

*Link Between
Present and Past*

On June 9, 1976 the Alma College Alumnae Council held the 68th annual reunion banquet in the Barbara Heck Dining Hall with over 100 alumnae present. Joanne Scarlett Turner, President of the Council, chaired the event, and in the course of the evening she called on Past-President Berenice Chalk to present the Sisk Trophy cup and tell something about Miss Emma Sisk, the beloved founder of the Alma Daughters Society in 1901. Berenice stood up smiling and someone deftly tied a 100-year-old jabot round her neck with a black velvet ribbon in the style of our grandmothers. Berenice read this vivid excerpt from Alma Daughters' minutes in 1908. It tells the story of that first reunion banquet 68 years ago:

*Planning that
First Banquet
1908*

During the visit in St. Thomas of our honoured President of Alma Daughters, Miss Emma Sisk, two members of this society accompanied her to spend a beautiful May day at the summer home of Mrs. R. McLachlin, Port Stanley. In the course of that delightful drive is it any wonder that ways and means were discussed to promote the welfare of Alma Daughters? In fact it would be impossible to be in the company of Miss Sisk without the conversation turning to a topic so near to her heart. Someone made the suggestion that some form of entertainment be provided for the visiting delegates at the annual executive meeting to be held in June. In those days when a simple form of pleasure satisfied,



Graduates - 1909

a ride around the belt-line of St. Thomas, with a possible treat of ice cream after, was considered sumptuous. One of the most aggressive of the party whispered 'Banquet'. This was at first glance received as something too formidable and beyond comprehension, but by the end of the day's outing the magnitude of this undertaking somewhat diminished. It was finally decided to carry out this idea providing a suitable place could be secured where no chance reporter would intrude. Upon consultation and with considerable trepidation, a committee undertook the final arrangements to hold the first annual banquet of Alma Daughters at Spencer's Restaurant, Talbot Street, St. Thomas, on June 22, 1908.

*Alma Daughters
Dine Together
1908*

It was indeed a delightful surprise when the large company of members and guests gathered at seven o'clock to meet old friends of College days. No trouble had been spared by the committee in charge, consisting of Mesdames Plewes, McLachlin and Misses McKay and Moore, to complete a most artistically arranged table. The college flower, the pansy, with College colours entwined, formed the scheme of decoration, each guest receiving a lovely bunch of pansies . . .

And now let us go back to the very beginning, and read from the story of Alma Daughters by Olive Lewis Smith, written in 1926:

*February 25, 1901,
A New Society*

On the twenty-fifth day of February, 1901, fourteen of Alma's old students met in Mrs. Warner's drawing room and there organized a society for the purpose of keeping in touch with each other, with the College, and in some material way aiding their Alma Mater. The promoter of the movement was the much beloved and at that time Lady Principal of the College, Miss S. Emma Sisk.

A week later there was a second gathering with nine newcomers, at which the election of officers took place —

Honorary President — Mrs. R. I. Warner
President — Miss S. E. Sisk
First Vice-President — Mrs. F. M. Griffin
Second Vice-President — Mrs. Robt. McLachlin
Treasurer — Miss S. McKay
Recording Secretary — Mrs. Plewes
Assistant Secretary — Miss Williams
Corresponding Secretary — Mrs. Martin Kerr

The first contribution to the Society came to hand for this meeting in the sum of \$5.00 from Mrs. Brock of Coal City, Illinois. Another week and the third gathering with two more faces, and it was at this assembly the Society obtained its name, 'Alma Daughters', which was chosen from eight possible suggestions. We must note that the amount of the membership fee was twenty-five cents, and is still — the only thing that hasn't advanced in price in twenty-five years.

Just seven days later we find these loyal ex-students convening again, and the committee previously appointed submitting their constitution and by-laws for the Society. At the regular meeting in May, an emblem and motto were chosen, the former, the forget-me-not, and the latter, 'Lest we forget'. At the June meeting a motion was carried that the Society's money be deposited in a chartered bank. No hint is given why this matter arose, so we shall just naturally suppose that the fund had become exceptionally large.

*The First Year's
Achievements by
February 25, 1902*



*Ethel Cocking Butt, (1900-1904)
Still a speaker who charms in 1977*

*Alma Daughters
Board 1904*

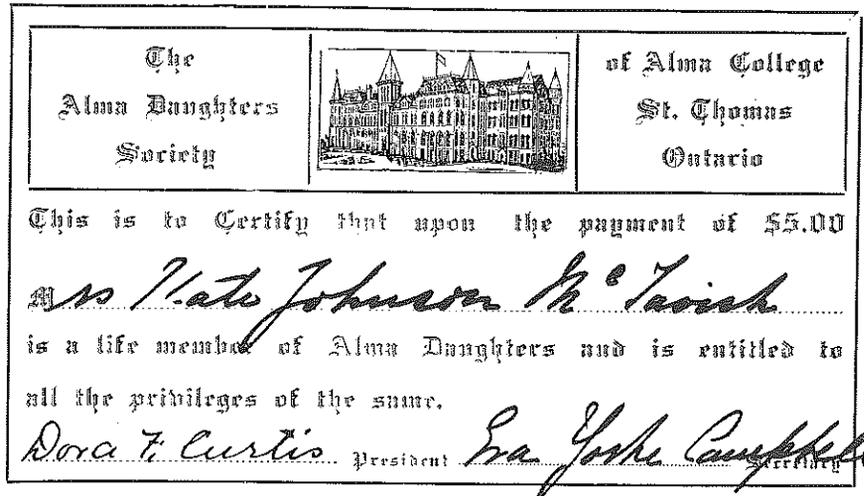
We come to the end of the first year, and it was surely one of great interest, for no less than ten regular and ten special meetings were held, eighty-two placed on the roll, and branch societies formed in London and Toronto. On February 25, 1902, on the first anniversary of the organization, the members and faculty spent a delightful social evening in the drawing room.

In 1904, a general executive, consisting of representatives from the branches, was formed under the initiative of the parent society.

