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The College of the Pacific 1850-1950

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THE COLLEGE OF THE PACIFIC 1850-1950

The movement that came to be known as Methodism was born in a university. One of its earliest interests, amounting to a passionate conviction, was education. Matching education was the spirit of evangelism—missionary activity was from the beginning a conspicuous characteristic of Methodism.

Within the church in America were raised up ministers admirably adapted to frontier work. The itinerant preacher helped to mold the growing population of the opening West into some semblance of Christian civilization: in the great Westward Movement he was admittedly a real factor.

The Oregon-California Mission Conference was set up in 1848 by act of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Rev. William Roberts, who had been appointed to head the missionary work of the church on the Pacific Coast, had arrived in San Francisco in April, 1847: he was made superintendent of the Conference, with headquarters in Oregon. Roberts was genuinely interested in religious developments in California; but because of pressure of duties in Oregon, his name is not prominently mentioned in connection with the earliest activities of Methodists in California.

The Marshall discovery of gold in January, 1848, changed everything. When Roberts returned to California he found San Francisco "in wildest confusion." The Methodist General Conference quickly sensed the new situation, with the pressing need for intensified religious activity. Leaders in several denominations promptly began preparations to enter the field. Bishop Beverly Waugh of the Methodist Episcopal Church with the utmost care selected two young men of exceptional qualifications for service in California. These young men, Isaac Owen and William Taylor, who arrived by separate routes in California in the autumn of 1849, were destined to have profound influence in the religious field and in the establishment of an institution of Christian education in the incipient state. There appears to be little doubt that Owen had in mind the founding of an institution of learning in California from the time of his arrival, if not even before!¹ If one were called upon to name the individual, on the ground, who, more than any other, was the actual founder of the College, one would almost surely name Isaac Owen.

But in reality the promotion of education in newly-occupied lands was only normal procedure for Methodists. In this instance, for example, Rev. J. P. Durbin, Corresponding Secretary of the Missionary Society, expressed very early a deep interest in Christian education for California. In a letter to Owen, dated May 21, 1850, Durbin said:

. . . It is very important that the infant Seminary be in the right place, be as we judge, at first an academy; and that it

¹ Cf. Ferrier, *Ninety Years of Education in California*, p. 188.

may grow to be a college; that the buildings be of proper size and arrangements, and of good materials and substantially built; and that debt be avoided as much as may be. . . .

It is in this letter that Durbin mentions the appointment of Rev. Edward Bannister, "to be a teacher in California in such capacity, and under such conditions as the Missionary Board may direct." Bannister had been appointed to look after educational interests of the church in California, "to begin a College or University . . . in such place as yourself with Roberts, Taylor and the rest of the friends shall think well of."¹

Bannister was a passenger on the steamship *Oregon*, which reached San Francisco October 18, 1850, bearing the great good news of California's admission into the Union. Almost immediately he became Principal of a school called San Jose Academy, which is not to be confused with the University of the Pacific, although it may be regarded as a forerunner.

The first important educational convention, called by Isaac Owen, was held at San Jose in January, 1851. It recommended the "founding of an institution of the grade of a university." A second meeting was held in May, at San Francisco, at which possible locations for the proposed institution were discussed. At the third convention, held in late June, a resolution was finally adopted fixing the site at Santa Clara. What should be the name of the institution? "California Wesleyan University" won the greatest support. But because there was then no authorization for the establishment of a university, the first actual name was "California Wesleyan College," a name, however, which proved unpopular and was followed a few months later, when duly authorized, by the spread-eagle name, "The University of the Pacific." The charter had been granted by the State Supreme Court July 10, 1851, the Methodist college being thus the first to receive a charter in the state of California.

