died. Subsequent searches turned up another victim, alumnus Julius Dornblut, 29, lying 70 feet down in a crevasse. The search for the remaining four victims went on for days, then stretched into weeks, as agonized parents of the climbers organized their own search parties when official resources ran out.¹²⁸ At the time, it

¹²⁷ Sefrit to Max H. Clark, July 15, 1939, box 1, folder 3, Bellingham Herald collection.

¹²⁸ The family of student Hope Weitman, particularly, pressed for continued searches for many days after the accident, and sought funds from the college to maintain the search as late as July, 1940, a full year later. Minutes of the Board of Trustees, July 1940, WWU Archives.

ranked as the worst alpine climbing disaster in U.S. history.¹²⁹ Fisher, a lover of the Mount Baker area who had made the climb more than once himself, was fully engrossed in the search, and spent an anguished night at the mountain after receiving word of the accident. Friends and associates later recalled the president as being as upset as if the victims had been his own children.¹³⁰

In the midst of this despair, August 18, 1939, loomed as the end of Western's Summer Session, thus the official end of Charles Fisher's dream job – and, unbeknownst to him, in large part the end of his academic career. On August 11, one of his last days at the school he had built almost literally from the ground up, Fisher sat in his office and responded to a small stack of letters from academic colleagues. Each of Fisher's responses to his friends expressed despair. Each thanked the correspondent for his or her offer to assist in any way. Each concluded that nothing could be done, in his case. Each expressed only dim hopes for future systemic reforms:

I am leaving here at the end of this month and a new man who has just been elected will take my place. The election of a liberal governor in this state in 1940 is the only thing that can happen to change the situation. I am the victim of a poor system of administering higher education. This system will have to be changed or there will be a repetition of my case.”¹³¹

¹²⁹ “Sudden tragedy: 75 years ago, a massive avalanche on Mount Baker killed six WWU climbers,” *The Bellingham Herald*, July 21, 2014. The victims remain entombed in the glacier at this writing.

¹³⁰ His anguish was heightened by the fact that his daughter, Mary Ann, knew four of the victims, and might well have been on the climb herself if not for a last-minute decision to travel to Pennsylvania to visit grandparents, instead. “Made Trip to York, Missed Tragedy on Mountain Climb,” *The (York, Pa.) Gazette and Daily*, July 24, 1939.

¹³¹ Fisher to Nelson L. Bossing, University of Minnesota, Aug. 11, 1939, Fisher Case Records, President's Office, Correspondence, WWU Archives.

The system would, in fact, ultimately be changed. But those changes would come far too late to save Fisher, who at midlife found his career foundation stripped from beneath him. After battling for six years to save his reputation, and, in his mind, the integrity of a college that represented his life's work, a battered, exhausted, and bitter Charles Fisher had finally given up.

Chapter 7

Unraveling the Fisher Mystery: Investigations Old and New

In the immediate wake of Fisher's departure, a burning question hung over the entire affair: What, exactly, had changed in the minds of trustees between spring, 1935, when they vigorously defended and even championed Fisher, and autumn, 1938, when they abruptly showed him the door? Trustees and the governor, hammered with questions from media, refused to discuss the case in detail, beyond Martin's flippant contention that Fisher had merely worn out his welcome. The lack of a credible answer to questions about the trustees' flip-flop became the immediate puzzle in the wake of Fisher's firing. It would remain an enduring mystery for eight decades.

But newly discovered documents related to the case shed substantial additional light on the Fisher firing, revealing it to be a decision made in a political quagmire far more complex than previously known. None of the documents alter the known facts about the well-organized Red Scare campaign against the embattled president. Rather, they reveal an additional layer of investigation – and tension — between Fisher, college trustees, and Governor Clarence D. Martin that had simmered alongside the formation of the Committee on Normal Protest, and came to a head in summer, 1938 — only months before Fisher was ordered to leave. This additional leverage against Fisher – what appeared at the time to be a potentially serious financial impropriety at the college – was unknown to all but a few individuals in Bellingham and Olympia, and would remain hidden until documentation was discovered, in the long-ignored files of an extinct state agency, in the course of research for this study in 2016. The confidential documents also establish a previously unknown link between the Frank Sefrit group aligned against

Fisher and high-level state officials in Olympia, in the person of a state auditor who learned many intricate details of the pending case against Fisher well before it was presented in a hearing in 1935. Additionally, newfound internal documents of outside groups that conducted their own investigations of the Fisher case in 1939 confirm the rumors of financial impropriety, and add their own new layer of nuance to the events surrounding Fisher's dismissal.

All surviving records of the financial questions looming like a dark cloud over Western Washington College of Education in the mid- to late-1930s are contained in the files of the Washington State Department of Efficiency, a long-defunct precursor to the state Budget and Auditor's offices. When the agency began catching up on long-neglected audits of the college in the early 1930s, a series of red flags popped up. In succeeding years, enhanced scrutiny of college financial management would reveal not only generally sloppy bookkeeping, but ongoing negligence in adopting suggested reforms. By 1938, as Fisher's job hung in the balance amidst an intense political battle, quiet concerns in Olympia about possibly misappropriated funds were deemed serious enough to merit a warning to the governor — and to earn the scrutiny of the state Attorney General. But largely owing to what appears to have been a deliberate campaign to keep the matter from public view, no hint of the financial investigation has ever been connected to the Fisher case to date.

A Separate Scandal, Long Buried

Auditors conducting routine reviews of college books as early as 1931 had noted multiple irregularities in college accounts. This was not necessarily unusual; many of

these appeared routine, and examiner's warnings mirrored criticisms over haphazard bookkeeping commonly identified in state audits of far-flung institutions – especially those without trained accounting staffs. Because of lean administrative structures – no doubt exacerbated by Depression-era financial pressures – much of the financial decision-making authority at institutions the size of Western fell upon the president. But several persistent irregularities in the books at the Bellingham college were deemed unusual enough to prompt warnings from auditors to supervisors, beginning in the early 1930s. Particularly troubling to auditors and their supervisor, state Budget Supervisor E.D. Brabrook, were cash payroll advances made to faculty and staff, and suspect loans made to students, faculty and staff, from a longstanding Student Loan Fund.

The fund, created by the college in 1904 and financed by student fees, was designed as a financial backstop for parents and students unable to pay college expenses. During the Depression, it served as a lifeline to keep many students from dropping out of school entirely. By 1938, the loan fund, through contributions and earned interest, had grown to approximately \$27,000, which was held in what then was an unofficial trust by the college. All disbursements from the fund were, according to its bylaws, to be approved by a Student Loan Fund Board, comprising the president and six faculty members selected by the president.¹ But college records show that the loan fund, perhaps

¹ “Rules and Method of Handling Student Loan Fund, Western Washington College of Education,” signed by fund administrator Evelyn Hughes, Student Loan Committee secretary, Jan. 20, 1938, Department of Efficiency, Subject Files, Correspondence and State Agency Budget Statements File Title: Bellingham Normal School, Accession Number 06-A-80, Box Number 4, Washington State Archives, Olympia, WA. Loans were not to exceed \$75 to registered students in attendance for at least one quarter, with a satisfactory record. Total caps at this time were \$75 for freshmen, \$200 for sophomores, and \$300 for

a unique source of liquidity on campus during the Depression, also was used by the college for various other expenditures, including the purchase of real estate, supplies, and even the payment of some staff salaries, including staff time to administer the fund itself.² Some of these transactions were completed, auditors charged, with the apparent approval of President Fisher, but without approval by the Student Loan Fund Committee – a violation of policies in place for the fund. Further complicating the matter was the fact that, for most of the decade, the loan fund’s legal status – for example, whether or not the fund constituted an official, “legal” trust, and if so, who served as its official trustee – was unclear to both college administrators and trustees.³ But audits uncovered a number of lax procedures, and improper disbursements from the fund, that auditors feared might make some money loaned unrecoverable.

Most troubling to auditors was a series of Student Loan Fund checks written to three members of Fisher’s staff. State records indicate loans totaling \$2,252 were made between 1931 and 1938 to S.J. (Sam) Buchanan, the college financial secretary; Ethel G. Church, the president’s personal secretary; and Evelyn “Lyn” Hughes, an assistant

juniors. Loans were to be made at 6 percent interest, repayable in one year, and secured by a satisfactory guarantor.

² A report on Student Loan Fund activity made to trustees in June 1937 showed expenditures of \$1,301 over the previous five years, for expenses including “the secretary’s salary, postage, supplies, the cost of auditing, and also the purchase price of property.” The fund, however, showed a net gain of \$1,888.27 over the same period. Minutes of the Board of Trustees, June 21, 1937, Western Washington College of Education, Western Washington University Archives.

³ Numerous written exchanges between the school’s Board of Trustees and the state Attorney General’s office over the decade make this clear. The loan’s legal status was not clarified by the state until the early 1940s, when other state institutions, chiefly the University of Washington, raised similar questions. See below.

financial secretary who administered the Student Loan Fund. The zero-interest loan to Hughes, in particular, was later described by state officials as “illegal.”⁴ In spite of what were described as “repeated” warnings from auditors, “it appears that these recommendations have not received the proper attention of either the Board of Trustees or the President,” Brabrook wrote to Governor Martin on June 9, 1938. Brabrook continued in the letter:

All the rules and regulations covering the issuance of student loans have been ignored in making the above loans to employees. They have not been approved by the Loan Board, interest rates have been materially reduced or dispensed with entirely and in some cases there is no guarantor or co-maker as is required from students. In one case no payment was made for almost two years on one of these notes.

It is apparent that definite action must be taken to protect the funds of the school. Whether these loans are made to cover a shortage in funds or for some other purpose appears to us to be immaterial. The facts remain that these are trust funds

⁴ “Loans to Employees of Bellingham Normal School from Student Loan Fund,” undated attachment to June 9, 1938 confidential letter from E.D. Brabrook to Charles D. Martin, Department of Efficiency files. According to this tally, Hughes initially borrowed \$200 in February, 1931, in a note, “due 2/11/32,” listing her colleague, S.J. Buchanan, as “guarantor.” She made no payments on that loan, but paid it off with a subsequent withdrawal of \$600 on Oct. 31, 1934, “due 10/31/35,” listing her father, S.R. Hughes, as “guarantor.” Evelyn Hughes made regular payments on the no-interest loan of \$600 through May, 1938 – the apparent approximate date of the record detailing the loans, when a balance of \$272 remained. She received another loan of \$337 from the fund in Jan. 1938, “due 1/31/39,” with an interest rate of 1.5 percent, and no guarantor. The record notes no payments on this loan. Ethel Church, the president’s secretary, was loaned \$300 at 1.5 percent interest in January, 1938, “due 1/31/39,” with “R. Walker” (manager of Sun Life Insurance Company of Bellingham) listed as guarantor. She made seven payments on the loan through May 1938, leaving a balance of \$174.50. Church received an additional loan in February, 1938, for \$300, “due 2/3/39,” with an interest rate of 1.5 percent, and no guarantor. The record shows no payments on this loan. Buchanan borrowed \$375 from the fund in January, 1938, “due 1/31/39,” “interest rate originally reduced from 6% to 1% then erased,” with a guarantor listed as Doris Buchanan.” The record indicates no regular payments on the loan. On July 20, 1938, the college board of trustees, noting that the loans had been “objected to by the State Examiner,” recorded loan repayments of \$665 from Hughes, \$590 from Church, and \$375 from Buchanan – amounts roughly corresponding to the balance owed figures indicated on the tally submitted to Governor Martin a month prior. (Records indicate the loans by the three staff members were repaid in full within five to 12 days of the letter from Brabrook to Martin about the long-running Student Loan Fund problems, indicating that the outstanding loans, and the serious of the matter, had been transmitted to officials at the college by the governor, Brabrook, or both.) Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Western Washington College of Education, July 20, 1938.

for the purpose of making loans to needy students in modest amounts and any advancement to an officer or employee of the institution, in our opinion, is a misappropriation of funds.⁵

Significantly, the letter from Brabrook to the governor, sent approximately four months before Martin met with college trustees in September, 1938 and reportedly demanded Fisher's resignation, was not the first indication of financial irregularities at the college. In fact, it was the last on record in a series of internal communications between state officials about financial discrepancies at the college stretching back approximately eight years. None of these communications between auditors, the budget office and the state Attorney General's office – most marked "confidential" — were ever disclosed to the public, nor reported in local or regional media. College trustees, in spite of numerous, documented communications from Olympia about the matter, never discussed it candidly in their meetings, assuming that meeting minutes are an accurate indication. Notably, these state findings of accounting and spending irregularities were not limited to the Student Loan Fund.

Auditors were particularly concerned with a longstanding pattern of employee cash advances from school funds. In a routine audit of the institution covering the period July, 1923 to March, 1931, (a period coinciding with the first eight years of Fisher's presidency) a review of cash (general fund) accounts revealed "twenty-six I.O.U.s of the faculty and office staff, amounting to \$1,132.40, composed principally of advances on anticipated salary checks, and advances to the president against traveling expenses,"

⁵ "CONFIDENTIAL," E.D. Brabrook to Gov. Clarence D. Martin, June 9, 1938, Department of Efficiency Files.

according to an audit report, which concluded: “This practice should be discontinued.”⁶ A follow-up audit for the period April 1931 through March 1933 similarly noted in cash accounts 25 personal checks, totaling \$1,479.42, apparently serving as advances for the same purposes: “The vast majority of these checks were deposited in the bank soon after, and the remainder, we were advised, were, through the sanction of the president, held for a longer period,” the audit report stated. “The criticism is made that these personal checks are taking the place of I.O.U.s which were objected to in the previous examination. In either form they are worthless in so far as they do not represent cash or its equivalent which is bankable. The practice is clearly one that creates a condition that might very easily lead to considerable loss.”⁷ The same audit criticized general “looseness in handling refunds to students.”

Another audit, for the period April, 1933 to April, 1935, noted that the practice of cashing personal checks for employees, “with the sanction of the president,” had continued.⁸ The same auditor noted, for the first time, that: “Unwarranted liberties are found to have been taken with the Student Loan Funds, to the extent that loans of considerable sums have been made to employees (not students) of the institution.” The loans were “made by the President of the institution without submitting to and obtaining

⁶ “Audit Report No. 232,” Bellingham State Normal School, Washington State Archives, Olympia, WA.

⁷ Audit Report No. 302, Bellingham State Normal School, Washington State Archives.

⁸ Audit Report No. 393, Bellingham State Normal School, Washington State Archives. The auditor concluded: “The present officers of the institution have heretofore been advised against the practice of carrying personal checks as cash items. It is now suggested that the department [of Budget] call this matter to the attention of the Board of Trustees, and the President of the institution be notified to require compliance with the instructions heretofore given.”

authorization by Student Loan Board,” according to the auditor, who stated that the money should be paid back immediately. In a 1935 communication, Brabrook, citing the previous audits, advised his field auditor to maintain close scrutiny of college books in general. He further noted that any disbursements from the Student Loan Fund without approval by its governing board “represent illegal disbursements from the fund.”⁹

By this time, the school’s broader spending practices – and the trustees’ oversight of same – also had fallen under scrutiny. Ten months after Brabrook’s dire 1935 warnings about the Student Loan Fund, for example, he informed Governor Martin in writing that the college appeared to be burning through its biennial budget allotment at an alarming pace: During the first ten months of the biennium, the school had spent nearly \$41,000 of a budgeted allocation of \$53,000 in operating funds intended to last two years. That left the college with only \$12,463 for the remaining fourteen months.¹⁰ The same day, Martin wrote college Board of Trustees Chairman Kirkpatrick with what amounted to a red-flag caution about the budget drain: “It is needless to say this is a serious situation ... We are quite at a loss to understand the reason for the vast increase in the cost of operations.”¹¹ Kirkpatrick responded swiftly, explaining in a letter that the money had

⁹ E.D. Brabrook to R.P. Fraser, May 4, 1935, Dept. of Efficiency files. Brabrook in the same letter discussed the possible need to send an “Examiner’s Requirement Letter” to the college president, “requesting that the amounts be returned to the fund forthwith, and insisting that no further disbursements be made from this fund unless regularly authorized by the responsible Board.” He also wrote that he believed “the matter can rest where it is, unless additional information should come into your hands.” The initial loans remained on the books for another three years after this communication, and during this period, an additional three loans were granted to staff, apparently without Student Loan Fund Board approval.

¹⁰ Brabrook to Martin, March 9, 1936, Dept. of Efficiency files. See also Brabrook to W.D. Kirkpatrick, March 12, 1936.

¹¹ Martin to W.D. Kirkpatrick, March 9, 1936, Dept. of Efficiency Files.

gone to make emergency replacement of steam pipes that had burst in a tunnel below campus buildings, creating a “rather dangerous” hazard. “We are through with all this, with all bills paid, at the present time and the expenses will now be rigidly held down,” Kirkpatrick vowed.¹² Adjustments, including staff reductions, would be made to allow the college to get through the coming year on money allotted, he said, and a meeting of the trustees would be promptly called to address the subject.¹³ However, while the minutes of the trustees’ meeting of March 25, 1936, indicate a general budget discussion, no direct reference to what must have been an unusual matter – a dire warning about the school’s finances, directly from the governor’s office – was made, or at least not recorded for public edification and posterity.¹⁴

The following month, Governor Martin paid a personal visit to campus, as noted in minutes of a special meeting of trustees on April 15, 1936. Here, a vague reference to the budget matter emerges in meeting minutes: An engineer’s report on campus repair and maintenance, with total expenditures of \$20,109, was sent to the governor. “Most of these expenditures were absolutely necessary because of an accumulation of repairs over a period of years when there were not funds available to do these things,” the meeting

¹² Kirkpatrick to Martin, March 11, 1936, Dept. of Efficiency Files.

¹³ Martin responded the following day, saying he would expect the board to make the necessary budget adjustments. Martin to Kirkpatrick, March 12, 1936, Dept. of Efficiency Files.

¹⁴ Minutes of the Board of Trustees, March 25, 1936. Several financial matters are noted in the minutes, including a statement that the state appropriation for college wages for the period “should be adequate,” and that the college might save on expenditures for janitors and gardeners. The minutes further note that receipts at Edens Hall, the campus dormitory, were showing a surplus of \$1,733 for winter quarter, and that “These figures were submitted in support of the statement made by President Fisher that Edens Hall [then the loan campus dormitory] would be able to bear part of the cost of operations during the rest of the biennium.”

record states. “Governor Martin seemed to be satisfied with the expenditures that were made. Assurance was given to him that we would not ask for additional funds for operations, and that by means of rigid economy we plan to live within the funds appropriated.”¹⁵ That immediate budget crisis seemed to have been averted. But by this time, Governor Martin clearly was taking a keen interest in all expenditures at the Bellingham campus. The governor, for example, requested from Brabrook a personal review of Fisher’s expense account for a trip on college business to Atlantic City, New Jersey, from February 19 to March 6, 1938.¹⁶ No improprieties were found in Fisher’s expense claim for \$207.47, but Brabrook noted that “... the voucher did not pass through the hands of the State Auditor.”

Eventually, in the months immediately prior to Fisher’s departure, the ongoing problems with the Student Loan fund were deemed serious enough to merit consultation with state attorneys. In December, 1939, Assistant Attorney General Browder Brown responded to a report about the Student Loan Fund from Brabrook, telling the budget supervisor that he planned to investigate in person during the next month. “This record as submitted by you covering the history and operation of student loans at the college is very unsatisfactory,” he wrote. “It is just regrettable that these notes have to be turned over to collection agencies for collection ... it does make a very unsatisfactory record.

¹⁵ Minutes of the Board of Trustees, April 15, 1936.

¹⁶ “Confidential,” Brabrook to Martin, June 3, 1938, Dept. of Efficiency files.

After I have talked with the authorities now in charge of the college, I will take the matter up with you further.”¹⁷

In a letter to newly arrived college President Wade Haggard in August, 1940, assistant AG Brown noted that an examination of the Student Loan Fund had been made the previous summer and fall by Brabrook’s state Department of Finance, Budget and Business.¹⁸ “You probably have a copy of their report in your files,” Brown wrote. “You will observe on page five a summary which shows that there are outstanding notes to students in the amount of \$24,914.39.”¹⁹ Brown notes that he had discussed the matter with incoming president Haggard, but come to no conclusions. State law required the report on the loan fund to be shared with the Attorney General, and that “in all cases where there is evidence of any misuse of public funds or any loss of public funds due to the neglect of any state official, it is the duty of the Attorney General to secure a settlement of the same, or at least to reduce the same to judgment.”²⁰ Brown at that time asked Haggard to advise the AG’s office on the status of collection of the funds. No response from Haggard is found in the file.

¹⁷ Browder Brown to E.D. Brabrook, Dec. 21, 1939, Dept. of Efficiency files.

¹⁸ An apparent successor to the state Department of Efficiency.

¹⁹ Browder Brown to W.W. Haggard, Aug. 6, 1940, Dept. of Efficiency files. For context: \$24,000 in 1938 would have been enough money to pay the salaries of about 10 full-time professors at the college for a year. The annual operating budget of the school during that period, sans salaries of approximately \$500,000, was approximately \$75,000.

²⁰ Ibid.

Sloppy Bookkeeping: A Hidden Smoking Gun?

The revelation, nearly 80 years after the fact, of a financial scandal at the college – largely coinciding with Fisher’s attempts to fend off community attacks on his character — raises an obvious question: How much of a role, if any, did the secret financial cloud hanging over the college play in his eventual dismissal? Based on currently known documentation, the answer is unclear. But it strains credulity to assume it was not a factor at all. Surely, public disclosure of even a hint of financial impropriety, especially involving public funds, would have been considered scandalous during the depths of the Great Depression. Political fallout for the college, Fisher, and state officers as far up the chain as Governor Martin, likely would have been substantial.²¹ Public disclosure also would have been substantially embarrassing to trustees, all businessmen in good standing in their community who oversaw college financial reports, and had to be aware of the audit warnings. This likely affected the balance of power between trustees and the governor in any negotiations over Fisher’s fate, especially in 1938, when the matter appeared most serious.²²

But the surviving paper trail tells only one side of the story – that of state examiners. Absent from the known record is a detailed response from Fisher, or even a

²¹ This would have been particularly true in Bellingham given that, at various times during the decade, state officials reportedly considered shuttering one or more of the state’s three “normal” schools for budgetary reasons. Some reports indicated Bellingham’s college was the most likely to remain open, but that favored status might have been threatened by public knowledge of sloppy finances on the campus. See also Chapters 2 and 4.

²² One logical conclusion might be that the potential embarrassment of trustees over disclosure of the financial concerns gave Martin additional leverage over the trustees to push for Fisher’s removal – or perhaps to push the president himself to resign.

direct acknowledgement by college trustees of most of the identified problems.²³ Fisher's general behavior after his dismissal became public – specifically, his refusal to resign and repeated demands for a public hearing of any performance-based charges against him – belies the notion that he was fearful of being exposed as culpable in any campus financial scandal.²⁴ Further, archival records of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) establish that investigator A.J. Carlson had heard rumors about a college

²³ One exception is a response from Fisher to Brabrook about criticisms noted in state audit number 232, covering the unusually long period from July 26, 1923 to March 31, 1931. Responding directly to charges of irregularities in accounting for the Student Loan Fund and other accounts, Fisher writes: “We are willing to admit that from the examiner’s standpoint we had a crude system of bookkeeping, but at the same time we think from our standpoint that the system worked.” Fisher also acknowledged that college follow-up on delinquent Student Loan Fund accounts “has not been as persistent as it should have been.” He blamed this on a lack of clerical staff, noted the addition of a new part-time clerk to handle the task. Fisher concluded by saying he hoped audits would occur every biennium from that point forward. Fisher to Brabrook, Jan. 15, 1932, State Correspondence: Governor, records of the President’s Office, accession 77-9, box 13, WWU Archives.

²⁴ Details of Fisher’s defiant, post-firing statements are contained in Chapter 6. One intriguing possibility is that payroll advances and other loans to staff were part of some informal, intra-fund financing scheme employed by Fisher during a period when the college, due to reduced operating funds necessitated by flagging state tax revenues during the Great Depression, struggled to remain in operation. A suggestion of such a defense issued by Fisher or other college staff members is made in an important passage in the sharply critical June 9, 1938 letter from Brabrook to Martin, cited above: “Whether these loans are made to cover a shortage in funds or for some other purpose appears to us to be immaterial.” Beyond those words, any assumption that this was a reason offered by staff members for borrowing against the fund is purely speculative. But Fisher, in fact, had been known to employ creative financial juggling before. In an exchange with state examiners in 1935, Fisher received an inquiry from state Budget Supervisor Brabrook about an unusual \$200 salary payment made to S.J. Buchanan, the college financial secretary, from a Library Fund for work supposedly performed in August, 1931. The payment appeared to repeat salary payments made four years earlier, and recorded in state payroll accounting, noted Brabrook, who wondered in writing why that would be, and why Buchanan would be paid, in any event, from library funds. Fisher explained that the payment was owed to Buchanan for a vacation which, because the college was so short-handed, he had been unable to take in either 1930 or 1931. The Library Fund, Fisher said, “was the only fund we had that could be used for this purpose. We had no state funds that could be used, so we took the funds where [they] happened to be available with the thought that in time the Library Fund would be reimbursed by charging a book order to this amount to state funds. It was a case of doing the best we could under the circumstances and being fair to a faithful employee.” The file contains no response from Brabrook. Brabrook to Fisher, May 20, 1935, and Fisher to Brabrook, May 28, 1935, State Correspondence: Governor, 1933-1940, WWU Archives. The previous year, Fisher also had shown a keen interest in new state legislation, apparently initiated as Depression relief, that allowed state colleges to more freely shift funds between traditional accounts to cover shortfalls. See Fisher to Harold McGrath, secretary, State Finance Committee, Feb. 6, 1934, State Correspondence: Governor, 1933-1940, WWU Archives.

financial scandal from an unnamed source, but dismissed them and other gossip as components of a “smear campaign” to justify Fisher’s firing, ultimately having little bearing on the actual decision.²⁵ And at the risk of diminishing the urgency state officials felt about the matter in 1938, when the outcome was unknown, it must be noted that college financial records from the years following Fisher’s departure make it clear that earlier dire warnings about the shaky status of as much as \$24,000 in state funds turned out to be both speculative and overblown.

A renewed interest in the fund’s legal status, no doubt prompted by the scrutiny of the governor, prompted a series of formal questions from trustees to the state attorney general’s office about the Student Loan Fund in the early 1940s, after Fisher’s departure. Attorneys responded that the fund did not technically qualify as “state funds,” but rather, was constituted from student funds and held in trust by the college, with trustees serving a legal trusteeship role over the account.²⁶ State examiners, in an audit of college finances

²⁵ A.J. Carlson to Ralph Himstead, Sept. 18, 1939, Committee B, AAUP General Historical Files, box 1 (box UP0037), Special Collections Research Center, Gelman Library, The George Washington University, Washington, D.C. In this memo containing his initial assessment of the Fisher case after eight days of work in Bellingham, Carlson notes: “It is a curious fact that that the technique of ‘smearing’ your opponent with allusions to sex irregularities and financial irregularities are the same whether directed against a college instructor or a college president.” It is unclear whether these “financial irregularities” were the problems specified herein, or what Carlson meant by the reference to sex. A subsequent written request was made by Carlson to Fisher to meet in person to discuss allegations “from an apparently reliable source regarding funds and money matters which I must clear up and which consequently I cannot write you about. I wanted to be sure whether all that too is just part of the smearing technique. I feel sure that it had little or nothing to do with your dismissal.” No response from Fisher is found in the files. But no mention of the “smear campaign” is made in Carlson’s final AAUP report. Carlson to Fisher, Sept. 27, 1939, AAUP General Historical Files, GWU. See below for a fuller discussion of the AAUP investigation.

²⁶ This legal opinion – issued after similar questions about the legal status of Student Loan Funds raised by officials at the University of Washington, allowed the trustees to reinvest interest proceeds from the fund in higher-yielding investments and perform other management tasks. See Jerome Kuykendall, state assistant attorney general, to Raymond C. Davis, University of Washington, Jan. 24, 1942, attached to Report of the Student Loan Fund Committee to the Board of Trustees, Feb. 16, 1942, Student Loan Fund, President’s

released in early 1942, covering the period 1939 to 1941, noted that \$301,657 had been loaned from the fund over the course of its life. The auditor concluded that the number of “outstanding notes,” totaling about \$6,000 and likely uncollectible, were “quite insignificant when considered in relation to the total amount loaned.”²⁷

Any remaining questions about the health, or prior potential misuse, of the Student Loan Fund were answered the following month, when a comprehensive report on the fund’s history and operations, requested by trustees, was completed by the college’s Student Loan Committee.²⁸ The report indicated that the fund balance had increased from \$14,000 in 1920 to more than \$29,000 in 1941, largely through accrued interest. Loan disbursements from the fund had ranged between \$10,000 and \$14,000 per year since 1920. But in spite of accrued interest and a repayment rate deemed satisfactory, the fund

Office records, accession 78-24, box 8, WWU Archives. Also see Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Jan. 21, 1942. The fund remains operational at present-day Western Washington University.

²⁷ Audit, Western Washington College of Education, September 1, 1939, to March 31, 1941, Jan. 10, 1942, Washington State Archives, Olympia, WA, 5.

²⁸ The review was part of a dual process, on-campus and off, to examine the fund’s accounting and obtain a legal definition of its status from state attorneys. Trustee Branigin, himself an attorney, had expressed frustrations about uncertainty surrounding the fund with President Haggard in a letter Nov. 23, 1940, in which he noted: “It appears that there are quite a few student loan notes long past due and some of them are ‘outlawed.’ It also appears that the state examiner will not allow them to be charged off and as a result the fund is always in the red, and subject to the recurring harassment in his reports. It further appears that there is no legal entity authorized to administer this fund ... Before anything else can be legally accomplished, this fund must be defined.” See Verne Branigin to W.W. Haggard, Nov. 23, 1940, Student Loan Fund, records of the President’s Office, box 8, accession 78-24, WWU Archives, Bellingham, WA. University records show similar confusion about the fund from Charles Fisher dating to 1932, when he wrote Brabrook in the above-referenced Jan. 15, 1932 letter responding to an audit: “One of the greatest problems we have had in administering the Student Loan Fund is to know when an unpaid loan should be marked off as a loss,” Fisher wrote. “The office staff think that the examiners have considerably over estimated the amount of uncollectible notes we have on hand.” Fisher to Brabrook, Jan. 15, 1932, State Correspondence: Governor, records of the President’s Office, accession 77-09, box 13, WWU Archives.

had been operating at a small loss for the previous eight years, the committee reported.²⁹ A minor reduction in the fund balance over the period in question was deemed to have occurred “not through mismanagement of the fund on the part of the committee or the trustees,” but by an ongoing drain on the fund by expenses charged against it, chiefly the half-time salary of the fund administrator. A review of similar college loan funds indicated this administrative cost typically was borne by general college payroll accounts, not the fund itself.³⁰ Actual losses in the Student Loan Fund, from loans deemed “uncollectible” after six years of non-payment, amounted to an average of only \$200 to \$300 a year – an amount well within the expected default parameters as indicated in a national survey consulted by the committee. The Student Loan Committee, deeming the fund healthy and essential, recommended that, in the interest of balanced books and a clean audit report, accounts deemed “uncollectible” for six years be cancelled by the Board of Trustees, whose role as legal trustees of the fund, with the power to administer it, had finally been clarified by state attorneys.³¹ “In conclusion the Committee feels that the Fund has always been and will continue to be a decided asset to the college,” the

²⁹ “Report of the Student Loan Committee to the Board of Trustees,” Feb. 16, 1942, Student Loan Fund, records of the President’s Office, accession 78-24, box 8, WWU Archives.

³⁰ Ibid. The fund over the period 1933-1941 had earned \$7,685 in interest, but paid out \$7,048 in expenses.

³¹ Ibid. Attached to the report was an Attorney General’s office finding in the form of a letter to University of Washington comptroller Raymond C. Davis, from Washington state Attorney General Smith Troy, in response to similar questions about the legal status of state student loan funds from that institution. The letter indicated that monies in the loan fund “are not public funds in the true sense of the word” and that state auditors had been auditing the funds to avoid irregularities in spite of doubt as to whether the state was legally required to do so. See Smith Troy to Raymond C. Davis, Jan. 24, 1942, Student Loan Fund, President’s Office, WWU Archives.

report stated. “The Student Loan Fund has increased enrollment in the past and in all probability will continue to do so in the future.”³²

The lack of any evidence of the actual loss of state funds by the school’s sloppy accounting was bolstered by the absence of action taken against staff members largely responsible for the dire earlier warnings from the state. Based on available records, Fisher was never suspected of using college funds for his own purposes.³³ And no evidence exists of any officer of the college being disciplined by the president, trustees or any state officials during Fisher’s tenure. No charges are known to have been brought by the state Attorney General; as noted above, all the money from “suspect” withdrawals from the Student Loan Fund was paid back, in full, within two weeks after the governor was notified of their existence in 1938. Those borrowers suffered no apparent career consequences. Loan recipient Evelyn Hughes, the Student Loan Fund secretary, resigned her post in January, 1941 to take a new job in Washington, D.C.³⁴ Loan recipient Church, the president’s secretary, stayed on in that position for many years after Fisher’s departure. Loan recipient Sam Buchanan, the financial secretary, would go on to serve a

³² Ibid. The college board of trustees concurred with the report’s recommendations, declaring that “certain notes, legally uncollectible, in the amount of \$4,010.70 from the Student Loan Fund ... be cancelled as of March 31, 1942.” The board further agreed that payment of \$600 per year for a staff member to administer the fund be transferred from the fund’s proceeds to general payroll, that a yearly report of the fund be sent to the board of trustees, that the college consider lowering interest rate on loans, and that increases in the fund due to accrued interest be devoted to annual scholarships, rather than merely accumulating in the fund. Trustee Verne Branigin agreed to inquire further about strategies for the college to hire its own collection agency to pursue delinquent loans. Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Feb. 16, 1942.