The executive became the Alma Daughters Board. Late in the fall of this year the Society reports a summing up of work undertaken since its inception and is proud to list the following: refurnishing of reception and drawing rooms, three receptions and entertainments, one sale, and one afternoon tea, luncheon served to W.C.T.U. Convention and an autograph quilt underway.

The Council

In 1905 the Alma Daughters Board was renamed Council to avoid being confused with the College Board of Management. The new Council, as one of its first acts, decided to use their general funds to help educate at Alma College the daughter of an Alma Daughter. They also decided that on payment of \$5.00 within five years after leaving the College an Alma Daughter could become a life member.



Jubilee 1906

Alma became 25 years old in 1906 and everyone was busy planning the first Jubilee celebration. The College Board gave official recognition to the Alma Daughters by asking them to be responsible for decorating all parts of the College for the three-day event in October. Alma Daughters, now five years old, suddenly seemed to have come of age.!

*The First Alma
Daughter on the
College Board*

At the March meeting of 1908, Alma Daughters came into their own when the Provincial Legislature amended the College Charter admitting alumnae to the Board. Mrs. Sperrin Chant became the first woman to receive permanent appointment to the Board. At a general meeting of the Council, Miss Sisk was appointed official organizer of the Society and Jean Axford Baker and Catherine Parsons Warner were appointed to the Board.

Sisk Trophy Cup

Now began the recruiting of members for the branches. The first mention of the trophy cup in honour of Miss Sisk appears in a letter from Kate Johnson McTavish, describing Alma Daughters Day on June 19, 1911:

It was a happy surprise when Mrs. Pearson (Toronto) presented for competition the Sisk Trophy Cup — a beautiful copper loving cup with silver handles and mountings. The St. Thomas Society having the largest increase of new membership holds the Cup for the first year. The same conditions will decide the winners for the next year.

New Branches

By this time two new branches had been organized to bring the number up to five — Hamilton in 1908 and Brantford in 1912, with a sub-branch at Paris. Alma Daughters turned international this year with the founding of the New York branch whose lofty purpose was “. . . to promote understanding between Canada and the United States of America”.

*Front Gates
and Fence*

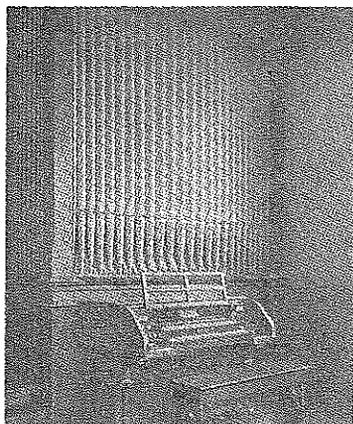
The alumnae embarked on a major project in 1907. In the words of Olive Lewis Smith in her early history of Alma Daughters:

In the late summer of the following year and after much thought, many propositions and hours of discussion, contracts were let to Smythe and Son, of London, for the erection of gates and fence along the front of the College property. This beautiful and substantial entrance, through which we so often pass, was erected at a cost of \$1,175, the amount being met by the three branches organized at this time.

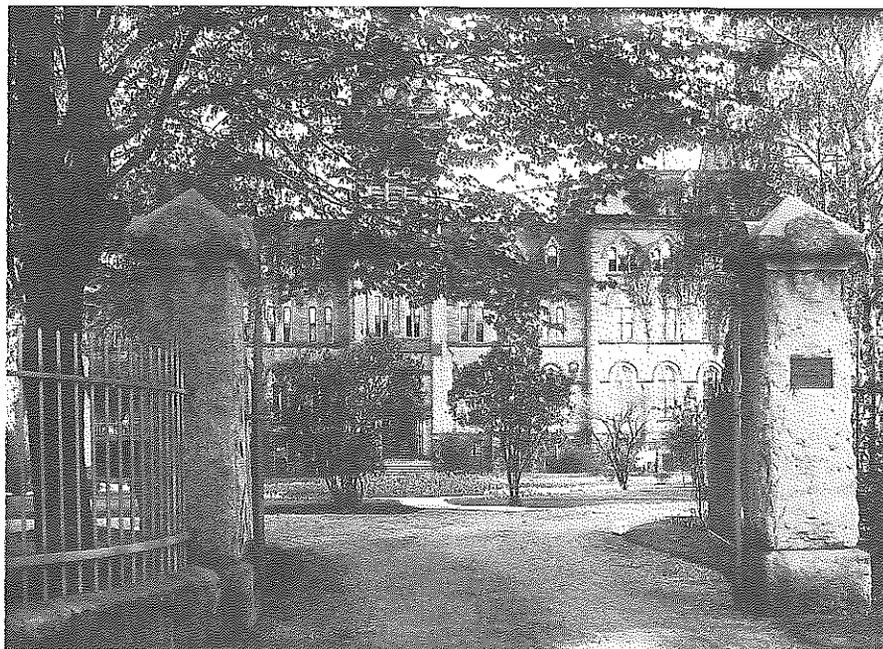
Part of the programme of the June reunion in 1910 was the formal presentation of the granite pillars and wrought-iron fencing and gates. A speech in Miss Sisk's own hand-writing has recently been found in the archives:

“. . . This month our last payment has been made and we present the fence and the gates to Alma College free of debt. I take great pleasure in asking Mrs. Warner to unlock these gates.”

Mrs. Warner then handed the keys to Dr. James D. Coyne, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Board.



Alma College New Pipe Organ



Alumnae Fence and Gates - 1910

Pipe Organ

Over the summer of 1911 ex-Alma girls began dreaming of a pipe organ for the chapel, and by spring all branches were enthusiastic. At an April meeting a fund was started off with a donation of \$5.00 from Rose Bloom Morrison. In two years the total funds were raised and the pipe organ was contracted, built and installed, "complete with an electric motor", by the Warren Company of Woodstock, at a contract price of \$2,200. In September, 1913, Alma Daughters were invited to the chapel in McLachlin Hall for a recital by the organist and teacher, Mr. J. H. Jones. The alumnae must have felt proud of their two-year project so well accomplished.

