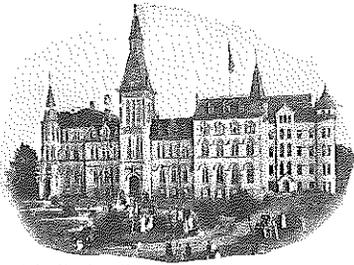


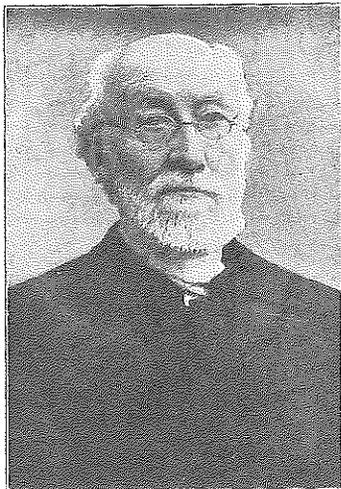
St. Thomas

*A ladies' college
for Elgin county*

*Bishop Carman's
Proposal*

By the mid 1870's, St. Thomas was an enterprising and industrious town set in a prosperous county. Eight railways passed through with their long lines of freight and passenger cars. A small group of able physicians had set up the first medical centre in the province that became eventually the nucleus of the Medical School of the University of Toronto. Farmers brought their fruit and vegetables and dairy products to St. Thomas markets and flour mill and creamery. There was a bustling retail trade. Eight churches kept their fingers on the spiritual pulse. St. Thomas was a young ambitious town aspiring to become a city. A ladies college for the county of Elgin would most certainly add to its prestige, and put St. Thomas firmly on the map.

On October 11, 1876, an impressive group of forward-looking citizens gathered in the dignified St. Thomas-Elgin Court House at the end of Wellington Street. There they heard Bishop Carman's proposal that a ladies college be established in St. Thomas. It was a new idea and one that greatly interested them. The delegates were leading professional and business men of the city and the county of Elgin — Judge D. J. Hughes; Archibald McLachlin, County Registrar; Sheriff Colin Munroe; Mayor Drake; Captain James Sisk; Colin McDougall, M.P.; John E. Smith, hardware merchant and former mayor; J. Farley, banker; John Arkel, businessman; Dr. A. E. Griffith, minister of Central Methodist Church.

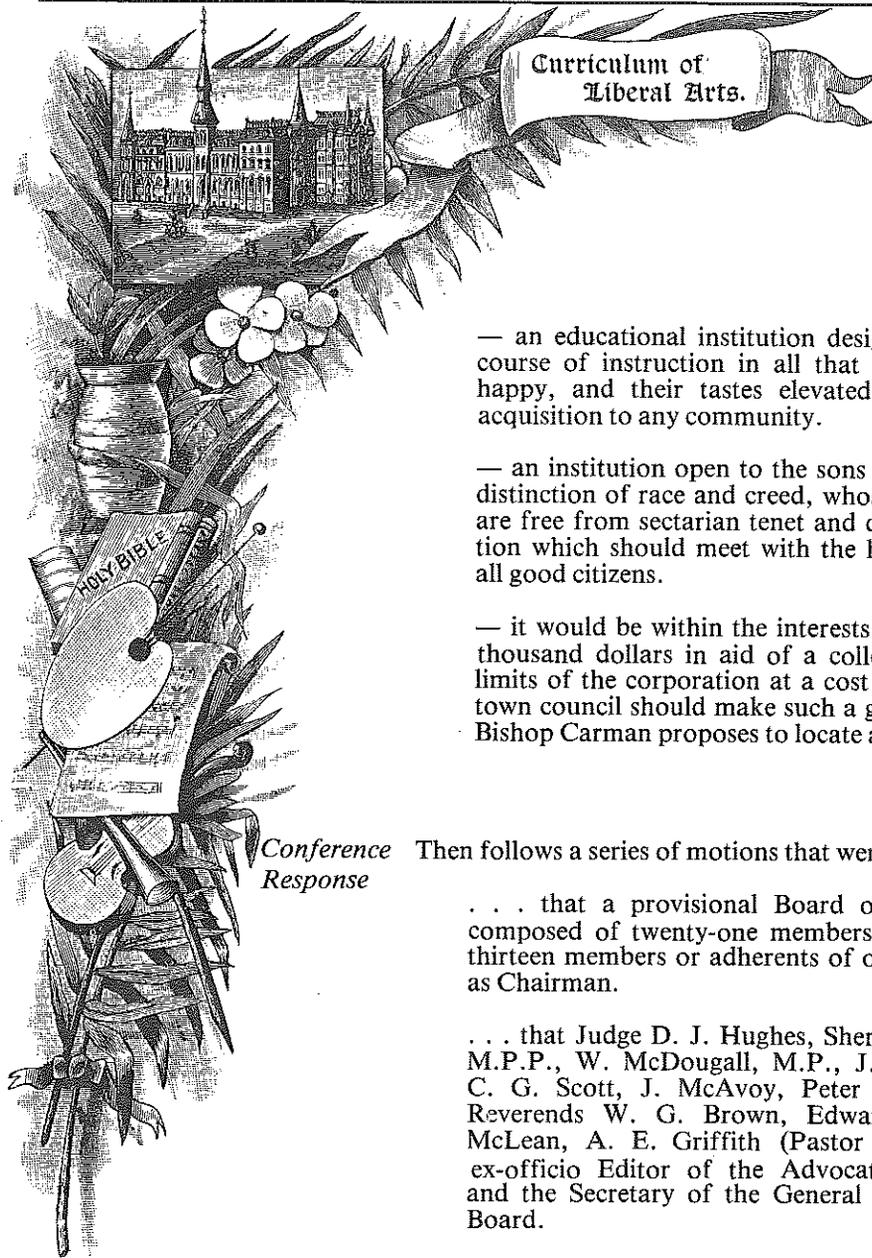


*Bishop Albert
Carman*

The initiator of the consultation that day, Rev. Albert Carman, D.D., LL.D., was Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church of south western Ontario, a minister and a scholar who had at one time been president of Albert College in Belleville. Later as Bishop he had travelled through much of Ontario. He came to feel more and more strongly that an institution of higher learning for young women was needed in south western Ontario, and he selected St. Thomas as an appropriate town.

We have no detailed record of that 1876 meeting until the next year when Dr. Carman presented his formal report of the church's Committee on Education to the Niagara Conference, again in St. Thomas. The report reflects the atmosphere and level of discussion of that first meeting. Dr. Carman had put a great deal of thought and research into his report, and we have a record of its recommendations and the almost unanimous approval it received. In summary it reads as follows:

. . . But while we thus rejoice in the prosperity of our educational institutions, the field of effort and usefulness in this department of the Church's work is enlarging, and we are invited to its cultivation. The western part of this province demands our attention and effort, and is looking hopefully to us as a church to meet its requirements. We deem it advisable to present for your consideration a few plain statements touching this question:



Curriculum of
Liberal Arts.

— an educational institution designed to afford young ladies a liberal course of instruction in all that tends to make their lives useful and happy, and their tastes elevated and refined, would be a desirable acquisition to any community.

— an institution open to the sons and daughters of our citizens without distinction of race and creed, whose teachings and curriculum of studies are free from sectarian tenet and dogma . . . is virtually a public institution which should meet with the hearty approbation and willing aid of all good citizens.

— it would be within the interests of this town to grant the sum of five thousand dollars in aid of a college building to be erected within the limits of the corporation at a cost of not less than \$20,000 and that the town council should make such a grant in aid of the ladies college which Bishop Carman proposes to locate and erect.

*Conference
Response*

Then follows a series of motions that were passed with enthusiasm:

. . . that a provisional Board of Management be appointed, . . . composed of twenty-one members, seven residing in St. Thomas, and thirteen members or adherents of our own church, with Bishop Carman as Chairman.

. . . that Judge D. J. Hughes, Sheriff Colin Munroe, Dr. J. H. Wilson, M.P.P., W. McDougall, M.P., J. Cook, J. Wilcox, D. Mills, M.P., C. G. Scott, J. McAvoy, Peter Graham, M.P.P., C. Palmer, and Reverends W. G. Brown, Edward Lundsburry, J. N. Elliot, John McLean, A. E. Griffith (Pastor of Central Methodist Church and ex-officio Editor of the Advocate), President of Albert University, and the Secretary of the General Conference shall constitute the said Board.