³³ The most damaging specific charge against Fisher, aside from his approval of the inappropriate Student Loan Funds, was the apparent practice of taking his own salary advances from college funds. See below.

³⁴ Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Jan. 22, 1941.

lengthy, distinguished career in the college finance office.³⁵ Fisher himself, as will be noted in Chapter 8, would briefly serve as a wartime business employee of the State of Washington under a Democratic governor a decade after his departure from Bellingham – hardly the predicted fate of an administrator deemed untrustworthy with public funds.

In short, what appeared to have been a hint of serious impropriety at the college in the mid- to late-1930s had been deemed largely inconsequential by most of the same state officials by the early 1940s. Board of trustees meeting minutes for the subsequent two years contain occasional updates on the Student Loan Fund, including references to various collection attempts on individual unpaid loans, all for less than \$100.³⁶ But trustees, assuming they were aware, neither publicly acknowledged, nor responded to, the Attorney General’s unsettling initial charge that the fund had appeared to be as much as \$24,000 in the red. This lack of public disclosure both in Bellingham and Olympia – exacerbated by either the misplacement or willful destruction of many records related to the matter in both places — helps explain the fact that the financial questions to date have

³⁵ A large Western Washington University campus residence building, Buchanan Towers, bears his name.

³⁶ The difficulties inherent in such collections are illustrated by letters to the school from Whatcom-Skagit Collectors, Inc., hired to collect some unpaid debts. Responding to one inquiry about an unpaid loan by a Mr. Earl O’Grady, the collection agency notes that the job had been assigned to its agent in Auburn, Washington, who had subsequently gone out of business. The company’s new agent in the area said previous files on the case were probably lost, but offered this summation about the attempt to collect a now-13-year-old debt: “As far as this Earl O’Grady, whose note you are looking for, is concerned – he has skipped out long ago, has married within the last few years, and isn’t paying any old bills. He knows all the outs, and collection from him would be impossible.” The note concluded: Our files show this note was dated April 29, 1926, for the sum of \$25.00. We are closing our files in this matter.” Whatcom-Skagit Collectors to Evelyn Hughes, Student Loan Committee, Western Washington College of Education, Aug. 30, 1939, Dept. of Efficiency files.

never been cited as a possible factor in Fisher's dismissal.³⁷ Knowledge of the matter, it appears, was confined to a select group of state officials. None of them disclosed it during Fisher's fight to save his job – or even after, in spite of the fact that it seemingly would have helped justify a highly unpopular firing. Remarkably, in the fall of 1938, as the fight over Fisher's job raged on, nary a hint of the financial scandal appears to have been known by campus faculty, students, or the community at large. For decades, even as numerous conspiracy theories about the president's firing swirled in Bellingham and beyond, it would remain an unknown and unconsidered factor in the president's ultimate demise.³⁸

³⁷ Archival files of the state Department of Efficiency, a precursor to the Office of Finance, Budget and Business, cited above, contain the sole known record of correspondence between state officials discussing the serious of financial accounting at the college. Archival files of the college, the attorney general and governor's office include none of the correspondence, and no hint of possible illegal activity related to college funds. In addition, two audits containing information about the Student Loan Fund and other campus bookkeeping irregularities, are missing from Washington State Archives. These are Examination Number 528, covering April 1, 1935 to March 31, 1938 (which features an unusual reversion on the beginning date covered, to match the beginning date of audit Number 447, already conducted — possibly because that audit had been the last conducted by the Dept. of Efficiency before a new state agency, the Department of Finance, Budget and Business, assumed the task), and Examination Number 572, covering April 1, 1938 to Aug. 31, 1939. Acknowledgement of the completion of these audits, presumably along with copies of the audits, was received by the college; see H.A. Peterson, state Department of Finance, Budget and Business, to Kirkpatrick, June 15, 1939 and Brabrook to Haggard, Feb. 29, 1940, State Correspondence: Governor, 1933-1940, WWU Archives. The reason for the absence of the two audits at the Washington State Archives headquarters in Olympia, where copies of all other audits from the era are housed, is unexplained. No copies of state audits from the period are found in the WWU Archives.

³⁸ One place where the theory that Fisher ultimately was driven from his job by college financial impropriety lives on to the present is among the direct descendants of Frank Sefrit. This case is made in no uncertain terms in a lengthy letter, written sometime in the 1970s by Ben Sefrit, Frank Sefrit's youngest son, and passed down to Ben Sefrit's children. Ben Sefrit, who worked for decades at *The Bellingham Herald*, and served in newsroom-management positions long after the death of his father in 1950, describes what amounts to a multi-party conspiracy to remove Fisher and hide the real reasons for his departure in 1939. Frank Sefrit, Ben recounted, learned of "conclusive evidence" of Fisher's complicity in misappropriation of student funds "for his own gain." This information allegedly came from college Board of Trustees Chairman Kirkpatrick, a longtime friend and personal physician to the Sefrit family. The board chairman had been informed about the financial red flags by Gov. Clarence Martin, in strict confidence, Ben Sefrit writes. His recollection was that Fisher had been given an ultimatum: resign, under the guise of health reasons, or be arrested and prosecuted. Frank Sefrit's supposed role was to print a falsified news

The State's Secret Witness

The newly discovered documentation of Western's financial troubles during the latter decade of the Fisher administration brought with it, serendipitously, yet another previously unknown – and potentially historically significant – finding: The long-lost Department of Efficiency files also contain evidence that most of the supposedly “secret” activities of Sefrit's anti-Fisher committee were in fact known by state officials even before charges were brought against the president in May, 1935. The committee's ongoing activities early that year were being relayed to Olympia by an unlikely third party – a state examiner stationed at the Bellingham campus, completing one or more of the above-referenced audits, in 1935. The documents reveal that state auditor R.P. Fraser served as a prolific pipeline for information about the percolating activities of the Frank Sefrit-led Committee on Normal Protest leading up to the filing of formal charges against Fisher in late April, 1935. Fraser, the first state auditor to comprehensively document, and formally question, the college's handling of its Student Loan Fund, expanded his

story in *The Herald* confirming that Fisher was leaving the college for health reasons. Fisher would be gone, the reputation of the college – which Frank Sefrit saw as a significant community asset – would be spared, and no one would be the wiser. The problem with Ben Sefrit's recollection is that Fisher's firing did not follow this script at all. While Frank Sefrit might have believed otherwise (and made public statements suggesting so), no evidence exists that the state had actionable criminal evidence against Fisher for misusing college funds. And even if a conspiracy had been afoot to force Fisher to resign under threat of lesser action, it surely would have been foiled when Fisher, even after direct pressure from trustees and the governor, publicly refused to resign. In fact, he repeatedly requested a public hearing over any possible charges against him. These facts were dutifully reported in the pages of *The Bellingham Herald*, which, contrary to Ben Sefrit's recollection, did not publish any known story about Fisher resigning for reasons of health, or resigning at all. It is logical to conclude, based on these facts, that Ben Sefrit's recollection of the events is flawed. Nevertheless, the tale does raise the intriguing possibility that Frank Sefrit believed he and state authorities were sitting on actionable evidence that could be used to fire Fisher for cause. It is conceivable that this constituted the “other” evidence against the president to which Frank Sefrit often referred in editorials and letters about the case. Undated letter, “To My Sons Barney and George,” circa 1970s, provided to the author by Ben Sefrit's son, George A. Sefrit, in March, 2016.

own duties in the weeks spent on campus that spring. While in Bellingham, he became intimately familiar with the secret effort by Frank Sefrit's red-baiting group to document the supposed communist leanings of Fisher. The record shows that he dutifully and enthusiastically relayed every scrap of this gossip to his superiors in Olympia.

Fraser had been living in Bellingham's Cissna Hotel while conducting what began as a routine audit of college finances in early 1935. After communicating with one or more unnamed Bellingham sources, Fraser passed details of the growing effort to oust Fisher to his boss, then-state Budget Division supervisor Brabrook, in a series of communiques.³⁹ In an April 30, 1935 missive typed on Washington State Normal School letterhead and labeled "CONFIDENTIAL," Fraser laid out all he had learned about the scandal to date.⁴⁰ He first introduced Brabrook to the two notorious campus "troublemakers," Catherine Montgomery and Alma Jenkins, both passionately dedicated to Fisher's demise.⁴¹ Montgomery, he wrote, was a former instructor, "not liked and unpopular," who was let go by Fisher. "That happened years ago," Fraser noted. "But all the while since, she has apparently nursed her wrath to keep it warm, and bears umbrage to anyone belonging to the school." The auditor added that he had learned that "to assist her [Montgomery] in bringing war right into the middle of the camp against Dr. Fisher, she had made personal application to the Governor for a Trusteeship when the position

³⁹ "CONFIDENTIAL," R.P. Fraser to E.D. Brabrook, April 30, 1935, Dept. of Efficiency file, Washington State Archives. Many of the details of the Sefrit group's efforts, including a nearly complete roster of the Committee on Normal Protest, were sufficiently detailed to suggest that they came from a member of the committee itself.

⁴⁰ Ibid. Fraser begins the letter by saying he was responding to a prior request from Brabrook for information about the movement against Fisher. That letter is not found in the collection.

⁴¹ See Chapter 4 for details of their relationship to the Fisher case.

was open a year or two ago.” Montgomery’s antipathy toward Fisher, Fraser deduced, was a “purely personal affair.” Mrs. Jenkins had her own reasons to despise Fisher – the dispute over her family’s property, taken over by the college in its expansion push, he noted. “Since that time, this lady, who by all I can learn is rather clever and brainy, has missed no occasion to belittle Dr. Fisher. Some little time ago, this lady took occasion to visit the Dr. here in the school, in which she denounced him as a communist. The Dr., it is said, called her a liar, using this short and ugly word a few times more, winding up ... by insisting she never enter the building again, and so on. I got this from two independent sources. The onslaught, in this case like the other, had its beginning in a personal issue ... and may be dismissed.”⁴²

Fraser noted that the vengeful crusade of Jenkins, who was “pretty well fixed financially and with lots of time on her hands,” was being used by a group of prominent Bellingham citizens to build a case against Fisher. Fraser described a comprehensive, legal-style case about to be made against the president – one, he was told by a “reliable” source, that would have been made in court long ago, except for concerns that such action would damage the reputation of the college.⁴³ “While the group freely admits his ability as an educator, and his devotion to the school, yet it is felt in the face of an ever diminishing attendance and other matters that ... Dr. Fisher has outlived his period of usefulness,” Fraser wrote. “The indictment will set out to prove that, somewhere,

⁴² Ibid. The alleged “liar” statement by Fisher also is described in the files of the Committee on Normal Protest.

⁴³ The theme mirrors what became the mantra of Frank Sefrit, before, during and after the case made against Fisher was presented in 1935.

somehow, there is an element of pernicious teaching going on of communism and atheism.”⁴⁴

Fraser described a story told to him about an unnamed city merchant whose girls attended the college, and were so irreparably spiritually damaged by the experience that they were withdrawn from the school:

I was also told of the definite case of three sisters who came from one of the little places around here somewhere. Three sweet, charming Christian girls. Immediately they came to school, they attached themselves to active work in a church here. In about six months' time, they had learned to discredit everything associated with Christianity, even their evening prayers.⁴⁵

Fraser went on to relate other key claims that would find their way in the formal letter of charges presented by Sefrit to the board three weeks later. Chief among these was the charge that seditious speakers of a “highly radical nature” had addressed students at school assemblies in recent years. Fraser also engaged in his own personal attacks on Fisher that went beyond the charges by Sefrit’s group, suggesting that Fisher’s administration amounted to a “dictatorship.”⁴⁶ The auditor noted that the college had no vice president, secretary or manager beneath its longtime head. “The Janitor goes to the

⁴⁴ Fraser to Brabrook, April 30, 1935.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Fraser’s take is ironic given that Fisher, in his own letter to Brabrook in 1931, had praised Fraser as a helpful examiner who was very understanding of conditions at the college. “What I especially like about Mr. Fraser’s work as an examiner is that he is constructive in his approach, and is not arbitrary about accountancy. In every instance with us he took into consideration the work of our school and tried to understand what we as an educational institution are endeavoring to do ... Probably the best piece of work Mr. Fraser did for us was to completely reorganize our system of accounts with respect to the Student Loan Fund. As a result of this reorganization, I am sure that we have the Student Loan Fund under our control and working much more satisfactorily than before.” Fisher to Brabrook, Dec. 11, 1931, State Correspondence: Governor, records of the President’s Office, WWU Archives.

Dr. for instructions,” he wrote. “I have heard them consulting together.” Fisher’s controlling personality, he continued, extended to his relationship with the board of trustees. “Dr. Fisher told me himself ... that in the last battle for Trusteeship, his fight for the appointment of Verne Branigin was solely from the standpoint that he would have a Yes-Yes man,” Fraser wrote.⁴⁷ The gossip-prone auditor also relayed rumors he had heard about internal political fights Fisher allegedly had engaged in at local churches. And he described a veritable social wall between faculty members and the general community in Bellingham, worsened by general disdain for Fisher among local citizens. He had also heard, he wrote, from “one in the school here who is in a position to have an opinion, that ‘The Dr. is no manager.’”⁴⁸

Fraser eventually departed from this recitation of hearsay to focus on his own audit findings, in the process making a potentially damaging charge against Fisher: While faculty were “deprived of their salary” for some periods (presumably due to budget concerns with the onslaught of the Depression several years before), Fisher had made sure that he and his administrative staff continued to draw their own salaries, Fraser reported, adding: “Necessarily (it seems to me) he had to allow the office staff to have theirs’ also to have the matter kept quiet. The office staff are in terror that this matter crops out through the organization.”⁴⁹ The proof: An inventory of the college Cash fund

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ The latter comment may be a reference to the college’s troubled bookkeeping tendencies.

⁴⁹ As noted in Chapter 2, faculty salaries were severely reduced between 1932 and 1934. Because of the rapidity with which staffing and payroll reductions were made during the Depression, faculty salaries initially were trimmed simply by foregoing paychecks for two months. At Bellingham Normal, for example, faculty received no paychecks during July and August, 1933. “Faculty to Lose Two Months’ Pay at Bellingham,” *The Bellingham Herald*, April 1, 1933.

on March 15th, 1935, Fraser wrote, indicated a series of checks, “being carried as cash items, belonging to Dr. Fisher, in the amount of \$980.” Fraser listed 17 checks by date, beginning December 9, 1932, and ending March 14, 1935, with amounts ranging from \$10 to \$300, allegedly cashed by Fisher from school funds. “That was on March 15th, understand,” Fraser wrote. “On March 31st when I again counted the cash, they weren’t there. From enquiry I had made, I discovered that I appeared on the scene too quick for the Dr. He went down to the bank and borrowed on his insurance policies to clear up the affair.”⁵⁰

Fraser then described the Student Loan Fund withdrawals of college financial staff member Evelyn Hughes, whom he described as “the kid of the business – a young woman of about 24,” who borrowed from the very fund she administered. A first loan of \$200, he noted, was repaid with part of a second loan for \$600, “leaving her with \$400 to do something or another with, supposedly to help her father who was out of work. This large loan, the Student Loan Board knows nothing about,” Fraser wrote. “It was OK’d by the President, who otherwise takes no say with such matters of the Student Loan Board.” Fraser concluded: “Personally I am somewhat familiar with the circumstances of the [Hughes] family, and from that knowledge I make the prediction that there is not a chance in the world of it ever being paid.”⁵¹ Fraser also referenced the first loan to

⁵⁰ Fraser to Brabrook, April 30, 1935. The existence of these cash-draw checks is not in evidence in Fraser’s audit report for the period in question (presumably because they were repaid), nor in the 1938 detailed letter from Fraser’s superior, Brabrook, to Gov. Martin about the proliferation of cash-advance IOU checks issued by faculty and staff at the college. Fisher’s normal gross pay around this time would have been approximately \$400 to \$500 per month.

⁵¹ As noted above, the loan was repaid in full in 1938.

Fisher's personal secretary, Ethel Church, saying it might be repaid, but he had his doubts. "These are quite beyond my comprehension," he wrote.⁵²

In conclusion, Fraser told Brabrook that he would attempt to learn the date of the board of trustees hearing by the citizen's group seeking Fisher's firing. "I forgot to say earlier, that I have been made aware that if the complainants cannot get the result they are looking for [through] the trustees, it is their intention to carry the matter to Olympia. With this information, you yourself could make a demand to the Trustees to be furnished with a copy of the charge. By doing so you would have a better quality of evidence than is within my ability to secure. An alternative plan might be to have the case presented in Olympia in the first place. These are matters of course for your own determination." As a P.S., Fraser added that he had just learned that "there is a communist club amongst the students. The famed Mrs. Jenkins has all the details of it apparently. I do not care to visit this party [Jenkins] as I think it would be bad judgment on my part, unless you request me to do so if there is anything particular you would like to know, that she might be able to furnish."⁵³

Fraser kept Brabrook posted on rumors about a potential hearing date in subsequent weeks. In his last report on file, typed May 4, 1935, Fraser, in another "Confidential" memo, reported that he had learned that a copy of the "voluminous charges" against Fisher was then in the hands of the trustees.⁵⁴ "Great preparation is

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ The charges in fact were delivered during the prior week.

being made to have the case conducted in proper form,” he wrote. “A court stenographer will be there taking down the records. Of the three Trustees, I am informed that Dr. Kirkpatrick is leaning slightly toward the side of the complainants; Saunders of Everett is wide open to be guided by the facts. As for Branigin, he will be on the side of Dr. Fisher in spite of any facts. I did not need to be told that.”⁵⁵ Attached to this letter to Olympia superiors was a typed list of known Committee on Normal Protest members, largely mirroring the list contained in Sefrit’s files, detailed in Chapter 4. Fraser’s list confirms the presence on the committee of prominent businesswoman and civic do-gooder Francis Payne Larrabee (described as “capitalist”), but omits pastor John Robertson Macartney, Victor Roth, and Solomon Blanton Luther, the self-professed Klansman. However, it adds the name of Bellingham hotel proprietor Henry Schupp, previously not connected with the group via membership rosters contained in documents among Sefrit’s files.⁵⁶

Fraser also excitedly passed on to Brabrook his recent discovery of the popular, scandalous new book, *The Red Network*, by Elizabeth Dilling, which he noted was “made up in the usual Who’s-Who Fashion, giving the names and an abbreviated history of sponsors etc. etc. of Redness.” Embodied in the charges against Fisher, he said, would be “proof” that 23 people listed in the book had addressed assemblies on campus within the prior three years. The school librarian, Mabel Zoe Wilson, would be called to attest to the number of books on radicalism and communism on library shelves. The group had a list

⁵⁵ Fraser to Brabrook, May 4, 1935, Dept. of Efficiency files.

⁵⁶ Schupp, however, was in attendance at the meeting at which Sefrit and other community members pressured Fisher to reinstate fired history professor Pelagius Williams, according to an account by Sefrit at the 1935 Fisher hearing. This group appears to have been the progenitor of the Committee on Normal Protest. See Chapter 5.

of some 200 of them, he was told. Fraser attached to the letter his own list of many of these “radicals,” complete with biographical documentation of the “redness” of each speaker, as noted in Dilling’s work. Of particular note is the fact that Fraser’s list of 13 “radical” speakers, each with a short biography which he suggested in the letter was drawn from *The Red Network*, appears to have been drawn not from that book at all, but from similar annotated biographies contained in the working materials of Frank Sefrit’s Committee on Normal Protest.⁵⁷

Fraser concluded his unofficial espionage duties for Brabrook with a warning: If the complainants for whatever reason proved unable to make their case to their satisfaction, “the school is doomed,” he wrote. “While it was not stated in so many words

⁵⁷ Fraser to Brabrook, May 4, 1935, Dept. of Efficiency files. In an attached, typed document titled “Persons Who Have Addressed Assembly: Bellingham School,” Fraser lists 13 of 23 Sefrit-committee-identified “radical” speakers who had spoken on campus in the prior three years. Each name was followed by what Fraser described as a “sketchy biography.” Fraser’s list begins with a notation that the information was taken from Dilling’s book, *The Red Network*. But direct comparisons of these biographies to those in a broader list of “radical” speakers compiled by Sefrit’s group reveals that Fraser, in preparing the materials he sent to Olympia, was actually copying from those internal Sefrit committee documents, not writing his own biographies. Fraser’s short biographies read nothing like corresponding passages in Dilling’s book. Rather, they mirror the Sefrit committee’s version – assembled from a broad range of sources, of which *The Red Network* was only one – almost word for word. (Fraser’s version even remains faithful to unusual capitalizations and other oddities of the committee’s work, such as the phrase “Chamberlin is a Communist-Recommended author” in his entry on William Henry Chamberlain.) Fraser, apparently in the interest of brevity, appears to have simply edited down the committee’s material in some places for his letter to Brabrook. Further evidence of this is the inclusion, on both lists of “radical” speakers, of Seattle pastor Fred W. Shorter. Shorter appears nowhere in *The Red Network*, but his biography appears, in a word-for-word match with Fraser’s version, in the Sefrit committee files. Thus, it can be established that Fraser not only knew details of the Committee on Normal Protest’s activities and strategies, but was provided with some of the group’s source materials assembled to make their case that Fisher was a dangerous communist. The Sefrit committee’s use of *The Red Network* as source material for its identification of, and source for annotated bibliographies of, “reds” who had spoken on campus, is discussed in Chapter 4. For the full list of annotated bibliographies of speakers from Sefrit’s committee, see “Persons Who Have Addressed Assembly, Bellingham State Normal,” box 1, folder 5, Bellingham Herald Collection on Charles H. Fisher, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Western Libraries, Heritage Resources, Bellingham, WA.

what steps would be taken to doom it, I think I was left to infer that in such an event, the case would be broadcast to the world. This of course is a guess on my part.”⁵⁸ Fraser, in these letters, seemed to possess little doubt the anti-Fisher group would be successful – perhaps solving the college’s record-keeping and political problems in one fell swoop. “The group is prepared to spend the money to pursue the case to a finish,” he wrote of the Committee on Normal Protest. “As you can see from the names of the parties given, there should be no shortage of funds; and now that they have thrown down the challenge I am of the impression that it will be pursued until one or other of the sides calls, ‘Enough.’”⁵⁹

Thus were the basic facts of the conspiracy to defame Fisher as a dangerous seditionist officially linked, in high offices at the state capitol, with a growing examination of alleged financial improprieties of his administration. To the present day, it remains unclear to what degree either one of the matters informed, propelled, or affected the other. But Fraser’s demonstrated inside knowledge, bolstered by the stark similarities between materials possessed by Fraser and by Sefrit’s committee, clearly indicates cooperation between the two parties. Discovery of the Fraser letters does answer one abiding mystery about the Fisher affair: How much of the red-scare case against Fisher was known to state officials while it played out, or even afterward? Fraser’s previously unknown missives stand as proof that most facts of the Sefrit campaign against Fisher – details presumably supplied by Sefrit himself, or a close associate in the secretive group

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Fraser to Brabrook, May 4, 1935, Dept. of Efficiency files.

— were known by the state supervisor of budget well before the closed-door May 22, 1935 “trial” of Fisher began.

A Trio of Investigations

As noted above, rumors of a financial scandal investigated by state budget officials eventually became known to at least one person outside the college’s immediate circle – an investigator for the AAUP. Archival correspondence of that group establishes that rumors of college financial misdeeds were reported by A.J. Carlson, the University of Chicago professor sent to Bellingham to investigate the Fisher case in 1939. Other correspondence reveals that Carlson agreed, very early on in the investigation, with Fisher’s contention that his firing had been ordered by the governor, exclusively as a result of lingering political animosities stirred up by Sefrit’s red scare campaign. That finding was reflected in the group’s final report, issued in 1941 – the last and most complete of three such investigations conducted into Fisher’s firing. Together, the trio of investigations would form what stood for decades as the unofficial historical narrative of the facts of the Fisher case. As such, they are worthy of separate examination.

The first was a brief inquiry by the Washington Education Association, which sent two representatives on its own volition to Bellingham to interview board Chairman W.D. Kirkpatrick, Fisher, and faculty representatives. In a brief report released in June, 1939 – before Fisher’s departure — the WEA issued a broad call for what amounted to enhanced due process for college employees: the group endorsed formal notices of unsatisfactory performance and possible dismissal, and provisions for employees to request a public hearing to contest the details of any charges of misconduct. The

organization claimed Fisher had been given formal notice of his pending dismissal on Aug. 31, 1938, nearly a year before his final termination.⁶⁰ However, “There seems to have been no formal notice of reasons for dismissal assigned by the board, the board of trustees having felt that through the discussions of the case with Mr. Fisher, the reasons for the action were fully known. It is evident that political issues were involved in the controversy,” the WEA report said.⁶¹

The Fisher case, the WEA stated, raised again the question of the need for possible new state governance procedures to ensure college employees had protection from personal or political biases “so far as practical.” Changing the system to reflect other states’ practices of governing like institutions, such as the three Washington state teacher’s colleges, by a single board, with more than three members, and trustees subject to removal only for cause, seemed “worthy of study,” the group concluded. Faculty members, noting the glaring lack of censure of the board of trustees or governor for actions already taken, were unimpressed. “In effect, the association was all in favor of locking the stable door after the horse had been stolen,” Fisher-defender Hicks recalled.⁶²

The AATC Investigates

Gathering information concurrently was the investigative team of the American Association of Teacher’s Colleges (AATC), Western’s official accrediting agency. The

⁶⁰ Neither the board of trustees minutes of Aug. 17, 1938 nor a special meeting on Aug. 31, 1938 contain any record of such a notification.

⁶¹ Statement from Arthur L. Marsh, executive secretary, Washington Education Association, contained in Minutes of the Faculty, July 13, 1939.

⁶² Hicks, *Western* at 75, 58.

stakes for this investigation were considerably higher, given the group's stake in establishing the school's credibility in the national education community. Two AATC representatives visited Washington state from July 30 to August 2, 1939.⁶³ They interviewed Fisher, seven faculty members, the trustees, a representative of the Associated Students, and Governor Martin. Their report, published March 30, 1940 also noted that the board had been supportive of Fisher, in spite of persistent opposition from some community members, up until a year before his dismissal. The group echoed Martin's contention that the board made the choice to dismiss Fisher because his "lack of tact and conciliatory attitude led to adverse criticism."⁶⁴ Yet Fisher, the AATC noted, did not resign "as he did not consider valid the reasons given for asking him to retire."

The AATC investigators, responding to charges by faculty that the AATC's Standard XII, which prohibits political interference with member institutions, had been violated, gave what amounted to a yes-and-no answer: "There were earnest expressions of many honestly held opinions to the effect that Standard XII had been violated, but no facts were adduced which fully substantiated or disproved such implications. As stated by members of the board, they believed they had acted for the good of the institution in dismissing President Fisher."⁶⁵ Trustees conceded to the AATC that Governor Martin had "for some years been dissatisfied with President Fisher because of complaints which came to the governor's office." But the board members insisted Martin was not making

⁶³ The AATC investigators were Ned H. Dearborn, dean of the division of general education, New York University, and Sheldon E. Davis, president of Montana State Normal College.

⁶⁴ "AATC Report on the Fisher Case, *School and Society*, March 30, 1940, Vol. 51, No. 1318, 420-422.

⁶⁵ AATC Report on the Fisher Case, 420.

an attempt to directly control the institution. As proof, they pointed out that they had already appointed a successor to Fisher with no interference from the governor, who had merely been notified of the choice. Even so, the association concluded:

Board members expressed the opinion that, while they were independent in their action, they would not consider it loyal nor expedient seriously to oppose a course of action urged by the governor, who appoints the board and is held responsible for their actions. This interpretation of relationships places very great power over the institutions rather directly in the hands of the governor.⁶⁶

The report noted that, under an existing court precedent, the governor could remove trustees for misconduct, malfeasance, or incompetency, but was not required to specify the acts of misconduct or malfeasance, nor state his reasons.⁶⁷ “It is clear that the governor participated in the discussions of the board regarding the administration of President Fisher,” the AATC said. “The board evidently never questioned the propriety of the governor’s active interest in the administration of the college, and in this case agreed with the governor ... that President Fisher’s services should terminate not later than the end of August, 1939.” The AATC warned that the same methods conceivably could be used to remove any faculty member or administrative officer of any Washington institution of higher education: “The Washington system ... lends itself to charges and countercharges of political interference or domination in matters of professional education.” State law created the appearance of conflict, whether such conflict existed or not: The mere suspicion of political exertion “is damaging to the public interest, even

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ The AATC report cites State Supreme Court, 139 Washington, P. 525, July 14, 1926. The “misconduct or malfeasance” language would be added to state law in 1943, after which trustees could be removed “only” for those reasons, and only after a formal process of judicial review. See Chapter 8.

though the suspicion be utterly unfounded on fact,” the report stated. “With the militant and sharply aligned groups active in Bellingham and in the state, it is inevitable that the governor’s political enemies will interpret any positive connection with administration or policy of a state educational institution as an attempt to promote his own political ambitions. That is the situation in this case as it was with the [1926 University of Washington] Suzzallo case.”

The AATC, in summary, declined to choose sides on the specific question of whether Martin’s own actions had been politically motivated, or simply practical. But it agreed with Fisher loyalists that the system in place clearly allowed for the appearance of the former:

Ignoring motives, politically operative or otherwise, which no committee can objectively and conclusively determine, the indisputable pertinent fact ... is that the governor believed that President Fisher should be dismissed, participated in the discussions with the board in relation to his dismissal, and agreed to the dismissal. It cannot be supposed that such a situation, the natural result of a system ill-adapted to its purpose, helps anyone. Quite the contrary.

The system itself is quite indefensible. It makes possible gubernatorial domination in the education policy of any or of all Washington state institutions of higher learning ... The system should be changed by the Legislature of the state.⁶⁸

The AATC’s proposed solution was establishment of a non-partisan Board of

Education to insulate trustees and regents from the whims of the person inhabiting the governor’s mansion. It did not recommend a stripping of the college’s accreditation, but teetered upon a thin political line on this question, concluding: “The slightest political interference constitutes a violation of the association’s accrediting regulations.”⁶⁹ Faculty

⁶⁸ AATC Report on Fisher, 222.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

members, understandably, wanted to know: Had not that interference just occurred in Bellingham? The AATC had said, effectively, sort of – but not so much as to constitute a defensible charge that the governor’s intent was purely political. Hicks, for one, concluded: “(T)hese strong words amounted to no more than an expression of opinion, no action was taken to apply those accrediting regulations to the Western Washington College of Education.”⁷⁰ The AATC tried to assuage that angst by working to live up to its promise to help seek legislative reforms while leaving the college on its accreditation list.⁷¹ In the near term, at least, those efforts would prove fruitless.⁷²

The AAUP Follows Suit

The AAUP was able to draw on these opinions shortly after it began its own investigation. The group also enjoyed the advantage of substantial additional time before

⁷⁰ Hicks, *Western* at 75, 59.

⁷¹ The AATC waffled several times on the question of stripping of accreditation. On January 10, 1940, the AATC’s Secretary-Treasurer, Charles Hunt, wrote to newly appointed Western President Wade Haggard to warn him that it would recommend removing the college from the accredited list: “The committee recognizes that the cause for political interference might not be located in the institution but it believes that the institution will be benefited by this action.” Re-application could be made, Hunt said, when the state legislature enacted appropriate changes in the state’s higher-education governance system to ensure “... no further interference on the part of the Governor.” Hunt to Haggard, Jan. 10, 1940, Fisher Case Records, Vice President for Enrollment and Student Services, AATC Accreditation Committee, Accession 74-1, Box 36, Western Washington University Archives. But the threatened action was never taken. Haggard, summoned to meet with the AATC’s Accreditation Committee at its annual meeting in St. Louis the next month, warned of the damages to the institution that might occur from a stripping of accreditation. After hearing him out, the committee backed off of its recommendation to strip accreditation in favor of a statement of concerns that was characterized by Haggard as “more cautious.” See Minutes of the Faculty, March 12, 1940, WWU Archives. A full year later, the group still was threatening decertification to try to spur cooperation from the Washington state Legislature. Based on facts of the AATC investigation, “changes in the legal basis of control are urgently required for the good not only of the state teachers colleges but of other institutions,” the AATC’s Hunt wrote to state lawmakers in 1941. The Accreditation Committee, Hunt wrote, was faced with two choices: Drop Western’s accreditation to call attention to the matter, or wait to see if the state acted on its own. “Rightly or wrongly, the Accrediting Committee chose the second course,” he stated. Charles W. Hunt to Committee on Educational Institutions, The Senate, Olympia, WA, Feb. 26, 1941, Fisher Case Records, Vice President for Enrollment and Student Services, WWU Archives.

⁷² See Chapter 8.

issuing its own report, which in succeeding decades would become the most commonly accepted narrative of Fisher's firing. But an examination of the group's internal communications from the two-year investigatory period reveals important context about the case that never made it into the final AAUP report, or the historical record in any form. For example, aside from picking up rumors of the financial scandal, the AAUP inquiry turned up conflicting versions, from two of the three college trustees, about exactly how Fisher was let go, the degree to which the governor guided that decision, and even whether Fisher's firing as announced in 1938 truly was intended as a final termination. The group's once-confidential correspondence files also contain previously lost communications from Fisher's nemesis, Frank Sefrit; a timeline of events written by Fisher; and new insight into the degree to which investigators from the AAUP worked with fellow investigating academics in the AATC.