ADs Meet



Alma Daughters at a Pt. Stanley picnic

The meetings held by Alma Daughters (ADs) are faithfully recorded in minutes and scrap-books. Some of the pages and snapshots are beginning to turn brown but they still give a vivid picture of what it was like to be members of the Society in the first years of the century. There is no lack of spirit in the occasions described here:

On June 22, 1901, the Alma Daughters arranged a surprise party in honour of Principal and Mrs. Warner to celebrate their pearl (wedding) anniversary. A card of invitation was distributed, and over 150 guests gathered to express their good wishes, and to present a purse (of money) that had been collected in the strictest secrecy.

A chartered street car and trolley ride around the St. Thomas belt-line was an enjoyable and exciting outing for our members.

The coming summer found (us) at Pinafore Park for the June meeting. Minutes were read, bills passed, seven new members received and all the rest of the time was taken up with eating and racing.

From the earliest days Alma Daughters arranged interesting occasions that involved both students and alumnae. One memorable night in March, 1912, a reception was held in the College — a formal “Conversat” reminiscent of the opening night in October, 1881. It included students, faculty, alumnae, husbands and children, with programme cards to be filled in with partners, music to walk to, groups of chairs for “sitting out”, lemonade and homemade cakes for refreshment!

One Hallowe’en, students, teachers and alumnae assembled in McLachlin Hall for a masquerade in costume with games and booths selling pumpkin pie, gingerbread and cider.

Two more evenings gleaned from the minutes:

A country fair in the fall kept all hands busy preparing material for the following booths: fancy work, food, candy, country store, Eaton’s samples, and fortune telling.

The making of property bags for the soldiers, holding a rummage sale, and gathering horse radish bottles to make a mile of pennies, were some of the year’s activities.

While the branches were meeting and raising money, the Council was also busy. In 1916 they formed a House Committee and brought forward the following surprising resolutions:

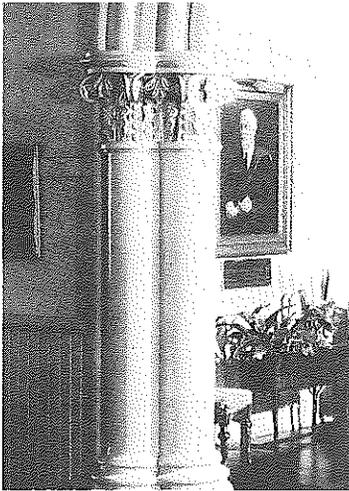


*First May Queen - 1921
Isobel Taylor Miller*

House Committee

- Uniforms for students to be compulsory, with Miss Bowes in charge of regulating them. (Little did she realize then that the trick would be to keep those long black stockings meeting the bloomers.)
- Mac Hall to be wired for electricity for the first time. (It is hard for us of the electric age to visualize Alma girls studying by gas light only.)
- Principal's apartment to be wired.
- A light bulb to be placed in the centre of the flower bed.
- Floors to be tiled in the bathrooms.

*Dr. Warner's
Resignation and
New Principal
Approved*



In 1919 the College Board regretfully accepted the resignation of Principal Warner and appointed Rev. P. S. Dobson to be his successor. To quote again from the Story of the Alma Daughters by Olive Lewis Smith:

Principal Dobson thoughtfully planned an oil painting of Dr. Warner by Eva Smith McGillivray, and with the initiative of the St. Thomas Society and the financial aid of other branches, together with subscriptions from ex-students far and near, the beautiful painting which now hangs in the main entrance was made possible. It was presented to Dr. Warner at Convocation in June, 1920.

*Death of
Miss Sisk*

There was no June reunion of Alma Daughters in 1921, since Miss Sisk, their beloved founder and leader, lay very ill.

“She died in Toronto on July 23, 1921, ” wrote Olive Smith, “and all hearts were full of sorrow. Over the years she had stimulated and activated the idea that ‘One must give of oneself . . . to fully receive’.”

*Memorial
Scholarship*

The next year, Mrs. J. H. Still, treasurer of the Council, suggested the establishment of a Sisk Memorial Scholarship with the capital sum of \$500.00 to be invested, and the interest to be used each year. In June, 1922, a motion was passed, "That the Sisk Scholarship be awarded to an undergraduate in piano, either resident, or day (school), but one who expects to return to the College for graduation."

*Plan for
Building
Postponed*



Mrs. J. H. Still, Sisk Memorial

In 1922 Principal Dobson approached the Council with a plan for consideration. He was anxious to build a memorial to Dr. Warner, to contain a much needed auditorium, practice studios, and a gymnasium. The Council considered the matter seriously, but finally adopted this wise resolution:

Alma Daughters Council considers this a very inopportune time to go to the public for funds and we cannot see our way clear to approve of a scheme for a memorial hall. In pledging ourselves to raise \$500.00 for the Sisk Memorial Bursary Fund we feel we are doing all that we can do for the present.

Principal Dobson respected their advice and agreed to postpone the expansion plan. The Council proceeded to request all branches to contribute to the Sisk Fund and the first \$300.00 was paid in May of 1923.

*Warner
Endowment
Fund
Suggested*

In an address to Alma Daughters just before his death, Dr. Warner had remarked, "I feel within my heart that an endowment should be established with a base of \$100,000 to be the strength of the school in years to come." Dr. Warner would have been gratified to know that the alumnae acted upon this idea in the Jubilee Year of 1927. It was moved by Mrs. Smith that a Warner Endowment Fund be established and money be applied to it instead of to smaller projects. Council supported her motion unanimously and voted that the \$75.00 in the treasury be directed to this fund. Mrs. Smith added a substantial personal gift. At the banquet the Council presented Principal Dobson with a cheque for \$500.00 to establish the Warner Endowment Fund; Dr. G. T. Kennedy of the College Board was made treasurer and responsible for the investment of the Fund.