The actual opening of the University, at first a preparatory school, was on Monday, May 3, 1852, with Professor Bannister as principal. Owen, the financial agent, reported: "The school has opened with more promise than was anticipated . . . They have fifty-four students. . . ." While it was a modest beginning, there were grounds for encouragement, the chief asset being unwavering confidence in a sacred mission and supreme faith in a favoring Providence. The complete devotion of the principal and of the sustaining trustees were more than a match for the huge obstacles and appalling difficulties that beset the pathway.

When Bannister asked to be relieved of the burdens of administration, in 1854, Rev. Martin C. Briggs, an exceptionally dynamic leader among the Methodists, was selected unanimously to be president, though it must be added that Briggs, extremely active with other church interests, seems never fully to have taken to himself the presidential role. Administrative duties were turned over to two leading professors—William S. Maclay and Alexander S. Gibbons, each of whom, in turn, was made president following Briggs' resignation in 1856.

¹J. P. Durbin to Isaac Owen, May 31, 1850.

The first class regularly to receive the baccalaureate degree graduated in 1858. There were five young men and five young women; but separate graduation exercises were held, since the Female Collegiate Institute and the Male Department were conducted as almost independent schools, although they had the same president and both were governed by the same board of trustees. There was co-education, to be sure, in the University, but it was of a decidedly qualified nature. President Gibbons conferred the first degrees at that June commencement, 1858—a most significant occasion which attracted more than local interest. Much encouragement was felt by the self-sacrificing founders and patrons of the young institution: there was fresh enthusiasm among the students and their many friends.

Who were the leaders whose unselfish labors and sincere devotion enabled this struggling College to carry on and perform the work committed to it? Mention has already been made of some of them—Owen, Taylor, Bannister, Briggs, Maclay, Gibbons, Bishop Waugh, Secretary Durbin. These, and still others, were all ministers of the gospel. Their leadership was indispensable. They deserved well of the church and of the state. But there were also large-hearted laymen, likewise devoted to the cause, whose contribution proved also indispensable. Mention must be made of a few. Annis Merrill, a graduate of Wesleyan University, successful attorney and respected jurist, the man who drew the petition for the original charter of the college, served as a trustee for forty years, being president of the board thirty years. His many services were of inestimable value. There was Captain Joseph Aram, also a college graduate, California pioneer of 1846, delegate at the Monterey Constitutional Convention of 1849, member of the state's first legislature—he gave service to the University, as trustee and otherwise over a period of more than four decades. Still other worthy founders were among the laymen, men like C. P. Hester, judge of the District Court; and David Jack, eccentric but generous Scot, large-scale California farmer. It was clearly impossible to finance the struggling educational institution without the generous contributions of these and many other men outside the profession of the ministry. Running through the entire history of the College, the invaluable service of loyal laymen is clearly evident.

In the early years there was little room in the curriculum for frills in the Male Department: great stress was laid upon the Latin and Greek, mathematics, and Bible study. In the Female Institute, however, were such subjects as embroidery, painting, and "hair work"—assignments like "weaving into intricate floral patterns locks of the hair of one's relatives and friends." The preceptress insisted upon certain "lady-like accomplishments." As a basis for student government the "Rule of Right" was set forth:

"We cumber not the memory with a variety of regulations," we read in the catalogue for 1859-60, "but endeavor to cultivate the moral sense, as a universal, self-governing principle."

As early as the fall of 1858 steps were taken toward the establishment of a school of medicine. The following spring witnessed the formal opening of the "Medical Department of the University of the Pacific"

in San Francisco, with Dr. R. Beverly Cole as dean.¹ Plans for this department were badly disrupted, however, as a result of the Civil War. It suspended in 1864, and was finally reopened on a new basis after the Civil War, in 1870. The establishment of the University of California in 1868 and its plans for a school of medicine, with the newly organized Toland Medical College, brought new difficulties and unhappy prospects, with the result that in 1872 the connection of the Medical School with the University of the Pacific was finally dissolved.