Some members of the AAUP, then a relatively young organization, seemed at first hesitant to wade into the murky political waters of the Bellingham imbroglio.⁷³ By tradition and stated purpose, the group typically engaged in investigation and defense of faculty members. But faculty at Western Washington, and also other colleges where faculty and administrators had been informed about the Fisher case, convinced AAUP leaders that the academic-freedom elements of the Fisher firing were sufficient grounds

⁷³ The organization was founded in 1915 by philosopher and intellectual historian Arthur O. Lovejoy and educational reformer John Dewey. It is known for its "Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure," which in 1925 (revised, 1940) established standards for academic due process, and emphasized the importance of the maintenance of academic freedom. See www.aaup.org.

for an investigation.⁷⁴ Chief among these was Professor S. Stephenson Smith, an AAUP member at the University of Oregon, who had communicated with key faculty members in Bellingham about AAUP involvement as early as February, 1939, and with Fisher himself in May of the same year.⁷⁵ Other Fisher allies, such as professional colleague Alonzo Myers of New York University (connected to Fisher through the AATC) also chimed in, urging an investigation.⁷⁶ It is notable that pleas for direct interdiction by the AAUP began very early in 1939, before Fisher's coming departure had been leaked to the press in the spring. Given this, some of those urging AAUP action still hoped that a timely investigation might convince Martin and the trustees to reverse course. Fisher advocates played up the broader academic-freedom elements of the struggle to entice AAUP action. In a January letter to University of Oregon AAUP member Smith, for example, University of Washington faculty member Bert Farquharson said of the Fisher case:

⁷⁴ The AAUP at the time claimed a membership of 15,330 – roughly one-fourth of all eligible teachers in 550 colleges and universities in the U.S. and Canada. "Professors Rap Fisher Removal," *The Seattle Times*, Feb. 24, 1941.

⁷⁵ Upshall, et al, to Smith, Feb. 15, 1939, Committee B, AAUP General Historical Files, GWU. Smith relayed the concerns to Ralph E. Himstead, the AAUP general secretary on Feb. 20, noting that the firing of Fisher "has apparently already occurred but it has not yet been made public." Smith added: "... it may be possible, if the right kind of suasion is used, to convince Governor Martin that he will have a bigger fuss on his hands if he dismisses Fisher than he will if he leaves him alone." Smith added: "Since the enemy in this instance consists, not of an administrator, but of the Governor and the Regents, the case is of course highly political." Himstead replied on March 1 that he had met with Fisher the previous fall, noting: "He impressed me very favorably." Smith followed up with a telegram on May 29, 1939, informing Himstead that "Fisher case has broken in press. Faculty there and many members in Northwest urge that we act." Fisher had forwarded a set of documents about the Sefrit campaign, and the college response to it, to Smith earlier the same month. Fisher to Smith, May 11, 1939, file on Fisher case records, President's Office, Accession 94-12, Box 1, Western Washington University Archives.

⁷⁶ Myers to Carlson, June 30, 1939, Committee B, AAUP General Historical Files, GWU.

... (T)he sum total of his story presents an astounding picture of political influence. If we play our cards in proper sequence, I hazard the guess that the Governor will drop it like a hot potato ... Fisher will have a group of very reputable Bellingham citizens call on the Governor in the very near future. Clarence will not like this and will probably begin to back up. If this could be followed by a simple routine question from the chairman of the AAUP committee asking simply for a confirmation of the rumor of removal, it is possible that the matter might become self-energizing from that point on.⁷⁷

In June, 1939, Smith ratcheted up the pressure on his AAUP peers, telling General Secretary Ralph Himstead in a letter that he understood the group's reluctance to commit resources to an investigation involving an administrator, given that so many worthy cases of faculty with grievances remained active. But, he continued: "(T)his Fisher case has become a *cause celebre*; it is being fought on a really high plane, with academic freedom as the real issue ... The whole thing has of course been bruited in the newspapers to such a degree that the real issue in the state of Washington is political control of the higher institutions ... If the AAUP is going to take a stand against arbitrary political dismissals by a governor who owns, operates, and controls a board of regents, we shall not soon find a better case."⁷⁸ Also agitating for an investigation, via persistent letters to the AAUP leadership, were Western Washington faculty member Hicks, the founder of the new AAUP chapter at the college, and William Fisher, the president's son.⁷⁹

AAUP officials were well aware that the college accrediting agency, the AATC, had already conducted its own investigation. That group's inquiry had begun with the

⁷⁷ Faquharson to Smith, Jan. 22, 1939, Committee B, AAUP General Historical Files, GWU.

⁷⁸ Smith to Himstead, June 19, 1939, Committee B, AAUP General Historical Files, GWU.

⁷⁹ William Fisher, utilizing his position as head of the Washington Federation of Teachers, wrote repeatedly to the organization about the inquiry, later growing demonstrably impatient about the plodding progress of the writing, editing and publishing of a report.

infamous Brandenburg visit, in which the Kansas educator declared the Fisher situation unresolvable, and ending with a more detailed inquiry after the AATC finally relented to faculty calls for a fully investigation. In an attempt to share information, the AAUP contacted Brandenburg, who wrote Himstead to say that his official report about the Fisher case had been forwarded to the AATC secretary-treasurer, Charles Hunt, who should speak for that group. Brandenburg, continuing to serve as a thorn in the side of Fisher loyalists, added: "I may say here briefly that I doubt that politics have been used to any extent at Bellingham. There just seems to have grown up over a wide number of years a lot of dissatisfaction and factionalism. Just where the greatest fault lies I was not able to determine in the short time I had in that State of Washington."⁸⁰ Two weeks later, Hunt offered his own take on the case, explaining to Himstead that the AATC struggled with somewhat conflicting goals: The group was firmly on record against allowing political interference with school operations. But it also drew an important line at interfering with local officials' clear right to choose their own administrators.

Nevertheless, he wrote:

For the first time in the history of the Association in such a case, we sent a representative to Washington. The reports reaching us from reliable sources ... indicated that the administration of President Fisher had been a professional administration, actuated by fine motives and conducted with professional skill. They further indicated that he is awkward in his social relationships and perhaps intolerant in his expression toward people of different convictions. It was found that his dismissal had been agreed upon before our representative reached the state. The circumstances made the situation unusually difficult, even tragic for President Fisher. The Accrediting Committee has not felt that it could be of use in making open protest up to this time.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Brandenburg to Himstead, June 13, 1939, Committee B, AAUP General Historical Files, GWU.

⁸¹ Hunt to Himstead, June 30, 1939, Committee B, AAUP General Historical Files, GWU.

Hunt wished Himstead luck with the AAUP's own investigation.

Most of the legwork for that inquiry was conducted by Carlson, a noted Swedish-American physiology professor from the University of Chicago.⁸² His work officially began on Aug. 21, 1939, when Himstead mailed him the AAUP's growing files on the case.⁸³ Carlson was tabbed to complete the on-site investigation into the matter, which would become a rare, joint inquiry of the AAUP panel he chaired – “Committee B” on Freedom of Speech – with “Committee A” on Academic Freedom and Tenure, headed by historian W.T. Laprade. Traveling to Bellingham in mid-September, 1939, Carlson over the course of eight days met with 20 faculty members; the new president; Sefrit (described by Carlson as Fisher's “arch enemy”); trustees Kirkpatrick and Branigin; as well as Fisher advocate Bert Farquharson and other faculty members from the University of Washington.⁸⁴ Carlson's repeated attempts to contact the governor for an interview

⁸² Carlson in a Feb. 10, 1941 cover story in *Time* magazine was lauded for his comparative studies of the muscular action of the heart in humans compared to the horseshoe crab. He also was an outspoken Humanist, and one of 34 original signers of the Humanist Manifesto in 1933. See: http://americanhumanist.org/Humanism/Humanist_Manifesto_I. Other signers of that document include Columbia University educator John Dewey, editor William Floyd, newspaperman Harry Elmer Barnes, Unitarian minister Raymond Bragg, Unitarian minister and editor Albert C. Dieffenbach, Smith College professor F.H. Hankins, University of Chicago history professor A. Eustace Haydon, *New Republic* editor Robert Morss Lovett, Unitarian minister R. Lester Mondale, Humanist Society founder Charles Francis Potter, educator Curtis W. Reese, and Unitarian minister David Rhys Williams. All, including Carlson, are listed in the “Who Is Who In Radicalism” section of Elizabeth Dilling's *The Red Network*. The defense of Fisher by individuals and groups with far-left associations was cited by Fisher's foes, such as Sefrit, as “evidence” of the merit of charges of sedition levied against him.

⁸³ Himstead to Carlson, Aug. 21, 1939, Committee B, AAUP General Historical Files, GWU. Unfortunately, Carlson's field notes and early drafts of his report are not found in the AAUP archives consulted for this study.

⁸⁴ Fisher was out of town during Carlson's visit in mid-September, 1939. The two communicated by mail after Carlson's visit, and presumably met in person later. Fisher to Branigin, Nov. 11, 1939, AAUP Historical Files, GWU.

were “ignored.”⁸⁵

Carlson’s initial assessment of the matter on September 18, 1939, was candid, and laid the groundwork for the report to come:

The issue is complicated but the main element unquestionably is a weak Board yielding to the clamor of the American Legion, the pro-America and other extreme reactionary groups and pressure from Governor Martin, whom President Fisher had irritated with several things. When the dismissal had been agreed on, of course, the usual technique of “smearing” had started, not primarily I think from the Board or the Governor, but from Fisher’s enemies in the state. The faculty at the college is still very loyal to President Fisher despite the fact that there is no chance that I can see of Fisher ever being reinstated at Bellingham ... I also got a very distinct impression that the extreme reactionaries and the extreme radicals are more jittery and violent than in the middle west or east. There is not much choice between these two groups, because neither of them fight fairly. So far as I can gather without having seen President Fisher, he is not in any sense a radical. Some call him a conservative. He is probably an old style liberal, a fair man, and an excellent executive. I must, however, see him before I conclude my final report.⁸⁶

Carlson upon returning to Chicago spent weeks corresponding with fellow AAUP members about the tone and tenor of his draft report, with Himstead urging a stick-to-the-facts approach because of what he termed the “political dynamite” attached to the case.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Himstead to Martin, March 14, 1939, Committee B, AAUP General Historical Files, GWU. Himstead informed Martin in a letter that a committee of faculty members had requested an investigation, and said that “the future of the college as an educational institution is threatened unless the situation is cleared up.” Martin promptly failed to respond, but passed the letter on to Western’s Board of Trustees. Branigin, speaking for the board, responded to Himstead on June 1: “I am quite sure the Governor appreciates your Association’s interest in respect [to] tenure and academic freedom in educational institutions, and he feels, as do we, that the colleges should be administered in the American way.” He urged an AAUP representative to visit in person in Bellingham to inquire about events. Branigin also noted the AATC’s Brandenburg had already trod this ground. “Please confer with him, it will save much work,” Branigin wrote. Branigin to Himstead, June 1, 1939, Committee B, AAUP General Historical Files, GWU.

⁸⁶ Carlson to Himstead, Sept. 18, 1939, Committee B, AAUP General Historical Files, GWU.

⁸⁷ Himstead to Carlson, Jan. 15, 1941, Committee B, AAUP General Historical Files, GWU. Himstead tells his colleague that members of AAUP Committee A, charged with reviewing and suggesting changes to the draft report, “were of the opinion that a maximum of safety in expression was essential, providing there was no sacrifice of the strength of your report.” Expounding on the “political dynamite” statement, Himstead told Carlson in a subsequent letter that, given the ongoing political upheaval over the case in

Carlson pursued Fisher for an in-person meeting to clear up many small facts and assertions made by Bellingham sources both on and off the record. With regard to the latter, Carlson stressed to Fisher at the end of September that it was essential to meet and respond to accusations levied against him.⁸⁸ Ultimately, the two either met in person or corresponded and Fisher responded to Carlson's satisfaction, as none of the matters that Carlson referred to as constituting a "smear campaign" against Fisher made it into the association's final report.

Correspondence collected by Carlson and other AAUP officials as they proceeded with their investigation also reveals intriguing new details about the circumstances of Fisher's firing. Trustees, in attempting to explain their actions to AAUP, spoke more candidly than they ever had in public about the Fisher debacle. And in at least one instance, they disagreed about key events: Branigin, queried by Carlson in November, 1939 about the expunging of a statement describing Fisher's firing from the minutes of the board of trustees meeting of October 11, 1938, responded in a letter: "It appears that Mr. Fisher places his own construction on why the record was ordered deleted, and why the record was ordered deleted, a wrong one, in fact. He kept the self-prepared, and

Washington state, extra care was needed to make sure "every statement in the published report is as invulnerable as possible." He reminded Carlson: "Many people in Washington ... are waiting for our report and will wish to utilize it with the public and the legislature in securing the enactment of remedial legislation. Himstead to Carlson, Jan. 29, 1941, Committee B, AAUP General Historical Files, GWU.

⁸⁸ Carlson to Fisher, Sept. 27, 1939. This letter, referenced above, includes Carlson's mention of off-the-record reports of "funds and money matters which I must clear up ... I wanted to be sure that all that too is just part of the smearing technique. I feel sure that it had little or nothing to do with your dismissal. The main elements in your dismissal were the charges by the Sefrit group in 1935 from which the Board then not only gave you a clean bill of health but went out of its way to commend your administration."

deleted, paragraph to serve his own purposes, when it was supposed to be destroyed. It was I who moved that the reference be deleted and it was the sense of the board, and even concurred in by the president.”⁸⁹ Branigin went on to suggest that the board’s decision at that time did not, in fact, constitute a final dismissal. The “gentleman’s agreement”

Branigin believed had been reached between the four men was that:

... in consideration of the continuance of the president until the end of the 1938-39 school year, he [Fisher] would proceed as theretofore, cause no trouble, and without opposition surrender his position, *providing however that if through conduct and endeavor of the president, he could overcome the obstacles and objections to his tenure at the state capitol and elsewhere, there might be some better outcome of the situation.*⁹⁰

Branigin recalled that the board removed its description of Fisher’s ousting from meeting minutes because placing it in the public record would not be helpful to Fisher, “and most certainly it would not aid him in any composition of difference with the Governor and his detraction in Bellingham. It was most embarrassing to all concerned to meet such a situation, and it was thought to be the kindest thing to do, to suppress the writing of facts and circumstances in the cold record.”⁹¹ Branigin continued:

The president, at the time of the making of the terms with the board, was non-committal on the matter of resignation, he seemed to think that he wished to hold that in reserve, and did so until the next meeting, nearly a month later. It will be remembered that during the meeting, it was stated by myself, that if he felt that he must oppose the ouster and give trouble, his tenure would not under such

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid. Emphasis added.

⁹¹ Ibid. Thus, the “embarrassing to all concerned” reference, plucked from this letter and widely bandied about after the AAUP report by defenders of Fisher, appears to have been taken at least somewhat out of context by authors of the AAUP report, who excluded the board’s protestations that the deletion from the minutes was, in fact, made partially to benefit Fisher, both to save face and perhaps in case he was somehow able to turn the tide and save his job. The suggestion of the latter possibility, however, flies directly in the face of statements made to the AAUP by board chairman Kirkpatrick (see below).

circumstances continue, for the school could not have such a disturbance and made to suffer by it. Hence there was a very definite understanding, coupled with a consideration, that the school would continue as before and the presidency vacated peaceably at the end of the school year. The Governor was so advised.⁹²

Thus, in Branigin's view, Fisher had been granted an additional partial year of employment at the college – time he could spend trying to unwind his political difficulties with the governor — but only if he agreed not to “cause trouble” by protesting the action, or making it public. Branigin's contention to the AAUP that a “gentlemen's agreement” had been struck between Fisher and the board – and the accompanying suggestion that Fisher's job, or perhaps an alternate job at the University of Washington, might somehow still be in play – was never communicated publicly, and in fact seemed not to have been understood by Fisher himself, based on his reaction to the board's ultimatum. Fisher's confusion might be better understood when one considers board chairman Kirkpatrick's version of the same events, related to the AAUP later, after the board had been excoriated for its perceived fecklessness in caving to demands of the governor.

Kirkpatrick, in his own written response to AAUP, made no mention of the supposed “gentlemen's agreement” described by colleague Branigin. In fact, in a January, 1941 letter delivered just before the AAUP report was printed, he emphatically insisted that any blame for Fisher's firing lay with Fisher himself, not the governor:

In the fall of 1938, when we asked Mr. Fisher to resign – his resignation to take effect the following summer – it was because we were in the face of a situation developed around Mr. Fisher, which could not continue. For several years before this we had defended him against attack from those who were opposed to his continuance as president, thinking in each instance harmony might follow; but

⁹² Ibid.

instead criticism became more and more widespread and the school was being injured. It is our opinion that Mr. Fisher could have been more tactful with his critics. We urged him, more than once, to attempt to change his attitude relative to these critics; but we did not try to restrain his academic freedom. As you must know, part of our trouble was due to his dismissal of faculty members.

Governor Martin did not call the Board to his office on September 28th, 1938, as is stated in your communication. The Board requested the meeting to discuss matters of Administration. Governor Martin has never demanded that the Board dismiss Mr. Fisher. It was true, of course, that a great deal of pressure was brought on the Governor. We know that Mr. Fisher antagonized the Governor in several conferences, which placed all of us in a difficult situation so far as working together was concerned ...

Do not believe that the dismissal of C.H. Fisher was a one-sided affair. Dr. Anton J. Carlson [the AAUP's lead investigator], when he came here, saw the situation that had developed. The same statement may be made about President W.A. Brandenburg, who told me, after talking with Mr. Fisher and with the other Trustees and after a study of the situation, that: "Mr. Fisher should go." This was a definite statement made by him.

Mr. Saunders, of Everett, Washington, and Mr. Branigin, of Mt. Vernon, Washington (the two other members of the board) are clear-headed men who have the interests of this Institution very definitely in mind. They are not the kind of men to be told by a governor what they should do.

I repeat: That the Governor did not demand that we dismiss Mr. Fisher. Our action was clearly for the good of the school.⁹³

The latter protestation from Kirkpatrick would not appear in the final report of the AAUP, for which pressure to publish had only grown as months passed with, with little

⁹³ Kirkpatrick to Ralph E. Himstead, general secretary, AAUP, Jan. 23, 1941, Committee B, AAUP General Historical Files, GWU. Kirkpatrick's contention at the close of the letter seems to fly in the face of fellow trustee Branigin's recollection to the AAUP in November, 1939, that the board's "gentleman's agreement" with Fisher included the possibility that the order for Fisher to vacate his post might have a "better outcome" if Fisher could work to "overcome the ... objections to his tenure at the state capitol." His statement about the governor's alleged restraint clearly was not believed by Carlson, who concluded essentially the opposite in his final report.

but public silence from the group.⁹⁴ The long delay was due, partly, to the association's internal committee process: Carlson's initial report on the case, to satisfy all parties, apparently was submitted to the AAUP's Committees A and B for feedback and modifications. Later draft versions were sent to the college trustees, Fisher, and other quoted parties, for possible corrections. The final report was edited and finalized by members of Committee A, headed by W.T. Laprade, a Duke University historian.⁹⁵ In the interim, interested parties including both Charles and William Fisher notified the AAUP that they would be seeking hundreds or even thousands of copies of the final report to disseminate to supporters.

In February, 1941, the AAUP's Committees on Academic Freedom and Tenure and on Freedom of Speech published the long-awaited final report, copies of which were broadly distributed in the education community and to media organizations.⁹⁶ It contained a somewhat-detailed accounting of the events of the Fisher case, beginning with Sefrit's involvement in attempting to force the reinstatement to the faculty of instructor Pelagius

⁹⁴ Fisher advocates, spearheaded by son William, now president of the Washington State Federation of Teachers, thirsted for the report, whose conclusions were generally known to them, for use as ammunition for an ongoing attempt to persuade the state legislature to reform its higher-education governance system. "We are ... still in the midst of a vigorous fight to get the law changed relative to the method of Board-of-Trustees – Governor control of Higher Institutions," the younger Fisher wrote to the AAUP head. William Fisher to Himstead, May 12, 1940, Committee B, AAUP General Historical Files, GWU.

⁹⁵ Laprade had been initially hesitant about the investigation, and likely was a conservative force with regard to the tone and degree of accusatory language in the final document. Laprade to Himstead, Aug. 11, 1939, Committee B, AAUP General Historical Files, GWU. In this memo, Laprade endorses AATC head Hunt's views on allowing local authorities to appoint educational executives: "The tenure of a President will always be of another sort than that of a professor."

⁹⁶W. T. Laprade and A. J. Carlson, "Academic Freedom and Tenure: Western Washington College of Education," *Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors* 27, no. 1 (February 1, 1941): 48–60, doi:10.2307/40219179. Carlson's more-extensive, original draft report is not in evidence in the AAUP archival files at GWU.

Williams in 1934. The report called attention to Sefrit's generally hostile demeanor toward academic freedom, as evidenced by his newspaper editorial of July 26, 1939.⁹⁷ It chronicled the charges filed by Sefrit's group against Fisher and the trustees' response to them, concluding that Sefrit and other "co-complainants" clearly took their case to Governor Martin after being rebuffed by the Board of Trustees. The group found no evidence of new complaints against Fisher after the 1935 hearing of charges brought by Sefrit's group. Noting the 1938 scrubbing of the record of meeting minutes by trustees, and the aborted attempt to mollify Fisher with a University of Washington job, the investigators asked, bluntly, what had changed between the 1935 stout defense of Fisher by trustees and his firing in 1938. Their answer: Nothing. "It seems clear that he was dismissed because of the same reasons stated by Mr. Sefrit and his associates in 1934," the report concluded.⁹⁸

The AAUP report also analyzed the charge that Fisher invited seditious speakers to campus. It concluded that the 96 lecturers on campus from 1932 and 1935 – and indeed the 176 in Fisher's full tenure – represented "a particularly well-balanced" mix of personalities, professions and ideologies.⁹⁹ The report added that Fisher had been criticized by those of similarly mixed political persuasions, concluding: "The record indicates that President Fisher *is* a liberal in the sense that he understands and believes in

⁹⁷ See Chapter 6.

⁹⁸ Laprade and Carlson, 57. This would have been the place for Carlson to introduce the financial-records scandal at the college, if he believed it truly had any bearing on the firing. Either he – or perhaps colleagues editing his original draft report — chose not to. Locating the draft might shed additional light on how the rumors about college financial misdeeds were viewed inside the AAUP, or whether the full membership received that information.

⁹⁹ Laprade and Carlson, 59.

academic freedom and freedom of speech ... which experience has demonstrated are essential to the advancement of truth.” Sefrit’s efforts and their de facto endorsement by the governor were contrary to the public interest, the report stated.

The authors lauded Fisher in general for his work at the college, noting the unusually cohesive support he enjoyed from faculty and students. But the AAUP found “persuasive” evidence that the same super-patriot group that vilified him in the mid-1930s continued to hound Fisher at the state level. “There is no evidence that President Fisher’s educational and administrative policies had changed during his last three years in office,” the report concluded.¹⁰⁰ Not satisfied to let the matter die with Fisher’s departure, the authors joined the AATC in an urgent call for reform of the state’s higher-education governance structure. The power vested in the governor over local boards “invites arbitrary and irresponsible action” as well as political interference, they wrote. The AAUP called for a new system “more in keeping with generally recognized educational standards and also in keeping with our constitutional principles of due process.”¹⁰¹ That point echoed the conclusions of all three investigations, each of which concluded by calling urgent attention to perceived state higher-education governance structural flaws that breathed life into the campaign against Fisher. At the heart of this matter, as noted earlier by the AATC, was the governor’s ability to personally remove university regents or trustees, essentially without cause, conceivably allowing the governor, or a political ally, to extort changes in college policy or personnel.

¹⁰⁰ Laprade and Carlson, 60.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

Trustees took note of the three critical reports, but did not respond publicly. Fisher, now working as a lecturer in educational administration at New York University, issued a statement after the release of the AAUP report through son William, then teaching high school in the Seattle suburb of Kirkland. The report, Charles Fisher said in the statement, vindicated the work that he and his faculty had done on campus for 16 years:

I tried to conduct an educational institute in accordance with the accepted standards of academic freedom and freedom of speech. The opposition we encountered tried to make it appear we were the enemies of genuine Americanism. I have been done an injustice, and what is more the college which I faithfully served was done an injustice. If the State of Washington has any regard for its reputation in the field of higher education, it will see to it that these injustices are corrected.¹⁰²

¹⁰² Professors Rap Fisher Removal," *The Seattle Times*, Feb. 24, 1941. Also "College Group Raps Ouster of Dr. Fisher," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, Feb. 25, 1941. Privately, after reviewing Carlson's draft, Fisher thanked the organization, saying the report "ought to arouse considerable interest in having the administrative system of higher education changed in the state of Washington." Fisher to Himstead, Jan. 19, 1941, Committee B, AAUP General Historical Files, GWU.

Chapter 8

Postscripts

As Charles Fisher continued to appeal, in the court of public opinion, what he saw as a wrongful dismissal, his successor already was waiting in the wings. College trustees, perhaps motivated to show that they were not, in fact, puppets of Governor Clarence Martin, after all, moved swiftly to turn the page on Fisher's administration. In June, 1939, less than a month after announcing the forced departure of Fisher, trustees convened a special meeting at the office of Verne Branigin, the board secretary, in Mount Vernon. The location – 25 miles away from the winds of anger still swirling from their decision to sack Fisher – might not have been intended as symbolic. But it served the purpose of separation. At the meeting, the beleaguered trio of trustees began the unenviable task of damage control – and moving forward. The first step: Fill the void. The board decided that trustee Branigin would be sent “to points in the east and mid-west” to seek candidates to replace Fisher, whose “term of service” was about to expire.

Branigin was authorized to “get data and information” about qualified successors from institutions such as Columbia University, the University of Chicago, and Stanford University.¹ The result would be the hiring of Fisher's replacement, Dr. William Wade Haggard, whose tenure at the college began on August 31, 1939. The new president in coming years would be credited with gradually mending frayed relationships between the trustees and the campus community, and between the college and state government. He

¹ “Special Meeting of Trustees,” June 2, 1939, Board of Trustees, Fisher Case Records, Accession 77-30, box 3, Western Washington University Archives, Bellingham WA.

also worked diligently to assuage the ire of constituents still outraged over what was broadly viewed as a blatant breach of standards of academic freedom.² Haggard also would be credited, many years later, with having helped, along with the faculty, rebuild the college's regional and national reputation, and with retaining at least a strong semblance of the liberal-arts mission forged by Fisher between 1923 and 1939. In short, the worst fears of Fisher and his supporters – a college forced by direct or indirect coercion to dumb down or alter its carefully considered curriculum to satisfy right-wing political activists – would not materialize. The college, if anything, institutionalized Fisher's vision over the coming decades, albeit with a somewhat diminished focus on teacher training, as the school grew into a regional university. But this outcome could not have been predicted in 1939, when wounds from the Fisher firing were fresh. The path between Fisher's ousting and the college's eventual recovery would prove neither short, nor smooth. Nor would Fisher's journey from educational administration into an uncertain future.

Emotions were high on campus after Fisher's ousting, and remained so for many years. Faculty member Moyle Cederstrom remembered the Fisher ouster deepening a pre-existing gulf between "town and gown" in Bellingham. "The attacks on Fisher tended to drive a wedge, or perhaps even built a wall, between the faculty and the townspeople," he

² Because of the manner in which Fisher had departed, the college had some difficulty finding a suitable replacement, recalled longtime English professor Moyle Cederstrom. The board of trustees found Haggard in a school system in Joliet, Ill. "The faculty felt he was being hired primarily to quiet things down," Cederstrom said. "He accomplished that very effectively. But I do not think he every achieved the degree of loyalty afforded to Fisher." Moyle Cederstrom, taped interview by Garry Harrod, Nov. 20, 1970, (reel-to-reel tape) box 29, folder 1, Rogan Jones Papers, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Bellingham WA.

said in 1970. “The faculty stopped going places where they knew they would have to listen to diatribes about Fisher. I don’t think I spent a single social evening, other than faculty homes in the community, during my entire first year [1935] in Bellingham.”³

Once Fisher departed, “(T)ension on campus relaxed somewhat,” Cederstrom said. “But I think the faculty tended to keep pretty much to itself and not have anything to do with the townspeople for almost a decade. They operated on the theory that the once-burned child dreads the fire.”

Although he ultimately was left with no choice but to walk away from his dream campus community, Fisher worked in the immediate aftermath to drive home his point about the perceived flaws in Washington state’s higher-education governance system. Fisher and his supporters took to the public the argument he had been making for years: that the lack of redress for college and university trustees and regents who were either dismissed, or threatened with dismissal, by the governor, presented what amounted to an open door to those who would attempt to politicize education. This argument was bolstered, and amplified, by the trio of external investigations of the case, each of which cited those very flaws in the state system. Those findings, the first of which came from the Washington Education Association in 1939, with the last delivered by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) in 1941, would provide some degree of what longtime faculty member and unofficial campus historian Arthur C. Hicks termed

³ Moyle Cederstrom interview, Nov. 20, 1970, Rogan Jones Papers.

“cold comfort” for an angry campus community.⁴

The investigations provided momentum for proposed state legislative reform efforts that already had been instigated by Fisher, faculty members and political allies during the summer of 1939. The American Association of Teachers Colleges (AATC), which had come to the brink of pulling the school’s accreditation before backing away in the hope of legislative reforms, also remained active in the case. A full year after its investigative report, the AATC continued to threaten state legislators with stripping Western’s accreditation. Based on facts of the AATC investigation, “changes in the legal basis of control are urgently required for the good not only of the state teachers colleges but of other [Washington state] institutions,” AATC head Charles Hunt wrote to state lawmakers in February, 1941.⁵

Fisher, by now living with his son, Robert, in New York City, helped devise an ambitious overhaul of state law, hoping to channel public backlash against Governor Martin’s actions into political momentum sufficient to sway incoming Governor Arthur B. Langlie and state legislators.⁶ The resulting legislative push was timed to capitalize on

⁴ Arthur C. Hicks, *Western at 75*, (Bellingham, WA: Western Washington State College Foundation, 1974), 58. Later that year, the AAUP took the additional step of a formal censure of Western Washington College of Education. Western remained on the group’s censure list until 1944.

⁵ Charles W. Hunt to Committee on Educational Institutions, The Senate, Olympia, WA, Feb. 26, 1941, Fisher Case Records, Vice President for Enrollment and Student Services, AATC Accreditation Committee, Western Washington University Archives, Bellingham WA.

⁶ Republican Langlie, a conservative former mayor of Seattle, in 1940 was elected governor by less than 1 percentage point over former Sen. C.C. Dill, who had bested Martin in the Democratic primary, foiling Martin’s historic bid for a third term as governor.

publicity created by the release of the AAUP report in early 1941.⁷ Assisted by sons Robert and William and a handful of sympathetic lawmakers, Fisher's group brought to the state legislature a reform proposal that would establish a single, nine-member State Board of Education to govern all state institutions of higher education. Trustees would be chosen to represent geographic and occupational diversity. It also would protect the tenure of regents, trustees and administrators by restricting the governor's ability to remove them without cause. Old legal language allowing removal for malfeasance, misconduct or incompetence would remain, but trustees would gain the right to a public hearing before a tribunal of superior court judges to dispute any charges. Finally, it would create a faculty advisory committee on each campus for consultation with the president and Board of Education about the "democratic administration of the college."⁸

The message found sympathetic ears of some legislators, but not enough: A campaign to codify Fisher's vision in state law failed during the 1941 legislative session, and the aggressive reform plan would never be revived in its entirety. Still, a critical portion – the requirement of "for-cause" dismissal of trustees and regents, and a provision for judicial review of same, survived, and was enacted into law in 1943.⁹

⁷ William Fisher reported to the AAUP that 2,000 reprints of the group's report had been distributed to educators, Bellingham citizens, legislators and other political allies. William Fisher to Ralph Himstead, AAUP, July 30, 1941, Committee B, AAUP General Historical Files, box 1 (box UP0037), Special Collections Research Center, Gelman Library, The George Washington University, Washington, D.C.

⁸ The bill also called for at least two female trustees on the board at all times. "House Bill No. 571," Washington State Legislature, first reading Feb. 28, 1941, box 2, folder 16, Charles Henry Fisher Collection, Western Libraries Special Collections, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA. The bill, sponsored by 32nd District Rep. Richard H. Murphy, was not advanced from the House Committee on Educational Institutions. Gov. Langlie remained neutral on the proposed changes.

⁹ Revised Code of Washington 28B.10.500. Prior state law contained no specific language on terms by which trustees or regents could be removed, placing the matter solely at the discretion of the governor.

Much of this effort had unfolded while Fisher briefly explored a political career, then bounced between a series of short-lived jobs that would mark his post-firing years. “It was hard, and my father was quite bitter,” daughter Mary Ann Fisher (Nichols) recalled in 2004.¹⁰ Fisher, at the urging of friends, mulled a run for Congress in the state’s Second District in the 1940 election. He was not entirely comfortable with a quick jump into politics, his daughter recalled: As a career college administrator, he had always attempted to avoid open partisanship, she said.¹¹ The ugly ending to his college career, however, had hardened Fisher politically, and he was enticed to jump into the next congressional election as a Democrat. But his would-be candidacy quickly became embroiled in an internal Democratic Party/Washington Commonwealth Federation political spat. Whatcom County party officials ultimately tabbed a local minister who was

Removal for reasons of “malfeasance or misconduct” as a guiding principle existed in case-law precedent, but was not codified in state law until 1943, as noted. The present law allows for removal of trustees or regents “only” for malfeasance or misconduct in office, and then only after the trustee or regent has been formally notified of the reasons for dismissal by the governor, and a judicial review, via a tribunal of Superior Court Judges, has been exercised. These reforms clearly are rooted in the post-Fisher-case upswell of pressure on the state legislature. The judicial review option appears never to have been exercised in years since; the change made it exceedingly more difficult for a governor or other political appointee to exert political pressure on trustees, using the threat of forced removal as a political cudgel. A politically fueled Martin/Fisher scenario, in other words, would be far less likely to occur under present law. See Analysis, below.

¹⁰ Mary Ann Fisher edited transcript, Aug. 18, 2004, Campus History Collection, Western Washington University Libraries Special Collections, Bellingham, WA, 16. She recalled that the competing candidate [the Rev. Joe Warner] from Whatcom County had greater support among union members: “The thing was my dad had never gone on a picket line; well that just wasn’t his style. I can’t imagine him on a picket line – although he would be in support of some of the causes they were picketing about.”