*Changes
in
Leadership*

The alumnae had to make many adjustments in 1924. Mrs. Sperrin Chant died, the first member of the Council to be appointed to the Board and one of the Council's Honorary Presidents. Then in the fall, all were saddened by the death of Dr. Warner. He had won the deep respect and affection of all the alumnae and he and Mrs. Warner had made them welcome in the Principal's apartment on countless occasions. When Mrs. Warner moved to Toronto to live, she was greatly missed since she was an Honorary President of the Council and attended all their meetings. Another change came about when Mrs. Still resigned as Treasurer of the Council, an office she had held so efficiently for fourteen years. Fortunately she agreed to remain as Treasurer of the Sisk Memorial Scholarship Fund which had been her special project since she initiated it in 1923.

*Silver
Jubilee*



*Mrs. G. P. Smith (Olive Lewis)
Original Historian for Alma
Daughters*

The Silver Jubilee Year was 1927. By that time there were ten branches; the last four were Calgary and Border Cities formed in 1924, and Aylmer and Chatham in 1926, just in time to help with preparations for celebrating Alma's first fifty years. Writers were appointed to write the Alma story — Rev. E. W. Edwards and Mrs. G. P. Smith (Olive Lewis Smith) — and committees were chosen to prepare for the influx of alumnae expected to attend the reunion. The Council arranged with the Principal for all former students to come into residence for three days at the remarkable cost of \$1.00 per day. In the winter of 1926 the Board set up an official Jubilee Committee of two alumnae, two from the Board and one from the staff. Many events took place at convocation time in June, including a civic banquet under a huge tent on the lawn. The London branch arranged a Jubilee Garden Tea for 250 guests at the London home of the Morgans whose daughter Gertrude Morgan attended Alma. There was an orchestra, refreshments and even dancing on the lawn! All in all the Silver Jubilee of Alma College was a tremendous success and marked twenty-five years of solid work of the Alma Daughters.

After the excitement of the Jubilee with all the press accounts and letters and reports, it became evident that many were beginning to question the name "Alma Daughters". It seemed cumbersome and out-of-date. As a result of wide discussion it was decided to change the name to "Alma College Alumnae" to be in tune with other colleges and universities. A revised constitution using the new name was mailed to every member of the alumnae in 1932.

Similarly, the old "Alma Daughters Notes" in the *Almafilian* no longer seemed adequate and the popular *Alumnae Bulletin* came into being. Olive Lewis Smith was appointed convenor to collect news from the branches and pass them on to the College. The *Bulletin* was published twice a year and mailed by the College to all who sent in \$2.00.

"Alma"

It may be interesting to describe the forerunners of the *Alumnae Bulletin*. In 1903 a few Alma young ladies saw the need for inner school communication, and began publishing a school paper under the name "Alma". At first there were no formal alumnae notes, but in a column called "Personals" there appeared an interesting letter from two graduates, the Dupuch sisters, East Indians from Nassau, who attended Alma in 1886 — probably Alma's first foreign students and the first alumnae to send in notes.

Almafilian notes to *Alumnae* *Bulletin*

In 1906 "Alma" was changed to "Almafilian" and alumnae notes became a regular feature. In 1925 Mrs. Dobson was made life editor of these notes. From these beginnings has grown our popular *Alumnae Bulletin* whose editors have been Mrs. Dobson, Dr. Dobson (helped by Theresa Cutler), Dr. Sifton, and now in 1977, Principal Bone and Helen Taylor Houghton.

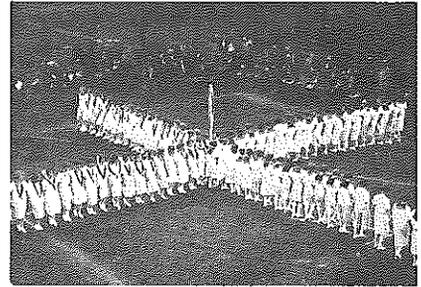
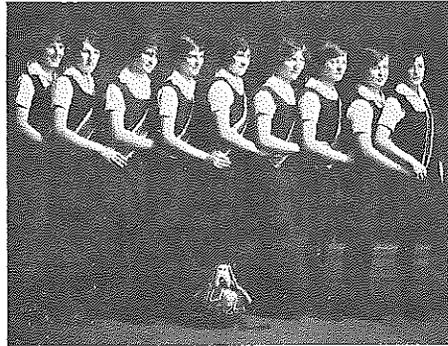
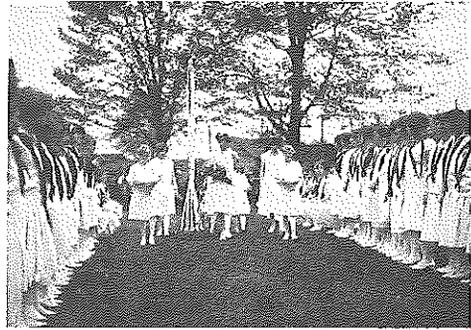
New Branches



Gertrude Huntly's recital in Eaton Auditorium, arranged by Toronto Alma College Alumnae.

In the thirties several new branches were formed. Perhaps the depression years created a need for closer contact. On March 17, 1930, the old Sulphur Springs Hotel in Preston was the setting for the branch meeting of Kitchener-Waterloo with 23 ex-students present from Kitchener, Guelph, Galt, Preston, Waterloo and Brantford. They elected an executive that included one member from each area. The same year saw the formation of the Woodstock branch as well. In 1933, Buffalo, New York and Niagara-Frontier branches were formed. On April 27, 1934, Tillsonburg joined the group and the total membership stood at 514. The Alma family was becoming more and more closely tied together.

As the branches grew in number the Council grew in strength and self-confidence. At one of their meetings, Principal Dobson was present and asked permission to organize branches in the West during a trip he was planning to make. After much discussion, the Council granted his request although the members expressed the feeling that the President of the Council should be responsible for branch formation whenever possible.