Funding

. . . that unless the municipal council of St. Thomas grant the \$5,000 in aid of the college buildings and a sufficient amount of reliable subscriptions can be secured to warrant the undertaking, then this recommendation and appointment to be void.

. . . that in case these conditions are complied with, then we recommend that the St. Thomas Ladies College be affiliated with Albert University for a degree in Arts.

. . . that this Conference cordially invites the cooperation and assistance of the Ontario and Bay of Quinte Conference.



Two sisters, Eugenie and Mamie Dupuch, the first foreign students at Alma—from Nassau

The Charter

When the General Conference of the Methodist Church met in 1877, approval was given. The Charter was then granted by an Act of Legislature of the Ontario Government:

The Name

... Alma College is chartered by an Act of Ontario, passed on March 2, 1877, and enjoys extensive legal privileges and corporate powers. It is owned and controlled by the Methodist Church — Rev. A. Carman, D.D., General Superintendent, having been its most active promoter, aided in his efforts by several conferences and by the citizens of St. Thomas.



*Alma Munroe Duffield,
daughter of Alma Munroe,
after whom Alma College was
named*

The charter also made provision "if the need should arise for an enlargement in the future by the addition of a school for boys". During the first hundred years the need seems to have arisen occasionally, but so far nothing has come of it.

The planners called the new school "St. Thomas Ladies College" until early in 1877. The honour of formally naming the school was given to Sheriff Colin Munroe. His wife Alma had recently died, and the Sheriff was happy to honour her name and that of their daughter, Mrs. J. D. (Alma) Duffield of London, in the official title of the College. The school has been known ever since as Alma College.

The College colours were chosen at the same time. They represented the three branches of the College curriculum originally planned: Literature, blue; Art, gold; and Music, crimson.

Motto

The choice of motto seems to have caused some confusion during the first few years. The architect, James Balfour, gave the first suggestion to the Board, "Jamais Arriere". This conveyed well enough the idea of never moving backward, but it was over cryptic for elegant French. Two years later Principal Austin printed a revised motto in a prospectus, adding the desirable "en" but he changed the final word, resulting in a phrase not only incorrect but comical as well, "Jamais En Derriere"! Then Dr. Warner, scholar and gentleman that he was, again changed it in the prospectus to read "Jamais En Arriere". This was perfectly good French, but when Mrs. Harriet Dobson arrived with the new principal in 1919 she was unhappy over the three variations then in existence, and the negative flavour of them all. She changed it to the more positive form that still prevails in 1977, "Toujours En Avant".

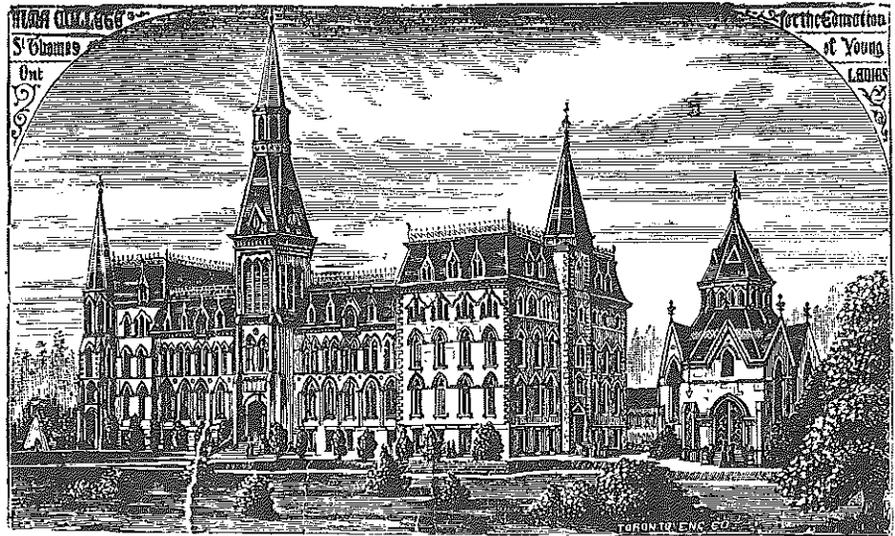
Tenders

In April, 1877, the new College Board called for tenders and architects' plans on the building. Twenty architects submitted plans, and James Balfour of Hamilton won the competition. The contract for the actual construction went to Henry Lindop of St. Thomas for \$24,064. All the contractors adhered so closely to specifications that the difference between the highest and the lowest tenders was only \$177.28. The plan called for steam heating, thorough ventilation, and "every degree of comfort possible". All these requirements together with plumbing, gas light fixtures, wooden fencing, and improvement of the grounds, brought the estimated cost to about \$50,000.

The Board appointed a Mr. Ware as superintendent of works "at a (total) salary of \$400.00 or pro rata, should the engagement be terminated by either party on a week's notice prior to completion of the work". Little else is known about Mr. Ware except that he seems to have completed his job. There is no evidence of either party giving one week's notice!

Cornerstone

In those Victorian times May 24, 1878 was felt to be a most appropriate day for laying the cornerstone of Alma College. Members of the Board and many St. Thomas citizens, both interested and curious, were on hand to welcome Education Minister Adam Crooks who was to officiate at the ceremony. His formal and flowery speech deserves a place in this story:

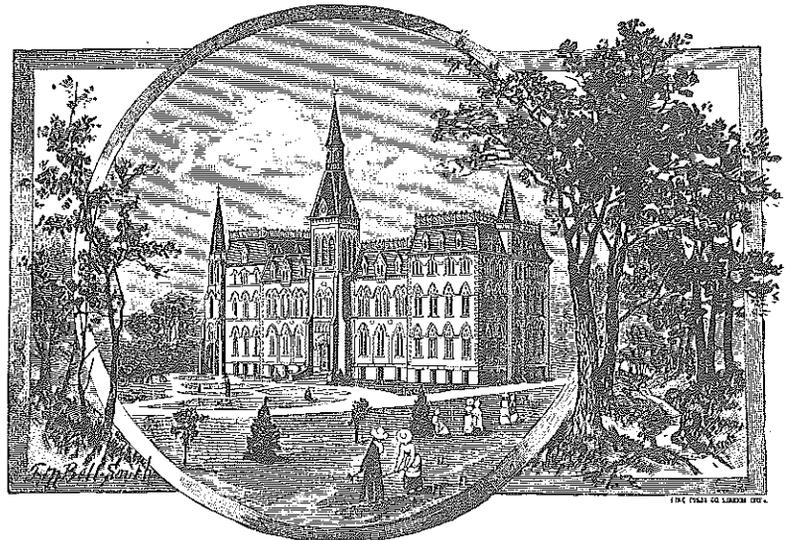


Architect James Balfour's sketch that won the competition

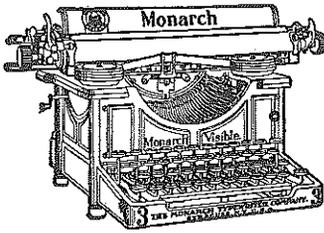
I have not seen in this country — I have not seen anywhere else — a design in better harmony with the objects of the institution, the cornerstone of which I am about to lay; or one more expressive in its every feature of the noble work to which it is to be dedicated. That is a successful drawing indeed to which one cannot point to some drawback, to some serious defect either in detail, in proportion, symmetry or arrangement of parts. But this design appears to me faultless. It is in fact above criticism. That is more than I can say of any other plan for a public building that ever came under my observation . . .