¹¹ Mary Ann Fisher edited transcript, 20. Upon arrival in Bellingham, Charles Fisher, not schooled in local politics, had listed himself as a Republican, as was consistent with his family’s affiliation in Pennsylvania, she recalled.

defeated handily in the primary election by a young Henry “Scoop” Jackson of Everett, Washington.¹²

Finished, for the moment, with Washington state politics, Fisher returned to his roots in the East. After a stint at NYU, he taught briefly at a school in Montclair, N.J. He looked into the presidency of a college in New Mexico, and another in Lewiston, Idaho, but it is unclear if he formally applied for those positions.¹³ In 1943 he accepted a job as Dean of Education at private Huron College, South Dakota, where he remained for more than a year.¹⁴ During his tenure, Fisher administered a Civilian Aeronautics Program at the college. Mary Ann Fisher recalled her parents enjoying their role at the small school.¹⁵ But while details of his departure from the post are unclear, the Bellingham incident, campus historian and faculty member Arthur Hicks believed, cost him that job,

¹² Fisher would mount an ill-fated second Congressional attempt in 1950, challenging Jackson in the Second District primary election. *The Seattle Times*, noting that Fisher had been ousted from his Bellingham presidency because of “leftist views,” described Fisher as a “follower of the Progressive Party” who had been “disavowed by the leaders of the Democratic Party as an unwelcome returnee.” “North King County Now Important in 2nd District Race,” *The Seattle Times*, Sept. 1, 1950. Fisher garnered only 6 percent of the primary vote.

¹³ Fisher in July, 1941 wrote to AAUP head Ralph Himstead to request a letter of recommendation for the New Mexico job. In the letter he noted: “I have had much experience with state officials and with state legislatures. In the immediate community I have gotten along with almost everyone except in Bellingham where a newspaper man ran everybody and everything, but I would not let him run the college for which I was responsible ... I don’t know whether anything should be said about my leaving the State of Washington. You would know about this better than I would.” Fisher to Himstead, July 20, 1941, AAUP General Historical Files, GWU.

¹⁴ Arthur C. Hicks, recorded interview by Robert Taylor, Dec. 9, 1970, box 29, folder 2, tape 2, Rogan Jones Papers, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Western Libraries, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA. Mary Ann Fisher recalled that the job came through her father’s “Presbyterian connections.” Charles Fisher also served there as administrator of the wartime Civilian Aeronautics Program, a civilian pilot-training program, while there, she said. Mary Ann Fisher edited transcript, 17. Note that some press accounts indicate Fisher held the Huron post from 1942-1944.

¹⁵ Mary Ann Fisher edited transcript, Aug. 18, 2004, Campus History Collection, WWU, 17.

and nixed his candidacy for others. Wherever Fisher would go for the rest of his life, his past followed him. “His enemies from Bellingham and elsewhere were firing letters,” Hicks said. “They effectively ran him out.”¹⁶ With opportunities in his chosen field dwindling, Fisher and his wife Mary in 1944 moved back to Washington state, where some of the Fisher children still lived. The former president came “home” to take a job as state Rationing and War Priorities Director under Democratic Governor Monrad C. Wallgren.¹⁷

When that post faded away at the close of the war, Fisher took a job as business manager for the state School for the Deaf and Blind in Vancouver, Washington – a job arranged by an old Bellingham political ally, Rogan Jones, then serving as the state’s director of finance, budget and business.¹⁸ He remained there until the position was summarily eliminated by the state in 1947.¹⁹ One observer blamed his ouster on petty jealousies of previous superintendents who were intimidated by an administrator with the depth and breadth of Fisher’s experience. But Fisher’s short tenure there also might have been politically influenced — part of what was described at the time as a 1946 Cold War-inspired purge of Democratic Party liberals “who were in most instances unjustly accused

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Wallgren, the former Second District Congressman succeeded by Henry M. Jackson in 1940, was elected governor in 1944, defeating Republican incumbent Langlie. See Chapter 3 for details of Wallgren’s involvement in Bellingham politics via the Sefrit/Rogan Jones FCC radio-station licensing hearings.

¹⁸ “Dr. Fisher Gets Deaf-School Job,” *The Seattle Times*, July 8, 1945.

¹⁹ Letter from Geo. L. Howeiler to Central Labor Council, Vancouver WA, April 5, 1947, box 2, folder 14, Charles Henry Fisher Collection, Western Libraries Special Collections, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.

of affiliation with Communist organizations.”²⁰ Writing to fellow Vancouver,

Washington Labor Council members, one observer of Fisher’s ongoing struggle noted:

Dr. Fisher has worked a life time for the public interest. He has never amassed a fortune in serving that interest. In fact, the suddenness of his “retirement” has given him concern as to the future from a financial standpoint ... Certainly a man of his humanitarianism and sincerity who has been betrayed by his colleagues and deserted by his party needs some moral support.”²¹

Communism Charges, Round Two

Fisher’s next – and final – public act was one that, through no intention of his own, would serve to burnish his reputation, among casual observers and even some former supporters, as an extreme political leftist. The 67-year-old former president’s severance from the job with state schools for the blind led him to new mission, serving a demographic group of which he was now a member – senior citizens. Fisher, again displaying an uncanny knack for being in the wrong place at the wrong time in terms of Pacific Northwest Red baiting, in 1947 signed on as educational director for the Washington Pension Union, an outgrowth of the old, left-wing Washington Commonwealth Federation. The Pension Union, established in 1937 by former state legislator and liberal activist William Pennock, was an advocacy group that worked for — and won, via initiative and legislation — enhanced Social Security benefits for state

²⁰ Ibid. The state’s 1946 legislative campaign had been rife with red-baiting aimed at incumbents. WPU President Pennock and Vice President Thomas Rabitt lost their respective seats in the state House and Senate, and with them control of Social Security committees. See Robert L. Mitchell, "An Embattled Liberal: Charles H. Fisher," (unpublished history seminar paper, University of Washington, 1971), 3, contained in box 1, folder 1, CHF Collection.

²¹ Ibid. Fisher lived out his final two years in a Des Moines, WA retirement community on what appeared to be a very tight budget, supplemented by occasional support checks from the Fisher children. See below.

senior citizens, and unemployment benefits and other relief funds for the needy.²² The work suited Fisher's still-strong yearning to administer an agency working for what he saw as the progressive, public good.²³ Unfortunately for Fisher and his own legacy, his new employer almost immediately became a primary target of a new state panel organized by conservative state legislators in the fashion of the congressional House Un-American Activities Committee. Washington's Joint Legislative Fact-Finding Committee on Un-American Activities, led by freshman Washington state Representative Albert Canwell of Spokane, conducted what amounted to Red Scare show-trial hearings in Seattle in 1948. The proceedings, which came to be known as the "Canwell Hearings," came amidst a spike of anti-communist crusading nationwide at the dawn of the Cold War.²⁴

²² "1948 Canwell UnAmerican Activities Hearings (Seattle)," *Communism in Washington State*, Pacific Northwest Labor and Civil Rights Projects, University of Washington, http://depts.washington.edu/labhist/cpproject/canwell_hearings.shtml.

²³ The WPU, comprising Aid-To-Dependent-Children mothers, unionists, timber workers, and civil rights and peace activists as well as communists, claimed a membership – 30,000 in the late 1930s – that likely was exaggerated. But it won numerous electoral victories and ultimately made Washington one of the nation's most generous states in pension programs for senior citizens, perhaps the most-vulnerable population during the Great Depression. The WPU's work on these issues was unprecedented for its time. The state by 1949 claimed the third-highest Old Age Assistance grants in the nation. "Washington Commonwealth Federation & Washington Pension Union," *Communism in Washington State*, University of Washington, <http://depts.washington.edu/labhist/cpproject/hipps.shtml>. Fisher essentially served as the organization's chief lobbyist, and also traveled the state to meet with WPU locals. Mitchell, "An Embattled Liberal," 20.

²⁴ "1948 Canwell UnAmerican Activities Hearings (Seattle)," *Communism in Washington State*, Pacific Northwest Labor and Civil Rights Projects, University of Washington. In the months preceding the Canwell Committee's first hearings in early 1948, Congress passed the Taft-Hartley act, banning Communists from holding union leadership positions, and President Harry Truman ordered loyalty oaths of all federal employees. Additionally, on the heels of Congressional red-hunting committees led by Hamilton Fish III and Martin Dies Jr., the House Committee on UnAmerican Activities had become a standing committee in 1945. The committee delved into alleged communist affiliations of Hollywood officials in 1947, and launched an espionage investigation of government official Alger Hiss in 1948. Washington

Canwell and fellow committee members believed the Pension Union to be a recruitment and fundraising tool for the state Communist Party.²⁵ The young legislator, a former journalist who had organized a carefully orchestrated parade of witnesses, called on a number of Seattle-area residents eager to testify about the communist roots, and alleged Communist Party collaboration, of the Pension Union. Witnesses in the first round of questioning, January 27 to February 5, 1948, testified that Pennock and Fisher had seized the occasion of a funeral service for Marie Redenbaugh, a Seattle woman who had died without means — to clumsily politicize the plight of seniors and advocate for a communist revolution.²⁶ A lifelong friend of the deceased, John R. Hamilton, testified that Pennock insisted the woman had died of malnutrition because the state had no means to support indigent seniors. Fisher, he added, offered a prayer during the service. Asked for details of the prayer, Hamilton responded: “Well, he – the prayer seemed to be principally for a change in conditions for these old people, regardless of how they got it.”²⁷

state’s Canwell Committee was modeled after HUAC. It chose as its first target the Washington Pension Union, labeled by the federal government as a front group for the state Communist Party. A second round of hearings later in 1948 focused on alleged communist infiltration of faculty at the University of Washington. See Chapter 1.

²⁵ Testimony at the hearing was described by Yale University law professor Vern Countryman as “... designed to produce a collection of rumors, opinions, suspicions, and perhaps hallucinations which will furnish content for newspaper headlines, but ... not likely to get information of much reliability from even the most cautious lay witnesses.” Vern Countryman, *Un-American Activities in the State of Washington: The Work of the Canwell Committee* (New York: Johnson Reprint Corp, 1967), 350.

²⁶ Albert F. Canwell, et al, “First Report, Transcript of the Proceedings of the Un-American Activities Committee,” <https://archive.org/details/FirstReportUn-americanActivitiesInWashingtonState1948>, 537.

²⁷ First Report Transcript, 550. Fisher’s typed script for that service, which survives in Fisher family papers, contains the passage: “Sister Marie Redenbaugh is a victim of the outrageous new laws on social security. Other victims will follow in time.” “Address in Chapel,” box 2, folder 15, CHF Collection, WWU Special Collections. The script also contains Invocation language such as: “We raise our voices in protest to

Another witness recounted a meeting at which Pennock and Fisher, addressing an audience of senior citizens, “ranted like wild men, trying to whip this poor group of misguided ole people up into a frenzy in order that they would do their bidding.”²⁸ The same witness, Sarah Keller, testified that Fisher, responding to queries about the group being controlled by Communist Party members, said that “he was certain there were some Communists in the organization and that they were there because the Washington Pension Union would accept members of all political affiliations, races, and creeds.”²⁹ At the end of this first phase of testimony, Canwell opined that “... We feel that the case against Communism, the case against Communists in the Washington Old Age Pension Union, has been quite thoroughly made.”³⁰ Canwell claimed to have identified and named 50 Washington state communists during this initial testimony, and later claimed to have identified 24 communists within the Washington State Legislature.³¹ Neither Fisher nor Pennock was called to testify.

an inhuman system that creates fear in the minds of our people and will not provide needed medical care and sufficient nutritious food. May the tragic end of our beloved sister renew in the brothers and sisters assembled here, a firm determination to end fear and want in a land of plenty.” In newspaper accounts of the hearing, Fisher responded: “The remarks were not what you’d ordinarily hear at a funeral, because we felt that here was a person who was a victim of the new pension laws. We had a roomful of Marie Redenbaugh’s friends – old pensioners. They were the people we were speaking to.” Unidentified newspaper clip, “Pension Unionist’s Funeral Unorthodox But Sincere,” Feb. 6, 1948, news clippings, Bellingham Herald Collection on Charles H. Fisher, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Western Libraries Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.

²⁸ First Report Transcript, 505.

²⁹ First Report Transcript, 507.

³⁰ First Report Transcript, 604.

³¹ Albert F. Canwell, interviewed by Timothy Frederick, *Albert F. Canwell: An Oral History*, Washington State Oral History Program (Olympia: Office of the Secretary of State, 1997), 153.

In the second round of committee hearings from July 10 to 15, 1948, the focus turned to higher education, particularly alleged communist activity at the University of Washington.³² But the panel also found time to hear from S.P. Davis, an elderly Burlington, Washington resident, testify that his son, Phillip H. Davis, had been “indoctrinated” into communist beliefs while enrolled at Fisher’s Bellingham college from 1929 to 1931. Davis said that after hearing reports of his son’s communist leanings:

I became alarmed and went to the Normal School and tried to have a talk with the President of the Normal School ... That was Charles H. Fisher. He was president then. I complained to him about the activities of these young Communists and the Communist Party generally there at the Normal School and told him how they were weaning my son away from his home, and from the church and from everything decent, for that matter, and all the consolation I got out of Fisher was the statement: “Mr. Davis, some day you will be proud of your boy, he’s all right.”³³

Once again, Fisher was not called to testify. But he would have plenty of opportunities to do so in subsequent years. The Washington Pension Union was declared a subversive organization by U.S. Attorney General Harry Cain in 1953; hearings of the U.S. Senate Subversive Activities Control Board to consider that ruling commenced in 1954. But Pennock, the group’s president, never got a chance to testify. In 1952, Pennock along with six other local residents had become charged with sedition under the 1940 Alien Registration Act, popularly known as the Smith Act. The “Seattle Seven,” as the defendants came to be known, were charged with conspiring to teach and advocate the

³² See Chapter 1.

³³ Albert F. Canwell, et al, Second Report, Transcript of Proceedings of the Un-American Activities Committee, <https://ia800306.us.archive.org/17/items/SecondReportUn-americanActivitiesInWashingtonState1948/48-canwell-secondhearing.pdf>, 137.

violent overthrow of the government of the United States.³⁴ When the six-month trial began in late July, 1953, Pennock was the first defendant to testify. He admitted on the stand that he had lied for years about his Communist Party membership, and that he had been an active Communist since his days as a University of Washington student.³⁵

Charles Fisher testified as a character witness on Pennock's behalf. He told the jury he had known Pennock and other officials of the WPU professionally, through the state legislature, for years, but did not know they were accused communists until they were arrested the year before.³⁶ Fisher reacted coldly to government attorney Tracy Griffin's suggestion that he had been "discharged" from his Bellingham presidency in 1939, insisting that he had been "removed from the payroll" after trumped-up charges by Frank Sefrit and other ultra-conservative citizens. Griffin asked Fisher: "Those charges involved subversive teaching on your part, didn't they?" Fisher replied: "They did."³⁷

³⁴ The case was part of a wave of similar Smith Act prosecutions around the U.S. beginning in the late 1940s.

³⁵ Pennock also acknowledged that Communist Party leaders were consulted in the drafting of Initiative 141, an old-age pension measure approved by state voters in 1940. Pennock, a former state legislator, said he had denied his Communist Party ties because they would have distracted from the decidedly non-communist mission of his organization.

³⁶ "Pennock Confesses He Lied; Fisher Character Witness," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, July 29, 1953. In the hearing, Fisher also acknowledged that one of his sons had been a Communist Party member "for a short time."

Five of Pennock's co-defendants were later convicted. One, longtime Communist Party stalwart Barbara Hartle, turned government witness and would spend years testifying against former colleagues in exchange for a reduced sentence. Defendants John Dasbach, Terry Pettus, Paul Bowen and Henry Huff won release on bail pending an appeal; their convictions were overturned when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against the legality of the Smith Act in 1957. See "The Seattle Seven: The Smith Act Trials in Seattle (1952-1958)," *Communism in Washington State*, Pacific Northwest Labor and Civil Rights Projects, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, <http://depts.washington.edu/labhist/cpproject/SmithAct.shtml>.

³⁷ "Pennock Confesses he lied," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*.

On August 2, 1953, days before he was scheduled to give further testimony, Pennock died from an overdose of sleeping pills.³⁸ His death was ruled a suicide.³⁹ Afterward, the Pension Union's membership plunged, and it struggled to remain a viable organization. But Charles Fisher, selected by members to assume the presidency, was left to pick up the pieces – and defend the honor of the flagging organization for another eight years, in the face of what seemed relentless harassment by the federal government. In 1954, at a hearing over the federal government's listing of the Pension Union as a subversive organization, Fisher again emphasized that the group's practical value was far more important than whatever political elements might have created it. "I don't know anything about its beginnings," he said. "The organization's purpose is to serve people in need, particularly the elderly people. We say anyone regardless of politics, religion or race who is interested in helping this purpose is welcome. Of course, any organization that takes this position is bound to have communists in its membership as well as Republicans and Democrats."⁴⁰

In 1955, a "bemused" Fisher, now 75, appeared yet again before the Subversive Activities Control Board and yet again denied that neither he, or the agency he served,

³⁸ Five of Pennock's co-defendants were later convicted. One, Barbara Hartle, a longtime Communist Party stalwart, turned government witness and spent years testifying against former colleagues in return for a lenient sentence. Defendants John Dasbach, Terry Pettus, Paul Bowen and Henry Huff won release on bail pending an appeal; their convictions were overturned when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against the constitutionality of the Smith Act in 1957. "The Seattle Seven: The Smith Act Trials in Seattle."

³⁹ Friends and associates disputed the determination, saying Pennock's death, brought on by an accidental overdose, was due to the strain he was under because of the trial. Fisher described Pennock as a victim of the "Cold War." Mitchell, "An Embattled Liberal," 5. The author cites personal interviews conducted in 1970 with Pennock associates Terry Pettus, John Caughlan and Henry Huff, as well as Fisher.

⁴⁰ "Pension Union's Registry is Asked."

was part of a communist plot. He was, in fact, a non-communist who happened to have shared goals with other Pension Union members who may in fact have been communists, he said. He was emphatic about his own politics. I'm not a Communist," he said. "I never have been. I've never sensed that the Communists are using me."⁴¹ Fisher said he had drawn a mere \$900 in salary from what was left of the organization the previous year. "Communism is one thing we've never talked about in the Pension Union – we've never discussed it," he said.⁴²

In 1961, Fisher officially shut down what remained of the Washington Pension Union. But, remarkably, he was forced to appear at additional subsequent hearings before the Subversive Activities Control Board to insist – and attempt to prove — that the Pension Union, in fact, no longer existed.⁴³ The U.S. government finally dropped its case

⁴¹ "Fisher Denies Pension Union Tie With Reds," *The Seattle Times*, Bellingham Herald collection on Charles H. Fisher, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Western Libraries Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.

⁴² Ibid. Fisher later told his son, Robert, that the proceedings became "petty and contemptible ... They have the subversive stuff as their slant and this makes them terribly suspicious. I was on the witness stand 2 ½ hours, this is old stuff to me and I rather like it." CHF to Robert Fisher, Box 1, folder 8, March 15, 1962, CHF Collection, WWU Special Collections.

⁴³ The WPU's legal appeal of the Subversive Activities Control Board order to open the organization's books to federal scrutiny remained active after the dissolution of the group; the federal appellate court on its own volition sent the case back to the SACB to establish whether the Pension Union was, in fact, dissolved. (Federal attorneys argued that "the dissolution of an organization does not affect the order to register as a Communist-front organization," Fisher wrote. "The gist of their position is that there is still a nucleus of people who could be active in starting a new organization. I suppose as long as any of us live, we will be a threat.") CHF to Will Fisher, June 30, 1962, box 1, folder 7, CHF Collection. A three-judge District Court of Appeals in Washington, D.C. finally dismissed the petition for review on June 6, 1963, ruling, in effect, that a government order to register as a communist-front organization could not be enforced against a non-existing entity. WPU attorneys opined: "The opinion in effect puts an end to the case and removes all possibilities of the former officers of the organization being harassed in any way. Fisher and the other former officers of the organization no longer have any cause for concern." Charles H. Fisher letter, "Dear Friend," June 29, 1963, box 1, folder 9, CHF Collection. Fisher, in a subsequent letter to his daughter, Mary Ann, noted: "The SACB would like to have sent some of us to prison but we can be

against the organization in June, 1963 – almost a decade after it first was investigated by federal officials. In a letter to remaining members, Fisher wrote: “Thus ends the sorry story of ten years of harassment of an organization dedicated to the welfare of old people and others who needed assistance.”⁴⁴

Fisher told family members that he had no regrets about his involvement in the matter, “because I know what it is to have lived through one of the worst periods in U.S. history in violation of the Bill of Rights.”⁴⁵ He remained philosophical about the broader connotations of the active anti-communist movement that had so impacted his own life. In another dispatch to his son William, the 83-year-old former president lamented: “We have become so much involved in being Against Communism that we have neglected to develop with the people what we are For — those sound ideas that we inherited from the past and have made this country what it is. We will never be on the right course until we return to these ideas.”⁴⁶

Fleeting “Golden Years”

Charles and Mary Light Fisher, their public battles finally, officially over after some three decades, gained some peace in their final few years. In spring, 1962, they moved from a Seattle home to Wesley Terrace in Des Moines, Washington, a suburban retirement community near Puget Sound, southwest of Seattle. Here, they would live out

thankful that we still have courts that dispense justice.” CHF to Mary Ann Fisher, July 10, 1963, box 1, folder 9, CHF Collection.

⁴⁴ “Dear Friend,” June 29, 1963, CHF Collection.

⁴⁵ CHF to William Fisher, July 10, 1963, box 1, folder 12, CHF Collection.

⁴⁶ CHF to William Fisher, March 25, 1962, box 1, folder 12, CHF Collection.

their lives. Happy to be free of stress and responsibilities, Charles Fisher kept busy monitoring news and politics, and taking every opportunity to engage in what he loved to do most – educate. Not long after moving in to the 249-unit retirement residential complex, he talked his way into leading presentations before a Wesley Terrace lecture group, the Public Affairs Council. Fisher spent ample time at the local public library, researching and then delivering presentations on subjects ranging from the Alliance of Progress in South Africa to U.S. electoral politics to a proposed nuclear test ban treaty being negotiated by the John F. Kennedy Administration, for which he expressed great admiration.

He corresponded regularly with the family's four children, all of whom had absorbed, in some fashion, the passions of their parents and gone on to their own successful careers: Son Robert had pursued a career in international relations and settled into a post as an overseas administrator for the United Nations, then stationed in Jordan; son William, "Will," was well down the road in his own higher-education career that would leave him as a long-serving professor of education at the University of Montana in Missoula; son Chuck had made a career as a professional musician; daughter Mary Ann was a public school teacher and active civic volunteer in Ephrata, Grant County, a small Central Washington farming community.

The stacks of surviving, typed personal letters to family left behind by Fisher suggest a happy, engaged lifestyle — lived on what amounted to a shoestring budget.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ C.H. Fisher, outgoing, box 1, folders 6-10, CHF Collection. Fisher often took time in his notes to his children thanking them profusely for their check for small amounts of money, noting that it enabled he and

He was an active fan of the Pacific Coast League Seattle Rainiers baseball team, which he listened to on the radio. Keenly aware of state and local politics, he often discussed elections and political rumors by mail with his children. His letters occasionally touched on the couple's health – his own, appearing sound, and that of wife Mary, who continued her lifelong battle with health problems related to her Bellingham accident, in seemingly constant flux. Mary Fisher suffered from high blood pressure and occasional fainting spells, one of which left her in the Wesley Terrace infirmary for a period of days. Her husband fretted that she might remain for 60 days, at which time a \$50 surcharge would kick in for the couple's rent. It was money the Fishers did not have. "She wanted very much to write you explaining why she hasn't written," Fisher told son Robert. "I know now that she can't possibly write any kind of letter."⁴⁸ But he remained optimistic. "She has always been able to stage a comeback and we believe she will do it again."⁴⁹ Six months later, his prediction was borne out by events. "Last evening was our monthly game night," he told son Robert in a letter. Fisher played Canasta, while "Mother played a new game of Parcheesi. I can assure you that life is not dull at Wesley Terrace."⁵⁰

wife Mary to buy groceries or pay for unexpected expenses such as medication or medical bill. The Fishers moved into the retirement home with an upfront payment of \$8,000, financed by the proceeds of the sale of their Seattle home. Charles Fisher told son Rob in a letter that the couple's income consisted of a teaching pension (specific source unknown) and Social Security, together providing \$247 a month. Their monthly fees at Wesley Terrace, which paid for meals and utilities and other services, were \$215 a month. The Fishers had no additional savings, and relied on their children's donations to cover medical care and other expenses. CHF to Robert Fisher, Nov. 25, 1962, correspondence, box 1, folder 8, CHF Collection.

⁴⁸ CHF to Robert Fisher, Aug. 7, 1962, CHF Collection.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ CHF to Robert Fisher, Feb. 13, 1963, CHF Collection.

The Fishers gained new friends at a local Unitarian Church, which Fisher praised for its non-dogmatic viewpoint. Fisher also kept in close touch with a few old chums at Western Washington College of Education. They kept him apprised of the ongoing machinations of a school that continued to morph from a teacher's college into a broader-focused regional university with a growing reputation as a quality, relatively affordable, non-pretentious liberal-arts school. Fisher lamented some aspects of this expansion, which by its very nature stole attention and focus away from teacher training, his true passion.

On some occasions, his disdain for the politicizing of education seeped into these conversations. In one letter, Fisher — perhaps recalling his long-ago exchanges deep into the night with Frank Sefrit in Western's administration building — reminded his son that education, for all its inarguable worth, had clear limits as a tool for social change:

Throughout the history of education, I believe it [education] has been used to support the status quo. I recall the mess George Counts got himself in, when he raised the question, whether the schools could build a new social order. An existing order will not support schools for its own undoing. Anyone who gets out of line, can expect to have his professional head taken off. There are numerous examples to support this.⁵¹

Fisher didn't bother to list himself as one of the examples; there was no need. Even so, he managed to remain relatively upbeat about his legacy at the college, often noting with pride its accomplishments, or occasional write-ups about the college in the Seattle press.⁵² After a Bellingham public appearance in 1949, at which he was warmly received

⁵¹ CHF to Will Fisher, July 7, 1962, CHF Collection.

⁵² Fisher appears to have visited there only rarely after his departure. The occasion for the 1949 visit was the college's 50-year anniversary celebration. Longtime friend and colleague Arthur Hicks recalled that

by faculty, he apparently never ventured back to Bellingham in any official capacity. “I would enjoy meeting with some of the old associates, say, off the campus, but I doubt if the campus will see me again,” he told son Robert in a February, 1963 letter.⁵³

On December 9, 1964, Mary Light Fisher, bored with a movie being shown downstairs at Wesley Terrace, returned to the Fisher’s modest fourth-floor apartment and found her husband of 55 years dead, in his pajamas, on his bed. Fisher’s physician, who said he had been in good health literally the day before, said it appeared he had died in his sleep. Family members said the likely cause of death was a stroke. The 84-year-old former college president was cremated after a service officiated by the Reverend Peter Weller of the First Unitarian Church of Seattle. Weller lauded Fisher as a man who had dedicated his life to sharing his keen intellect with others through education and social welfare programs. He credited the former president for substantially upgrading Washington state’s public education system, via the steady stream of ably prepared teachers who left Bellingham to take teaching positions around the Evergreen State. He praised Fisher for his demonstrated courage to champion unpopular causes, and for being a devoted citizen, father, grandfather and husband. The service was attended mostly by the Fisher’s “new” friends from Wesley Terrace; about 30 “old-timers” from Western sent a special floral display with their names attached to honor their longtime leader. Weller noted that, even though he had known Charles Fisher for only two short years, it

Fisher “gave a very generous appraisal” of the present state of the school. “There seemed to be no remnant of bitterness whatsoever.” Arthur Hicks, interviewed by Robert Taylor, Dec. 9, 1970, Rogan Jones Papers.

⁵³ CHF to Robert Fisher, Feb. 28, 1963, CHF Collection.

was clear to him that the man had a presence – “one of those persons who we believe will just go on, living forever.”⁵⁴

Mary Fisher, whose struggles with her debilitating brain injury shortly after the family’s arrival in Bellingham had been abided by Charles Fisher with what family members remember as heroic patience, held up “surprisingly well” after her husband’s death, son Will, recalled.⁵⁵ Mrs. Fisher died on December 2, 1966, and was described in an obituary as an accomplished musician and composer.⁵⁶ A small memorial service was held at Wesley Terrace.

The Fishers were gone, but memories of their time in Bellingham were sparked again two years later, when faculty, alumni and friends organized a fundraising campaign to do what the college, to date, had not – create a physical monument to Fisher on campus. With the school’s consent, money was raised to construct a fountain bearing Fisher’s name in the campus’s main public square. The simple, round, low-walled fountain with a pale blue pool, still a campus landmark, was dedicated on May 25, 1968, at a ceremony with faculty member and longtime Fisher supporter Arthur C. Hicks officiating. All of the Fisher children were in attendance, along with many of the 281 friends from 22 states who had contributed to the Fisher Memorial Fund. Hicks read a biography of Fisher, recounting his contributions to turning Western Washington College of Education into a national leader in diverse training for teachers, and his role in

⁵⁴ William Fisher to Nettie Fisher, Dec. 14, 1964, CHF Collection.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ “Mary L. Fisher, 84, Musician, Dies,” undated newspaper clip, Fisher family documents, CHF Collection.

expanding campus facilities. Fisher had turned a modest, two-year teacher school into a thriving, four-year institution, Hicks said before offering a personal recollection of his old friend:

Physically Mr. Fisher was big, broad, tall, erect and dignified in bearing. He had a deep, resonant voice and a command of forceful, idiomatic language by which he was able to seize and hold the attention of any audience. He was a man of tremendous energy and seriousness, of strong convictions which he expressed with frankness and vigor. Withal he was genial and warm-hearted, and had a delightful sense of humor that often found vent in a sudden smile or a glint from his alert, intelligent, large blue eyes. While his prime concern was the advancement and improvement of teacher education, his mind was wide-ranging, acquisitive, inquiring, and open.

He greatly enjoyed good music, drama, and literature and actively promoted series of concerts and lectures for the benefit of students, faculty and townspeople. He was keenly aware of current affairs in the state, the nation, and the world and had a passion for free and unhampered discussion of controversial issues.

Among his favorite maxims were these two: "Let a hundred flowers bloom and a hundred schools of thought contend" and "Slumber not in the tents of your fathers; the world advances, advance with it." I dare say that, like Thomas Jefferson, he had sworn on the altar of God eternal hostility to every form of tyranny over the mind of man. Indeed, in the realm of ideas he was a Happy Warrior.⁵⁷

The fountain remains the only memorial to Fisher on the campus of Western Washington University, now a 15,500-student regional university. Ironically, its placement in the middle of the campus's central plaza, popularly known as "Red Square," has served only to burnish, through simple word association, the reputation of its namesake as a possible seditious, even communist, former leader of the college.⁵⁸ That

⁵⁷ "Dedication of the Charles H. Fisher Memorial Fountain," Western Washington State College, box 2, folder 5, CHF Collection.

⁵⁸ The association is coincidental; the unofficial name of the campus square is a reference not to radical politics, but to the red pavers from which it is constructed. A plaque on the fountain bears only Fisher's name and the dedication date.

reputation, it seems clear, was further damaged, among casual observers and even supporters, by two other factors. The first was a period of decidedly leftist political experimentation of Fisher's son, William. He became active in far-left political causes while attending the University of Washington, and remained so afterward, even identifying for a short time as a practicing communist. The second was Fisher's above-described, seemingly endless presence before official state and federal communist-hunting panels, which continued to place the name "Fisher" next to "Red" in headlines for many years. If anything, this high degree of scrutiny — by trained, federal red hunters, nonetheless — might have served to exonerate Fisher when it produced little but guilt-by-association results. But the mere presence of these inquiries created smoke that many observers assumed was connected with some degree of fire. Hal Reeves, a longtime Bellingham newspaper, radio and television reporter who worked for Frank Sefrit early in his career, illustrated this confusion in an oral-history interview conducted in 1970: "Wasn't it substantiated [later] that he was a card-carrying Communist?" Reeves asked. "Also that one of his sons was ... according to the testimony?"⁵⁹ Other Bellingham residents looking back on the incident expressed similar confusion. One of the fundamental cornerstones of American red-baiting – guilt by association – had worked its dark magic on Fisher, forever associating his name, in the minds of some, with "Red" or

⁵⁹ Hal Reeves, undated audio interview, (circa 1970), box 29, folder 5, Rogan Jones Papers, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Heritage Resources, Bellingham, WA. The "son" reference is likely to Fisher's second son, William, who was actively involved in left-wing politics while a college student at the University of Washington.

“Communist.” The confusion lingers today, the “Red” smear becoming perhaps even more prevalent with the passage of time.

Fisher’s legacy, of course, is far more complex. People involved directly in the struggle for Fisher’s job did not see his later activities as a tacit admission of dangerously leftist leanings. “The faculty was definitely pro-Fisher, and so was I,” longtime instructor Moyle Cederstrom said. “I admired the man for his courage and his idealism. I don’t think there was any question that he was a liberal. But I’m sure that he was not a communist.”⁶⁰ Faculty member Hicks concurred: “His name was cleared in the minds of unprejudiced and professional people.”⁶¹ Even in the mind of at least one clearly prejudiced participant in the mid-1930s crusade, Charles Fisher never really met a straight-faced definition of communist. Ben Sefrit, a foot soldier for his father’s Committee on Normal Protest and, later, longtime city editor of *The Herald*, said as much in a letter to his sons: “I rather doubt that Fisher was ever a card carrying member of the Communist Party,” he wrote. “But he undoubtedly was one of those ultra liberal educators of the new deal variety who believed there was a better form of government that [*sic*] a democracy.”⁶²

Frank Sefrit’s Complicated Legacy

Aside from the fountain bearing his name, Fisher exists on Western’s campus today only as a photograph and a separate portrait in Wilson Library, the Fisher-produced

⁶⁰ Moyle Cederstrom interview, Nov. 20, 1970, Rogan Jones Papers.