A very significant part in the life of the Methodist institution was played by its literary and debating societies. As early as March, 1854 a group of earnest young men interested in debating and oratory initiated a movement resulting in the organization of the Archanian Literary Society, claiming to be the oldest of its kind west of the Mississippi. The twenty-four charter members, "desirous of mutually aiding each other in the acquirement of an easy, graceful, and impressive manner of speaking, . . ." ² formally adopted a constitution and set of by-laws. The young ladies were not to be outdone. In 1858 the Emendian Literary Society was formed, claiming to be the first of its kind in the Far West. Programs included music, readings, and essays, with insistence upon proper decorum and lady-like deportment. As an expression of the strong Northern sentiment among students, the Rhizomian Society, which came to be Archania's rival, was organized in 1858. The second literary society among young women was Sopholechia, which dates its origin in 1881. All these student organizations have in more recent years taken Greek-letter names and become local fraternities and sororities.

On the resignation of President Gibbons, in 1859, Dr. Bannister was recalled to enter upon his second administration. He remained president throughout the entire heart-breaking period of the Civil War. As to the desperate financial situation confronting the trustees, an illuminating commentary appears in Bannister's laconic report of June, 1861 to the Board, in which he states: "I have nothing to recommend in respect to buildings, faculty, etc., because we have no funds for improvement." The marvel is that the hard-pressed college survived at all! In 1865 conditions were such as to induce Principal Tuthill of the Female Institute to agree for the next year to "assume all pecuniary responsibility for conducting the Institute," and give instruction in return for rent of buildings and furniture, on no account incurring any debts against the trustees. And President Bannister personally offered to sustain instruction in the Male Department "without involving the Board in any financial liability for the next Collegiate year." On such a slender thread hung the future of the institution ambitiously named "The University of the Pacific!"

There was no let-up to the financial struggle—no relief in sight. The institution was fighting for its very life. Then there was performed one of the near-miracles that on several occasions brought glorious resurrection—a plan was conceived by Greenberry Baker to move the

¹*Alta California*, May 6, 1859.

²From the Preamble.

University away from its restricted site in Santa Clara to a more ample campus where it would enter upon an entirely new era, sustained by the sale of lots from its spreading acres.

Under Baker's brilliant leadership followed the acquisition of the 435-acre tract of the Stockton Rancho midway between Santa Clara and San Jose. Of this tract twenty-one acres were to be reserved for a campus, the balance to be subdivided and lots put on the market for the support of the University. But there was no magic by which such a move could actually be made, including the construction of necessary buildings and supplying all needed equipment.

Baker died in 1869, before the consummation of his plans. In the meantime President Bannister, who had worked far beyond his strength, had felt it necessary to resign, in 1867, and Rev. Thomas H. Sinex was elected to succeed him, when the actual condition of the institution was low indeed. Financial distress and rigorous austerity were everywhere in evidence. But there was encouragement in knowing the College Park campus was laid out and lots were selling briskly.

The laying of the cornerstone of West Hall (September 10, 1870) was an event of real significance. But President Sinex was not permitted to enter fully into the promised land: in 1872 he resigned, passing the feeble torch to another. This other was Dr. Gibbons, who was asked to come back from Ohio and assume the responsibilities of president for the second time. Gibbons accepted the challenge and continued in office five years, during which period the University became well established on the new campus at College Park. The president greatly endeared himself to the students, and—despite the severe limitations—he did much to invest the institution with a truly academic atmosphere, especially on occasions such as commencement and the conferring of degrees.

It was on Gibbons' recommendation that C. C. Stratton became the next president. So successful was Stratton's administration that it became known as the "Era of Good Feeling." In his "charge" to the new president Judge Annis Merrill, president of the board of trustees, asserted that our literary institutions—

should be especially cherished, as essential to our social industrial, and national welfare . . . ; and that these institutions should be liberally furnished with all the appliances requisite for the diffusion of an elementary and finished education, among all classes of society; . . . it is indispensable that our literary institutions should keep pace with the progress of the age.