Construction

The contractor and workmen had by this time started construction and the work of the members of the College Board entered a new phase. They were responsible for securing funding, for detailed planning of the interior, and for constant promotion in the province through local newspapers and speeches to prepare for recruitment of students within a year. The first meeting of the executive committee of the College Board met in 1880 with six present: Bishop Carman, President, Archibald McLachlin, Secretary, Rev. A. E. Griffith, Captain James Sisk, Sheriff Colin Munroe, Colin McDougall, M.P., J. E. Smith. We can picture these serious gentlemen in their stiff winged collars, gathered round a table poring over plans and accounts. In the minutes appears a rather curious "memo of expenditures up to July 25, 1880":



Sketch by F. M. Bell Smith of College when the building was completed



When Dr. Warner became Secretary of the Senate, he desperately needed a typewriter—like this

Furnishings and Equipment



Tower room for two

Paid contractor including debentures available.....	\$31,137.31
Salaries and travelling expenses of agents	5,330.00
Interest on borrowed money	2,235.50
Expenditures of miscellaneous character	985.31
Paid on site directly by Board	1,000.00
Paid indirectly by note and cash	1,600.00
Exchange of lands.....	800.00
Total payment for College.....	\$43,088.12
To contractor on contents proper (H. Lindop not including claims for drawings)	5,572.29
To J. J. Blackmore and Co.	750.00

It took only three years for the architect's plan to be transferred into an imposing building. By August 16, 1881, only two months before the opening of the school, the Board, as shown by the minutes, had arranged:

- for carpeting the students' reception room.
- for carpeting the floors of the dormitories to within fifteen inches of the baseboard, and for painting and stenciling the uncovered space so as to show a border around the carpet.
- that of each pattern of carpet there should be at least sufficient to cover six rooms; and that (it) should not exceed thirty-five cents per yard.
- that the rostrum for the Convocation Hall and the (teachers') platforms for the classrooms should be movable on castors . . .

These hard-working board members were concerned throughout all their planning that the facilities would enable the school to realize the lofty hope of that early stated purpose "to afford young ladies a liberal course of instruction in all that tends to make their lives useful and happy, and their tastes elevated and refined".

It would seem, however, that very low priority was given to office equipment. In 1883, two years after opening, the secretary of the Senate and head of the modern languages department, Dr. Warner, appealed to the Board for "one typewriter". Until that time all College correspondence and business was carried on in long-hand in the one small office then designated for College administration.

YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION

MEMBERS' * COURSE *

ATTRACTION No. 2.

CONCERT

—IN—

VICTORIA HALL, &

—BY—

Ladies of Alma College

ST. THOMAS

—ON—

Friday, March 25, '87

Admission, 25c. to all Parts of the Hall.

Seats can be reserved without extra charge at Gillean's Jewelry Store,
Richmond Street, Thursday, 10 a.m.

The Concert Grand Steinway and Haines Pianos used on this
occasion have been kindly loaned by Dr. Sippi
who represents A. & S. Nordheimer.

ADVERTISER PRINTING CO.

Long before the College was scheduled to be opened, Dr. Austin, the principal-elect, and the Board, were busy promoting the school, its programme, and the city in which it stood. Notices were sent to newspapers of Ontario cities, Montreal, Detroit and New York, and copies of the "Announcement" were mailed to churches, schools and libraries. This enticing detail appears in the first prospectus published in the spring of 1881:

. . . St. Thomas is situated . . . in the midst of splendid country; it is a growing town which possesses citizens of evident enterprise and liberality. It is served by such a network of railways as to make it accessible from all directions and is small enough to be comparatively free from the vices and snares incident to overgrown cities.



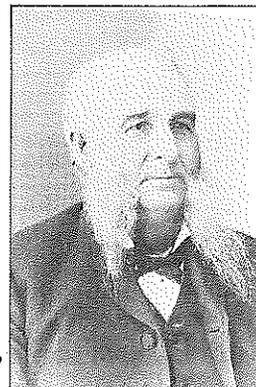
*Miss Clara M. Woodsworth B.A.,
Teacher of Latin and English*



*Miss Harriett Jolliffe
Teacher of Piano*



*Miss Gertrude Huntley
Teacher of Violin*



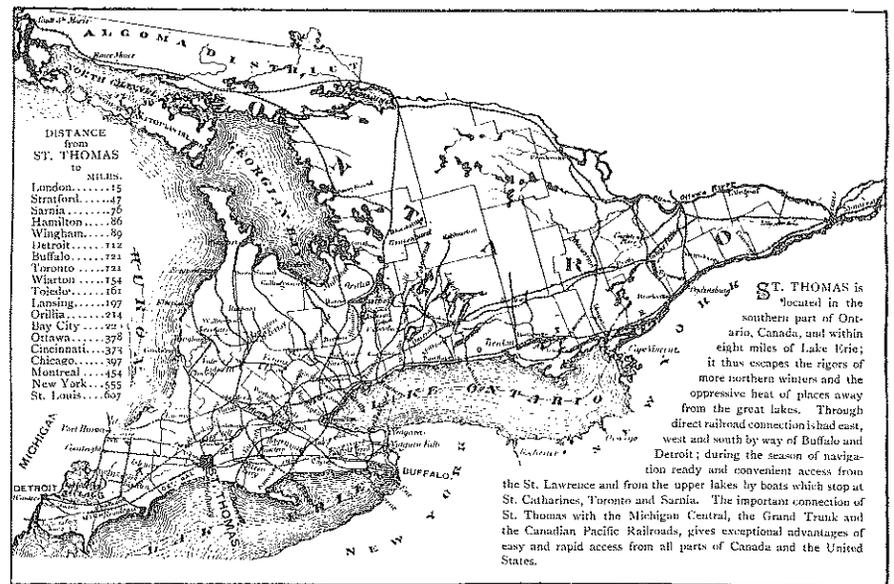
*Peter Wood Esq.
Brantford, Ont.
A generous
friend of Alma*

*Plans for
Funding*

When the building was almost completed subscriptions totalled \$32,763.11 which left an uncovered balance of \$25,000. To quote from the minutes,

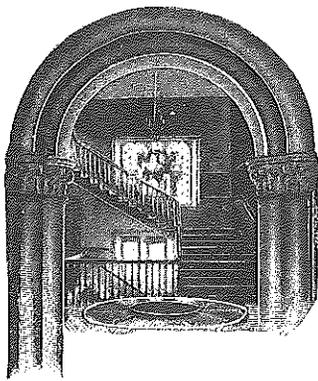
The Niagara Conference, in view of the additions made to the first estimates, respectfully yet urgently requests the people of St. Thomas to provide the sum of \$5,000 toward furnishing the building. We would recommend that \$1,000 be raised by the young women of our church, either by personal solicitations, or the promotion of aid societies, such societies to be formed by the ministers where practicable. We would also recommend the adoption of the scheme of the Board that an effort be made to secure 250 shares of \$100.00 each payable January 1, 1881, each amount not valid until the whole amount be secured and that persons taking shares be responsible for the collection or payment of same.

It was not as easy to collect these sums as the Conference had so optimistically expected, but Bishop Carman refused to become discouraged. In his words, "Alma College is bound to rise above all the clouds of financial difficulties to where perpetual sunshine shall settle upon it". This rather unrealistic brand of faith caused a good deal of inconvenience and despair over the next year or so.



St. Thomas railroad connections

Opening



The "Doughnut" radiator
in the front entrance

In spite of the Board's financial worries, the building was completed in the allotted time and was formally opened on October 13, 1881. The large College Chapel and Convocation Hall (now the principal's apartment) which at that time constituted the entire east wing of the main floor, was crowded at the morning, afternoon and evening services. Dr. Carman delivered the sermon and conducted the ritual of dedication, after which the students were formally enrolled. The musical part of the programme was directed by Mr. St. John Hyttenrauch, interspersed with some dozen addresses by Mayor Dr. VanBuskirk, Principal Miller of the Collegiate, Mr. McLean, Inspector of Schools, and other dignitaries. The gala opening *Conversazione* is vividly described in the *Journal*:

. . . Within, as without, the College building was ablaze with light (candles and gas) and its wide halls and corridors were echoing with music. The grand edifice never before showed to such advantage, and many were the exclamations of praise and admiration that were heard on every hand. The students seemed already at home, and with the visitors thronged the corridors, and before the hour for commencing the exercises had arrived, standing room was not to be had in the chapel, and in a few minutes more, a chance to look in at the door, over the heads of a multitude, was at a premium.

Faculty

On December 19, 1881, Dr. Carman presided at the installation of the faculty. He read the declaration which set forth the "Design of the College" and expressed his confidence

in the choice of the discreet and learned officers, that the great advantages of good government and thorough instruction might be combined. Out of the numerous gentlemen of high capabilities and satisfactory qualifications within their reach, (they) have made their selection of officers and instructors for the proper government of the school and the efficient instruction of the students.

The principal and faculty chosen for that opening year were remarkably well qualified, gathered from many universities and schools of training, and representing wide experience. In spite of this statement of "design" six women were included in the final choice of those of "high capabilities".