⁶¹ Arthur C. Hicks, interviewed by Robert Taylor, Dec. 9, 1970, box 29, folder 2, tape 2, Rogan Jones Papers.

⁶² “To My Sons,” undated letter, Ben Sefrit, provided to the author by son George A. Sefrit, March, 2016.

building since named after his mercurial librarian friend, Mabel Zoe Wilson. But Frank Sefrit's name is memorialized in Whatcom County in far-grander fashion – no doubt owing to community contributions made in addition to, and well after, his sub-surface campaign to upend the college president. After Fisher left town in 1939, Sefrit continued to follow, from afar, the career of the man he had deemed “a mental and moral degenerate.”⁶³ Sefrit's personal files, unearthed in 2013, contain news clippings about the ex-president that extend well beyond Fisher's Bellingham years, detailing particularly his experience on the ill-fated Washington Pension Union. The last letter in the correspondence folder of this extensive, once-private dossier on Fisher is from Darrell Houston, chief of investigations for state representative Canwell's infamous red-baiting committee. The note, addressed to Sefrit on State of Washington Un-American Activities Committee letterhead and dated March 16, 1948, reads in its entirety:

I am returning herewith the material you so kindly loaned to this Committee for use in our recent hearing on the Washington Pension Union. It was given to Investigator Pomeroy when he was in Bellingham and consists of a Handbook of the Student League for Industrial Democracy, Minutes of Hearing Conducted by the Complaint Committee, and miscellaneous papers. The information was of considerable value, and we have made copies of pertinent parts for future reference. Please accept our thanks for your cooperation and assistance. It was greatly appreciated.⁶⁴

Sefrit, it seems clear, was dedicated to the task of outing Fisher for his “seditious” tendencies long after he had rid the college of the former president.⁶⁵ In the post-firing

⁶³ Sefrit to Max H. Clark, July 15, 1939, box 1, folder 3, Bellingham Herald Collection on Charles H. Fisher, Western Libraries Heritage Resources, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Western Washington University, Bellingham WA.

⁶⁴ Houston to Sefrit, March 16, 1948, box 1, folder 3, Bellingham Herald collection.

⁶⁵ His sons, it seems, continued the obsession. Frank Sefrit's files on Fisher contain news clippings that date to several years after Frank Sefrit's death. Someone continued to maintain the file in his absence.

years, the cantankerous editor had kept a relatively low profile about the Fisher case in the pages of his own newspaper. The spat was revived only on rare occasions, when Sefrit deemed it necessary to point out the left-wing tendencies of those who would bring up old accusations that Sefrit essentially helped convict an innocent man of charges of un-Americanism.⁶⁶ The passage of time worked to cover, if not heal, the deep wounds between town and gown inflicted by the Fisher struggle. His successor, Wade Haggard, made overt attempts to reach out to the community. Both sides, recognizing the benefits of a growing college in the city, stepped slowly back from the brink.⁶⁷

As the public blowback against Sefrit faded, the now-elderly editor focused on other concerns. One of them, unbeknownst to most community members, was contributing to charity, former employee Reeves recalled. Beneath his gruff public exterior, Sefrit had a soft spot for individuals. “Mr. Sefrit was kind,” Reeves said. “I knew him personally. And I knew of the many charitable things he did that nobody knew of.”⁶⁸ Reeves said Sefrit made a habit of supplying food and clothing to some needy local residents. “I know because I delivered it for him.”⁶⁹ Sefrit softened somewhat – and finally withdrew, at least briefly, from his job – after being diagnosed with cancer in the late 1940s. “He knew he was going to die,” said Reeves, who recalled discussing the

⁶⁶ Descendants of Frank Sefrit still maintain that the editor, satisfied with the result of Fisher’s firing, might have been silent because he continued to sit on information implicating Fisher in a criminal conspiracy to misuse college funds. See discussion of the Ben Sefrit letter, Chapter 7.

⁶⁷ “The faculty felt like Haggard was being hired to quiet things down,” recalled faculty member Cederstrom. “He accomplished that very effectively. But I do not think he ever achieved the degree of loyalty afforded to Fisher.” Cederstrom interview, Rogan Jones Papers.

⁶⁸ Reeves interview, Rogan Jones Papers.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

matter with Sefrit at his Lake Whatcom home. “He told me ... what’s the expression they use, something about being finished. Oh: ‘It’s later than you think.’”

Frank Sefrit died on May 27, 1950, at the age of 82. The flag atop *The Herald* building was lowered to half-staff. His newspaper eulogized him as “one of the most respected figures in West coast journalism,” and noted that his devotion to his work was evident in the fact that he had regularly visited his office at the *Herald* Building until several weeks prior.⁷⁰ The newspaper noted that Sefrit had been at the helm of *The Herald* since 1911, but in recent years, business affairs of the paper had been transferred increasingly to his eldest son, Charles, “Chick” Sefrit, and the newsroom responsibilities to younger son, Ben, then city editor. “Still possessed of an extraordinary memory and the passion for facts which made him a great reporter in earlier days, Mr. Sefrit commanded the respect and affection of Herald staff members through the years,” *The Herald’s* obituary stated.⁷¹

Another abiding passion of Sefrit, known mostly to his closer friends, was his love of the wild alpine country surrounding nearby Mount Baker. Sefrit had spent much of his leisure time hiking with friends through the old-growth forests and alpine meadows, and was active in ongoing efforts to build a road into the area and, later, to push for federal recognition of the land as a recreation area. At his own direction, Sefrit’s

⁷⁰ “Death Closes Long Career of Frank I. Sefrit,” *The Bellingham Herald*, May 28, 1950.

⁷¹ Ibid. There is little doubt about the latter claim. Even some former employees who acknowledged Sefrit’s taste for political blood tended to blame this trait on a drive to achieve nobler goals. “He was intensely patriotic,” said Wally Lindsley, a reporter for Sefrit in the 1920s. “He was from a mold of newsman that just simply doesn’t exist anymore ... He was a crusader.” Wally Lindsley, interviewed by Don DeMarco, Nov. 30, 1970, box 28, folder 7 (reel-to-reel tape), Rogan Jones Papers.

ashes were scattered by friends above the beautiful alpine area known as Heather Meadows. One of Sefrit's closest friends, Archie Shiels, wrote in a tribute to Sefrit published in *The Herald* that the mountains had been a source of refuge to the sage Sefrit – a place where he went to gain the necessary peace, strength and wisdom to solve the town's stickier problems:

When some problem that really had to be thought out would come up, he would call his small band of close friends and say to us, "Let's take a trip up to the mountains," and there around the camp fire after supper we would discuss the problem and figure out the best way to attack it to bring success to our community. No one knew or appreciated more than he the benefits one derives in the view from above, where the air is clearer and where one's thinking is, like the air, clearer also.⁷²

After his death, a cadre of friends – mostly Bellingham businessmen, organized by Chamber of Commerce officials, began pondering a fitting memorial to Sefrit. They settled upon a notion to ask the federal government to name one of the peaks in Sefrit's beloved North Cascades Mountains after the longtime newspaperman. In December, 1951, the Bellingham Chamber of Commerce petitioned the National Forest Service to assign the name "Mount Sefrit" to an unnamed peak in the Ruth Range, near Mount Baker.⁷³ Chamber officials in the proposal described Sefrit as one of a handful of local businessmen "who thought themselves 'Visionists,' – a group which contributed

⁷² "A Tribute," *The Bellingham Herald*, May 28, 1950.

⁷³ C.W. Gannon to Phil Brandner, Mt. Baker National Forest, Dec. 20, 1951, Bellingham Herald collection on Fisher. Gannon called Sefrit "one of the pioneers and one of the most active participants in the movement to develop the recreation advantages and attractions in the Mt. Baker area." Sefrit, he said, had helped promote the Mount Baker Development Company and Mount Baker Lodge (destroyed by fire shortly after its opening in 1927). "Although he was usually in the background, he wielded not only his personal influence but the influence of the Herald ... to publicize the Mt. Baker Recreational Area."

generously of time and money to the advancement of Northwest Washington as a tourist mecca.”⁷⁴ The federal panel responsible for geographic place names ultimately concurred with the request. The craggy, 7,191-foot high point on Nooksack Ridge, offering a grand view from its summit of the north face of Mount Shuksan, was officially named Mount Sefrit. It still bears the name today.

A Blurred Historical Image

In spite of its historical significance on several fronts, time has blurred the sharper edges of the long battle between Sefrit and Fisher — and the college’s arguably inadequate efforts to acknowledge exactly how and why it ended with the president’s firing. The lack of a subsequent, comprehensive historical examination of the Fisher Case — abetted by the Board of Trustees’ failure, up to the present day, to correct its own official, heavily redacted record about the scandal — has created a modern air of confusion about the influential president. No easily obtainable historical information guides current students, faculty or community members who might question Fisher’s guilt or innocence of the nefarious charges levied against him more than 80 years ago. Even officials who speak for Western Washington University today seem ignorant or confused about one of the college’s most-seminal historic events. At present, the university’s official website contains a terse, 343-word biography of the institution’s fourth president. It recounts his career path, notes his 16 years of service on campus, and

⁷⁴ Ibid. The letter to the Forest Service also notes that Sefrit, described as a quiet, charitable man, collected ancient Bibles, and was “perhaps one of the greatest authorities on ancient Bibles in the Northwest. Both Protestant ministers and Catholic priests, and Rabbis of Jewish faith, counseled with Mr. Sefrit. All that met him in these religious conferences came away feeling that they had met a great personality.”

concludes thusly:

Prompted by concerned community, student and faculty members, as well as the Board of Trustees, Gov. Clarence D. Martin asked Fisher to leave Western on July 14, 1939. The governor claimed the reason behind firing Fisher was the “lack of tact” Fisher possessed and that the decision would benefit the college. Amongst the ten charges presented to the board by a community committee in April 1935, Fisher was accused of expressing his liberal leanings and non-traditional religious ideas at the college.⁷⁵

Apart from the memories of immediate descendants of the protagonists, the entire affair seems conveniently forgotten.

In 2015, the somewhat-secluded, hilltop university, seeking a more-visible, downtown presence in Bellingham for prospective students, alumni, and potential donors, shopped for office space for a visitor’s center. The university wound up acquiring ground-level space in a stately old building at 1155 North State Street. It is a landmark building, one of Bellingham’s most imposing since its construction in 1926. On top of the historic, six-story structure, which bears terra cotta cladding and Late Gothic Revival ornamentation, is a small, one-story penthouse apartment, built to sit back from the building’s edge, so as not to be visible from the street. The apartment was built for Sidney A. Perkins, noted owner of multiple conservative newspapers, who, according to several employees, rarely, if ever, used it. Next to the penthouse is an electric sign, with brightly lit, red letters, ten feet high, spelling out: “HERALD.” Western Washington University placed its most-public Bellingham face inside the confines of the building

⁷⁵ “Western Profiles,” http://library.wvu.edu/hr/specialcollections/sc_westernprofiles. Aside from the inexcusable error of historical fact that suggests complaints against Fisher arose from students and faculty, it is unclear whether the tacitly endorsed description here of Fisher’s religious ideas as “non-traditional” refers to his younger years as a member of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, his later years as a Presbyterian and Congregationalist, his final years as a Unitarian – or something more nefarious.

constructed for Frank Sefrit's former enterprise, *The Bellingham Herald*, where the newspaper staff still works, in a much-smaller space.

This, of course, is purely coincidental; the building and the newspaper itself were long ago sold to separate investors; modern workers have no reason to understand, let alone act on, the bitter history of former managers.⁷⁶ Clashing occupants of the old buildings offices, including not only Sefrit and his sons, but Dr. W.D. Kirkpatrick, chairman of the college Board of Trustees, have been absent for decades. And so, apparently, is any memory of what occurred here. The respective, remnant organizations of two unusually eloquent, strong-minded men who had engaged in mortal political combat in Bellingham during the Great Depression now happily engage in business under the same roof – to the upset, or even notice, of frankly no one. It is a vivid illustration of how fully the once-momentous battle over Charles Fisher has slipped from local memory.

That memory lapse probably would not have surprised Charles Fisher, a realist who, keenly aware of the lasting power of guilt by association, accurately foresaw a deliberate, deep burial of his college career by his successors at Western. Months before his death, Fisher predicted, in a letter to his daughter, that college trustees would never

⁷⁶ Perkins owned *The Herald* until his death at age 90 in 1955; his heirs retained it until 1967, when it was sold to Federated Publications, which later merged with the Gannett Company. Knight Ridder purchased *The Herald* in 2005, and it transferred to the McClatchy Company when McClatchy acquired Knight Ridder in 2006. The paper is still printed daily, but under contract on a press owned by the nearby Skagit Valley Herald. Charles "Chick" Sefrit served as the newspaper's general manager until a new Perkins Press mandatory retirement rule forced his retirement at age 65. He kept a private office in *The Herald* building for years after retiring, and died in April, 1965. Ben Sefrit worked as a reporter and editor at the paper from 1928 to 1960. He died in May 1984. "National Register of Historic Places Registration Form," Bellingham Herald Building, National Park Service, <https://www.nps.gov/nr/feature/places/13001032.htm>.

risk opening old, deep wounds by naming a prominent campus feature after an important, but still controversial, former leader:

Because of the circumstances of my leaving and because the present board and later boards know nothing about my work, I don't ever expect any building to be named for me. If it were done, it couldn't be any building. It would have to be a library or education building. But the image of what I stood for has been wiped out ... I believe I will have to be content to live in the minds and hearts of the students and teachers with whom I worked and associated.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ CHF to Mary Ann Fisher, May 30, 1964, CHF Collection.

Chapter 9

Conclusions

“What happened to Charles Fisher?” The question lingers, but thanks to new documentation of the political winds that swept through Washington state in the latter half of the 1930s, answers now are more complete. Little of this new research, granted, does much to change an old, blunt answer to the same question by local politico Vaughn Brown, who knew both Fisher and Frank Sefrit well, and curtly summed up the matter of what happened to Fisher nearly four decades ago: “He was fired because Sefrit didn’t like him, and he [Sefrit] had enough political oomph to get rid of him.”¹ That conclusion remains rock solid, albeit simplistic. Fortunately, it is now possible to move far beyond this simple premise. New information about the case has the net effect of offering a much more thorough understanding of the way the Fisher case fits into the local, national and regional historical narratives about Depression-era politics, public education, and the broader concept of academic freedom. Because of it, most of the basic tenets of the Fisher case can now be examined in an entirely new context. These will be addressed below by subject.

The Committee on Normal Protest

Before the recent discovery of what amounts to the working files of newspaper editor Frank Sefrit’s Committee on Normal Protest, the motivations and methods – and much of the membership – of this secretive group were unknown. The driving forces

¹ Vaughn Brown, interviewed by Don DeMarco, Nov. 19, 1970, box 28, folder 7, Rogan Jones Papers, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham WA.

behind the group as a whole, let alone its individual members, were a gaping hole in accounts of the Fisher story: Were they really early anti-communists? If so, what influenced them? Did they really believe Fisher to be a practicing communist, or did they use, in a politically volatile era, the cudgel of sedition as a tool to exact revenge for other perceived transgressions? Answers now present themselves.

Sefrit, clearly the ringleader, and a man of undeniable, super-patriot tendencies, seemed to harbor sincere fears of rising communist agitation, if not government takeover, in his adopted hometown of Bellingham, Washington. As a businessman during the Depression, his own enterprise, even while enjoying a monopoly on print news distribution in the city and region, teetered at times on the brink of either failure, sale, or radical business-plan reconstruction. Letters from Sefrit to *Bellingham Herald* owner Sidney Perkins make this clear. In the midst of the anti-Fisher campaign, Sefrit witnessed the impact of the 1934 West Coast Longshoreman's strike on his own, heavily port-dependent local economy. Rumors of what were feared to be future coast-wide general strikes, in the fashion of the reviled 1919 Seattle General Strike that had forged many of the political enmities of his civic business associates in Northwest Washington, seemed real. Sefrit, for a man with no formal education, possessed a keen intellect and had forged a remarkable career as a both a newspaperman and political operative (roles that often went hand in hand during this era). The new documents make it clear he was very well-read about global news developments that raised the specter of communism as an imminent threat. Clearly, these fears were heightened by what seemed a radical departure in the approach to governance by the administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt, whose

administration was creating a federal arm with unprecedented reach and power into American society and business. To suddenly back-benched conservative power brokers such as Sefrit, this must have seemed like the beginning stages of the communist nightmare, writ large.

Sefrit, of course, also had more pedestrian, petty reasons to rid his town of Fisher. Portrayed by all who knew him as a man who neither backed down from a fight, nor hesitated to cheat to win in battles over political power, it is readily apparent that Sefrit, aside from the communism charges, was personally “agin” Fisher, and wanted him gone. In Sefrit’s mind, no man crossed him and lived, professionally, at least, to tell about it. Fisher at some point crossed a line with Sefrit that could not be uncrossed. The irascible newspaper editor had multiple reasons to assail Fisher, and multiple reasons to hang that assault on Fisher’s supposed communistic, atheistic, and “free love” tendencies. His reasons were varied, yet deeply felt. Sefrit’s oft-repeated contention that he went after Fisher only at the behest of other community members who begged him to lead the effort seems disingenuous; his animosity toward the man he saw as the personification of dangerous political progressivism was intensely personal.

In some ways, this mirrors the respective motivations brought to the effort by the other dozen or so members of Sefrit’s secretive committee. While most of the other members seemed to simply be businessmen (and, it now is clear, one woman) or conservative community leaders who were following Sefrit’s lead, others involved in the effort harbored their own personal grudges against the president, whose overall on-campus popularity often hid his “lack of tact” in dealing with the broader community.

The group included jilted ex-employees, impinged-upon campus neighbors, a religious zealot or two, and even a self-described Klansman. But another key finding of this study is that it would be a fundamental mistake to characterize the Sefrit group, as it has been in the past, as a coincidental grouping of “fringe” political elements. While their overall philosophies might have qualified as such in comparison to local and national political trends towards progressivism, the Sefrit group would not have seemed overtly “radical” in their time and place. The committee included a large swath of the business and political power structure – at least its old guard – of the Bellingham community. The previously known list of Sefrit co-conspirators included a downtown property owner, a group of professionals including a retired teacher, a dentist and a minister, and key commercial titans such as A.W. Deming, of the family that ran Pacific American Fisheries, one of Bellingham’s prime industrial engines. Add now to that list even-more-secretive Fisher foes, including civic stalwart and prominent businesswoman Francis Payne Larrabee, who brought with her to the table an alleged affinity for a business-oriented, unusually conservative Democratic Governor, Clarence D. Martin. As the head of this group, Sefrit, more than ever, stands as the inspiration and enabler of the movement. While each member had his or her own reasons to lash out at Fisher, only Sefrit possessed the means, the political savvy, the connections, and the ink-by-the-barrel means of communication and public pressure to pull off the Fisher action. As manager and editor of the community’s primary news source, Sefrit’s place at the head of this table was doubly useful to the group; not only did his role give him great political power, but his ability to influence what the public was told about Fisher – and hide the activities

of his own, private anti-Fisher group — was immensely valuable. It seems unlikely that the onslaught against Fisher would ever have amounted to more than a brief, ultimately failed, uprising without Sefrit at the helm.

Another interesting finding of historical significance in this study is what appears, at least, to be an absence of active involvement in the anti-Fisher campaign by the Ku Klux Klan. It is admittedly difficult to gauge the relative degree of involvement of any one group member based solely on the files left behind by Sefrit. Even so, it is noteworthy that (Solomon) Blanton Luther, the lone Committee member identified as a Klan member, left not a single trace of personal activity in those files. The only mention of Luther in the Sefrit documents, in fact, is his name appearing on a roster of Committee members, handwritten by Sefrit, in which Luther is identified not as a Klansman, but as a significant downtown Bellingham property owner. The Sefrit files contain no other documents listing Luther as a Klansman. The only “Klan” connection to Luther’s name in documents related to the case at all is actually made not by Sefrit or the Committee, but by members of the Board of Trustees, in their written response to charges presented against Fisher at the May 22, 1935 Fisher hearing.² There, Luther spoke only briefly, answering in the affirmative when trustees questioned individual members of the Committee on Normal Protest whether they concurred with statements made there by Sefrit.

² Neither Luther nor any other member of Sefrit’s committee appears to have challenged the designation after the written response was issued; Luther presumably identified himself as “Grand Dragon, Ku Klux Klan,” the title that the response document attaches to his name.

None of this is to suggest that Luther was not a Klansman. That fact seems clear, and is emphasized by the fact that neither Luther nor any other member of Sefrit's group, at least in the known historical record, objected to Luther's identification as "Grand Dragon, Ku Klux Klan" in the Board of Trustees' response to the charges against Fisher. But the only other apparent Klan connection to the case, based on available evidence, is the presence of several items of general Klan literature contained in the Sefrit files. Again, it is difficult to judge Luther's degree of commitment or involvement. But the apparent lack of hands-on activity on his part is an important distinction; the presence of a Klan member on the roster of hearing attendees has been emphasized in most existing historical accounts as evidence of significant involvement of either the Klan, or select Klan members, in the campaign to remove Fisher. In the whole, this appears not to be the case.

The apparent distinctive roles of Luther and other "official" Committee on Normal Protest members and the actual foot soldiers of the group illustrates the degree to which Sefrit was able to masterfully handle his committee's willing participants, successfully insulating, for many years, his own name from the effort. Because eager recruits conducted most of the publicly visible dirty work of the campaign — barging into campus assemblies, club meetings and documenting other activities — Sefrit and the other signators to the charges against Fisher were able to sit back, out of the public eye, and merely observe. All the while, other volunteers with their own, arguably petty motivations — "she-devils" Alma Jenkins and Catherine Montgomery come to mind — served as what little face there was of the secretive anti-Fisher crusade. This provided

important political cover to prominent committee members with reputations to protect.

The new glimpse inside Sefrit's campaign provided by the recently released Sefrit files – weighed alongside previously unconnected materials detailing the long-running battle between Sefrit's *Bellingham Herald* and upstart radio station KVOS – emphasizes another historically significant point: The Sefrit group did not operate in a political vacuum. The anti-Fisher campaign, it now seems clear, was informed by, if not inspired by, a concurrent Red Scare campaign, being waged by another steely newspaperman, William Randolph Hearst, on the campuses of larger universities all across the nation. It now is evident that Sefrit and his co-conspirators borrowed directly from Hearst's red-baiting playbook: They adopted the very same thinly researched anti-communist guide, Elizabeth Dilling's *The Red Network*, as a tool to identify seditious people and organizations that Fisher had allowed to "infiltrate" the Bellingham campus. The simultaneous Hearst-manufactured onslaught against other universities provided political cover, and perhaps an emboldened sense of purpose, to the Bellingham group. Their fight, thanks to the concurrence of the broader, Hearst-manufactured Red Scare, could be viewed not as just a spat on the American political frontier, but as a skirmish in a much-larger battle with far broader consequences. (Ironically, while attracting little national notice at the time, or since, the Bellingham Red Scare ultimately proved more successful than the campaign stirred up by the powerful newspaper mogul Hearst.) The clear connection between the two campaigns established in this study is significant. It links the Bellingham case and the national Red Scare episodes to a common source of intellectual and ideological inspiration – the national "super-patriot" movement that was simmering

across the nation, in the halls of the American Legion, and, notably, the Daughters of the American Revolution and other conservative women's groups. It is worth noting that one prominent member (Francis Payne Larrabee) and many of the most-passionate foot soldiers in Sefrit's "Pro-American" army were women.³

Finally, analysis of the newly available Sefrit materials reveals a depth of planning and research for the Fisher assault that goes well beyond previous assumptions. Frank Sefrit, well-schooled, thanks to his own history of court entanglements, in the art of building a solid legal case, had established a pattern of using information gathered by his newspaper to threaten or extort political opponents. In preparing such evidence, Sefrit routinely hired workers to transcribe conversations, speeches or radio broadcasts, or create courtroom-ready, notarized witness statements, to add an additional air of authenticity. He worked, in other words, as an unelected public prosecutor (and often judge and jury), and created paper trails to justify his actions. Sefrit prosecuted his attack on Fisher in precisely this manner. In effect, he managed to investigate and prosecute a court case with no courtroom, at least beyond the Board of Trustees meeting room, and no judge, beyond the apparently politically allied governor of the State of Washington. There should remain no doubt: The anti-Fisher campaign was a serious, professional endeavor — conducted by a skilled political operative with an established track record of destroying political opponents — to isolate, discredit, and remove a prominent public

³ The "Pro-America" group, its local chapter founded by Larrabee, was described specifically as an organization both "anticommunist" and "anti-New Deal." The active presence of female political operatives in the anti-Fisher movement has been absent in historical accounts of the Fisher case to date, and presents an intriguing avenue for further study.

official, the veteran, nationally respected president of Western Washington College of Education.

The Fisher Case Brought to Life

An additional gift contained in the recently unearthed Sefrit materials is the only known surviving copy of the manuscript of the Fisher-Sefrit grudge match during the Board of Trustees hearing of the Fisher charges on May 22, 1935. This document alone broadens the previously known story of the Fisher affair immensely, bringing once-unimaginable clarity to the passions, personalities, and strategies of the key players in what can only be described as an emotionally charged, political drama. The transcript, a detailed record of a rousing verbal exchange between two uncommonly eloquent ideological warriors – one representing, in a sense, the conservative political past, the other proudly proclaiming its near-term, progressive political future – is an historical treasure. Before its emergence, the Fisher affair had been viewed as a two-dimensional spat – a game of challenge and rebuke played out mostly in private, its broad outlines left for posterity in documents providing little hint to the passions driving the combatants. Afterward, it is possible to view the Fisher case, and the ideological and intellectual reasoning that drove it, in all its rich, multi-dimensional complexity.

The discourse in the hearing transcript, aside from revealing personality traits of the combatants, effectively applies the principles argued over at the Bellingham campus to a national stage. In its pages, a student of history now can almost be present in the room as a well-prepared Sefrit expounds upon his and his co-conspirators' firmly held beliefs about freedom of speech and assembly, academic and religious freedom,

generational politics, the moral underpinnings of the New Deal, moral turpitude and countless other matters. And here, one can witness Charles Fisher, a man perhaps pushed to his limits of civility and patience, issue an equally passionate defense of the concepts of progressive education, political pluralism, free speech, academic freedom, separation of church and state, intellectual curiosity and other matters.

Here, also, one can finally see the nitty gritty of the few charges brought by Sefrit that possessed threads of defensible truth: A small group of students, exploring, mostly on their own, the exciting waves of political change sweeping the globe, had indeed invited a “card-carrying” Communist to campus in 1934, apparently unbeknownst to a faculty adviser, and to Fisher. The college had, indeed, invited a number of speakers who could be deemed controversial to campus – by design, Fisher would proudly proclaim. Most tellingly, the transcript reveals the ideological skirmish between the two men to revolve, at its root, around an age-old question of education, particularly the brand conducted in the public sphere: Does presentation of a particular topic, without undue caution to fragile young minds, constitute endorsement of same? Does providing a platform for a socialist, or communist-inclined journalist and author, represent a healthy challenge of societal norms, as an intellectual exercise, or simple indoctrination? On this question, the entire campaign against Fisher rested, and continues to rest. And in the transcript, the full argument of the merits, by both parties, is heard. This alone provides unprecedented depth and focus to the historical narrative of the events in Bellingham in the latter half of the decade of the 1930s.

Fisher's Defense: Too Little, Too Late

The 1935 hearing transcript also provides useful insights into the strategy employed by Fisher to attempt to deflate the case against him. Sadly, given the way the matter played out, a more accurate term might be his lack of a visible defense, at least until after the political tides had turned irreversibly against him. To better understand why, a brief exploration of the national historical context of the case is instructive.

Throughout the Board of Trustees hearing, and in Fisher's communications to faculty and educational peers thereafter, the embattled president seems shocked that the charges against him would even be brought forth by thinking people in his own community. Further, he seemed incredulous that they would gain sufficient traction with his superiors to be considered in a serious manner. History, it might be argued, should not judge him too harshly for this apparent nonchalance: Fisher came from a tradition of education, enlightenment, and intellectual seeking. His opponents, mostly uneducated, but powerful local citizens, came from a tradition of political hardball and what can only be described as traditional values. Threatened with irrelevance by their loss of political standing after the Franklin D. Roosevelt revolution in 1932, the disaffected local former power brokers were in the mood for vengeance. And Charles Fisher, arguably through no concerted action on his own, stood as the very face of "progressivism" in his community. This point cannot be over-emphasized in any serious discussion of politics surrounding the Fisher case: Fisher drew a dotted line between the contemporary "progressivism" as exhibited by his educational values and "progressivism" in politics. Granted, the two were not unrelated in his mind; Fisher believed that enlightened educations for teachers,

born of diverse, liberal-arts-style curricula, would lead to enlightened pupils who would create an enlightened society poised to make informed decisions that would move the nation forth in a progressive manner. This suited his personal beliefs about the role of education in a progressive society. Through his own actions in public, he separated himself, in this important way, from the broader educational reconstructionist movement, then a largely East Coast phenomenon espoused by the likes of George S. Counts, John Dewey, Charles A. Beard and others.

Fisher's opponents either failed to recognize, or simply refused to accept, this distinction. They had already seen their quiet, quaint local teacher's college — before Fisher's arrival, a glorified high school program focused strictly on pedagogical concerns — morph into something they did not recognize: A degree-granting institution that seemed to seek out controversial subjects of study. On top of this came another relatively new phenomenon: the intentional politicization of education, in a movement driven by what seemed, to Fisher's skeptics, to be a cadre of traitorous, East Coast intellectuals. It is not difficult to divine the source of this association: The collectivist doctrines being espoused by Counts at this point in his influential career not only failed to separate public education from public policy — they sought to inextricably link them. It should not be surprising, then, that reactionary conservative political figures, particularly those as defensive and coiled to strike as Frank Sefrit, would see Fisher and his largely Columbia University-educated faculty as little more than dupes — locally based stand-ins for Counts, hapless volunteers in an insidious campaign by the effete progressive educator to unleash “this Russian virus” on unsuspecting American communities. There can be little

doubt that this emotionally charged belief lay at the foundation of the campaign conducted by Sefrit and his anti-Fisher charges.

Fisher, it is now clear, thanks to the Board of Trustees hearing transcript, considered this to be preposterous. Aghast at the fact the charges ever saw the light of day – or at least as much “light” as can be attributed to a closed-door, star-chamber proceeding on his own campus – his initial responses make it clear he believed the insanity, already granted one hearing too many, would stop there. The president’s own words reveal that he believed the basic tenets of academic freedom – and the clear differentiation between the mere presentation of “radical” ideas and any attempt to inculcate them — to be abjectly self-evident. He had difficulty accepting that reasonable people could conclude otherwise.⁴ Fisher’s failure to grasp the difference in public perceptions of educational traditions between his own peer group and some influential elements of the general public in Washington state might be argued to be a key in his undoing. It seems safe to say that Fisher was not simply a man who refused to suffer fools, and thus “lacked tact” in dealing with his foes. He also was a man who, critically, failed to grasp the importance of this gap in understanding between academia and the common citizens in his adopted home.

The result, viewed through the clear vision of historical hindsight, can be viewed as something of an unfolding tragedy: Fisher believed that, once heard by reasonable, non-conspiratorial public leaders, Sefrit’s campaign of innuendo and guilt by association

⁴ Notably, this might be owing to the stark differences between public attitudes where Fisher received his academic training and where he wound up implementing it. The Eastern Coastal region of the United States had a 250-year tradition of academic inquiry; Washington state itself was barely 50 years old at the time.

would be seen for what it was, and quickly put down. This, in fact, occurred, with the trustees' stern rebuke of Sefrit's case, on every count, in June, 1935. But this decision had the effect of putting Fisher, and his broad group of supporters among faculty and students somewhat at ease, with a sense of false security. The upstarts had been revealed for the rabble-rousers that they were. Everyone back to class.

This would prove to be a fundamental miscalculation of the depth, energy, and passions of the movement. As Fisher went about his business, expecting the adults in the room to continue to keep watch over the outer gates of his institution, the would-be infiltrators conducted a simple runaround, taking their case to the state capital, where it was viewed with fresh eyes, influenced by an entirely separate political calculation. Fisher, after meeting with Martin in 1938, recognized the severity of this threat. He rallied, finally, to make the threat known to likely allies. He reached out to colleagues at peer institutions, waving flags of alarm that his base of security was being threatened. He sought out allies in key political constituencies – in labor, the state legislature, and elsewhere – building the base of a political firewall. And finally, in 1939, he reached out to those that he surely, with the benefit of hindsight, should have sought an audience with long before: the Bellingham community itself.

In this sense, businessman H.C. Banner's assessment of Fisher's meeting before the Washington Club, a group of local business leaders, in February, 1939, is a tragic epitaph to his case. At this meeting – notably, after he had already been informed of his pending dismissal – Fisher, remarkably, made his first extensive defense to the charges against him directly to members of his own community. Banner's subsequent call for

Fisher to make the same case, broadly and loudly, to the rest of the Bellingham community was essentially a plea for the beleaguered president to engage in what, in the present political world, would be termed crisis management. It was an idea beautiful in its simplicity, with implications, unknowable at the time, for the broader U.S. Red Scare to come: The best defense against guilt-by-association smears by shadowy, ultra-conservative forces, Banner suggested, was to drag them out into the light and expose them for what they are – early, often and enthusiastically. Fisher appeared to embrace this reality, but only after it was too late. Surely, he believed for years, sanity would prevail and the uprising would fade, without him having to grant it the undeserved dignity of public acknowledgment, let alone debate. But just as surely, it did not.