Collage of the 1920's



Trips



Dr. Dobson began organizing tours in the thirties. The first took place at Easter in 1935 when, for only \$50.00 each, thirty students and alumnae travelled by bus to New York City. A high spot in the visit was the luncheon put on by the New York alumnae in a downtown hotel. In 1937 Dr. and Mrs. Dobson travelled by sea to England and toured England and Europe with a group of students and alumnae for three weeks. In 1940, a second group went to New York to see the World's Fair at Flushing Meadows, Long Island. Other trips followed to Ottawa, Washington and Montreal and always the alumnae were welcome members of the group. In the words of one Alma tour member, "The girls looked forward to these exciting tours, because 'Dobbie' always had unscheduled side-trips up his sleeve that he would spring on us!"



1941 60th Birthday

In the forties there were many changes both in the world and in the school. And yet, there remained a sense of continuity to which the alumnae contributed in no small measure. 1941 was the sixtieth birthday of the College, but because of the burdens of the war years, there was no celebration. As usual, though, Nea Tucker Smith, a former student from Bermuda, sent lilies from her father's farm to celebrate Easter. As usual, too, the annual Alumnae Dinner was held in June, and speakers referred warmly to the sixty years of Alma College and the forty years of the Alma Daughters and the Alma College Alumnae. But members of branches were too involved in war work to plan the usual alumnae meetings.

1943 marked the largest registration since the opening of the school. Dr. Dobson completed his twenty-fifth year as Principal, and he and "Freddie" Smith, the gardener, celebrated by putting up a row of window boxes on the ground floor window sills, bright with red geraniums and blue lobelia — something to repeat in Alma's Centennial Year.

Sometimes the Board came to dinner at Alma. One of the Board reported this tidbit that may remind at least one table of girls in the diningroom of a certain night when the Board came to dinner: "Dr. Dobson saw the girls giggling and pointing to the east window beside their table. He rushed out through the kitchen to investigate and found three rather untidy and hilarious youths stretched out full length with their faces close to the glass beckoning to the girls. 'Would you like to see those girls?' he asked. 'Just come this way.' And he brought them into the dining room and pulled up three chairs so that they could eat with the girls. Needless to say those boys were never heard from again!"

Gifts



Miss Sisk, the founder of the Alma Daughters

During these two decades of alumnae activity, many practical gifts were made to the school by the branches. An early project was the renovation of the drawing room and one of the bathrooms by the St. Thomas branch. The entrance hall and guest room were redecorated by the London branch. The school infirmary was refurnished by the Border Cities. In each case, priorities for projects were decided by the House Committee of the Council in consultation with the Principal. When the Warner Endowment Fund was set up in 1927, the energies of the branches had been gently directed away from single projects toward this one great effort, and the House Committee was finally disbanded in 1932. But the alumnae were still eager to help in practical ways. In fact, as the Warner Endowment grew, so did their generosity in attempting to meet specific needs.

In May, 1933, Mrs. Robert McLachlin, a devoted charter member of the alumnae, presented a beautiful framed picture of Miss Sisk, the founder of the Alma Daughters. It still hangs in the front hall of the College to remind everyone of her leadership and spirit.





Cement and stone entrance and lights from N. Y. Alumnae — Sketch by Carolyn Curtis.

One special project undertaken by the Council was a rescue operation for the Chapel organ when it was sadly in need of repair. Subscriptions amounting to \$600.00 were received from friends of the College and alumnae. Many gifts were inspired by the amphitheatre created from the old city dump by the ingenuity and imagination of Dr. Dobson. The St. Thomas branch raised funds to build balconies around the Amphitheatre for the orchestra and special guests.

Another gift came from the New York branch — the handsome front entrance steps replacing the original wooden one.

The portrait of Dr. Dobson painted by Eva McGillivray was commissioned and presented to the school as a tribute to Dr. Dobson.



Original Steps



"The way we were" — 41 of us!



Dr. G. T. Kennedy, W. F. Thomas, and P. S. Dobson

At the time of the sixtieth birthday of Alma and the fortieth of the Alma Daughters, the Council placed a memorial window in McLachlin Hall to honour Miss Sisk.

*Cookbooks
and Plates*

Two unusual fund-raising ideas were initiated by the alumnae. The St. Thomas branch compiled a popular Alma College cookbook including favorite recipes from the Alma kitchen as well as their own. The Niagara-Frontier branch was responsible for the suggestion that Alma dinner plates could be sold by the alumnae and the school. A beautiful delft blue china plate was designed and created by Wedgewood in London, England. The plate had a border of forget-me-nots, fruit and leaves, and Alma College in the centre on a white ground. They are being reordered for sale in Centennial year, 1976-77.

*New
Drawing
Room*

In 1946 there was great excitement at Alma when the day finally came to open the drawing room, newly decorated by the alumnae. In the enthusiastic words of a member of the Windsor branch then at Alma:

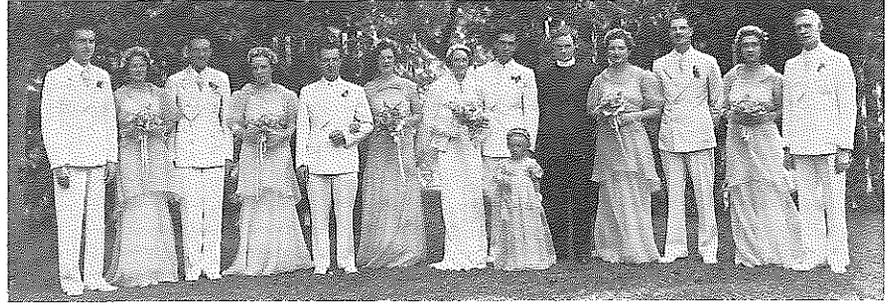
We were told at morning chapel that the drawing room would be ready for us Sunday evening for our usual cocoa and cookies. They kept us in suspense, locking the double doors. Sunday finally came, the doors were opened, and the scene took our breath away. The drawing room was gorgeous — turquoise broadloom and drapes, the black baby grand in the corner, the chairs and couches re-covered, some in plain gold, and some in floral chintz of golds, greens, rose and turquoise, all blending in with the paintings. What a thrill! No one spilled her cocoa that night!