Rev. B. F. Austin was appointed Principal and Professor of Classics and Mathematics. He was a young minister of the Methodist Church in the Bay of Quinte Conference who seemed to have the qualities required for leadership. He received his B.A. from Albert College in Belleville in 1877, and his B.D. from Victoria College in Cobourg in 1881. He came to Alma College with "a fine literary equipment and good credentials". In 1896 Victoria College conferred on him the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity.

Alma College Opening.

*You are respectfully invited to attend the
Opening Exercises of Alma College, St. Thomas,*

—THURSDAY, OCTOBER 13th, 1881—

*10.30 a.m.—Dedicatory Sermon by Bishop Carman,
D. D.*

2.30 p.m.—Enrolment of Students and Addresses.

7.30 p.m.—Conversazione.

In behalf of Alma College Executive,

A. McLACHLAN,
Secretary.



*Mrs. Margaret Capsey
Governess, Lady Principal, 1881*



*Miss S. Emma Sisk,
Teacher of Piano, 1881*



*Miss Maggie Baker,
First Teacher of Voice, 1881*

The first Professor of Modern Languages was Rev. R. I. Warner who received a B.A. and medal from Albert College, and in 1883 an M.A. degree from Victoria College. His wife was the former Catherine Parsons whose father was a minister at Central Methodist Church. She had worked with her husband during his probation years in the Niagara Conference of the Methodist Church on the Beverley, Seaforth, Forest and Embro circuits.

Mr. St. John Hytterauch was made Director and Professor of Music. He had received most of his musical training in Copenhagen, Denmark, before he came to Canada where he was associated with London Schools of Music. His position as conductor of the London Philharmonic Society for 25 years was regarded as "a most enviable position among musicians in Canada". He founded a notable tradition in music at Alma College.

The first Director and Professor of fine art and elocution was Mr. F. M. Bell Smith. He had studied at the South Kensington Art School in England, and then received a Grade A Certificate from the Ontario College of Art in Toronto. He was nominated as Director of Art at Alma College by the Ontario Society of Artists. He contributed a great deal to the richness of the College programme. For example, during the next few years the Ontario Society of Artists awarded to his Alma students the largest number of certificates given to any Ontario school. In 1893, at the World's Fair in Chicago, the Alma College exhibit won a coveted "diploma and medal" as well as half the awards given to private schools in Canada.

Miss Maggie Baker, appointed Preceptress and Teacher of Singing, was a graduate of the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston. She was trained to teach voice and choral singing, but as Preceptress she also acted with the Principal as "prefect of studies".

Mrs. Margaret Capsey was named Lady Principal and Governess . . . "in charge of the health, manners, morals, personal habits, and domestic relations of the students, acting toward them . . . as a kind and considerate matron".

Miss S. Emma Sisk, the senior teacher of piano under Mr. Hytterauch, was also organist at Central Methodist Church. She was an outstanding teacher and later became Lady Principal and founder of Alma Daughters, the College alumnae association.

Miss E. Gibbard became the teacher of "Fancy Work", a Victorian term for small handicrafts including in this instance "needle work, wax work, leather work, twine work, lace work, wool work, embroidery, Kensington painting, and home decorative arts".

*Museum and
Art Gallery*

Miss Amelia Brotherhood was appointed assistant in painting, and it was her duty to train students to teach art in the high schools. (An interesting reference to the emphasis on flower painting in Victorian times is found in an Alma student's letter, "If we can't paint tulips it isn't due to lack of practice. So far we've had three varieties of greenhouse tulips. We live in mortal terror of what we may have to face when the central flower bed in the campus blossoms out".)

The prospectus for Alma College gives this account of the Museum and Art Gallery:

The first anniversary of the College opening was celebrated on the thirteenth of October, 1882, by an Art Exhibition and the formal opening of a Museum and Art Gallery for the College. Among the donations which have been received are a case of Canadian birds, donated by ex-Mayor VanBuskirk; a collection of English, American, Canadian and foreign coins, over five hundred in number, by the late Dr. Tweedale, of St. Thomas; a choice collection of Indian relics, by the same gentleman . . .

Many other valuables have been given to the Museum over the years including rocks and minerals of Canada, Canadian woods, Japanese and West Indian curios, as well as "a fine Elk Head and Horns" which, happily, seems to have found another home by this time! For the Art Gallery the College purchased several paintings by leading Canadian artists, some of which hang in the halls and are greatly treasured today.



*A group of students
at Alma in 1886*

Senate

In 1883 at a meeting of the College Board, Principal Austin brought forward a new idea. This record appears in the minutes:

I would respectfully suggest to the Board for their consideration the necessity of constituting a Senate under whose jurisdiction and by whose arrangements and order the regular examinations for promotion should be conducted and by whom all certificates of standing and diplomas in the several departments should be issued.

The Executive approved the plan and made these resolutions:

. . . These persons shall constitute the provisional Senate of Alma College — the Principal, the Chancellor, the professors of Modern Languages, Music, Fine Art; the teachers of English, Natural Science, Mathematics; the General Superintendent of the Methodist Church, the President of the London Conference, the principal of the St. Thomas Collegiate Institute, the inspectors for St. Thomas and Elgin schools.

(The Board approved this group and added the Superintendent of the St. Thomas District and A. McLachlin.)



*Rev. B. F. Austin, M.A., B.D.,
First Principal*

(The duties are) to lay down courses of study . . . to appoint examiners and arrange for the examinations, to decide what prizes and scholarships should be established . . . to adjudicate upon the merits of examinations and to confer degrees and honors upon such candidates as may be deemed worthy.

Principal Austin was elected President of the Senate and Professor Warner was made Secretary. (About this time the minutes again record that Dr. Warner asked permission for the College to rent one typewriter!) Committees were chosen to draft courses of study. In 1885 drawing was made compulsory in the general literary course. By this time comprehensive courses were given in piano, voice, fine art, fancy work, commercial studies, domestic economy and cooking, and kindergarten training. There was also a strong academic department with courses leading to university entrance. In 1888 courses in violin were added, and three years later two advanced courses in the humanities — Mistress of Liberal Arts (M.L.A.) and Mistress of English Literature (M.E.L.).



Miss Marilla Adams, on right, Graduate Fine Arts, 1886, taught at Alma and in other colleges. Photo taken on her 100th birthday in Montreal. Lived to be 103. Mrs. Ruth Dobson, on left.

To All to Whom These Presents shall Come, Greeting :

Whereas Miss Marilla Adams has completed the course in Fine Arts as laid down in the Curriculum, embracing Freehand and Model Drawing, Practical Geometry, Perspective, Shading in Gray, Painting in Oil and Water Colors; and whereas she has received five Certificates in the above-mentioned subjects from the Ontario School of Arts; and whereas she has taught successfully the elementary subjects of the above course for half a year in this Institution

Now, Know ye, that in accordance with these facts and in testimony of our implicit confidence in her abilities to give instructions in Fine Arts, we have awarded her this

DIPLOMA

And have caused our Common Seal and the Signatures of the Principal and Registrar, and of our Professor in Fine Arts, to be hereunto affixed

Done at Alma Ladies College, this twenty-fifth day of June, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and eighty-four.

E. M. ... Professor of Fine Arts.
W. C. ... Registrar.
... Principal.

Church union

In 1883 three Methodist churches united — the Episcopalian Methodists, the Methodist Episcopalians, and the Wesleyan Methodists. With one church and one board instead of three, ministers were faced with many financial problems, since they had been hired by boards now non-existent. Many ministers and churches had promised to contribute to Alma College but now the pledges were difficult to keep. Some of the pledges were honoured at a great personal sacrifice.