There was gratifying response to President Stratton's untiring and well-directed efforts. Marked increase in the number of students and in the size of the graduating classes, backed by a spirit of cordiality throughout the Conference area—these, with the loyalty and enthusiasm of the student body itself, were leading factors which prompted the Committee on Education to report in 1881 that the University "was never in a more prosperous condition." And in 1885 the spirit of optimism is reflected in the student paper, in an article concluding, "It is,

indeed, a great epoch in the history of the College, and there is little doubt but that it will be so regarded for years to come."¹

New structures were added to the campus, the Conservatory Building was begun, the student annual, *Naranjado*, was instituted, the literary societies showed great activity, and numerous college customs were initiated. It was during the Stratton administration also that the rudiments of a Law Department were announced, and that steps were taken toward the establishment of a School of Theology. Never had the institution taken on so much of the appearance of a budding university.

But all this progress was attained at a costly price to President and Mrs. Stratton—they too had been laboring beyond their strength. Great was the consternation when, in December, 1886, Dr. Stratton in a long letter placed his resignation in the hands of the trustees. The trustees refused to accept it, but promptly agreed to meet the special conditions the president laid down, and the resignation was withdrawn. But not for long, as the event proved; for in the following March the president's second letter was presented and the trustees had no alternative—it was reluctantly accepted. Dr. Stratton became president of Mills College, a position he felt would not be so over-taxing. An earnest search was made for a worthy successor for Pacific.

The new president, elected in the summer of 1887, was Dr. A. C. Hirst, an eminent Cincinnati minister with excellent reputation as a classical scholar and for exceptional ability in pulpit and platform oratory. The first two years of his incumbency witnessed a continuation, even with acceleration, of the tide of prosperity. Never before, according to *Pacific Pharos*, had the University "stood in as favorable light as she does now." But by some strange irony of history there came, as if at the hand of a destroying angel, a swift reversal, suddenly transforming the mounting prosperity into disrupting disaster, precipitated by an internal difficulty and known in the history of Pacific as the "Hirst Trouble," or the "Secession." More class spirit, which the president had been urging, as a member expressed it, "became a riot." The rivalry between freshmen and sophomores—nothing in itself unusual in campus life—brought on a situation which seemed to be baffling to the president and his faculty. The suspension of the freshman class made matters vastly worse, when upper classmen took a hand and the juniors threatened to leave as a body if the Frosh were not reinstated. Last minute appeasement failed to undo the damage that had been done. The faculty itself was divided, and the president's adamant attitude was not shared by a group of the more progressive professors, who handed in their resignations, though most students and interested alumni felt the University could better afford to dispense with the services of the president, who, as the sequel showed, was himself impelled to resign a little later. From Pacific's standpoint the gravity of the difficulty, which brought on what the trustees called "the most critical period in all our history as an institution of learning," was greatly aggravated by the fact that at the very time, less than a score of miles away, richly endowed Stanford University was about to open its doors.

¹ *The Epoch*, September, 1885.

The exodus of students from College Park was such as to leave there a deserted campus, as far as college students were concerned. Not for many years was the University of the Pacific able to regain its lost position.

At this point it is necessary to introduce, even though it may seem a digression, another factor in our history, entirely removed from the College Park campus. Brief reference must be made to Napa College—first Napa Collegiate Institute—located in the delightful town of Napa, forty-five miles north of San Francisco.

This school, opened by A. H. Hamm in 1860, was taken over some years later by Rev. William S. Turner, who conducted it on a strictly religious basis, and in 1870, turned it over to the California Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Successive principals of this high-grade institution of learning were Thomas C. George, Lowell L. Rogers, and Abner E. Lasher. Its constituency was found chiefly in northern California and Nevada.