All these lively and imaginative projects added interest to the school and to the alumnae as well. The new name, Alma College Alumnae, had given a certain academic tone to the old Alma Daughters Society without sacrificing any of the original spirit and vitality.



The Alumnae decorate the drawing room

*Smith - Jay, first wedding
in Amphitheatre
July 25, 1936.*



*P.S.D.'s
Report
in His
Last Year as
Principal*

In the Alumnae Bulletin of May, 1946, there is a strong note of optimism in Dr. Dobson's message:

“This has been an inspiring year at Alma — overflowing residences, crowded dining-room, large classes, largest staff of teachers and household workers in the history of the school (over 60 on the payroll), enthusiastic alumnae branches involved in new interests and projects.”

Dr. Dobson compiled a special report in the Alumnae Bulletin on the College expansion plans, and thanked the alumnae for their generous gifts to the fund amounting already to \$11,000. There were descriptions and sketches of the proposed chapel, music building, and classrooms which were his special dreams. This was to be Dr. Dobson's last year as Principal, since he had already resigned.

At the annual Alumnae Banquet in June, 1947, Dr. Dobson, now named Principal Emeritus, introduced Rev. Bruce Millar appointed by the Board to succeed him as Principal in September. The Council presented Dr. and Mrs. Dobson with a beautiful silver tea service and warm words of appreciation and affection to mark Dr. Dobson's retirement. In their annual greeting, Perry and Harriet Dobson invited their alumnae friends to visit them in their new home at 88 Moore Street, just outside the College gates.

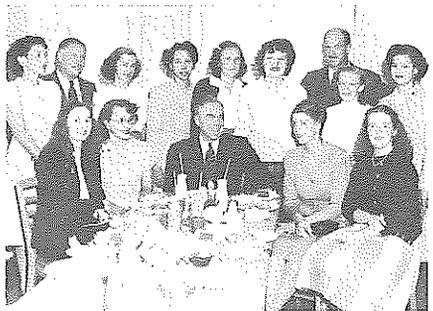
*Death of
Harriet Dobson*



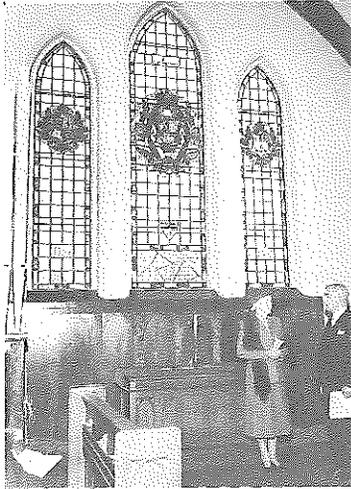
The next year the Dobsons visited many alumnae during their trip through ten different American states and Mexico — “our second honeymoon”, they said. A few months after their return home, Mrs. Dobson died suddenly on November 28, 1948, Miss Gladys Elliot wrote,

... a great loss to her family, Alma College, the church, the alumnae and the whole community. She was a warm and gracious hostess in the Principal's apartment and in the school, a brilliant scholar of modern languages, a skilled teacher, active executive member of the original St. Thomas Art Association, leader of the French conversation groups, loved and admired by all who knew her.”

In 1949, Principal Millar resigned to return to the pastorate, and Rev. S. J. Mathers M.A. was appointed principal. He wrote letters to all the alumnae inviting them to re-visit the College. Dr. Dobson also sent greetings to the alumnae giving another change of address, 6 Prince Albert Street, telling them that he had married Mrs. Ruth Lamb in Montreal and that she and he would be happy to see alumnae friends in their new home.



*St. Hilda's
Reunion*



*The Chancel window from St. Hilda's
Girls*

*New
Bulletin
Editor*

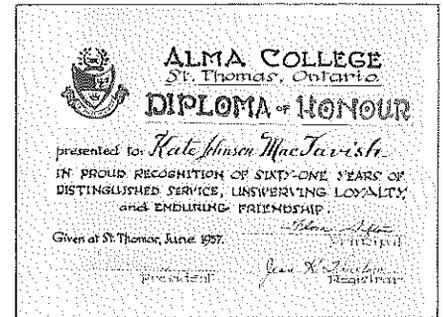
The members of the Board and the Alumnae Council gave Perry and Ruth Dobson a generous gift of money to help make possible a trip to England in 1951. While in London they met with twenty-five St. Hilda's Alma girls and their husbands and parents to renew friendships and memories. It was not possible to form a St. Hilda's London alumnae branch, but as the reunion proved, there was a great deal of interest and a desire to keep in touch.



St. Hilda's Girls at Alma



Ella Bowes Chapel — sketch by C. Curtis

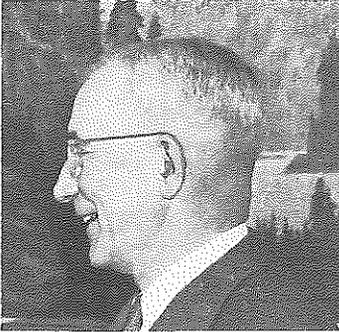


When Dr. Dobson returned, he was asked to become the editor of the Alumnae Bulletin, and began to consider ways of making it more attractive. He established a bulletin award to encourage better reporting by the branches. A silver Alma College coffee spoon was given to the branch editor who sent in the best contribution. The Bulletin began another popular tradition in 1957 by printing lists of graduates starting with the years 1889 - 1899. Soon the editor sent a "Diploma" to Kate Johnson MacTavish in Toronto — "For sixty-one years of service to the school." Those words were characteristic of him. He never missed an opportunity to make the alumnae feel at home, and always expressed appreciation and affection to each member of the alumnae in a very personal way.