New wing

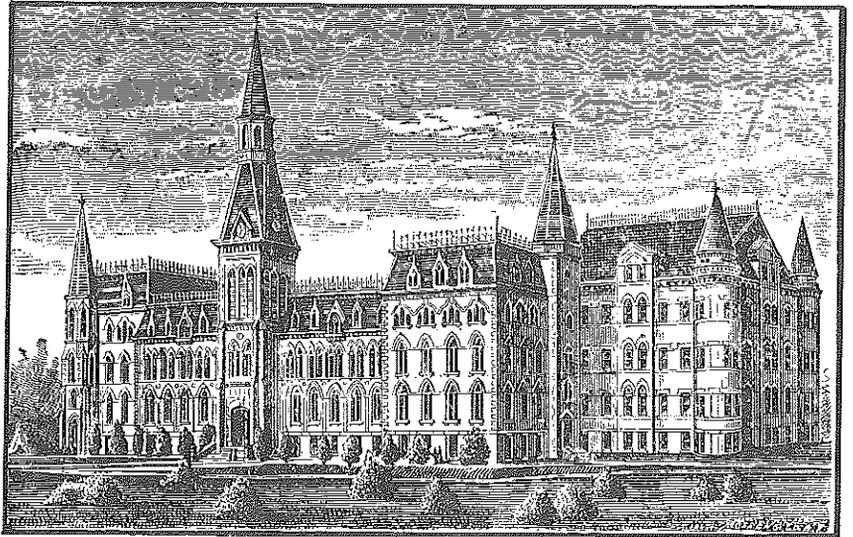


Archibald McLachlin

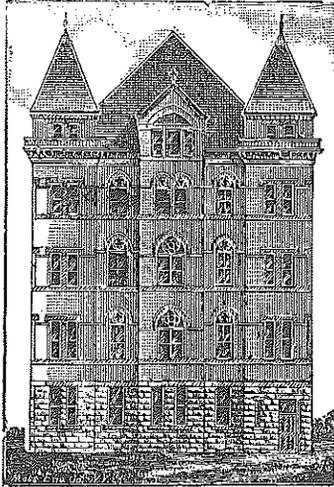
By 1886, five years after opening, the College was filled to capacity, and the Board felt that it was necessary to build an additional wing. Plans were again submitted by Mr. Balfour, and the contract was let this time to Mr. J. M. Green at an estimated cost of \$22,000. The new building provided for a music hall to seat 500, bedrooms for 50 students, four new classrooms, and an art studio "30 by 50 feet" with skylight. It was to be called McLachlin Hall after Archibald McLachlin, Registrar of Elgin County, loyal friend of the school, and for many years secretary of the Board. As Dr. Warner said to the Board:

"No man did more than he for the success of the institution, and the perpetuation of his name in this way was an honour merited and deserved."

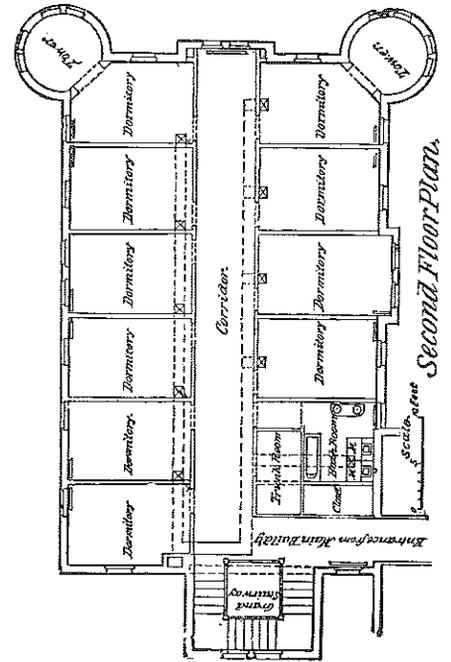
The corner-stone of McLachlin Hall was laid by Mrs. Carman on May 24, 1888. It was formally opened on October 16 by Hon. G. W. Ross, the Minister of Education for Ontario.



View of the entire building;
McLachlin Hall at the right



West elevation of new building
— McLachlin Hall



View of Second and Third Floors — Dormitories

Cultural Centre

During the next decade the College began to take its place in the community as a cultural centre. There were concerts and recitals of music and elocution held throughout the county, and art exhibitions and displays of hand work and physical culture in the College.

Fees

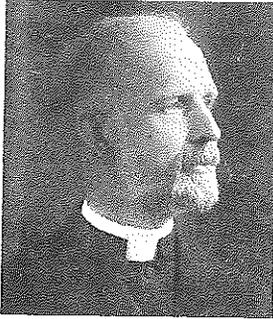
The original all-inclusive fee of \$190.00 held steady in spite of difficult financial times. For day-students the cost of lessons per term in piano and organ remained at \$15.00 "from the Professor", \$8.00 "from the teachers", \$5.00 for 8 Kindergarten classes. Special students in Fine Art paid \$100.00 for a complete year's course. A course in cookery or dressmaking could be arranged for \$3.00, and "For riding the fee for 12 lessons and use of horse and saddle is \$15.00. For one single lesson the fee is \$1.50".



*Art pupil of F. M. Bell Smith
in 1890—Jeannie Greson*



Graduates of 1896



*Second Principal,
Rev. R. I. Warner, 1898*

*Rules and
Pranks*

In matters of dress a prospectus in 1895 gives this advice:

“Although no particular dress is prescribed except for the school dress (white long-sleeved blouse and long dark skirt), it is desired that it be of a simple and substantial kind, no longer than the modern walking dress, should be made loose, and as much of the clothing as possible should be suspended from the shoulders, thus securing opportunity for development of the chest and for full respiration.”

Judging from the photos of the fashionable Alma girls of those days, it would seem that they did not take this advice too seriously!

The school seems to have been conducted with a minimum of rules, but one inspired the girls to great heights of courage and ingenuity: “No visiting in the rooms of other students after 7 p.m. except upon permission of the Governess”. The girls hid their visitors under the beds, arranged their midnight feasts on the floor in total darkness, and tied a string to the toe of a leading culprit down the hall to warn her of an approaching teacher. Four or five would climb under the blanket in a double bed to munch forbidden cookies, and one brave girl was known to make fudge in a tin cup over the gas jet! Their lives did seem to be “useful and happy” and their tastes “elevated and refined” as the founding fathers had so piously hoped.

*Dr. Austin
resigns*

Dr. Austin resigned as principal in 1897 and went to California to take up the duties of editing a magazine on spiritualism, a subject in which he had been deeply interested for some time. The College Board recorded in the minutes their warm appreciation of “his Christian character, his scholarship, ability and industry”.

New Principal

Dr. Robert I. Warner was appointed Alma’s second principal in 1898. He had many admirable qualifications for the office at that time — wide experience, extreme caution and patience, academic excellence, warm interest in people, a sense of humour, and a staunch faith in the future of Alma College. Mrs. Warner joined her gifts to his in a most helpful way. Dr. Warner had been on the College staff from the beginning, had been secretary of the Board and the Senate, and was familiar with all the traditions and problems of the college.

*Financial
Crisis*

Those problems were mainly financial and quite serious. Put most simply they came down to a high debt and insufficient income. In 1892 in order to find solutions and to guide the school through these difficult times, the Board appointed Rev. B. Clement, ex-president of the London Conference, as "financial agent". He found the task extremely difficult and resigned after a discouraging year. Rev. J. P. Rice was appointed in 1893 as his successor, but he too met with little success in reducing the debt and resigned after three years. The College also faced declining enrolment. Parents were no longer able to pay for tuition and board because of repeated crop failures and uncertain markets. With decreased revenues the school could not cover the overhead costs and increased interest charges.



Principal's reception room

The Board faced this emergency with what must have appeared to be a ruthless disregard for the personal rights of the faculty. First the Board drastically reduced the number of staff. Then they accepted voluntary rebates on the salaries of the teachers still remaining. When they were later forced to hire new staff, they considered only those who agreed to promise a rebate of 15% on salaries over \$400, and 10% on salaries under that amount. They saved only \$2,866 with these drastic measures.

By 1898 the Board realized that they must make plans to wipe off the debt by raising funds from outside sources. They were fortunate in obtaining mortgages of \$24,000 and \$10,000 from the Massey Estate and \$7,300 from Peter Wood of Brantford, for a total of \$41,300. St. Thomas agreed to contribute \$10,000 if the College could find \$5,000 elsewhere. As it turned out St. Thomas raised \$6,000, London Conference \$3,000, and Hamilton Conference \$2,000. In the end there remained only \$15,000 which the Molson's Bank, as "treasurer of Alma College", agreed to carry as a floating debt. In the words of Rev. E. W. Edwards, in his Alma history,

"The year 1898 marked a gratifying increase in the financial credit of the Board, and relief from immediate creditors".

One can almost hear the board members starting to breathe normally again!