The Politics of Dismissal: New Complexity

Additional original research conducted for this study reveals all of the above to be perhaps only one side of a political equation surrounding Fisher's firing far more complex than originally believed. The archival record of Fisher's administration maintained by the long-defunct Washington State Department of Efficiency offer up the intriguing possibility that a dueling scandal – one that suggested, at least initially, the illegal handling of public funds by Fisher and his college subordinates – might have hastened Fisher's departure – or at least made it easier for college trustees to reverse their strong show of public support for the president and show him the door. This is not to lessen the seriousness of the red-scare campaign against Fisher, nor diminish in any way its ultimate role in the removal of the president. That campaign, as has been established, was serious, heartfelt, and significant. And it had largely played out before state officials

had coalesced a series of at-first minor concerns about campus bookkeeping into serious concerns about the possible misappropriation of state funds, as outlined in Chapter 8.

As indicated there, those initial concerns proved largely unfounded; Fisher was not found to have absconded with any college funds, and withdrawals by college staff members from the college Student Loan Fund, albeit improper, were quickly repaid while Fisher was still in office. No charges were ever brought in the matter; no discipline was handed down to staff members responsible for the misdeeds. But the apparent seriousness of these offenses at the time Fisher's career teetered in the balance, in summer, 1938, should not be underestimated. For decades, the greatest single question about Fisher's dismissal has been what might have changed the minds of trustees about a man they, at least in public pronouncements, had enthusiastically defended, and seemed to respect. Why, in other words, did they change course from their vigorous defense in 1935 to their back-door dismissal in 1938? The revelation of what amounts to a long-running financial inquiry at the college conducted by state officials adds additional, intriguing possible answers.

First, it seems likely that the ongoing financial problems revealed Fisher, for all his educational brilliance, to be something less than an exemplary business manager. The latter aspect of his job was an important one, particularly given its place in a state bureaucracy no doubt hypersensitive to the disposition of public funds in an era of financial scarcity during the Great Depression. Fisher's neglect of this side of his job in itself might have helped tip the scales, in trustees' minds, toward making a fresh start under a new president. It likewise seems probable that the ongoing financial concerns –

unknown to the public then, and ever since – also altered the political balance of power between trustees and the governor. Charles Fisher’s neck was not the only one exposed by possible public revelation of sloppy financial procedures at a state-run institution. Trustees, the ultimate responsible party on matters of finance, also risked public exposure, and likely humiliation, had the scandal become public knowledge. It seems plausible that this information, now shown to have been presented to Governor Martin, at the very time Fisher’s job was in play, as possible criminal behavior, would have provided significant political ammunition to the governor in persuading the trustees to let go of their longtime president. The trustees’ surprising decision to change course and sacrifice Fisher, with little discussion or explanation, might be viewed as less surprising in light of these suggestions of financial impropriety.

This surprising new element to the case, of course, presents as many questions as answers: If the governor had damaging information about Fisher’s administration, why would he not bring it forth when faced with significant, post-firing political heat for his seemingly inexplicable decision? The Fisher firing was believed to have hurt Martin in his unsuccessful bid for a third term in office. Could the preservation of the reputation of a small Bellingham college really have outweighed the political expediency of leaking or revealing the financial scandal to the general public? The same question might be asked about the role of trustees, who, severely criticized in the wake of their tight-lipped approach to Fisher’s firing, never once offered up details of the financial sloppiness as an excuse for ordering the removal of their once-cherished president. Whether the “embarrassment to all concerned” associated with public knowledge of the financial

scandal might have outweighed such political calculations is unknown. Clearly, the close scrutiny of public expenditures by a state under the grip of Depression-era scarcity might have rendered public release of details of the affair a path that simply could not be taken, by either state officials, or Fisher himself.

Sefrit Family Lore – Fact or Mythology?

Worthy of note with regard to this point is yet another recent discovery: revelations made by Frank Sefrit's son, Ben, in a letter left to descendants to clarify the family's role in the Fisher matter and other historically significant events during Frank Sefrit's career as a newspaperman. In this letter, written in the 1970s and provided to the author by family members, Ben Sefrit lays out a conspiratorial role for father Frank Sefrit and *The Bellingham Herald* in Fisher's dismissal. As noted in Chapter 7, Ben Sefrit professed that his father learned of the financial misdeeds involving Fisher from his longtime friend, Board of Trustees chairman Kirkpatrick, in strict confidence. Kirkpatrick, the story goes, had been apprised, in similar confidence, by Governor Martin. The governor, Ben Sefrit recalled, possessed information about misuse of college funds which, presented to Fisher, would force him to resign or risk the public humiliation of criminal charges. Frank Sefrit supposedly agreed to keep the matter quiet and assist with a forcing-out of Fisher by publishing a fabricated story, after Fisher resigned in shame, indicating the president was stepping down for health reasons.

This, of course, did not happen, so the veracity of the report is questionable, at best. It might be the product of a sloppy memory, by Ben Sefrit, of events some 40 years before. Or, it might have been a deliberate attempt to paint the late Frank Sefrit, with

regard to the Fisher affair, in the best possible light. Under this scenario, Sefrit, rather than being consigned to history as a conniving political operative, is portrayed here as a civic hero – a man who tamped down the greatest urge of any good journalist, to publish, as a community service, protecting for time and eternity the good name of the hilltop college. Either way, the emergence of the letter adds an intriguing historical footnote to the case. Sefrit descendants, who said they only came forward with the long-secret story in light of new publicity about the case engendered by this study, believe strongly to the present day that Fisher was, indeed, a man of communist, or at least dangerously, radical-leftist, sympathies, and that the stealthy removal from office of this public cancer by Frank Sefrit was an act of near-heroic public service. This is a testament both to the power of historical interpretation as passed down through families – and to the enduring power of the cherished principles at play in this particular case, by protagonists on both sides.

The perhaps-apocryphal tale of Sefrit's inside knowledge in the case, while clearly at odds with known facts, remains an intriguing addition to the case for other reasons: Its broad outline, with Sefrit being tipped off to information that would lead him to believe Fisher could, in fact, be fired for cause — and go down in the flames of scandal that no one wished to see lit — contains a ring of plausibility. The main reason is that Sefrit, during the time of the firing and for some years afterward, acted as if this was, in fact, the case. At nearly every turn, be it editorials for public consumption or private letters to journalistic peers, Sefrit acted the part of a cat with a canary in his mouth: If you knew what I know, he inferred, you wouldn't be asking questions about why Fisher was

fired. At first blush, this cockiness comes across as a probable bluff. The journalistic career of Frank Sefrit is rife, in fact, with such pronouncements: It is not in the public's best interest to know what I know, he often said. This journalistic arrogance was typical of the brash American newspaper titan of Sefrit's era (see: Hearst, et al). A closer examination of the political dealings of many a newspaper editor of this era likely would reveal that sometimes, such pronouncements were sheer bluffs, erected to prop up flimsy editorial positions. But on other occasions, it might be true that editors did withhold information to suit their own interpretation of acting in the public good. It also was not uncommon, as discussed earlier in this study, for newspaper managers of the time to sit on information, acting in classic gate-keeper fashion and treating knowledge as currency that could be traded for various commodities – political favors, resignations from office, or even impromptu purchases of advertising space by sources being extorted.⁵ Thus, it is easy to dismiss Sefrit's constant refrain about possession of inside knowledge about additional, nefarious activities of Fisher as pure bluster – simple, traditionally applied leverage in a movement to topple the local college president.

But the Sefrit family letter presents the intriguing possibility that Sefrit did possess damaging information about Fisher – or, more likely, given the way the matter played out – what he *thought* at the time to be damaging information. In any case, this possibility does give one pause when reading Sefrit's bold statements, such as in an

⁵ This study makes no attempt to analyze, in comprehensive fashion, the significance of Frank Sefrit's historically significant role as a newspaperman, leading editorial voice, and simultaneous political operative during the 1930s. This role clearly merits further historical analysis in the context of the history of US journalism.

editorial in the 1939 wake of Fisher's firing, that "No injustice is being done President C.H. Fisher ... Fisher was fully informed of the reasons ... It is not in the interest of the college nor of Mr. Fisher that the public be given all of the facts of the controversy ... If there is cause for any censure of the governor or the Board of Trustees it should be because they did not discharge Fisher several years ago. Certainly there were ample reasons for doing so."⁶

Sefrit's additional private, even more-forceful pronouncements that he possessed secrets of some nefarious Fisher offense which, if the president continued to howl about his firing, might necessitate "taking the gloves off" also take on possible new meaning. The likelihood that Sefrit possessed information about, at the very least, sloppy managerial habits of Fisher gains additional credibility with the discovery that a state financial examiner was communicating with a knowledgeable source inside the Committee on Normal Protest about the case being assembled against Fisher.⁷ But Sefrit's degree of knowledge about the financial affairs of the college is likely to stand as one of the many mysteries surrounding the Fisher case that remains unresolved.

The AAUP's Tell-All Archives

Through its inclusion of previously unconsidered documents in the archives of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), this study highlights yet another new level of intrigue about the machinations of the president's removal. Specifically, trustees who apparently took most details of Fisher's dismissal to their graves spoke more

⁶ "The Fisher Controversy," editorial, *The Bellingham Herald*, June 12, 1939.

⁷ See Chapter 7.

eloquently about the matter, in private communications with the AAUP, than they ever did in public. And on some key points, they seemed to disagree.

Board of Trustees member Verne Branigin, in the immediate aftermath of the firing, related in a letter to the AAUP a “gentleman’s agreement” reached with Fisher (albeit never, apparently, to his full knowledge, or with his consent). He described this as a scheme that allowed at least some opportunity for Fisher to redeem himself. Whether that meant an opportunity to save his job, or just time granted to slide out the door sideways, to an alternate position at the University of Washington or elsewhere, is not clear. Perhaps even more significantly, fellow trustee W.D. Kirkpatrick’s protestations to the AAUP make it clear that he, at least, blamed Fisher for his own downfall, dismissing the furor over Martin’s perceived role as a red herring. Under Kirkpatrick’s scenario, the board’s enthusiastic rejection of Sefrit’s charges against Fisher in 1935 had come with a private, probationary element: Fisher was quietly told to make the problems with the community go away; he did not, and thus was let go. (Never mind the fact that the assigned task of reconciliation with community members was one trustees themselves, noting the unceasing “strife-breeding” in the community in their response to the Sefrit charges, considered nearly impossible.) Whether Kirkpatrick’s take on the firing is a sincere recollection, or simply an attempt at self-preservation in the midst of a significant public backlash against trustees’ actions, is unknown.

All of these new questions illustrate the need – and opportunity – for additional research about the Fisher case and its political fallout. Further review of additional possible surviving archival materials of the AAUP, or perhaps the similarly involved

American Association of Teachers Colleges – might shed additional light on the case. Unfortunately, what should have been one of the most important sources of archival information about the Fisher affair – the files of the Washington State Archives – do more to obscure the events of 1935-1939 in Bellingham than they do to enlighten. It is possible, though difficult to imagine, that this was not intentional. The state Open Records Act did not exist in the 1930s; policies and procedures for retention of government documents – and in fact, likely the definition of what qualified as “public” information – were vague and selectively applied. For all these reasons, perhaps, the vast majority of what one would imagine to be a cache of records related to the Fisher case either have been intentionally excluded from state archives, or intentionally destroyed.

Illustrating this point, the official gubernatorial archive in Governor Martin’s files about Western Washington College of Education is a single, skimpy folder, containing not a single document related to the controversial firing of a college president that made national news – and threatened to upset the governor’s reelection bid – in 1939. No records of known meetings with Bellingham citizens for and against Fisher are found there. No correspondence between Martin and members of the Sefrit committee to depose the president are evident, nor are letters of any kind related to the Fisher case. No record of the governor’s communications with members of the Board of Trustees of the college, beyond perfunctory budgetary matters, are evident. A preliminary search of the governor’s “personal” papers at Washington State University, containing a much-larger volume of correspondence – reveals a few related documents, such as the letter from the

state's congressional delegation decrying Fishers firing. But no subject files related to the case are found there, either.

Thus, the governor's role in the Fisher case – an indisputably key factor – remains largely a mystery. The conservative Democrat, swept into power in his first term, and kept there for a second, by a fragile political coalition that included active communists of the far left, and upright-and-uptight businessmen on the right, Martin facilitated New Deal reforms in the state, but not enthusiastically. He was a political enigma, arguably more aligned with the needs of business concerns than the wants of public policy. Martin felt the need, at various times, to placate both the political left and right within his party, and the ideological gap between them at the time was immense. Assigning specific political pressures to his action against Fisher is tempting, but also perhaps prone to error. The political equations driving Martin during his governorship are insufficiently documented to select any one association and assign to it blame for the demise of Fisher.

Historians also should remain open to the very real possibility that the driving force behind Fisher's removal was not politics, at all. Martin said all along he considered Fisher simply to have worn out his welcome at the college. He grew weary, he said, of the yammering over the college president, by both sides, and just wanted the matter off his desk. Perhaps it was that simple, and he was telling the truth. Either way, the red scare histrionics that had swirled around Fisher several years before worked in Martin's favor when he decided to remove him, for whatever reason, later on. Whether Martin wanted Fisher gone simply because he had tired of him, because of Fisher's handling of money, or because of some deeper political motive, he had to know that, if he simply remained

mum about his reasons, the Sefrit-led crusade ultimately would fill any vacuum of curiosity sure to grow in the wake of the action. Whether this helped or hurt the governor politically remains an open question to this day, although his loss in the succeeding primary election argues for the latter.

Unfortunately, the historical silence created by the lack of any significant paper trail from his office argues both the conspiracy and banality theories of Fisher's removal with equal authority.⁸ Additional historical study of his business and political connections and motivations may well shed additional light on the political equation that would prove fatal to Charles H. Fisher.

Fisher's Place in History

What happened to Charles Fisher? Not one thing, but many. As revealed by this study, Fisher was an imperfect administrator who made enough mistakes to immerse himself in hot water, perhaps not quite boiling. He also surely was guilty of the infamous "lack of tact" cited by his employers, albeit usually in contentious situations where many people would react in the same manner. None of this, it is clear, would have been sufficient grounds for dismissal, alone or in combination, had the foundation for his presidency not already been weakened by the local red tide of the mid-1930s. The red-scare element of his firing remains relevant both for its unusual nature in the time and place in question, but also in the broader historical context of collisions between radical politics and academic freedom. The significance of the case in that regard, while lost in

⁸ Existing historical analyses of Martin's administration seem wholly incomplete, especially, given his critical role in administration of major New Deal public works projects, including the Columbia Basin Reclamation Project and the construction of Grand Coulee Dam.

public discourse, has long been evident to a few keen observers, including one participant in the Fisher struggle, faculty member Arthur C. Hicks. Hicks, discussing the general subject of academic freedom in Washington state in a 1975 oral history interview, offers a unique, convincing interpretation of the Fisher case as a victory, not a defeat, in the broader historical context. Discussing a former Washington state law requiring educators to sign loyalty oaths, Hicks remarked:

(T)hose of us who were here when that [loyalty oath] law was passed, signed it under mental reservations. We knew that we were taking a certain chance in signing the oath. That if we wanted to ... join organizations that we thought had a good aim or purpose or motive, we would have to be very careful that that organization was not on some blacklist or the other, in some way tied up with this particular oath. And then a person so charged would be brought up on charges of perjury. In signing the oath, he would have perjured himself, because he did belong to an organization that, according to Albert S. Canwell and others, had as its ultimate objective to overthrow the government of the United States by force or violence.

That was really what all of the agitation centering around Mr. Fisher in the '20s and '30s was about. We were hopeful that when the board allowed the Committee on Normal Protest to make all the charges they wanted to against the institution, and the board had weighed them and found them wanting, that that would stop them. It didn't, it just turned their energies from the campus to Olympia. They'd gotten the ear of the governor and he listened, I'm sure with awareness of the political implications of all this. And finally in the fall of 1938, for mainly, if not entirely political reasons, he told the board to fire Mr. Fisher ...

I think that firing Mr. Fisher did him [Martin] more harm politically than good. Well, the institution wasn't concerned with the politics of the matter. We understood the institution was interested in giving a good education and it did not welcome this kind of interference from the outside, whether it came from the editor of *The Herald* or from the governor's office. And so the faculty and the students and the alumni, they stood up and fought. They did not have sufficient clout to overturn the governor's decision, but at least they made their position plain: that they believe in academic freedom and the pursuit of knowledge, and they were not going to tailor their curriculum to the prejudices that were so rife in society at that time.

Well, our main ordeal came in the '30s with the Fisher case, and then of course there was World War Two, and before the end of the '30s, incidentally, the House

Committee on Un-American Activities was appointed, 1938, and only recently has been dissolved. It had a run of almost thirty years.⁹

Hicks was slyly making the case for the importance of the firing of Charles Fisher in the broader historical context of Red Scare politics in the United States. And the case serves as exactly that. The Fisher story is in fact a bridge between the nation's two traditionally defined Red Scare periods, both in the figurative and literal senses. It stands as powerful evidence that politics, at least in the far-flung Pacific Northwest, surely did not undergo a period of non-Red-Scare "normalcy" between the close of the First Red Scare after World War I and the dawn of the second, following World War II. Instead, at least in Northwest Washington state, angry sentiments lingering after what was seen as the civic betrayal of far-left groups during and after The Great War remained red-hot, barely below the surface, in many political circles. The American Legion, Pro-America, D.A.R and other groups providing membership for Frank Sefrit's anti-Fisher committee fit this definition. These citizens had been fearful of Reds – or at least seditious leftists – since the October Revolution of 1917. They were every bit as scared in the late 1920s, when opposition to Fisher's progressive regime at their hilltop college first began to simmer. And they were arguably more afraid in the early 1930s, when the Roosevelt Administration's increasingly aggressive New Deal tactics were implemented. Combined with the petty jealousies and other personal animosities that commonly linger as side

⁹ Arthur Hicks, interviewed by Don Eklund, March 6, 1975, box 2, folder 16, (reel-to-reel tape) Western Washington University Centennial Oral History Project Records, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham WA.

effects of radical changes in a political power structure, these sentiments grew into an overt, but powerful, political coalition on the shores of Bellingham Bay in the mid-1930s.

Aiding this development, surely, was the concurrent national emergence of other groups, similarly inspired by their own local political catfights, falling largely under the titular umbrella of the “super-patriot” forces found in various corners of America in the decade of the 1930s. Historians gazing backward at that era tend to dismiss these groups as silly affectations, based largely on the questionable character, and often bizarre behavior, of their leaders.¹⁰ But to dismiss them as irrelevant is historically negligent. Clearly, these groups, emboldened by a shared sense of purpose gained by the slipshod, but incredibly successful, communications of provocateurs such as Elizabeth Dilling, made their own serious political impact in some areas of the country. The campaign against Fisher in Bellingham, Washington is but one example.

The case fits tidily into the category of “Little Red Scares,” as described by historian Robert J. Goldstein in 2014:

The first “great” red scare also left many traces and the use the emergence of the second red scare reflected decades of developing American anti-communism which never disappeared. In fact, the period between the two great red scares were marked by frequent instances of political repression and anti-communism. While the two ‘great’ red scares and, often, their subcomponents, have become the subject of an enormous scholarly literature, the ‘little’ red scares in between them have left behind a dearth of scholarly traces, perhaps because much of the material deals with events scattered in time and space which never reached the intensity of the two great red scares.¹¹

¹⁰ Case in point, Arthur M. Schlesinger’s dismissal of the relevance of Elizabeth Dilling, who, he noted dryly, “. . . did bring the red scare into an authentically Marxian world, it was, alas, more Groucho than Karl.” Arthur M. Schlesinger, *The Age of Roosevelt. Vol. 3. The Politics of Upheaval*. (Heinemann, 1961), 87.

¹¹ Robert J. Goldstein, ed., *Little “Red Scares:” Anti-Communism and Political Repression in the United States, 1921-1946*, (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2014), xiv.

Goldstein, editor of a collection of individual studies of said “little red scares” in various facets of society, including politics, education, the workplace, and the struggles for civil and women’s rights, noted several common themes between them: One was the breadth and depth of conservative anti-communist coalitions that “lay in wait” (often under the guise of various clubs or service organizations) to act where allegedly seditious activity was afoot. Another was that the “sources and intensity of the little red scares varied from time to place and year to year.” But the general trend was for increased activity through the decade. This is illustrated by a Roosevelt-directed uptick in FBI monitoring of such groups by the mid-1930s, prompted by controversial battles over teachers’ loyalty oaths, as well as major strikes in San Francisco and Minneapolis.¹² Monumental governmental responses came amidst and immediately after the collective controversy created by these “little red scares” from 1938-1941: The Dies Committee, the 1939 Hatch Act barring “subversives” from federal employment, and the 1940 Smith Act outlawing violent overthrow of the government.¹³ Count the Fisher affair among these red scares – “little” in the national context, but looming large in the communities from which they sprang.

The campaign against Fisher stands as a notable example of a little-understood, red scare-inspired assault on a public institution of higher learning – a campaign that ultimately succeeded. To the careful observer, the fate that befell Fisher is significant in the many ways that it presages the looming activities of Red Scare groups about to unfold during the passions of the Cold War. It also provides significant historical context and

¹² Goldstein, xv.

¹³ Ibid.

connectivity to many other instances in which Americans, for reasons real or imagined, have responded to visceral fear with what might be termed panicked political expediency.

Worthy of note is that tactics and techniques adopted by the committee bent on Fisher's destruction were largely organic in nature: In this phase of proto-anti-communism, vanguards of the fight against the Red Menace had no real playbook to follow (short of the decidedly non-subtle strategic "outing" strategies outlined by Dilling, et al). Many of their means seemed to evolve naturally according to events. Foremost among these, in the Fisher case, was the powerfully effective tool of guilt-by-association, deployed deftly, if unsuccessfully in the short term, by Sefrit via his presentation of selective lists of "seditious" books, authors and campus guest lecturers. (Interestingly, Sefrit's most effective use of this tactic might have come after Fisher was fired, when the editor used the identities and affiliations of those protesting the action to justify the decision itself.) Also evident in the Fisher case was the early red baiter's effective tool of coalition-building among like-minded political groups. Rallying against the creep of communism created a common rallying cry for numerous otherwise disparate groups in Bellingham in the 1930s. It would do the same for national political groups in the coming age of McCarthyism. Additionally, the red-obsessed protagonists in the Fisher case seemed, at least, to have been early adopters of what would become another staple of the McCarthy movement – "blacklisting" of suspected seditionists after an intense period of public scrutiny. The shifting of the campaign against Fisher to career ruination after his removal from campus, via communications to prospective new employers, as was suggested by some contemporary observers, bears uncanny resemblance to successful

blacklisting efforts that would unfold in the anti-communist movement of the Cold War. Further comparisons of tactics employed against perceived “reds” during the early Red Scare years, the interwar “little red scare” era, and the later Cold War years would provide interesting insight into the evolution of the ideology – and the tactics of its adherents – during the first half of the twentieth century.

In all of these ways, the Fisher case stands not only as a figurative connector between traditionally defined Red Scares, but as what surely qualifies as an exceedingly rare, direct link from one to the other: “First Red Scare” political operatives still seething from leftist activity in the Northwest during the first two decades of the twentieth century launched the campaign against Fisher. They or their children handed off the “Red” dossiers – literally, in the case of Fisher – to investigators and agitators of the Second Red Scare, in this case to investigators assigned to the red-baiting Albert Canwell Committee of 1948. As discussed at the outset of this study, the more-isolated U.S. red-baiting activity of the interwar period has been little explored by historians in general. Of particular interest to future scholars might be the fact that the “outbreaks” of anti-communism during the interwar era, both in the Pacific Northwest and elsewhere, consistently found targets in public education, particularly academia.

This is not surprising given the social and political forces exhibited by the George S. Counts-aligned “social reconstructionists” of the 1930s, who brazenly embarked on a mission to use public education to push America toward a more collectivist society. This movement made academics, and academia itself, easy targets of manipulators of public opinion; the national red scare aimed at college campuses by William Randolph Hearst is

a prime example. As discussed above, that highly public effort, focused on universities in large cities that also were served by Hearst newspapers, may well have granted a sense of legitimacy and purpose to, or provided political “cover” to, like-minded operatives in more far-flung corners of the nation – places such as Bellingham, Washington., where the provocative agitation of Counts, et al, proved to be pure, red meat to rabid red-baiters.

Unlike the Hearst effort, which relied on subterfuge to create fake news stories painting university faculty and administrators as reds, the Bellingham group seemed comparatively sincere in its assault; members seemed either incapable of, or at least unwilling to, make a distinction between the brand of reconstructionism being espoused from the halls of Columbia University and the less-doctrinaire approach adopted by Charles Fisher in the more-modest classrooms of Western Washington College of Education. In this sense, Fisher and his own version of progressive education exist as unwitting misfits in their immediate surroundings. By sheer twist of fate – Fisher’s decision to leapfrog the country and move west — the college campus in Bellingham represented, even in educational circles of the day, an unusually progressive institution in an unusually conservative community, one still more beholden to the influences of its vitriolic political past, and, arguably, a “frontier” mindset than the enlightened ideas of the emerging New Deal America.

Given this, an ugly public collision such as the Fisher case, in hindsight, was more likely to occur in Bellingham than not. The long-running, intensely ugly battle between Bellingham’s conservative newspaper and its upstart, liberal radio station give a sense of the political passions at play here. It might have been more of a matter of when,

not if, the local higher education outlet got caught in the midst of this maelstrom. Fisher, the face of progressivism in the midst of an arch-conservative backlash, was an easy target for a local “little red scare” – one that ultimately would serve to spoil his career. Whether his awareness or acceptance of this fact at an earlier stage might have brought a different outcome is uncertain. But the president made it clear during his time under siege that he had been warned of these political realities before he ever made the large leap west to take the job in 1923. He gambled that calmer voices would prevail. And he lost.

Bellingham Anti-communism and the New Deal

The Fisher case also raises interesting questions about the larger role of the New Deal in the foment of early anti-communist passions, both in the Northwest and in America. While it did not emerge as a major theme, dotted amongst the paper trail left by Sefrit campaign are frequent references, by combatants on both sides, to the political relationship between friends and foes of Fisher and their relative degree of enthusiasm for, acquiescence to, or outright hostility toward the programs of the Roosevelt Administration’s New Deal programs. The Sefrit files, and indeed his own editorials, contain numerous references to ever-more-alarming (from the perspective of the political right) tactics of the federal government, many of which affected business and civic affairs in Bellingham in a profound manner. Frequent references, by both friend and foe, to Fisher as a “New Deal Liberal” further illustrate this connection.¹⁴ It also is worth noting

¹⁴ “His political and social views were essentially ‘New Dealish,’ faculty member Hicks remarked. “He was a good liberal, with an open mind, and misunderstood because he had a rather liberal view of the Soviet Union in the 1930s. He was never within a mile of what you might call an orthodox leftist or communist or Marxist.” Arthur C. Hicks, interviewed by Monroe McLaughlin, Nov. 20, 1970, box 28, folder 6, (unedited reel-to-reel tape recording), Rogan Jones Papers.

that the increasing association, among active anti-communists, of the New Deal with communism not only increased markedly during the period of the assaults on Fisher, but gained federal-level sanction, in a sense, when the Congressional Dies Committee chose, by the end of the decade, to focus much of its attention on alleged communistic influences on the Roosevelt Administration. Further study of this phenomenon, both in connection to this case and to general politics of this era would seem beneficial to understanding the coalescing of interwar anti-communist thought into what would become a mainstream political ideology during the Cold War.¹⁵

Fisher's Legacy: Job Lost, Principle Won

The fate of Charles Fisher contains historical lessons relevant to numerous fields of study. But for the non-academically inclined observer, it also presents an easily missed ultimate outcome, one worthy of remembrance. The Fisher case, commonly viewed as a victory for forces of conservatism and a loss for the cause of academic freedom, also might rightfully be viewed in the opposite context.

To restate what should have long ago been obvious, it is clear that Charles H. Fisher was not a communist, nor a communist sympathizer. Perceptions to the contrary, fueled to some degree by his post-college career, are inaccurate. Not a single piece of documentation exists that Fisher subscribed to what might accurately be termed

¹⁵ Some historians have argued that a lack of historical examination of “grassroots” anti-communism trends of the interwar period as “politics of pretext” has led to common misunderstandings of later, Cold War anti-communism, by leading historians such as Richard Hofstadter, as “an episode of delusion or hysteria.” In fact, World War II and its aftermath, notes historian Jennifer Luff, “suddenly elevated a protean popular American ideology into a core tenet of United States domestic and foreign policy. We need to know more about early American anti-communism to understand how and why that happened.” Jennifer Luff, review of *Little “Red Scares”: Anti-Communism and Political Repression in the United States, 1921-46*, *Reviews in History*, (review no. 1730) DOI: 10.14296/RiH/2014/1730.

communist philosophy, nor, certainly, that he attempted to inculcate students at his college with communist ideals. The fact that some of his expressed ideals and societal goals were shared by actual communists does not change this fact. The historical record is equally clear that he was not a seditionist, an atheist, a practitioner or advocate of “free love,” nor a traitor to the nation he loved and the democratic institutions to which he devoted much of his energy throughout his life.

He was by most accounts a brilliant educator, a passionate advocate of intellectual inquiry, a challenger of conventional wisdom and most importantly, an earnest, determined reformer, not a radical. His personal side reflects the professional. Fisher was an engaged father, a devoted husband, a capable first baseman, an amateur mountaineer, and by some accounts, a decent poker player. He was thrust by time and fate into a jetstream of national and local political foment far beyond his own control. His response, while clearly flawed in its intended outcome, might also be rightfully viewed in hindsight as heroic.

Fisher, unbeknownst to most, could have taken the easy way out of a vicious, relentless attack on both his career and character: A broad side door was opened, via a temporary position at the University of Washington. The embattled educator could have slipped through it, moved on to another presidency elsewhere, and faded into history as a more-obscure, but decidedly less-troubled, man of import and principle. But such an exit was contrary to his being. Charles Fisher, as noted above by his friend and colleague Hicks, stood and fought. His faculty stood and fought. The students who revered him as a leader stood and fought. They lost the day, but in many ways won the future. “If we had

not fought,” Hicks would observe many years later, “it’s very possible that this institution would have been turned over to the political henchmen of Governor Martin in 1939. That did not happen.”¹⁶

Because they fought, a meddling governor kept his hands off Western, and its faculty built upon the legacy of intellectual passion Fisher had instilled in the college that is now Western Washington University. Because they fought, an aging newspaper editor gradually slunk away, perhaps aware, perhaps not, that the alarming activity on campus he so eagerly and angrily opposed was not, in fact, a communist conspiracy, but simply the new normal, delivered by Fisher slightly ahead of its time, for higher education across the nation. Because they fought, the flawed legal structure that allowed the governor to pressure trustees into firing a beloved educator changed, over time, to better insulate college authorities from direct political influence.

Fisher’s removal, an under-appreciated example of borderline political repression occurring in a formative period for American anti-communism, is a notable black mark on Washington state history, especially in the arena of academic freedom. Faculty member Hicks did not engage in hyperbole when he termed the event “one of the most undemocratic acts that ever occurred in the history of education in this state.” The only comparably “high-handed act,” he also correctly noted, was the forced removal, also by a governor, of University of Washington President Henry Suzzallo in 1926. “No such act has been perpetrated since.”¹⁷

¹⁶ Hicks, McLaughlin interview.

¹⁷ Hicks, McLaughlin interview.

And here lies the lasting legacy of Charles Fisher. Ultimately, his note of resignation shortly before his death that “What I stood for has been wiped out” may reflect his sentiment at the time, but it does not define his historical legacy. In fact, the broader principles he stood for live on. His decision to fight brought change – too late for him, but arguably just in time for the principle of academic freedom in his adopted home state. Fisher was not the first, or only, Washington state college leader to pay for his principles with his job. But because he fought, he has stood ever since as the last.



Charles H. Fisher at his desk in 1938, on the occasion of his 15th anniversary as president of the Bellingham State Normal School/Western Washington College of Education. (Campus History Collection, Western Libraries Heritage Resources, Western Washington University.)

Appendix I

List of Speakers Who Addressed Students of Bellingham State Normal School

Jan. 15, 1932 to March 29, 1939¹

1932

- Jan. 15 **Lenox Robinson**, Irish Playwright. Lecture on Irish Dramatists, and the Abbey Theatre, Dublin.
- Jan. 19 **Wesley Renney**, Citywide Boys' Secretary of the Seattle Young Men's Christian Association. Lecture on "Present Day Europe."
- Jan. 22 **James Shelley**, Professor of Education and Lecturer on the History of Fine Arts at Canterbury College, New Zealand. Lecture on "Drama: Theory and Practice."
- Jan. 29 **Captain Sir Hubert Wilkins**, Arctic Explorer. Lecture on "By Submarine to the North Pole."
- Feb. 18 **Reverend Joseph A. Stevenson**, of the Department of Education of the National Board of the Presbyterian Church.
- Feb. 19 **William Trufant Foster**, Director of the Pollack Foundation for Economic Research.
- Feb. 23 **Walter B. Litcomb**, Lawyer, of Bellingham. Address on George Washington.
- Feb. 24 **Dr. Herbert Gowen**, Professor of Oriental History, University of Washington. Lecture on China and Manchuria.
- Mar. 15 **Jehan Warliker**, Prince Seesodia of India. Lecture on his travels and investigation in the India of today.

¹ Fisher to Dr. Stephenson Smith, American Association of University Professors, Eugene, Ore., May 11, 1939, File on Fisher case records, President's Office, Accession 94-12, Box 1, Western Washington University Archives. Specificity of lecturers' titles, occupations and choice of topics varies widely in this list. Aside from minor typographical and punctuation corrections, and boldfacing of the names, it is presented here as it exists in the WWU archives. Note that the list ends in March, 1939. It was part of a packet of documents related to the Fisher case compiled by Fisher and/or his staff in the spring of 1939, and sent to investigators with the American Association of University Professors studying the case. Fisher presumably left a copy of the same packet for college archival purposes when he left campus several months later. The list does not include speakers appearing off-campus at public events, some of which were recommended to students by faculty. Members of the Committee on Normal Protest assembled their own annotated lists of campus speakers, which can be found in the Bellingham Herald collection on Charles H. Fisher, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Bellingham, WA.