*Dr. Dobson
returns*

Alma began her seventh decade with a flurry of changes in leadership that were somewhat puzzling to the alumnae. Rev. S. J. Mathers, who had followed Rev. Bruce Millar as principal in 1949, resigned rather unexpectedly in 1951. The College Board recalled Dr. Dobson as principal and appointed Mrs. Steele Sifton as dean. The next year Dr. Dobson and the Board asked her to be assistant-principal with the understanding that she would become Alma's first woman principal in 1953.

*75th
birthday*



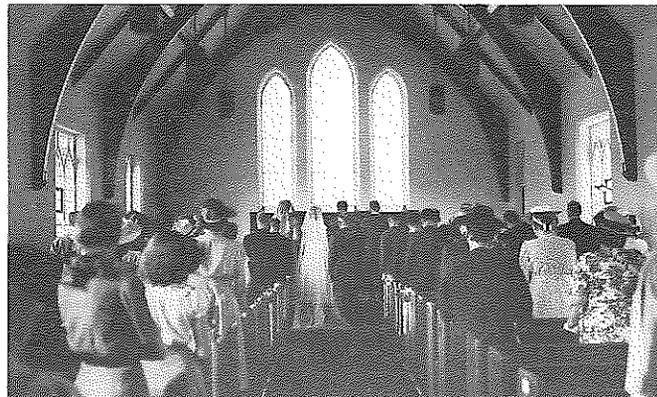
Dr. Dobson returns

Meanwhile in October, 1952, Alma College celebrated her seventy-fifth birthday. Dr. Dobson and Mrs. Sifton worked together with several committees of alumnae and staff to bring it off in style. A special delight was the visit of Mrs. Gertrude Huntly Green Durand, the former Director of Music. She came from Vancouver to give a piano recital to an enthusiastic audience in which were many of her former pupils. During the birthday weekend "Open House" was held in all parts of the building and 2,000 people, many of them alumnae, signed the huge guest book. There was a science exhibit, a gym demonstration, a play, home economics display, an exhibition of art by former and present instructors, and tea in the drawing rooms, hosted by various groups of the alumnae. To celebrate further, the St. Thomas branch held a Jubilee Tea at the Dingman's home near the old St. Thomas church.

This was also the year when the alumnae, under the leadership of Frieda Mills Sweitzer, completed the payments on the organ for the chapel that so enhanced the daily chapel services and the many alumnae weddings and christenings that were held there. Little Penny Grainger was the first child to be christened, and Barbara Underhill Blewett the first to be married in the Alma Chapel.



*Barbara Underhill - Frederick Blewett
First Chapel wedding, June 29, 1948*



*Mrs. Sifton
New Principal*

Dr. Dobson resigned for the second time in 1953 to become President, and Mrs. Sifton was appointed Alma's sixth principal. Her rich experience as a scholar, teacher, wife and mother, as well as her rare qualities of mind and spirit, fitted her admirably for the position of Alma's first woman principal, with its many human, intellectual and administrative challenges. As time went on, her goals for the school and her courageous plans and methods for achieving them won the respect of all. Dr. Dobson was right. Alma needed her.

*Station
Wagon
Fund*

When Principal Sifton met the Alumnae Council in the winter of 1953 she proposed a project that caught the imagination of everyone. Alma needed its own station wagon and perhaps the alumnae might like to help with the cost. To save time and to stimulate interest, a former student and Council President, Helen Snelgrove Bodkin, offered Alma an interest-free personal loan so that the station wagon could be purchased without delay. A Station Wagon Fund was set up immediately, and by 1954 the branches had paid off the loan.

*Alumnae
Council
50th
Birthday*

When the Alumnae Council became 50 years old in 1955, they too were entitled to a birthday. At their Fiftieth Anniversary Dinner in June, each Council President summarized the work of her year in office, and all the members present expressed their warm appreciation. There was one special surprise that evening. Mrs. Holman, the oldest living Council President, travelled by train to St. Thomas from Niagara Falls alone, and arrived, to everyone's delight, just in time for the banquet. Her granddaughter, Jeanne, studied and later taught Home Economics at Alma.



*Mrs. Sifton,
first Woman Principal*



*Helen Snelgrove Bodkin,
Alumnae Council President*



*Miss Mary C. Jackson
Dean of Residence*

*Help for
Our School*

But the alumnae did more than celebrate birthdays. They continued to find many practical ways of helping Alma, with veiled hints from Mrs. Sifton! In '56 and '57 Council projects included new carpeting for the front corridor (to replace the one so often repainted red), a sound-proof ceiling for the dining room, a tiled floor centred with the Alma crest and motto in the entrance hall where the old "doughnut" radiator used to be, new drapes for the rejuvenated dining room made by the St. Thomas branch, new 60 cycle clocks, modern light fixtures, and electric irons for each hall.

In addition to these gifts, the Alumnae Council subscribed \$2,000 in 1957 for the new Music Building in response to Dr. Dobson's appeal, leaving only \$10,000 to be raised for furnishings. To help the Music Building Fund, Mrs. Knowles held a Fall Tea and Exhibition of her paintings in her lovely studio home. Some of her friends in the St. Thomas branch assisted with serving the crowds who came to see and buy. More than \$100.00 was added to the Fund that day.

Branches



*Janet Riley - Broadway star in
"The Moon is Blue"*

There were now sixteen flourishing branches of alumnae — Aylmer, Brantford, Detroit, (or Border Cities), Hamilton, Kent, Kitchener-Waterloo, London, Niagara-Frontier, Sarnia, St. Thomas, St. Thomas-Dobson (the name chosen to designate a junior group of graduates), Tillsonburg, Toronto, Windsor, Vancouver. ". . . and a spark plug was glowing in Owen Sound", as the minutes read. Next came the seventeenth branch with Windsor-Dobson in 1954, the eighteenth with Detroit-Dobson, and sure enough, in 1956 the Council mailed the charter to Owen Sound, establishing the nineteenth branch. In 1960 the Council President, Berenice Chalk, recognised the lively young London-Dobson branch, the twentieth. Dr. Sifton and Council President, Kay Greenhough, met with alumnae in Ottawa hoping to form a branch. There was no permanent result although everyone enjoyed the party.