*Mrs. R. I. Warner, president of
St. Thomas Alma Daughters*

Toward the end of the second decade Principal Warner and the Board found that liquidation of the debt did not mean the end of financial worries. The College was constantly required to replace old furnishings and to repair and improve the plant. By 1911, the number of students needing physical training and sports, and the amount of community interest in music and social activities had so increased that Dr. Warner pointed out the need for a gymnasium, a music building and a larger auditorium. But money was so short that it was only possible to make essential repairs each year. Major additions to school facilities had to be postponed until the 1920's when the war was over. By this time, however, in spite of the financial distress of the College, the Board did increase staff salaries to bring them more into line with other teachers and workers in the community.

*Retiring the
Debt*

The first challenge confronting Principal Warner was the task of retiring the floating debt of \$15,000. He gradually increased enrolment by personally visiting families to recruit students in the surrounding area. He also cut down slightly the number of staff, and practised economies, large and small, while appealing to friends in the community for funds. Gradually the debt was amortized. This success inspired the kind of confidence that Alma had not enjoyed since it opened in 1881. By the end of 1898 the total subscriptions and gifts to the school since 1877 amounted to \$150,000, representing thousands of donors. The school seemed to be entering a period of stability at last.

*University
Affiliation*

As a means of encouraging Alma students to continue on to university after graduation, the Board arranged for Alma College to be affiliated in 1881 with Albert College in Belleville, then in 1898 with Victoria College in Cobourg and the University of Toronto, and finally in 1925 with the University of Western Ontario in London. A growing number of women were proceeding to higher education in many fields.

The prospectus of 1898 states that

“Of the 185 who have graduated at Alma College, over sixty percent have received college appointments as professors or teachers or (have taken) other lucrative situations in which they are utilizing the practical education received in these halls.”

Education at Alma College seemed to have gone beyond the goal of “making a gentlewoman” as an early advertisement had announced.

*Expanding the
Programme*

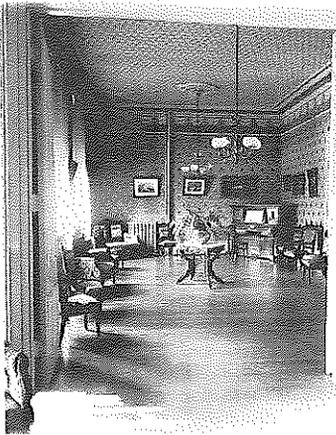
In the autumn of 1898, it was again possible to concentrate on strengthening the school's programme. Alma became the first girls' college in Canada to organize a department of Domestic Science with fully developed courses in home management, house decoration, food chemistry, cooking, preserving, sewing, child care and nutrition. The first equipment was presented by Mrs. Lillian Massey Treble.

The Preparatory Department was another innovation. It was organized about 1885 and among its first outstanding teachers was Dorothy Edge, who later married A. D. Lapan, the Superintendent of the University of Toronto. The department taught all the work of the public school and prepared the girls for High School Entrance examinations.

To satisfy public demand for practical training for women, the Board established a Department of Commercial Studies, with two full-time instructors and several lecturers in subjects such as commercial law and business ethics.

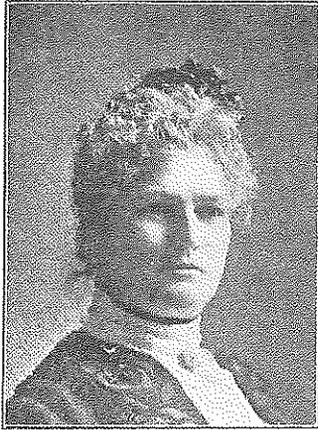


*First Household Science Department in Canadian Girls' College was established in 1898
This is Alma's Cookery Class 1886*



Drawingroom 1900

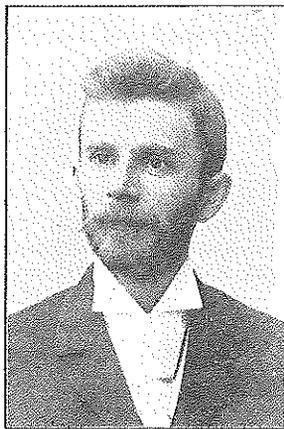
The Fine Art Department, first organized by F. M. Bell Smith in 1881, brought Alma students to a high level of excellence in drawing and painting. Some years later he was followed by another outstanding Canadian artist with an international reputation, W. St. Thomas Smith. In the Music Department, the successor to Mr. Hyttenrauch was Mr. Thomas Martin, A.T.C.M., a talented pianist and teacher who maintained and even increased the prestige of the department. The Elocution Department was taken over by another talented teacher, Miss May Walker, A.T.C.M.



*Mrs. Mary Jolliffe
Teacher of Singing*



Alma Champion Basketball Team, 1902



*Mr. W. H. Dingle
Music Teacher*



*Miss Margaret C. McKenzie
Teacher of Drawing, Painting
and Sketching*



*Colin MacDougall, Q.C., M.P.
Charter member of Alma College*



*Miss Hattie Maudana Smith
Piano Teacher*

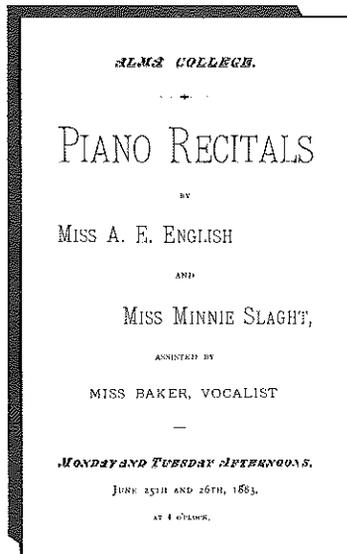
Alma Club

In the difficult years between 1885 and 1900 when finances were low and the future looked bleak, many friends of the College had been anxious. Miss Emma Sisk, the dynamic Lady Principal of that time, seemed to have an inexhaustible supply of faith and hope. Soon after Dr. Warner became Principal, she gathered about her twelve students and staff to form the Alma Club whose purpose was "mutual improvement and social fellowship". In Dr. Warner's words,

This group could not remain passive for long. They became busier than bees in no time, and set to work to help their College. The guest room was inspected and each member pledged herself to raise \$5.00 for a guest room fund . . . Thus \$60.00 worth of improvements were made to that room, and more than that — a beginning was made on improvements on a much larger scale.

In February, 1901, Miss Sisk organized the Alma Daughters Society for the alumnae whose chief function was "to organize the spirit of school fellowship into definite and effective expression". Their spirit and achievements are described in a later chapter of this history.

School Societies



The life of a school is reflected in its clubs and societies, and this was true at Alma even as early as the 1880's. The first to be formed was given the rather awesome name of Clio Club (Clio — the muse of history). The club included a quartette of singers organized by Miss Baker — Mrs. Warner, Clara Williams, Minnie McKay and Gertrude Salene, with Miss Sisk as accompanist. They arranged cultural programmes for the school and the city.

Since sports were given an important place in the daily schedule, an Athletic Society was formed to encourage tournaments in tennis and croquet. (One unforgettable day the Alma Tennis Club played the men of the St. Thomas Athletic Society — Alma 11, St. Thomas 9!) The Athletic Society also arranged field hockey, hikes, exercise on the lawn and in the gym as well as the annual Field Day. A room on the top floor of McLachlin wing was pressed into service for physical culture exercises; we trust that basketball was not included since the ceiling was a glass skylight. On sunny days the girls had workouts on the roof of the main building.

A Home and Foreign Missionary Society met on two Sundays a month. Among its activities the Society supported two native students in the Girls Missionary School in Tokyo, and two in the Mission School at Ahmednagar, India. In Canada the girls furnished a room in the Protestant Institute in Montreal. Alma also started a branch of the Y.W.C.A. and followed its broad aims.

Almafilian



Miss Minnie L. Bollett M.A.
Lady Principal 1903-04

The Almafilian Society, organized in January, 1882, took as its purpose "The mutual improvement of its members in musical and literary exercises". One interesting outcome of its activities was the publication of the Almafilian, which has continued to be the school's student paper to this day. It was the successor to "Alma", which was the original and rather pretentious publication that included long and learned articles. Dr. Warner said of the Almafilian that it "was well conducted and of real merit. In addition to its College news it cultivates the College spirit and may be regarded as the school's official organ". An interesting item from the Almafilian in 1903 gives the school full marks in the matter of health:

This girls' boarding school cultivates health. This is a great advantage. The regular hours, systemic living, physical training and wholesome diet, bring back health and strength to thousands of sickly, thin, anaemic girls who were being killed by late hours, candy and pickles!