In May, 1885, the decision was reached to provide in Napa "an institution of higher learning, where both young men and young women [might] receive a complete Scientific, Literary, and Classical education"—in other words, advance the Institute into Napa College. To effectuate this change, in 1887 Rev. J. N. Beard was made president of the college, whose first regular graduating class, consisting of three young men, received baccalaureate degrees in 1890.

But the promising young college never came to full maturity. Trustees and other friends did not fail to note the parallelism of the curriculum with that of the University of the Pacific—both were functioning under the aegis of the Methodist Conference, and at "the most critical period," following the "Hirst Trouble," both institutions were inadequately financed. Thoughtful leaders were impressed with the active competition for support; and the question inevitably arose, can it be wise to try to support two struggling colleges, less than a hundred miles apart?

Some sort of program looking to consolidation was but a natural outcome. In 1894 Dr. Beard became president of the combined institution. In the meantime, President Isaac Crook, who had succeeded Hirst in 1891, had scarcely made a start at College Park when, within two years he resigned to accept another position, leaving Wesley C. Sawyer as acting-president.

Under a plan worked out by President Beard San Jose College and Napa College were to be coordinate divisions of the University of the Pacific, with headquarters in San Francisco; all graduate and professional work was likewise to be in San Francisco. Dr. F. F. Jewell, as financial agent, was given the title of Chancellor. But it became increasingly evident with the passing of the months that strict economy dictated that one of the coordinate colleges must discontinue its work entirely. It fell at length to Napa College to make the supreme sacrifice. But before the completion of Napa's final year (1895-96) President Beard resigned and was soon on his way to England for special study in London.

Legal consolidation had been effectuated, but the consolidated insti-

tution was still not strong, and the feeling of the Napa students was far from friendly. Then it was that the trustees did a very strategic thing: they elected Dr. Eli McClish, who as Methodist pastor at Napa had endeared himself to the people and won the affection of the students, president of the University to succeed Dr. Beard. The genial doctor gave ten of the best years of his life to the institution; and whatever of deficiency may have been revealed from the standpoint of educational administration must be accounted as far less than his generous contribution in a time of great need. The "Golden Jubilee" (Semi-Centennial) was fittingly celebrated in May, 1901. Prominent among the speakers were President David Starr Jordan of Stanford and Honorable C. W. Baker of Cincinnati. In 1906, after the final resignation of Dr. McClish, Moses S. Cross became acting-president.

It was two years before McClish's successor was found. Then, in 1908, William W. Guth, who had taken his doctorate in a German University, was called to San Jose to take charge, and take charge he did! During the interregnum a strong feeling had developed among a portion of students favoring Dr. Cross for the presidency. This feeling amounted almost to a demand upon the trustees, which brought a situation of great delicacy, an outcome of which was President Guth's decision to dispense with the services of Cross and certain other faculty members.

Among the more far-reaching changes during the dynamic Guth administration were a strengthening of scholarship standards, bringing to the faculty a group of well-recommended younger men of Ph.D. training, and—perhaps most significant of all—the decision to change the name of the institution from University to College of the Pacific. The reason given for the change was that the institution was not equipped for real university work, made no profession of doing university work then or in the future; and that therefore in the interest of academic integrity the name should be changed to conform to the fact.

When Dr. Guth resigned to accept the presidency of Woman's College, Baltimore, in 1913, the immediate administration was placed in the hands of acting-president Bert J. Morris, who served loyally and efficiently until the installation of John L. Seaton, a year later. Hard-working Dr. Seaton had plenty of tough problems during his five-year administration. Within ten months two of the campus buildings were destroyed by fire. It seemed imperative for the president to be more of a money solicitor and bill collector than educational leader. But by dint of almost superhuman labor and strictest economy the college made progress, and all hearts were cheered by the success of the \$300,000 endowment campaign. Added to Seaton's other difficulties was the problem of the First World War, with its epidemic of "flu," complete disruption of regular campus regime, and the unfortunate choice in the appointment of the commanding military officer. But through it all Seaton persevered, and by faith and fortitude managed to maintain a surprising spirit of optimism. It is typical of the man that he should introduce the tradition of having Frederick Faber's hymn "Faith of Our Fathers" sung at each annual baccalaureate service. His is a respected name not only in the history of the College of the Pacific but in the annals of American Methodism. When he resigned in 1919 it was to

accept the invitation to become assistant secretary of the Board of Education of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