- Apr. 11 **Dr. Ernest Horn**, Professor of Education and Director of Elementary Schools at the University of Iowa. Lecture on "Children Must Succeed."
- Apr. 15 **Dr. E.N. Hutchinson** of the Washington State Dairy Association. Lecture on the food value of milk.
- Apr. 22 **Dr. Dorothy Reed**, Field Secretary of the National Council for Prevention of War. Lecture on disarmament.
- May 16 **Mr. W.E. Priestly**, Lecture on Manchuria.
- May 18 **Professor A.R. Lord**, Inspector of Schools of British Columbia. "The Organization and Supervision of the Schools of British Columbia."
- May 20 **Ellery Walter**, Author and Traveller. Report of his interviews with von Hindenburg, Mussolini, Pope Pius XI, and Stalin.
- June 5 **Reverend L. Wendell Fifield**, Paster of Plymouth Congregational Church, Seattle. Baccalaureate address.
- June 9 **Dr. Lyle M. Spencer**, President, University of Washington. Commencement address.
- June 17 **Anne F. Hodgkins**, National Amateur Athletic Association. Address on Sports and Sportsmanship.
- June 21 **Vaughan MacCaughey**, former Superintendent of Public Instruction for the Hawaiian Islands, and Professor of Botany at the College of Hawaii. Illustrated lecture on Hawaiian trails and mountains.
- June 24 **Dr. Ned. H. Dearborn**, Professor of Education, New York University.
- June 28 **Dr. H.B. Benninghoff**, Professor of Political Science, Waseda University, Tokyo, Japan. Series of lectures on Japanese life and culture.
- July 19 **Professor Archer B. Hulbert**, Director of the Stewart Commission on Western History at Colorado College. Illustrated lecture, "On the Oregon Trail."
- Aug. 2 **Mrs. Dorothy Fay Gould**, Seattle, Chairman of the Patriotic Service Committee of the Washington Stae Society of Colonial Dames of America. Illustrated lecture with slides on History of the State of Washington.
- Aug. 8 **Dr. Henry Newmann**, Author and Leader in the Brooklyn Society for Ethical Culture. Series of lectures on recent noted books, and other subjects.

- Aug. 16 **Mr. Sunder Joshi**, Professor of Oriental Culture at the San Francisco State Teacher's College. Lecture on "Contemporary Problems in Hindu Sociology."
- Oct. 4 **Mr. Upton Close**, Traveler and Lecturer on World Affairs. Lecture on "Behind the News in China."
- Oct. 11 **George E. Griffith**, Public Relations Department, U.S. Forestry Service. "Illustrated Lecture on Green Gold."
- Nov. 1 **Dr. Samuel B. Schmalhausen**, Author. Lecture on "The Use and Abuse of Freedom."

1933

- Jan. 3 **Maurice Sachs** of Paris. Lecture on "Modern Youth in America Compared With the Youth of France."
- Jan. 18 **Dr. Inazo Nitobe**, Japanese Statesman and Author. Lecture on the "Interest of Japan in Manchuria."
- Jan. 27 **William Henry Chamberlin**, Journalist, Correspondent for the Christian Science Monitor in Russia. Lecture on "The Balance-Sheet of the Five Year Plan."
- Jan. 25 **Reverend Ernest M. Whitesmith**, Eugene, Oregon. "An Evening with Robert Burns and His People." Illustrated lecture.
- Jan. 31 **President Elam J. Anderson**, Linfield College, McMinnville, Oregon, Former Professor of Education at the University of Shanghai, China. Lecture on the "China-Japan Question."
- Feb. 3 **Dr. Dorothy Reed**. Lecture on "Current International Affairs."
- Feb. 20 **Baron Richard von Kuhlman**, German Statesman. Lecture on "German Leaders: Hindenburg, Bruening, Braun, and Hitler."
- Mar. 1 **Lord Ronald Gorell**, British Statesman. Lecture on "Literature and Modern Life."
- Mar. 28 **Dr. Charles Susan Clark**, Professor of Languages, City College of N.Y. Lecture on "How Foreign Countries Treat the Liquor Problem."
- Mar. 31 **Johan Warliker** of India. Lecture on the effect of British rule in India.
- Apr. 3 **Lincoln Steffens**, Author and Journalist. Lecture on present day problems.

- Apr. 7 **Dr. Christine Calitzi**, Instructor of French and Sociology at Scripps College, Claremont, Calif. Lecture on: "The Social, Political and Economic Conditions in Mexico."
- Apr. 18 **Dr. Ambrose I. Suhrie**, Professor of Education, N.Y. University. Lecture: "Making and Keeping the Schools Democratic."
- Apr. 19 **James E. (Pussyfoot) Johnson**, formerly enforcement agent of federal liquor laws in the Indian Territory, now Oklahoma. Lecture on the Eighteenth Amendment.
- May 5 **Dr. Otis W. Freeman**, Instructor in Geography at the State Normal School, Cheney, Washington. Lecture on the Geography of Eastern Washington.
- June 4 **Reverend Fred W. Shorter**, Pastor of Pilgrim Congregational Church, Seattle. Baccalaureate Address.
- June 8 **Dr. G.G. Sedgewick**, Professor and head of the Dept. of English Literature, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C. Commencement Address.
- July 7 **President Fran E. Baker**, Milwaukee State Teachers College.
- July 14 **Professor A.M. Harding**, Dept. of Math and Astronomy, University. Illustrated Lecture on "Mother Earth."
- July 18 **Dr. G.G. Sedgewick**, University of British Columbia. Lecture on: "What is a University For?"
- Sept. 29 **Annah Lena Elgstrom**, of Sweden. Lecture on "The Part Taken by the Swedes in the American Revolution."
- Oct. 11 **Mr. R.W. Dunlap**, of the Scottish Society of Vancouver, B.C. Illustrated Lecture on Robert Burns and the Scotland of Burns.
- Oct. 23 **Mr. Syud Hossain** of India. Lecture on "Eastern and Western Ideals."
- Oct. 31 **Mr. A.L. Schafer**, Manager of the American Red Cross Society on the Pacific Coast. Lecture on: "The Purpose and Organization of the Red Cross."
- Nov. 17 **George E. Sokolsky**, Author. Lecture: "The Tinderbox of Asia."

1934

- Jan. 12 **Charles Morgan**, Architect, Chicago Illinois. Lecture: "Modern Art and Architecture."

- Jan. 26 **Mr. J.J. Handsaker**, Secretary, National Council for Prevention of War. Lecture on: Recent Events at the League of Nations, Geneva.
- Feb. 6 **President William M. Landeen**, Walla Walla College. Traveler and Educator. Lecture on "Post-War Germany."
- Mar. 2 **Maurice Hindus**, Author and Traveler. Lecture on: "The Soul of Russia."
- Mar. 9 **Peter Manniche**, Founder and Principal of the International Peoples' College, Elsinore, Denmark. 2 lectures on: "The Social Consequences of the Danish Folk-High Schools; and Grundtvig and the Danish Folk-High Schools."
- Mar. 13 **Captain Gypsy Pat Smith**, World War Veteran. Born and raised in a Gypsy Camp. Lecture on: "The Romance of Romany Camps."
- Apr. 4 **Dr. Alexander Meiklejon**, Professor of Philosophy, University of Wisconsin. Lecture on: "Significant Living."
- Apr. 6 **Floyd Schmoie**, Scientist and Naturalist, Puget Sound Academy of Science, University of Washington. Illustrated Lecture on "Down Through the Ages."
- Apr. 17 **Howard Scott**, Technocrat No. 1. Lecture on Technocracy, and present conditions in the social and economic world of today.
- Apr. 18 **Mrs. Earl J. Johnston**, Field Secretary for the Washington Tuberculosis Ass'n. Lecture on the causes and prevention of tuberculosis.
- Apr. 20 **R.L. Fromme**, U.S. Forestry Service. Illustrated Lecture on the preservation of the forest and fire prevention.
- Apr. 26 **Don Walker**, Boeing Airplane School, Oakland, California. Illustrated Lecture.
- May 1 **Alfred M. Bingham**, Executive Secretary, Farmer Labor Political Federation. Address: "Economic Fairy Tales."
- May 11 **Stanley Piper**, Architect, Bellingham. Illustrated Lecture on "The Modern Architecture of the Chicago Exposition."
- May 15 **Dr. J.A. Pearce**, Dominion Astrophysical Observatory, Victoria, B.C. Illustrated Lecture on: "Exploring Space."
- May 18 **Dean Vernon McKenzie**, School of Journalism, Univ. of Wash. Lecture on: "Do You Really Want to Write?"

- May 28 **Reno Odlin**, Past Commander, American Legion, Vice-Pres., First National Bank, Seattle. Address on the American Constitution and American Institutions.
- June 3 **Dr. E.C. Wagenknecht**, Department of English, University of Washington. Baccalaureate address.
- June 7 **Dr. W.A. Carrothers**, University of British Columbia, and Chairman, Economic Council, Province of British Columbia. Commencement Address.
- June 19 **Dr. Alonzo F. Meyers**, Professor of Education, N.Y. University. Two addresses: "Modern Tendencies in Education," and "What Lies Ahead in Teacher Training."
- June 26 **Dr. G.G. Sedgewick**, University of British Columbia. Address: "Playing on the Surface of the Arts."
- July 2-3 **George T. Berry**, Chairman of the Junior Red Cross, Pacific Branch.
- July 9 **Dr. T.F. Kane**, former president of the University of Wash. Address on the demands of a college education to meet the needs of our present day life.
- July 16 **Roy Malcom**, Professor of Political Science, University of Southern California. Address: "The Promise of American Democracy."
- July 30-Aug.3 **Dr. Henry Newmann**, Leader of the Ethical Culture Society, Brooklyn, N.Y. Series of addresses, morning and evening.
- Oct. 1 **Dan McCowan**, Canadian Naturalist. Lecture: "The Canadian Rockies in Picture and Story."
- Oct. 22 **President William M. Landeen**, Walla Walla College. Lecture on Present Day Germany and her Problems.
- Oct. 26 **Professor Frank C. Williston**, College of Puget Sound. Lecture on conditions in the Balkans.
- Oct. 30 **Glenn L. Morris**, popularized Science demonstration and lecture.
- Nov. 16 **Lorado Taft**, American Sculptor. Lecture: "One Hundred Masterpieces of Sculpture – Greek to Modern."
- Nov. 21 **Jim Wilson**, Explorer. Illustrated Lecture on Africa and its Peoples.
- Nov. 27 **Richard Finnie**, Arctic Explorer. Lecture: "The Last Frontier."

1935

- Feb. 5 **Dudley Crafts Watson**, Chicago Art Institute. Illustrated Lecture on the Art Exhibit at the Chicago Century of Progress Fair.
- Feb. 15 **Dr. No-Yong Park**, Author. Lecture on: "Japanese Expansion and World Peace."
- Mar. 1 **Dr. Emil Lengyel**, Journalist, Lawyer, Author. Lecture: "The Revolt of European Youth."
- Mar. 8 Symposium on Munitions by members of the **Varsity Debating Squad** of the University of Washington, under the direction of Professor Horace. G. Rahskopf, of the Department of English.
- Mar. 15 **Matthew W. Hill**, representing the Scientific Temperance Foundation. Lecture on alcohol and its effects.
- Mar. 18 **Jennie Lee**, former member of the British House of Commons. Lecture on "The Decline of English Liberty."
- Apr. 5 **J.J. Handsaker** of the National Council for the Prevention of War. Lecture on our relations with Japan.
- Apr. 23 **Richard G. Montgomery**, author of "The Whiteheaded Eagle," a biography of a pioneer of the Pacific Northwest, John McLoughlin. Lecture: "The problems involved in writing the Whiteheaded Eagle."
- May 14 **Vernon McKenzie**, Dean of the School of Journalism, University of Washington. Lecture: "The Crisis in Europe."
- May 28 **Dr. Irving E. Miller**, Dept. of Education, Washington State Normal School [Bellingham]. Lecture: "The Constitution of the U.S. From a Layman's Point of View." Memorial Day Assembly.
- June 9 **Reverend Geoffrey W. Stafford**, Pastor of University Temple, Seattle. Baccalaureate Address.
- June 13 **Dr. G.W. Weir**, Minster of Education, Province of British Columbia. Commencement Address.
- July 23 **Dr. Thomas Barclay**, Professor of Political Science, Stanford University. Lecture: "Democracy in Transition."
- Aug. 6 **Dr. Stuart A. Queen**, Professor of Sociology, Washington University, St. Louis. Lecture: "Social Work in the Light of History."

- Aug. 13 **Mrs. Louise Van Ogle**, Professor of Music, University of Washington. Lecture on Sibelius and Finland.
- Aug. 20 **Dr. G.G. Sedgewick**, Professor of English, University of British Columbia. Lecture: “Variations on a Theme from Anthony to Cleopatra.”
- Oct. 11 **Wm. Clark**, Secretary, Students Volunteer Movement. Lecture on Christian service in the foreign field.
- Oct. 17 **Sigmund Spaeth**. Lecture on how to listen to music.
- Oct. 22 **Burton Holmes**, World Traveler. Two illustrated Lectures: “London and Rural England,” and “Southern Europe: The French Riviera and Through Spain and Portugal.”
- Oct. 29 **Arthur C. Pillbury**, Scientist. Soil-less plant culture and miracles of nature.
- Nov. 5 **Julian B. Arnold**, Son of Sir Edwin Arnold, Author of “The Light of Asia” Lecture: “Closeups of Great Personalities.”
- Dec. 5 **Norman Hapgood**. Lecture: “Is National Recovery an Illusion or Reality?”
- 1936**
- Jan. 17 **James Williams**. Lecture on Liquid Air.
- Jan. 21 **Ann Morgan**. Lecture on Political Affairs in the United States.
- Jan. 24 **Lt. Com. Stewart F. Bryant**, Retired United States Navy. Lecture: “National Security, Military, Economic, and Political.”
- Feb. 6 **S. Miles Bouton**, Associated Press Foreign Representative. Lecture on Germany.
- Feb. 13 **Dean Vernon McKenzie**, School of Journalism, University of Washington. Lecture: “How to Become a Writer.”
- Mar. 10 **Dr. Dewal Motwani**. Lecture: “The New Asia.”
- Apr. 17 **Dr. George Earl Raiguel**. Two lectures on Hitler, Mussolini, Russia and Spain.
- May 12 **Branson De Cou**, Illustrated Lecture on Ireland.

- May 19 **Reverend Everett R. Clinchy**, Presbyterian Minister, and **Reverend Michale Ahern**, S.J., Catholic Jesuit Priest, **Rabbi Henry Berkowitz**, Beth Israel Synagogue of the National Conference of Jews and Christians. Joint Lecture.
- May 29 Memorial Day Address. **Victor Hoppe**, Western Washington College. On the soldiers who gave their lives in the World War.
- June 7 **Dr. Edward Wagenknecht**, Dept. of English, University of British Columbia. Commencement Address: "A Guess at Shakespeare's Philosophy."
- June 16 **Rabbi Adolph Fink**, Representing the National Conference of Jews and Christians. Lecture on Jewish contributions to our national culture.
- July 28 **Royal Arch Gunnison**, Foreign Correspondent, Associated Press. Lecture on the position of the Press in World Politics.
- Aug. 7 **Mrs. A.M. Young**, Seattle Museum of Art. Lecture on Modern Art and recent acquisitions in the Seattle Museum.
- Aug. 11 **J. Henry White**. Lecture: "A Day in China," Highlights of Chinese Civilization.
- Aug. 14 **Edgar C. Rain**, Illustrated Lecture, "The Land of the Midnight Sun."
- Oct. 9 **Dr. Kewal Motvarre**, two lectures: "India in the West," and "Indian Philosophy and a Study in Emerson."
- Oct. 13 **Dr. David Seabury**, Psychologist, Lecture on Mental Health.
- Oct. 30 **Burton Holmes**, Illustrated Lecture on New England.
- Nov. 10 **Sigmund Spaeth**, Lecture: "Great Symphonies – How to Recognize and Remember Them."
- Nov. 18 **Elmer Rice**, Playwright. Lecture on Modern Drama: "The Future of the Theatre."
- Nov. 24 **Dr. William Trufant Foster**, Director, Pollack Foundation for Economic Research. Lecture on the Modern Change in Economic Theories regarding production and consumption.

1937

- Jan. 19 **Eagle Plume**, Lecture on Indian Lore, Life and Culture.
- Feb. 5 **Dr. James Marshall**, Scientist, Illustrated Lecture on Australia.

- Feb. 23 **Ludwig Lewisohn**, Author and Literary Critic. Lecture on Modern Culture.
- Mar. 5 **Rabbi Samuel Koch**. Lecture on the Talmud.
- Mar. 12 **Harrison Brown**, Institute of International Relations, New York City. Lecture on International Relations between the United States and European Powers.
- Apr. 2 **Dr. William Landeen**, President of Walla Walla College. Lecture on Germany.
- Apr. 13 **Major James Sawders**, Illustrated Lecture: "Tropical Brazil."
- Apr. 19 **Dr. George Earl Raiguel**, Lecture: "The U.S. and World Affairs."
- Apr. 27 **Hillis Lory**, formerly on the faculty of Hokkaido Imperial University, Tokyo, Japan. Lecture: "Understanding Japan."
- May 14 **Branson De Cou**, Illustrated Lecture on the Mountains and Deserts of California.
- May 18 **Frank Davison**. Lecture: "What the Coronation Means to the British."
- June 10 **Dr. Norman F. Cole**, Professor of English, Reed College. Commencement Address.
- June 29 **Rabbi George Fox**, Advisor of Jewish Students, University of Chicago. Lecture: Judaism and Democracy.
- July 6 **John Butler**, Artist. Illustrated Lecture: "The Byzantine Art in the Monasteries at Mount Athos."
- Aug. 3 **Floyd Schmoe**, Director of the Marine Museum, Seattle. Illustrated Lecture: "I Live Under the Sea."
- Aug. 6 **Frank Davison**, Lecture on Rudyard Kipling.
- Aug. 10 **Dr. G.G. Sedgewick**, Professor of English, University of British Columbia.
- Aug. 18 **Dr. Bruce Raup**, Teachers College, Columbia University. Lecture on teaching the social sciences today.
- Oct. 26 **Eagle Plume**. Lecture on the Blackfoot Indians.
- Nov. 2 **Hans Helfritz**. Illustrated Lecture on Arabia: "Land Without Shade."
- Nov. 3 **Dr. A.J. Brace**, Secretary, International Y.M.C.A. Lecture on China.

- Nov. 16 **C. Ray Hansen**, Criminologist. Lecture: "The G-Man Angle."
- 1938**
- Jan. 11 **Z. Ying Loh**, Chinese Consul at Seattle. Lecture on the Sino-Japanese Conflict.
- Jan. 17 **Kenji Ito**, Japanese Lawyer in Seattle. Lecture on the Sino-Japanese Conflict.
- Jan. 18 **Ben Ames**, United Press Foreign Correspondent. Illustrated Lecture on Spain.
- Jan. 25 **Imogene Wordell**. Travelogue, Personal Experiences. "Gypsying Through Europe."
- Feb. 1 **Arville Belstad**, Pianist. Lecture on "Humor in Harmony."
- Feb. 4 **Vilhjalmur Stefansson**, Arctic Explorer. Two Lectures: Illustrated Lecture on "The Friendly Arctic" and an illustrated lecture on "The Northward Course of Europe."
- Feb. 8 **Dr. Nu Shih**, Chinese Minister of Education. Lecture on the Sino-Japanese Conflict.
- Feb. 15 **Upton Close**. Lecture: "The Illusion of Empire."
- Feb. 18 **Frank Davison**. Lecture: "American Shrines in England."
- Apr. 8 **Betty Lowman**, Student at the University of Washington. Personal experiences on a canoe trip from Puget Sound to Alaska by herself.
- Apr. 12 **Major James Sawders**. Illustrated Lecture on Scandinavia: "Sensible Scandinavia."
- Apr. 15 **John G. Hanna**. Lecture on National Youth Hostels in U.S. and Abroad.
- May 27 Memorial Day Address by the **Reverend Dwight C. Smith**, Pastor, Congregational Church, Bellingham, Wash.
- June 5 **Reverend William Brewing**, Pastor of the Wesleyan United Church, Vancouver, B.C. Baccalaureate Address.
- June 9 **Dr. G.G. Sedgewick**, Professor of English, University of British Columbia. Commencement Address.
- July 12 **John Claire Montoith**. Illustrated Lecture on "Deserts of the Northwest."

- July 15 **Ira Dilworth**, Professor of English, University of British Columbia. Lecture on the modern poets: "Poetry and Life."
- July 19 **President George W. Nash**, Yankton College, South Dakota. Lecture on personal experiences and travels in New Mexico.
- July 29 **Dr. No Yong Park**, Lecture on China.
- Aug. 5 **Dr. David Snedden**, formerly Professor of Education, Teachers College, Columbia University, N.Y. Lecture on methods in progressive education.
- Oct. 4 **Captain Warwick Tompkins**. Illustrated Lecture on West Around Cape Horn in a Sailboat.
- Oct. 18 **Jim Thorpe**, Indian, Star of Carlisle Indian Football Team. Lecture on Reminiscences of a Football Hero.
- Oct. 21 **Dr. Nolson and Miss Thornton**, of the Anti-Tuberculosis League.
- Nov. 1 **Kenneth Cole**, Professor of Social Science, University of Washington. Lecture on the United States Constitution.
- Nov. 4 **Howard Cleaves**, Naturalist. Illustrated Lecture on wild animal life: "Night Life in the Wilderness."
- Nov. 29 **Wilfrid Laurier Husband**. Illustrated lecture on Sweden.

1939

- Jan. 6 **Dr. William Landeen**, formerly president of Walla Walla College. Lecture on Central Europe.
- Jan. 24 **Dr. Alonzo Myers**, Professor of Education, N.Y.U. Lecture on the teaching of social studies.
- Jan. 27 **Dr. Arthur C. Pillsbury**, Naturalist. Illustrated Lecture on Plants and flowers of Hawaii.
- Jan. 31 **Brayton Eddy**, Scientist. Illustrated lecture on insects: "What Good Are Insects?"
- Feb. 14 **Ernest Wolff**, Lecture-Recital on the German Lied.
- Feb. 15 **Major General Walter C. Sweeney**, U.S. Army. Lecture on Armaments and Preparedness.
- Feb. 21 **Lieutenant Commander Stewart F. Bryant**, Retired U.S. Navy Officer. Lecture on the Crisis in Europe.

- Feb. 24 **Harrison Brown**, Institute of International Relations, New York City.
Lecture: "The Munich Pact."
- Feb. 28 **Carl C. Mose**, Sculptor: Lecture: "How a Sculptor Works."
- Mar. 28 **David E. Norcross**, National [Council] for Prevention of War. Lecture on
"Educational Approach to World Peace."
- Mar. 29 **Max Gene Nohl**, Scientist. Lecture on Deep Sea Diving.

Appendix IILetter from veteran faculty member Linus Alonzo Kibbe, submitted to college Board ofTrustees at Charles H. Fisher hearing, May 22, 1935

In response to your inquiry regarding my opinion as to the alleged Communistic propaganda at the Normal School assemblies, and as to the alleged disloyalty of some of our students or faculty members, allow me to express my own personal opinion, based upon my eighteen years as a member of the Normal School faculty.

In order that my point of view may be clearer, I wish to say that I have attended the Normal School assemblies very regularly, having missed not more than three or four during the eighteen years, except while I was on vacation. Also, may I state that I have been a member of one of the old-line political parties for many years, and have never been aligned with any of the so-called radical groups; also, that I claim Mayflower ancestry, and that several of my ancestors took part in the Revolutionary War, on the American side.

I can say frankly that I have never heard any sign of un-American propaganda at any of the lectures delivered at any of the assemblies. The lectures have presented various sides of public questions, but none has been of a dangerous type. These addresses have been very stimulating and have inspired careful thinking among students, faculty and outsiders who have been so fortunate as to hear them. Of course, not everything that was said agreed in every respect with my own personal opinions, but I would consider it a waste of time to listen only to speakers who agreed exactly with my own personal opinions.

I have never heard any lecture at the Normal School that gave me the impression of being in any sense dangerous propaganda. Our young people have, in my opinion, been given opportunity to form their own opinions and to think for themselves. Most of these young people come in contact with far more radical material in current magazines before coming to Normal School than they ever have in any of these addresses at the Normal School. Many of our Normal School lecturers represent the conservative points of view, so that there is plenty of opportunity to see various sides of every vital public question.

Every year, some students with rather radical points of view enter our Normal School. This is probably equally true of every institution of higher learning in the United States. However, I believe that most of these young people who are here for any considerable time leave the institution less radical, more tolerant, and with higher ideals of American citizenship, than when they came. I believe that the same is true of members of the faculty. I know of no member of

our faculty whom I consider dangerous politically. All seem to be more tolerant of honest opinions of others, and are inspiring students to think carefully for themselves.

I believe that there is much less extreme radicalism at the Bellingham State Normal School than in most colleges and other similar institutions throughout the country. The fact that there was absolutely no anti-war demonstration here recently tends to substantiate that opinion. Personally, I do not believe that there is a single student in our entire institution who is politically dangerous. There are a few, I believe, who express radical opinions merely to attract attention or to shock someone, but this seems to be merely a manifestation of the “show-off” attitude so common in adolescents and pre-adolescents, but gradually disappears as the students become more mature and form more mature judgments.

Teaching young people to think logically and carefully for themselves is, in my opinion, the best cure for radicalism, and I believe that parents, teachers and others who attempt to do the thinking for young people, entirely, make a serious mistake.

Present economic conditions naturally cause unrest among young people, but I believe that there is no occasion for alarm where they learn to take responsibility and think carefully for themselves. These young people must soon take the places of those of us who are older, and I have the most sincere confidence that they will think as clearly as we have done and make at least as good and patriotic American citizens as their parents have made.

Sincerely yours,

L.A. Kibbe¹

¹ Minutes of Hearing, 71-73.

Appendix III

Board of Trustees Response to Fisher Charges

Following is the written response to charges levied against Charles Fisher by the Committee on Normal Protest in April, 1935. The charges formed the basis of a private hearing at which the committee expounded on the charges, presenting “evidence” to support them, on May 22, 1935. In the interest of brevity, some of the full text of the original charges have been replaced with summary descriptions, indicated [by brackets].²

FINDINGS of the BOARD OF TRUSTEES upon the facts presented at a hearing of a citizens’ committee of Bellingham, upon charges presented against the administration of the Normal School, held May 22, 1935.

Present were:

Members of the Board of Trustees

President Fisher

Frank Sefrit, Manager of the Bellingham Herald

Blanton Luther, Grand Dragon Ku Klux Klan

Tom Chandler, Retired teacher of State of Kansas

Doctor McLeod, Dentist, former officer of American Legion

A.W. Deming, prominent businessman

Reverend Macartney, Presbyterian Minister

Marion Doty, Court reporter of Skagit County, Washington

Charge Number One of the Complaint [“Subversive and un-Christian speakers”]:

The transcript will show that assembly speakers are chosen by a faculty committee working in conjunction with the committee of the student body organization, which, through fees, provides the funds with which to employ talent. That going through the programs for the last three years, the general aspect of the programs shows a variety of entertainment and instruction which is not subject to adverse criticism. Nothing has been shown to have occurred in or upon the programs given in the assembly to foster or advocate free love, atheistic or un-

² (Note: The spelling of the last name of Rev. John Robertson Macartney has been corrected here.)

American beliefs or to invite the student body into the intrigues of such beliefs and practices. The evidence adduced tends to show that many speakers who have come to the Normal School have records of affiliation with organizations in various parts of the country, which do not represent conservative, political, social or orthodox religious convictions. Our committee has used such talent as other schools of higher learning, coming recommended, usually by the best bureaus, or engaged by grouped bookings with other State schools. We find that the charge states the truth in stating that “the character and activities of these subversive and un-Christian speakers (if they are such) have not been revealed to the students,” and further find that, not only have their characters and activities not been revealed to the students, but that the charge that implies that these atheistic un-American and free love teachings have been advocated or preached to the students at assemblies of the student body have not been proved. This administration has taken cognizance of the character of its visiting speakers so as to avoid criticism. The result has been that no propaganda subversive to loyalty and patriotism has been knowingly invited to or disseminated in the school.

Charge Number Two [“Studied avoidance of Christian leaders; condemnation of Christianity and American economic life”]:

We find that the administration quarterly transmits to each religious and sectarian church minister of Bellingham the names, addresses, and church affiliation, if any, of each and every student belonging or adhering to his church, in order that the minister of such religious body may form contact with such student. That religion has not been induced or made a part of any program in the school. No evidence sustains the charge that Christianity has been spoken of flippantly, nor has any lecturer “condemned the American economic life.” We find that at commencement time each year a religious service is conducted in the form of a baccalaureate address or sermon, in which service the ministers and speakers have been chosen from cities other than Bellingham. We find that the President of the Normal School and all of his family are attendants and members of a Christian church in Bellingham. That a great many of the faculty are also church members. That President Fisher has been actively engaged in Young Men’s Christian Association work in the City of Bellingham and in the northwest for ten or more years. That he has a church membership in the church presided over by Reverend Macartney [First Presbyterian] but by preference attends the Presbyterian Church [St. James] presided over by Reverend Wilson.

We find that the faculty has contributed generously to the community chest fund of Bellingham, a goodly portion of which goes for the maintenance of the Young Men’s Christian Association and Young Women’s Christian Association. That there is a Young Women’s Christian Association in the school but this organization is not very active. That the President has advised against the formation of a Young Men’s Christian Association in the school unless an organization is formed which will function independent of faculty control.

An exhibit in the evidence will show that the Reverend Macartney gave national publication and credence to an anonymous letter of statement read over the Bellingham radio station [KVOS], the origin of which he attributes to a writer in the Bellingham Normal School. That the publication of this letter and the article accompanying it is not proved to have had its origin in the school and the publication in the national organization of the Presbyterian Church is calculated to discredit schools and colleges generally and particularly the Bellingham Normal School. That upon being told of this, Reverend Macartney answered that it was not proved that the letter did not come from a student or students of the school, but he had no apparent proof or evidence that it did come from the hands of any student or students in the school.

Charge Number Three [“No patriotic meetings or assemblies; flag seldom displayed”]:

Apparently the charge that “The flag is seldom displayed on the campus” is not sustained by the facts. A large American flag is displayed on the flag pole in front of the administration building every day from morning until evening except when it rains. Every faculty member in the institution has taken and subscribed to the oath of allegiance to the United States of America, as shown by records.

Two recent speakers, Reno Odlin and Senator LaFollette, are the only speakers to have spoken upon the subject of patriotism.

National holidays are observed by the student body in their own way, which is a practice of other institutions of learning.

Charge Number Four [“Anti-American, communist organization formed by students”]:

There is and has been for some time past an organization of students in the school known as the Social Science Club. All clubs and organizations of the school are under the supervision and control of a member of the faculty delegated to supervise the conduct of such an organization.

In December, 1934, without the knowledge or permission of the faculty member who was supervising the Social Science Club, one Mirvin [*sic*] Cole, a young radical, of Seattle, associated with communistic organizations there, was either invited or permitted to speak before a meeting of the Social Science Club in Edens Hall, at which there were about thirty present, some of whom were students. From information gathered through one Mrs. Jenkins we learn that the coming of the speaker was known only to a few, and she was tipped off by one who was on the inside and acquainted with the character of speech that was going to be made. She attended and took notes of what was said by the speaker, which are used in this hearing, and what the supporters of the speaker did in the meeting. Cole’s speech was of the worst character of citizenship, but out of thirty present only six approved him by their vote. Action was taken for and on behalf of

arrested and accused strikers in the Roslin [*sic*] strike, among the six was Gordon Millikan, now President of the student body. That on his own authority, Gordon Millikan, as an officer of the Social Science Club, attempted to use his influence in the administration of justice at the location of this labor trouble. That the coming of the speaker, the meeting, the action taken and things done thereat were not known by the administration until shortly after the time and when it was ascertained it was not fully known what occurred until the time of this meeting. That Gordon Millikan and other members of the Social Science Club having affiliation with a peace organization of national character were called to account for what they did by the President. They were severely reprimanded, admitted their errors and promised to commit no such error or offense again. That the matter was brought to the attention of the Board of Trustees. That the trustees took informal action supporting the attitude of the President and further made it known that in the event such an occurrence happened again the students as well as any faculty member who was responsible for such an occurrence would be expelled. That since said time nothing has occurred of this character. We regard the incident as unfortunate but closed. That there are no other organizations of the student body brought into question.

Charge Number Five [Positions in the student newspaper on seditious books and magazines]:

We find that the charges against the Viking are not sustained.

Charge Number Six [Speakers invited by Fisher and faculty make “shameless allusions” about U.S. Presidents]:

The findings made on charges under number one apply here. The complainants promise stenographic reports of remarks made by a recent speaker, utterances of whom are objectionable, but disputed in this hearing.

Charge Number Seven [Decline in enrollment]:

No facts are adduced tending to prove the charge. Attendance figures are filed as an exhibit showing an increase in attendance over some years back. That the school has developed from a one course school to a four course college and that whereas in the beginning of this administration, the courses taught and the diplomas granted were scarcely equal to the usual high school diplomas of today, the institution now has become an accredited institution of higher educational standing as rated by the National Association of Teachers College of America, and necessarily the school has turned out graduates of quality instead of quantity. That whereas heretofore teachers’ certificates were issued upon a very short attendance now the qualification requirements of teachers have been materially raised.