Copies of the Almafilian have always proved a gold mine of fact and impressions. It seems that Miss Henwood, a popular Teacher, sent in this contribution to the paper:

LATIN

All are dead who ever spoke it,
All are dead who ever wrote it,
All will die who ever learn it.
Blessed death; they surely earn it!

The reporting of Saturday parties is vivid: "We new students (the imps) entertained the old students at an Old Maids Party, and everyone came dressed as a child (us) or an old lady (them)". There were reports of spirited debates on Woman Suffrage, Music Versus Cookery, and "Newspapers do more harm than good". A note in the fall of 1908: "For exercise in the opening days of term, the girls are rushing trunks down the corridors to their rooms at a dangerous rate. This evidently agrees with them for they wear a much brighter countenance as the days go by." And in 1910: "Great excitement and loud cheers rent the air. Miss Jolliffe came in first in the Faculty Race, followed closely by Miss Bowes". This Almafilian limerick is signed Anon:

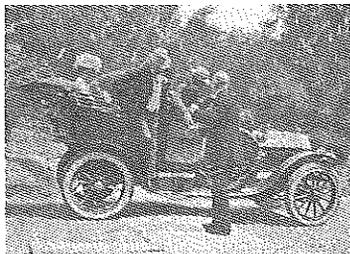
There are heaps of things we dream on
And many a friend we beam on,
But for absolute bliss
We commend you to this —
That rare fluffy cake with whipped cream on!



*Miss Ella D. Bowes
Lady Principal 1909-1920*

From the earliest days the students were expected to attend their own church twice each Sunday. When Dr. Warner became Principal in 1898 the students represented six different denominations and attended almost a dozen different churches. This meant that twelve chaperones had to be available to conduct twelve lines each Sunday — twice! This task was especially difficult in the evenings, particularly during the long trek to First Methodist Church a mile away. The chaperones were also much annoyed “by the obtruded attentions of impressionable youths”, to use Dr. Warner’s diplomatic phrase. Gradually the strict adherence to denominations was relaxed and the girls went to only one church at night, Central Methodist, which was close to the College. The “impressionable youths” were not so annoying when the line had only one block to walk to church.

Summer School



*Prime Minister Borden pays a
visit to the College in 1910*

To cooperate with the community, Alma soon began to make her facilities available to groups in the summer months. The Elgin County Teachers Institute held their annual conference in the College during the Easter holidays of 1896. Other such events followed. The first church summer school — a Normal Missionary School under the auspices of the London Conference Epworth League — was held at the school in 1908. Many young people from all parts of south western Ontario spent one week in residence each summer. The summer school was a model for many later activities that added greatly to Alma’s usefulness in the church and the community.

Lady Principals

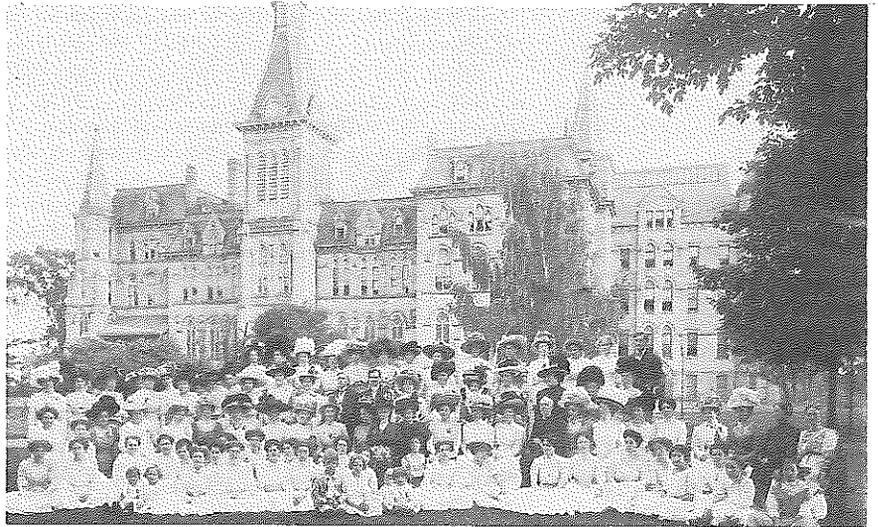


*Mrs. Jean Wylie Grey
Lady Principal 1909*

Several outstanding women served as Lady Principals at Alma from 1881 to 1919. After the capable pioneering of Mrs. Margaret Capsey and Miss S. Emma Sisk, came Jennie E. Axford who married a Mr. Baker and went to Albert College. She was followed by Miss Minnie L. Bollert who taught advanced English and left Alma to become Dean of Regina College and later Dean of Women at the University of British Columbia, where her portrait hangs today. The next Lady Principal was Mrs. Jean Wylie Grey, followed by Miss Clara Woodsworth who married Professor George Blewett of the University of Toronto. In 1909 Miss Ella D. Bowes was appointed and she was a moving spirit at Alma for the next decade. Her scrapbooks were carefully kept and give an interesting record of the life of the students and youthful staff members. Miss Hattie Jolliffe is in many staff snapshots, stately and beautiful as a very young girl.



Emma Baker, Blanche Brown 1910



Dedication of Front Gates 1910



May Dunlop 1910



1909-1910

Life at Alma

A vivid record of life at Alma can be pieced together from the wealth of photos and snaps that appear in the early year books — girls in long, full skirts and puff sleeves playing a sprightly game of tennis on the east court, one historic scene of a tennis contest between the young ladies of Alma and the young gentlemen of the St. Thomas Athletic Association; long dignified lines of students dressed in their Sunday best, walking briskly to church; a crowd around a St. Thomas street car eager to be off on a belt-line ride; five long-skirted ladies in a row bending forward slightly, ready to start a faculty race; girls swinging under the walnut trees, walking in the ravine, posing in front of the snowball tree, enjoying a picnic on the grass, talking around the “doughnut” (radiator) in the front hall, skating on the rink on the back campus.

*One
Commencement*

An illuminating summary of one year’s work is contained in a decorous Commencement pamphlet covering the events of June 3 to 18, 1912. Even the cover is impressive with its white embossed lettering on heavy white bond all tied together with a white silk cord. Inside are two full-page photos of Principal Warner and the College, flanking fourteen pages of detailed programmes of closing events. Here is the list:



*Mrs. N. W. Rowell
Teacher at Alma 1912*

June 3 - Field Day Sports with events every hour on the hour: baseball, tennis, bowling, tether ball, golf, boot and shoe race, egg and spoon race, soda cracker race, graceful walking, candle race, tug of war, marathon four times around the circle.

June 7 — Domestic Science Dinner (for examiners)

Menu

Fruit Cocktail
Dinner Soup Parker House Rolls
Steamed Lobster with Drawn Butter Sauce
Brabant Potatoes
Celery Olives
Creamed Mushrooms in Swedish Timbales
Fillet of Veal
Franconia Potatoes French Peas
Asparagus Salad Mayonnaise Dressing
Bread and Butter Sandwiches
Strawberry Mousse Little Cakes
Salted Almonds Bon Bons
Cafe Noir

This fantastic spread was prepared for the examiners at the end of the Domestic Science courses. Where could we find a meal like this today? Oh, to be an examiner in 1912!

June 8 - Reception for London Conference and Art Exhibit of work of pupils of Mrs. Eva St. Thomas Smith (water colours), Miss Procnier (design), and Miss S. McKay (china painting).
"Following there is to be a Lawn Fete of drills, marches, songs, band concert and addresses."

June 11, 12, 13 and 17 — Music and Elocution Recitals, one featuring the Senior Physical Culture class in Indian costumes for an "Eastern Temple Drill".

June 14 - Class Day Banquet with speeches by the Principal and the Chairman of the Board in the dining room, and Class History, Legacy, Prophecy and Songs by the graduates in McLachlin Hall.

June 15 - Alma Daughters Reception to alumnae, faculty, and students.

June 16 - 11 a.m. The Baccalaureate Sermon in Central Church.
2 p.m. Fellowship meeting of the Y.W.C.A. in McLachlin Hall.

June 17 - 2 p.m. Alma Daughters Council
7 p.m. Annual Banquet

June 18 - 2 p.m. Alumnae picnic at Pt. Stanley.
8 p.m. Commencement

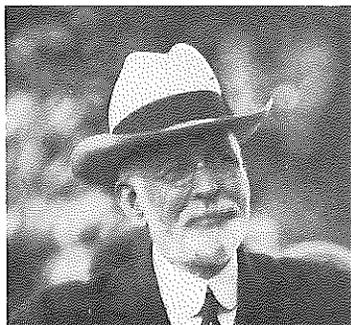
(Whew!)