The inauguration of Tully C. Knoles as president, in the spring of 1919, marked the beginning of a new era for the College of the Pacific. During his long and fruitful administration of twenty-six years, more than two and a half times as long as that of any of his predecessors, Knoles built himself into the institution in a remarkable way and led the institution itself to achievements and recognition never before paralleled. One of the most far-sighted and daring acts was the move from San Jose to Stockton in 1923-24, whose many aspects cannot here be reviewed. Another accomplishment was the timely elimination of the lower division, concomitantly resulting in the organization on the Pacific campus of the public Junior College of the Stockton public school system—something entirely unique in our educational annals, that has attracted very wide interest.

Under no previous administration had there been so many students, so large graduating classes, so many divisions of instruction, or such high academic recognition. There is no time here to tell the amazing story. But it is scarcely necessary—it is a contemporary phenomenon—the attractive panorama is spread out before us, known and read by all educators.

When Robert Burns, assistant to President Knoles, was asked to take up the responsibilities of administration in 1946, it was with the explicit understanding that as president he should freely consult and advise with Dr. Knoles, now made Chancellor. President Burns in his inaugural address made a plea for unceasing pioneering. His admiration for the founding fathers, his intense loyalty to his *Alma Mater*, and his own vigorous pioneering propensity give promise of lofty spirit and continued achievement in the opening years of the second century of the history of the College of the Pacific.

The general character and fundamental objectives of the College are stated in the current catalogue. From this I quote, in part:

The College of the Pacific seeks to be a good, liberal arts, co-educational, church-related college on the upper-division and graduate levels. It emphasizes self-criticism and self-discipline, freedom of thought and expression, high scholarship, broad culture, and personal character based on Christian principles.

The College of the Pacific is related to the Methodist Church, but does not enforce sectarian limitations on either its faculty or student body. So far as its facilities allow, it accepts students of any creed or race who are prepared for upper-division or graduate work and who seem to have high qualities of character and personality.

An analysis of the student body reveals representatives of a score of religious organizations, from more than half of the states of the Union, and many foreign countries.

True to original purpose religious education continues to be stressed; for "personal character based on Christian principles" has al-

ways been a chief objective. For many years Pacific Conservatory of Music has maintained a prominent place among the divisions of the college. More recently the School of Education has achieved a high and honorable place among similar schools of California. There are numerous additional foundation stones, including Speech and Drama, Radio, Engineering, Pacific Tours, Athletics and Physical Education, and still others. But at the center the constant aim has been to maintain as the core of the college, a sound progressive curriculum of arts, letters, and sciences, never suffering the heart of the institution to be overshadowed by special features. The recognition that has come has been won through earnest planning, consecrated toil, sacrificial endeavor, and prevailing prayer. The College of the Pacific is humbly grateful for the measure of success that has crowned the efforts of a fruitful century.

In conclusion it is worthy of note that the history of the College of the Pacific runs strikingly parallel with that of the commonwealth of California. The year of the gold discovery (1848) witnessed the selection of Owen and Taylor for mission work. Plans for the institution were being formulated almost immediately following California's admission into the Union. The struggle to hold the state loyal to the union during the dark days of civil strife had its counterpart in the University of the Pacific, loyal to the Stars and Stripes. Loyalty to the state and the nation was expressed in substantial manner in two world wars. The contributions made by a large body of alumni in various fields of activity to the character of the state throughout the century of history have been for the enrichment and ennoblement of California. A golden century crowns Pacific.