Charge Number Eight [“Strife-breeding attitude and ungentlemanly conduct” of Fisher]:

We find that strife breeding is most prolific in the environ of this school. That turmoil and trouble in the affairs of life in this community reaches into every phase of its civic life. That it is torn by animosity, personal grudges and grievances, and political enmities too numerous to mention. That the institution is first berated over the air by one faction and attacked by newspapers by the opposite faction; that it is attempted to be controlled; its employees and teaching personnel dictated to by organizations and people without any regard to the efficiency and the welfare of the institution. That if President Fisher has developed a temperamental attitude with respect to this and that conflicting interest, it is the natural result of treatment accorded him and the institution which he represents. We recognize the fact that the President must be tactful. We have talked these matters over repeatedly and with all due respect to the opinions of the complainants we cannot be severely critical of a personality capable of standing on his own two feet in this community.

Charge Number Nine [“Misapplication of student funds”]:

We do not feel that the charge is sustained in any particular.

Charge Number Ten [“Lack of respect” for Fisher among alumni]:

We find that there is a very small minority of the alumni of the school discontented with his administration and that this discontent has arisen principally from teachers and instructors and their friends who have been necessarily dropped from the employment of the school, or someone who has been aggrieved by denial of some privilege or benefit which he claimed was due him. We do not believe that any administrators of this school can pacify the conflicting factions of Bellingham. Nor do we believe that those who have a grievance or hostile attitude can be given that which they demand, except at the expense of the integrity of the administrators of the institution.

We recognize and admit that improvement of conditions and personnel shall and will be made as opportunity permits. We invite constructive and beneficial criticism, unbiased by personal interest and free of unworthy prejudice. We consider this a State institution of higher learning; that from this premise we regard and respect only the State and nation in the conduct of our duties as its trustees. We point with considerable pride to the record this school has made with a high national rating of the school by the American Association of Teachers Colleges and by the support given it by the legislature of the State of Washington. We call attention to the unswerving loyalty and public spirit of the faculty and employees of the institution to the welfare of the school through the recent and continuing depression, noting that no one of them resisted the large salary and wage reduction over a period of two years, amounting to almost fifty percent, but loyally and dutifully carried on. We are also gratified with the attitude and devotion of the student body to the school. Where co-operation with the trustees has been needed, perfect harmony has been accomplished.

In the administration of the affairs of the school a great responsibility has been placed upon President Fisher, to whom we give credit in a large measure for the foregoing conditions. We recognize in him an able and conscientious administrator. His devotion to his position and his cooperation with the Board of Trustees and the State authorities is commendable. In deference to all the good people in Bellingham and in the State of Washington, this Board of Trustees is committed to the responsibility of making this school such an institution that its influence will broadly develop the minds and enrich the character of any and all who come within its doors to the end that it will be a credit to the State of Washington.

[Signed]

Steve Saunders

William D. Kirkpatrick

Verne Branigin

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Appendix IV

Letter from Frank I. Sefrit to Time Magazine Editor Henry R. Luce

July 8, 1939³

Mr. Henry Luce
Editor of "Time"
Time and Life Building
Rockefeller Center
New York, New York

Dear Mr. Luce:

It may be interesting to know that "Time" was rather awkwardly imposed upon through an article on page 42 of the July 10 issue, purporting to be a statement of fact in the case of the dismissal of President Charles H. Fisher.

Ordinarily, I would pay no attention to a story uncomplimentary to myself. One who has stood upon the "firing line" of active newspaper work for more than half a century usually becomes inured to adverse criticism. This, however, appearing in a national magazine commands notice, and I believe you will find it necessary to investigate further and follow up with facts.

In the first place, the incident referred to as having occurred in the "Hobby Club" of Bellingham six years ago is pure fiction. There was no such incident six years ago or at any other time. This will be vouched for by the thirty odd resident members, most of whom are regular attendants.

If President Fisher gave you this statement, I have no hesitancy in characterizing him as a violator of a fundamental obligation as a member of that club, and as a common liar.

To be a member of the "Hobby Club," one is particularly admonished to refrain from making public anything transpiring therein. I, myself, have been a member for more than twenty-five years, and I have been assured by still older members that in all of the history of the club no member has violated his obligation until President Fisher began spinning this yarn about Russian Bonds. In no time has any newspaper referred in any way to the activities of this club. Its name probably did not appear in print until a week or so ago in the Seattle Star and now in "Time."

³ Committee B, AAUP General Historical Files, box 1 (box UP0037), Special Collections Research Center, Gelman Library, The George Washington University, Washington, D.C. This opening salvo in the *Time* magazine controversy is not found in Sefrit's files at the Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, which contain subsequent communications with *Time* about the July 10, 1939 article, "I'm Agin' You."

Will you reflect for a moment on this alleged incident and ask yourself what there would be in the purported statement about Russian Bonds that would cause anyone such indignation as your article says was aroused in me.

Had such a statement been made, I certainly would not have been in the least disturbed, much less have said what is placed in those quotes.

Instead of opposing President Fisher six years ago or five years ago, I was actively defending his administration against some of those radical forces in this community who are now his special champions.

My opposition to him sprang from facts presented to me showing the increased practice of President Fisher in bringing to the student assemblies some of the most notorious radical and social degenerates in this country. We did not object to an occasional address by one of these so-called "liberals," but we did protest the use of them almost exclusively when no one was being brought in to counteract their efforts here.

In the article referred to, you say in parenthesis: "Among President Fisher's speakers were Burton Holmes, U.S. Senator Robert LaFollette, Lincoln Steffens, Elmer Rice, George S. Sokolski." Under President Fisher's cut the story says, "Burton Holmes was a Bolshevik."

Just what justification there is for that line, I do not know. We made no complaint about Holmes, Rice or Sokolski. I do not know that they were ever here. Certainly they were not on our list, and there was but the mildest criticism of LaFollette and Steffens. Our complaint was largely centered against such men as George Sylvester, Alfred W. Bingham, Floyd Dell, Maurice Hindus, Alexander Meiklejohn, Dorothy Reed, Miss Jennie Lee, Dr. Henry Neumann, Dr. Samuel B. [*sic*] Schmalshausen, Henry [*sic*] Barbusse, John Dewey, and Rev. Fred Shorter. The latter was dismissed as pastor of the Pilgrim Church in Seattle because of his radical activities.

Instead of the Board of Trustees approving of this type of speakers, immediately following the appearance of our committee before the Board, President Fisher was given instructions to desist, and particularly told that he should not invite anyone to the assembly whose name appeared in the "Red Network." The committee did not make such a broad request. President Fisher has complained bitterly because he could not bring here radicals whose names appear in that publication.

It may be interesting to you also to know that this hearing before the Board was early in 1935, and that no member of the committee actively pursued his opposition to President Fisher. This includes myself, and until the dismissal notice was made public, the Herald contained no matter editorial or otherwise bearing upon that controversy. Just why I should be singled out as the "big bad wolf" needs explaining. I was assured and so assured our committee that the situation about which we complained would be corrected

and that in a reasonable time President Fisher would be replaced. Upon this assurance our committee ceased its activities. It was other groups that revived the fight early last year following a public attack which Fisher made upon a large group of representative women of this community. Following this, it was found that Fisher was continually involving himself and the school in some sort of controversy. He was frankly told that he should be looking for another situation. He knows the reasons for his dismissal. These reasons he conceals and has set up other reasons which are absolutely untenable.

Maybe "Time" would not be concerned to know the type of man or woman who are now passing resolutions condemning the actions of the Board. Aside from members of the faculty and some of the student body, these organizations are almost exclusively what are known as "reds" or "radicals" of the Northwest. These include some Communistic organizations and near Communistic organizations such as the Washington Commonwealth Federation. Aside from the two mentioned (the faculty and student body of the college) no reputable organization in this community has taken a stand in opposition to the Board. A few left-wing political groups have done so and a radical teachers' organization in Seattle is on record.

I do not want to make a statement for publication at this time because I do not think it would be in the interest of this school. This letter is from one newspaperman to another and is not for publication. I do not object to have you place my letter in the hands of your correspondent or a copy of it to President Fisher, but it is not written for publication.

Something like a week ago some party who claimed to be your representative called me by telephone from Seattle and asked for a statement on the Fisher controversy. He said Fisher would have a statement in the next issue of "Time." I told him I saw no reason why I should make a statement, but if he cared to know my views on the subject it was but a short distance from Seattle to Bellingham and I would tell him if he cared to come. I then assured him I had not been active in the fight with Fisher for more than four years, merely discussing some phases of it with those who cared to discuss it with me. I incited no opposition either personally or through our newspaper. He then asked me if I were an eccentric and if I were a member of the American Legion (I am 72 years of age), and whether my wife had anything to say about my eccentricities.

I did not at the time realize what he was driving at. Afterwards it occurred to me that he had been told that I was an eccentric, or something of that effect. He did not come to see me, and I did not know the nature of President Fisher's statement to "Time." Frankly, I do not believe this community cares very much about the question in controversy. Certainly there has been great disappointment among President Fisher's friends that Bellingham did not get on its heels and howl because of the dismissal.

One attempt was made to hold a protest meeting here, and representatives of a number of groups were invited. Twelve showed up. Bellingham is not in turmoil about this action and neither is the State of Washington. The only interesting phase about it is that this is perhaps the first case in history where a red army was mobilized to try to keep an unwanted editor in his job.

Yours Sincerely,

Frank I. Sefrit

Appendix V

“History of the Fisher Case at Bellingham, Washington”¹

Submitted by C.H. Fisher to AAUP

1933

Owing to a drastic cut in the budget, salaries had to be reduced 35% and the following year salaries were further reduced by 15% making a total reduction of 50%. To prevent further reductions in salaries, twelve teachers were dropped from the Faculty, among whom was Pelagius Williams of the Department of the Social Sciences.²

1934

Frank I. Sefrit, editor and manager of the Bellingham Herald, asked me to meet with a committee of six men in his office to discuss the finances of the college. He had me attend this meeting under false pretenses. What the committee actually discussed was the reinstatement of Pelagius Williams. I informed the committee that he was the poorest teacher on the staff and that I had no funds to pay his salary. I promised to bring this matter to the attention of the Board of Trustees, which I did and they refused to reconsider the case of Pelagius Williams. I informed the committee of the action of the Board of Trustees. This committee wanted Pelagius Williams reinstated because he had worked hard for them on a relief project.

1935

Frank I. Sefrit and his hand-picked committee of six men which he represented as a Citizen’s Committee, made ten charges against me and sent these charges to the Governor and the Chairman of the Board of Trustees and asked for a hearing. Delaying for a while, the Board of Trustees granted a hearing in May 1935. A reply was made signed by all members of the Board of Trustees denying that any of the charges had been proved and expressing fine support of the President and the Faculty.

1936

A committee of at least six persons including some who signed the charges and others who did not sign the charges called upon the Governor and either asked for my removal or that my contract would not be renewed. Mention should be made of one member of the

¹ Charles H. Fisher to A.J. Carlson, Oct. 26, 1939, Committee B, AAUP General Historical Files, box 1 (box UP0037), Special Collections Research Center, Gelman Library, The George Washington University, Washington, D.C. This timeline is the second, expanded recitation of events of Fisher’s firing submitted by Fisher to the American Association of University Professors in conjunction with their investigation of the Fisher case in 1939. Written two months after his departure from Western Washington College of Education, it was mailed with a cover letter typed on college stationery.

² As noted in this report, the actual reduction in faculty salaries due to Depression-era budget cuts is uncertain; multiple amounts ranging from 30 to 50 percent are cited in various documents.

Committee, William J. Kaigler, Chairman of the Committee on Americanism of the local post of the American Legion. Mr. Kaigler told me that the Committee was deliberately putting the governor on the spot just prior to a primary election in which the governor was a candidate for a nomination on the Democratic ticket. A committee of influential persons from Bellingham called upon the Governor to press the President's side of the case and offset the influence of the other Committee. The newspaper learned what was going on and gave publicity to the controversy and the matter was dropped.

1937

In June 1935 the term of Dr. W.D. Kirkpatrick, as Trustee, had expired. In June 1937 the term of Verne Branigin, Trustee, would expire. A strong effort was being made by the opposition to have these two Trustees replaced by other Trustees. This was being done because the opposition up to this time did not have any influence with the Board of Trustees. The President called upon the Governor regarding the reappointment of the same Trustees and the Governor a few weeks later reappointed these Trustees as he promised he would do.

1938

On September 28, 1938, The Governor called the Trustees to his office at the State capital. At this meeting it was agreed by the Board of Trustees and the Governor that I was to leave the Presidency at the end of the school year. The Board of Trustees did not make a request for this meeting but they were asked by the Governor to meet with him in his office in Olympia.

At a special meeting of the Board of Trustees, October 11, 1938, I was given to understand that I was to leave the Presidency at the end of the college year. No reasons have ever been recorded in the minutes of the Board of Trustees for my leaving. The Board of Trustees simply stated that there was a gentlemen's understanding regarding this.

On October 1 or October 8 (I am not certain of the exact date) I called on Governor Martin to discuss the outcome of the conference between him and the Board of Trustees. I tried to find out what the trouble was and why I had to leave the Presidency of the college at Bellingham. The Governor said he had only one answer to my question, and that was that I had been at Bellingham for fifteen years and during that time certain opposition had developed against me, and now it was time to move on. This was the only reason I was ever given for having to leave the Presidency.

1939

William J. Kaigler, Chairman of the Committee on Americanism of the local post of the American Legion, spoke before the Washington Club and told of radical activities that he had found among the labor organizations, the public schools, and the College. The following week before the same group I answered the charges made by Mr. Kaigler. This was the first time that I made any public statement regarding the charges of radicalism

that had been made against the College. According to the enthusiastic response that I got from the audience I believe that the charges were refuted to all but a few of those present.

Following this public statement before the business men of the community some of these men volunteered to do whatever they could to prevent my leaving the Presidency. When the proper time came a volunteer committee of five outstanding business men called upon the Governor in Olympia. This committee reported that they were unable to find out what the real trouble was and that they accomplished nothing with the Governor. The members of the committee said that they got the impression that an effort would be made to straighten out other educational institutions in the State and especially to rid these institutions of radical teachers.

On April 17, 1939, President W.A. Brandenburg of the State Teachers College at Pittsburg, Kansas visited the State of Washington for the American Association of Teachers Colleges. He had conferences with Governor Martin and the Board of Trustees. He tried to be personally helpful to me by urging the Governor and the Board of Trustees that they ought to help find me another position. At the request of Governor Martin, President L.P. Sieg of the University of Washington called me to his office and made me an offer of a position in the College of Education at the University of Washington. President Sieg's memorandum of our conversation which occurred on May 15, 1939, contains the following facts: subject to the approval of the Board of Regents at a meeting in August the appointment would be for one year. If a major disturbance through the severance of my position at Bellingham occurred, the Board of Regents would not consider making an offer. In order to obviate any disturbance, President Sieg suggested that I resign my position at Bellingham. President Sieg concludes the memorandum by saying there is no promise except a very tentative one. A letter from President Sieg dated May 27, 1939, contained the following statement: "In view of the publicity that has come out I fear that there will be no chance of my making any recommendation to the Board or the Board acting favorably even if I did make such a recommendation in the matter which we discussed."³

³ Attached to the timeline were typed copies of memos from Sieg dated May 15, 1939 and May 27, 1939, as indicated by Fisher in the text.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Archival Collections

- Albert J. Beveridge Papers, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
- American Association of University Professors archives, General History Files, Special Collections Research Center, Gelman Library, The George Washington University, Washington, D.C.
- Bellingham Herald collection on Charles H. Fisher, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Western Libraries Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.
- Bellingham Publishing Company Records, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.
- Charles Henry Fisher Collection, Western Libraries Special Collections, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.
- Clarence Daniel Martin Papers, 1896-1954, Washington State University Libraries, Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections, Pullman, WA.
- Department of Efficiency, Subject Files, Correspondence and State Agency Budget Statements File Title: Bellingham Normal School, Washington State Archives, Olympia, WA.
- Gov. Clarence D. Martin Papers, 1933-1941, Washington State Archives, Olympia, WA.
- Henry Suzzallo Papers, University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, Seattle, WA.
- Minutes of the Faculty, Minutes of the Board of Trustees, President's Office, Vice President for Student Services, et al, Western Washington University Archives, Bellingham, WA.
- Rogan Jones Papers, 1912-1983, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.
- Western Washington University Centennial Oral History Project, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.

Periodicals

Harper's

The Bellingham Herald

The Bellingham American

The Bellingham American-Reveille

The Lynden Tribune

The New Republic

The San Francisco Chronicle

The Seattle Post-Intelligencer

The Seattle Star

The Seattle Daily Times

The Northwest Viking

Time

Tacoma Times

Washington New-Dealer

The Klan Courier

The Presbyterian Banner

The (York, Pa.) Gazette and Daily

Applications, Reports, Private Papers,

Bellingham Herald Building Historic Application.

http://www.dahp.wa.gov/sites/default/files/WA_Whatcom%20County_Bellingham%20Herald%20BuildingFINAL.pdf.

Canwell, Albert F., et al, "First Report, Transcript of the Proceedings of the Un-American Activities Committee," <https://archive.org/details/FirstReportUn-americanActivitiesInWashingtonState1948>.

Canwell, Albert F., et al, Second Report, Transcript of Proceedings of the Un-American Activities Committee, <https://ia800306.us.archive.org/17/items/SecondReportUn-americanActivitiesInWashingtonState1948/48-canwell-secondhearing.pdf>.

Sefrit, Ben. Undated letter, “To My Sons Barney and George,” circa 1970s, provided to the author by Ben Sefrit’s son, George A. Sefrit, in March, 2016.

Secondary Sources

Books

Allen, Raymond B. (Raymond Bernard), University of Washington. Committee on Tenure and Academic Freedom, and University of Washington. Board of Regents. *Communism and Academic Freedom: The Record of the Tenure Cases at the University of Washington Including the Findings of the Committee on Tenure and Academic Freedom and the President’s Recommendations*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1949.

Benowitz, June Melby. *Days of Discontent: American Women and Right Wing Politics, 1933-1945*. Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002.

Bowers, C. A. *The Progressive Educator and the Depression; the Radical Years*. New York: Random House, 1969.

Cain, Timothy Reese. “Little Red Schoolhouses? Anti-Communists and Education in an “Age of Conflicts,” in Robert Justin Goldstein, ed., *Little Red Scares: Anti-Communism and Political Repression in the United States, 1921-1946*. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2014.

Chalmers, David Mark. *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan*. Duke University Press, 1981.

Countryman, Vern. *Un-American Activities in the State of Washington: The Work of the Canwell Committee*. New York: Johnson Reprint Corp, 1967.

Counts, George S. *Dare the School Build a New Social Order?* New York: Arno Press, 1969.

David M. Chalmers. *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan*. Third. Durham: Duke University Press, 1987.

Dennis, Lawrence J. *George S. Counts and Charles A. Beard, Collaborators for Change*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989.

- Dewey, John. *Moral Principles in Education*, 2008.
<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/25172#download>.
- Dilling, Elizabeth. *The Red Network: A Who's Who And Handbook of Radicalism For Patriots*. Chicago: Published by the Author, 1934.
- Ficken, Robert E. and Charles P. LeWarne. *Washington: A Centennial History*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988.
- Goldstein, Robert Justin. *Political Repression in Modern America from 1870 to the Present*. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1978.
- Goldstein, Robert Justin, ed. *Little Red Scares: Anti-Communism and Political Repression in the United States, 1921-1946* Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2014.
- Gruber, Carol S. (Carol Singer). *Mars and Minerva: World War I and the Uses of the Higher Learning in America*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975.
- Gunns, Albert F. *Civil Liberties in Crisis: The Pacific Northwest, 1917-1940*. New York: Garland Pub., 1983.
- Hicks, Arthur C. *Western at 75*. Bellingham, Wash.: Western Washington State College Foundation, 1974.
- Horowitz, David A. *Inside the Klavern: The Secret History of a Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1999.
- Hyman, Harold Melvin. *To Try Men's Souls; Loyalty Tests in American History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959.
- Jeansonne, Glen. *Women of the Far Right: The Mothers' Movement and World War II*. University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- Lichtman, Allan J. *White Protestant Nation: The Rise of the American Conservative Movement* New York: [Berkeley, Calif.]: Atlantic Monthly Press; Distributed by Publishers Group West, 2008.
- May, Dean L. *Utah: A People's History*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987.
- Metzker, Walter P. *Academic Freedom in the Age of the University*. New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1955.

- Murray, Robert K. *Red Scare; a Study in National Hysteria, 1919-1920*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955.
- Nasaw, David. *The Chief: The Life of William Randolph Hearst*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000.
- Nichols, Jeffrey D. *Prostitution, Polygamy, and Power: Salt Lake City, 1847–1918*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002.
- Nickerson, Michelle M. *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012.
- Pomeroy, Earl S. (Earl Spencer). *The Pacific Slope: A History of California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Utah, and Nevada*. University of Nevada Press pbk. ed. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2003.
- Sanders, Jane. *Cold War on the Campus: Academic Freedom at the University of Washington, 1946-64*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1979.
- Schlesinger, Arthur M. *The Age of Roosevelt. Vol. 2*. Boston; Cambridge (Mass.): Houghton Mifflin; Riverside press, 1958.
- . *The Age of Roosevelt. Vol. 1*. Heinemann, 1957.
- . *The Age of Roosevelt. Vol. 3. The Politics of Upheaval*. Heinemann, 1961.
- Scott, James William, Howard J. Critchfield, and Janet R Collins. *Pacific Northwest: Essays in Honor of James W. Scott*. Bellingham, Wash: Western Washington University, 1993.
- Strong, Anna Louise. *I Change Worlds: The Remaking of an American*. New York: H. Holt and Co., 1935.
- Strong, Donald S. *Organized Anti-Semitism in America: The Rise of Group Prejudice During the Decade 1930-1940*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1941.

Journal Articles

- “Academic Freedom and Tenure in the Quest for National Security: Report of a Special Committee of the American Association of University Professors.” *AAUP Bulletin* 42, no. 1 (April 1, 1956): 49–107.

- Abbott, Frank. "Academic Freedom and Social Criticism in the 1930s." *Interchange on Education* 14–15, no. 4–1 (1984): 14–15.
- Barth, Alan. "The Loyalty of Free Men." *Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors* 37, no. 1 (April 1, 1951): 5–16. doi:10.2307/40220788.
- Benowitz, June Melby. "Reading, Writing and Radicalism: Right-Wing Women and Education in the Post-War Years." *History of Education Quarterly* 49, no. 1 (2009): 89–111. doi:10.1111/j.1748-5959.2009.01169.x.
- Bernstein, Victor H. "The Antilabor Front." *The Antioch Review* 3, no. 3 (October 1, 1943): 328–40. doi:10.2307/4608952.
- Boesenberg, Ellen, and Karen Susi Poland. "Struggle at the Frontier of Curriculum: The Rugg Textbook Controversy in Binghamton, NY." *Theory & Research in Social Education* 29, no. 4 (2001): 640–71. doi:10.1080/00933104.2001.10505960.
- Bradshaw, William L., Dr. Scott, and W. T. Laprade. "Academic Freedom and Tenure: Simpson College." *Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors* 26, no. 5 (December 1, 1940): 607–19. doi:10.2307/40039359.
- Cain, Timothy Reese. "'Silence and Cowardice' at the University of Michigan: World War I and the Pursuit of Un-American Faculty." *History of Education Quarterly* 51, no. 3 (August 1, 2011): 296–329. doi:10.1111/j.1748-5959.2011.00338.x.
- Chamedes, Giuliana. Review: "Little 'Red Scares': Anti-Communism and Political Repression in the United States, 1921-1946." *Labour / Le Travail* 76 (November 2015): 256–58.
- Emirbayer, Mustafa. "Beyond Structuralism and Voluntarism: The Politics and Discourse of Progressive School Reform, 1890–1930." *Theory and Society* 21, no. 5 (October 1, 1992): 621–64. doi:10.1007/BF00993493.
- Erickson, Christine K. "'I-Have-Not-Had-One-Fact-Disproven': Elizabeth Dilling's Crusade against Communism in the 1930s." *Journal of American Studies* 36 (2002).
- . "'So Much for Men': Conservative Women and National Defense in the 1920s and 1930s." *American Studies* 45, no. 1 (April 1, 2004): 85–102.
- . "'We Want No Teachers Who Say There Are Two Sides to Every Question': Conservative Women and Education in the 1930s." *History of Education Quarterly* 46, no. 4 (December 1, 2006): 487–502.

- Fischer, Nick. "The Founders of American Anti-Communism." *American Communist History* 5, no. 1 (2006): 67–101. doi:10.1080/14743890600763863.
- Fish, Hamilton Jr. "The Menace of Communism," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, v. 156, July, 1931.
- Gallagher, Alan L. "The Fighting Judge," *Washington State Bar News*, Nov., 1989, 15.
- Gartner, Rosemary, and Jim Phillips. "The Creffield-Mitchell Case, Seattle, 1906: The Unwritten Law in the Pacific Northwest." *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 94, no. 2 (April 1, 2003): 69–82.
- Glass, Bentley, Robert K. Carr, Ralph F. Fuchs, Douglas B. Maggs, Glenn R. Morrow, Talcott Parsons, Russell N. Sullivan, and George C. Wheeler. "Supplementary Report of the Special Committee on Academic Freedom and Tenure in the Quest for National Security." *AAUP Bulletin* 42, no. 2 (July 1, 1956): 378–80. doi:10.2307/40222182.
- Goldstein, R.J. "Political Repression in Modern American History (1870-Present): A Selective Bibliography." *Labor History* 32, no. 4 (Fall 1991): 526–50.
- Haynes, John Earl. "The New History of the Communist Party in State Politics." *Labor History* 27, no. 4 (Fall 1986): 549.
- Heath, Harvard S. "The Reed Smoot Hearings: A Quest for Legitimacy," *Journal of Mormon History*: Vol. 33: Iss. 2, Article 1, Nov. 2, 2000: 1.
- Holsinger, M. Paul. "For God and the American Home: The Attempt to Unseat Senator Reed Smoot, 1903-1907." *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (July 1, 1969): 154–60.
- In the News, Teachers College. "Educators Accuse Hearst of Hitlerism." *The Teachers College Record* 36, no. 5 (1935): 428–430.
- Laprade, W. T., and A. J. Carlson. "Academic Freedom and Tenure: Western Washington College of Education." *Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors* 27, no. 1 (February 1, 1941): 48–60. doi:10.2307/40219179.
- Manning, Walton. "Academic Freedom and Politics." *The Phi Delta Kappan* 34, no. 9 (June 1, 1953): 398–400.
- Mayer, Milton. "The Red Room." *The Massachusetts Review* 16, no. 3 (July 1, 1975): 520–50.

- Mayers, Gabriel S. "The Ku Klux Klan in Bellingham, 1900-1935." *Journal of the Whatcom County Historical Society* No. 2, October 2001: 34-45.
- Metzger, Walter P. "Some Perspectives on the History of Academic Freedom." *The Antioch Review* 13, no. 3 (October 1, 1953): 275-87. doi:10.2307/4609643.
- Mitchell, Carolyn M. "Political Correctness Doctrine: Redefining Speech on College Campuses, The." *Whittier Law Review* 13 (1992): 805.
- Morris, Arval A. "Academic Freedom and Loyalty Oaths." *Law and Contemporary Problems* 28, no. 3 (July 1, 1963): 487-514. doi:10.2307/1190642.
- . "The University of Washington Loyalty Oath Case." *AAUP Bulletin* 50, no. 3 (September 1, 1964): 221-31. doi:10.2307/40223126.
- Mraz, Mark. "Harold O. Rugg and the Foundation of Social Studies." *International Journal of Social Education* 19, no. 1 (2004): 1-5.
- Murray, Keith A. "The Charles Niederhauser Case: Patriotism in the Seattle Schools, 1919." *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 74, no. 1 (January 1, 1983): 11-17.
- Patterson, James T. "The New Deal in the West." *Pacific Historical Review* 38, no. 3 (August 1, 1969): 317-27. doi:10.2307/3636103.
- Phillips, Peter. "The 1934-35 Red Threat and the Passage of the National Labor Relations Act." *Critical Sociology* 20, no. 2 (1994): 27-50.
- Schrecker, Ellen. "Academic Freedom and the Cold War." *The Antioch Review* 38, no. 3 (July 1, 1980): 313-27.
- . "Subversives, Squeaky Wheels, and 'Special Obligations': Threats to Academic Freedom, 1890-1960." *Social Research* 76, no. 2 (July 1, 2009): 513-40.
- Scott, George W. "The New Order of Cincinnatus: Municipal Politics in Seattle during the 1930s." *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 64, no. 4 (October 1, 1973): 137-46.
- Slaughter, Sheila. "The Danger Zone: Academic Freedom and Civil Liberties." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 448 (March 1, 1980): 46-61.
- Soderbergh, Peter. "Charles A. Beard and the Radical Right." *The Teachers College Record* 68, no. 8 (1967): 631-639.

- Suzzallo, Henry. "A Declaration of Independence for Public Education." *Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors* 13, no. 7 (November 1, 1927): 503–5. doi:10.2307/40217785.
- . "Our Tradition of Institutional Individualism." *Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors* 20, no. 4 (April 1, 1934): 235–37. doi:10.2307/40218571.
- . "Teaching as a Profession." *Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors* 12, no. 5 (May 1, 1926): 330–35. doi:10.2307/40217498.
- Wetering, Jack Van De. "The Appointment of Henry Suzzallo: The University of Washington Gets a President." *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 50, no. 3 (July 1, 1959): 99–107.
- Wright, Quincy. "Academic Freedom and the Cold War." *AAUP Bulletin* 42, no. 3 (October 1, 1956): 495–501. doi:10.2307/40222059.
- Yarnell, Allen. "Pension Politics in Washington State, 1948." *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 61, no. 3 (July 1, 1970): 147–55.

Unpublished Papers, Theses, Dissertations

- DeLorme, Roland L. "The Liberal Arts Come to Bellingham: Charles H. Fisher's Plan for the Liberally Educated Teacher," *Essays in Honor of James W. Scott*, Howard J. Critchfield, ed., Western Washington University, June 1993.
- DeLorme, Roland L., and Steven W. Inge. "Perspectives on Excellence: A Century of Teaching and Learning at Western Washington University." Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Western Washington University, 2000.
- Dye, Amy. "The Powers of Perception: An Intimate Connection with Elizabeth Dilling." *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*, May 9, 2009. <http://dc.etsu.edu/etd/1861>.
- Gleason, Mildred Diane. "In Defense of God and Country: Elizabeth Dilling, a Link between the Red Scares," PhD diss., University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, 1997.
- Karen E. Hoppes. "William Dudley Pelley and the Silvershirt Legion: A Case Study of the Legion in Washington State, 1933-1942." PhD diss., City University of New York, 1992.
- Krause, Fayette Florent. "Democratic Party Politics in the State of Washington during the New Deal, 1932-1940," PhD diss., University of Washington, 1971.

- Kuttel, Ryan. "Preserving Public Morality: The Ku Klux Klan of Washington and their Anti-Catholic School Bill," unpublished paper, Dec. 3, 2000, Wilson Library Special Collections, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.
- Mitchell, Robert L. "An Embattled Liberal: Charles H. Fisher," (unpublished history seminar paper, University of Washington, 1971), Charles Henry Fisher Collection, Western Libraries Special Collections, Heritage Resources, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA.
- Murray, Keith A. "Centennial Churches of Washington's 'Fourth Corner,'" Occasional Paper #20, 1985, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA, 98225.
- . "The History of the Bellingham Rotary Club, 1917-1981, Occasional Paper #16," Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Western Washington University, 1981.
- Parmenter, William Quayle. "The News Control Explanation of News Making: The Case of William Randolph Hearst, 1920-1940." PhD diss., University of Washington, 1979.
- Rademaker, John Adrian. "The Measurement of Occupational Employment and Earnings in the State of Washington" MA Thesis, University of Washington, 1935.
- Saltvig, Robert Donald. "The Progressive Movement in Washington," PhD diss., University of Washington, 1966.
- Weaver, Heather. "*That We Shall Increasingly Become a Real College*": *Western Washington College of Education as an Ideal in the Making: 1923-1939*, Western Washington University, Heritage Resources, Wilson Library Special Collections, 2003.

Websites and Online Articles

- "1948 Canwell UnAmerican Activities Hearings (Seattle)," *Communism in Washington State*, Pacific Northwest Labor and Civil Rights Projects, University of Washington.
- "Ku Klux Klan in Washington State, 1920s."
http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/kkk_history.htm.
- "Larrabee, Frances Payne (1867-1941): Community Builder and Consummate Clubwoman," HistoryLink.org Essay 8603,
http://www.historylink.org/index.cfm?DisplayPage=output.cfm&file_id=8603.

“The Seattle Seven: The Smith Act Trials in Seattle (1952-1958),” *Communism in Washington State*, Pacific Northwest Labor and Civil Rights Projects, University of Washington, Seattle, Wash.,

<http://depts.washington.edu/labhist/cpproject/SmithAct.shtml>.

“Washington Commonwealth Federation & Washington Pension Union,” *Communism in Washington State*, University of Washington,

<http://depts.washington.edu/labhist/cpproject/phipps.shtml>.

Black, Gordon. “Organizing the Unemployed: The Early 1930s,” *Communism in Washington State: History and Memory*, Pacific Northwest Labor and Civil Rights History, The University of Washington, 2002,

http://depts.washington.edu/labhist/cpproject/black.shtml#_ednref8.

Gregory, James. “Economics & Poverty,” *The Great Depression in Washington State*, Pacific Northwest Labor & Civil Rights Projects, University of Washington,

2009, http://depts.washington.edu/depress/economics_poverty.shtml#_ednref1

—. “Politics,” *The Great Depression in Washington State*, Pacific Northwest Labor & Civil Rights Projects, University of Washington, 2009,

<http://depts.washington.edu/depress/politics.shtml>.

—. “Special Section: Radicalism,” *The Great Depression in Washington State*, Pacific Northwest Labor & Civil Rights Projects, University of Washington, 2009,

<http://depts.washington.edu/depress/radicalism.shtml>.

Griffey, Trevor. “The Strongest Chapter in WA: Bellingham’s KKK,” from *The Washington State Klan in the 1920s*, Seattle Civil Rights & Labor History Project, University of Washington, 2007,

http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/kkk_politicians.htm.