This staggering succession of events into one short span of three weeks shows a stamina that we seem to have lost in these quieter more modern times!

That First Car

Just before Dr. Warner retired he and Mrs. Warner celebrated their many happy years together by purchasing a small Ford Coupé. They wanted to try out the newly paved road from St. Thomas to Talbotville — the first stretch of the highway to London. The Warners followed the Ira Fergusons in their little Overland touring car, holding fast to the steering wheel and after the best part of an hour they all reached Talbotville in safety!

Dr. Warner's Retirement



Dr. R. I. Warner retires

After twenty years of leadership as Principal, Dr. Warner resigned. The Board met on November 27, 1918, received his resignation with real regret, gave him the honorary title of Principal Emeritus with an honorarium of \$500 and offered him and his wife residence in the College for five years. After a long search the Board appointed Rev. Perry S. Dobson to take office as Principal on August 1, 1919.

Appreciation

Dr. Warner died in 1923, after four years of happy association with Principal Dobson and the College. At the annual meeting of the Board in 1924, six months after his death, in a session of warm memories, a resolution was passed expressing appreciation for Dr. Warner's contribution to the school. In addition to being an able teacher and administrator, he had been at various times, president of the London Conference, member of the Mission Board, and many committees of the church. His influence reached far beyond the College into the life of the community at large. He most certainly "had a way" as Dr. Dobson said, and his gracious and helpful spirit lives on in the memories of the students and friends all over this continent.

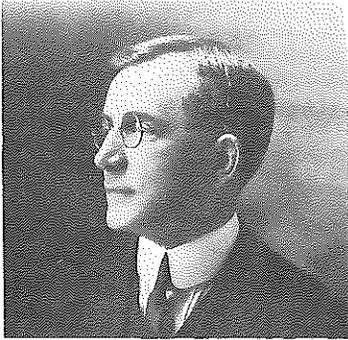
He had felt all through his years at Alma that a top priority was getting rid of the College debt, and to this end he practised every type of economy. When he retired there was no debt, and a small balance had accumulated in the bank. The repairs and upgrading of facilities were undertaken by the principal who followed him.

Writer's Note:

As I have searched through the Archives of Alma College I have been flooded with memories of my childhood. I was never a resident student but I was an adoring neighbour. Our family lived in the house on Moore Street, just over the fence beyond the beautiful wrought-iron gates. Dr. and Mrs. Warner were our dear friends. As long as I can remember I have pictured their gentle faces as they worshipped each Sunday in Central Methodist Church. They were a great influence on my life. Miss Bowes, the Lady Principal, was another good friend. She helped me with costumes for high school plays and encouraged me to study hard. I admired the College students from afar, and tossed back their tennis balls when they fell in our yard. When the girls marched past our house for their morning walk, two by two with teachers front and back, I knew that it was time for me to be off to school. The sounds of students practising the piano often wakened me in the morning and accompanied my study in the evening. I remember so many graduation recitals and convocations. Many times I tried to slip unnoticed into a back seat to admire the graduates — Marion Henry, Catherine Reekie, Marie Leeson, Elva Giles, Maud Finlay, Marion Chant . . . Although my parents could not afford the money for special music lessons, they sent me on to secondary school and teachers college. When I began to teach kindergarten and become independent I was able to study voice with Stanley Oliver and George Carrie at Alma College. These lessons were highlights in my life. At last I was studying within the walls of Alma.

LEDA FERGUSON SCARLETT

Perry S. Dobson
New Principal



Rev. Perry S. Dobson,
the new principal

The Board of Alma College went outside the province of Ontario to Quebec in their search of a principal to succeed Dr. R. I. Warner in 1919. They choose Rev. P. S. Dobson who had attended Simcoe, Parkdale and Bowmanville schools, Albert College, McGill University, Oxford and Wesleyan College in Montreal. His M.A. was from Oxford, and his B.D. from Wesleyan, later D.D. (The honorary degree of Doctor of Laws was conferred upon him by the University of Western Ontario in 1953.) Before coming to St. Thomas, he had served as minister of the Methodist Church in St. Lambert and then Hudson, Quebec. He was Methodist chaplain on the docks at Quebec city for a year before being persuaded by the church to work in education in Stanstead College, a Methodist co-educational school in the Eastern Townships in Quebec. He was first classics master, dean of men, and later acting-principal. During the war years of 1916-1918, he was director of military services of the Y.M.C.A. at Camp Borden.

When he came to Alma, he told the Selection Committee with a chuckle that experience from his student summers might prove most useful in his new post. To finance his studies, he had worked as a watch maker, a book salesman, and a student minister on a three point circuit bicycling 50 miles every Sunday. He has also spent a long summer in Mexico where he grew a big black moustache and joined a team of three Spanish-speaking salesmen selling encyclopedias!

Mrs. Harriet
Dobson

Dr. Dobson's wife, Harriet Page Dobson, was a distinguished scholar and teacher as well as a remarkable organizer of cultural activities, and warm and responsive wife and mother. She was a graduate of Stanstead College and McGill University, winning the gold medal in modern languages in 1901. After teaching languages and mathematics in the Derby Academy in Derby, Vermont, she was principal for two years of the North Troy High School, one of the first women in the country to be appointed to such a post. She then returned to Stanstead College to teach French, and she and Perry Dobson were both members of the faculty there when they were married. When they came to Alma College with their three children, Katherine, Franklin and John, Mrs. Dobson continued to teach languages and worked with her husband as dean of residence for a year. She later taught advanced French and organized French conversation groups in the College and in the city.

New Staff

In filling staff vacancies, Dr. Dobson appealed to his many academic acquaintances all over the country. Among the outstanding women recommended who joined the faculty in those first years were Marion Higgins, Kathleen Bowlby, May Belle Adams, Olive Zeigler, Iveagh Munro, Dorothy Burrell, Nancy Poole, Cleta Ford, and a little later Louise Neville, Marion Henry (Connor), Gertrude Huntly Green, Lila Taylor (Knowles), Helen Hardy, Ada Ross, Isabel Godfrey (Clark), Grace Thomas, Berenice Chalk, Helen Thomson, Betty Ross, Mary E. Johnson, Dorothy Davison (Dobson), and Mrs. George J. Blewett.

*Cooperation
of St. Thomas*

The success of a school depends not only on its principal and faculty with good academic training and rapport with students but on the general climate of co-operation and sense of involvement of the whole community. And so Perry Dobson set about immediately getting to know St. Thomas, its professional and business people, its skilled workmen, its churches, its schools, its organizations, its cultural interests, the people, older and younger, who lived around Alma. And they were outside St. Thomas too — in London, Talbotville, Aylmer, Tillsonburg. The list of new acquaintances is long; a few of those who became important to Alma were Tom Keith, Pete Birdsall, S. F. Maine, "L.H.", Glen Scarlett, Ira Ferguson, the Henrys, the Connors, the Ravens, the Lemons, George L. Gray, "Trev", Contractor Bill Green, Kiwanis, Y.M.C.A., Y.W., the Red Cross . . . Dr. J. D. Curtis, Dr. Kennedy, "W.F.", and all the loyal members of the Board . . .

How could they and Alma work together? What would interest them? What could Alma do for them? Perhaps the key to community interest might be the gym and pool project so close to his heart. The principal and some of the first St. Thomas friends walked up and down Wellington Street the summer when the paving started, signing up homeowners to donate the used bricks in front of their houses. It worked, and everyone got an instant sense of proprietorship and participation in the Alma project.

When the first new building was finally opened, the neighbours came to cheer, and Alma College found that she had a great many new friends who were proud of the school, eager to share in the use of the facilities they had helped to create, and even willing to help in any time of need.

During these years when the principal and the Board were so involved with raising money for the school, in consolidating public support, and upgrading Alma's curriculum and physical plant, it was always a haunting fear of Dr. Dobson, and of Mrs. Dobson too, that in the mass of duties and responsibilities outside the school perhaps they were not devoting time enough to the personal concerns of the students who were, after all, the only justification for all this effort. The Dobsons would be comforted and reassured by the personal memoir which follows in Chapter II.