Naturally there were occasional reverses and changes in branch activity. Brantford and Kent hesitated in 1959 and both disbanded temporarily, leaving small balances in the bank for the day of revival. In 1965 an energetic attempt was made by Judy Wicks Alexander and Joan Gibson Chesterfield, to form a branch in the Oakville and Port Credit area, but the alumnae lived so far apart that the effort to organize had to be abandoned after one interesting reunion. The St. Thomas seniors amalgamated with the young St. Thomas branch in February, 1967.

*Collage of Alumnae Councils
Presidents*



Charter for London Dobson Chapter. (Left to right) Mrs. W. J. Walker (Joan Henderson), hostess; Shirley McCallum, President; Miss Berenice Chalk, President of Alumnae Council.



Money Raisers

Many interesting and original money raising schemes were undertaken by the branches. A spot survey of Alumnae Bulletins produced this surprising list: 37 teas and bake sales (often for the girls in residence), 30 bridge parties, 18 auction and rummage sales, 15 candy and cookie sales, 14 pot-luck suppers, 11 ticket sales for ballet, theatre and concerts, 10 parties for birthday and waist-band pennies, 8 fashion and millinery shows, 5 craft sales and bazaars, 5 dessert and recipe sales, 5 stay-at-home teas, 5 pancake and coffee parties, 2 TV shows with live Alma audiences, and miles of Dominion Stores slips. Besides all this ingenuity and energy there were 35 types of special sales, from Christmas cards and marionettes to Tupperware and roasting bags.

Alumnae Programme

Monthly branch programmes were varied too. Our survey produced this enterprising list of topics and activities: talks on Handicrafts of India, Frontier College, Probation in Elgin County, Naparima College in Trinidad, Work in Inuvik, Canadian Embassy in Moscow; tours of the radio station, a keep-fit school, the May Court, Ontario Hospital, Children's Aid Society, School for the Retarded; demonstrations of cosmetics, hair styling, flower arrangement, sandwiches, desserts, salads; talks on Interior Decorating, Journalism, Careers for Women, Child Care, Treatment of the Mentally Ill, Cancer Research, Creative Writing, Toy Making, Baking Secrets, Crafts from around the World; visits to potteries, museums, art galleries; papers on History of Glass, County Roads, History of Elgin County, St. Thomas Smith and His Art; picnics, visits to neighbouring branches, sports events, 'dining out', lectures, plays, films, concerts. Border Cities had a lamb dinner put on by The Lamb Council of America!



*Miss Colombia 1965-66
Edna Margarita Rudd*

There was a growing emphasis on Canadiana in some branches. Windsor alumnae met one afternoon at the Museum and spent some hours examining old newspapers. The Windsor Record, 1834, read:

“Thank God my wife Susan has left my bed and board without the least provocation; therefore, this is to forbid all persons harboring her on my account, as I will pay no debts of her accounting.”

The minutes give no details of further discoveries!

Wellington-Waterloo arranged a nostalgic evening. They all came dressed in the styles of their Alma days — 1900's, 20's, 40's — and brought photos and Almafilians to show the customs, the games, the spirit of former days at Alma.

St. Thomas-Dobson branch spent an evening with the students from Mexico — Mexican dancing, Mexican fashions, Mexican food. They also held an old-time event, touring the Elgin County Museum, enjoying a box social, and ending the day as guests of the senior alumnae at a court whist party. That must have been quite a day.



*Miss Guyana 1970
Miss Jennifer Wong*

*Advisory
Committee*

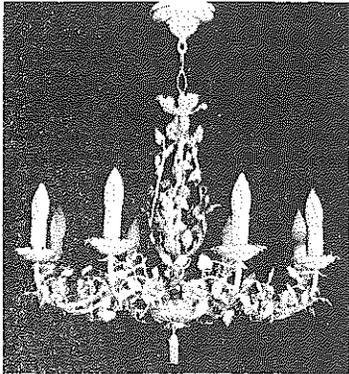
The Alumnae Bulletin quotes from the London Branch:

“London cleared \$10.00 from the sale of Weston’s shortbreads and Christmas cakes. Also, Dorcas Roe Sharman gave a brilliant demonstration of a knitting machine. Last time it was her electric organ. Maybe some day we’ll find something she can’t do, but we don’t know when.”

A popular tradition in the St. Thomas branch was their annual baby party when all members brought snapshots of themselves from the age of five months to five years. All current babies came as guests to make the party complete.

On January 23, 1960, at the Semi-Annual Meeting of the Council in Windsor, with branch executive members and delegates present, Miss Marion Still and Mildred Waldock Adams (Mrs. Leon Adams) suggested that an Advisory Committee be formed of all past presidents of Council to establish guidelines for projects and policy whenever needed.

Chandeliers



*Three Italian wrought
iron fixtures*

In 1961, sixty years after the founding of the Alma Daughters by Miss Sisk in 1901, the Alumnae Council sent \$600.00 as a birthday gift to Alma to cover the cost of three Italian wrought-iron chandeliers for the drawing rooms. They are still there, and still beautiful in 1977, with the lovely turquoise broadloom as fresh as the day it was laid in 1946.

*Death of
Dr. Dobson*



Dr. Dobson died in 1962 after a long illness in hospital. So many alumnae were saddened by his death, and so many letters and messages were sent to the College, that Dr. Sifton compiled a special Alumnae Bulletin as an affectionate tribute to him and a tangible remembrance for his friends. A graduate from Hamilton wrote:

The wonderful story of Dr. Dobson in the special February Alumnae Bulletin is a treasure. 'Thank You' are small words, but if each one of us who was under Dobbie's care said 'Thank You' together for the many things he did for us as individuals and for Alma as a whole, the sound would be as thunder.

Another member of the alumnae wrote:

As I look back, I believe his success with us at the school was because he thought of us as kids growing up — not as some kind of material to be moulded into a church pillar. He was truly interested in us as people, and his tolerance of us when we slipped made us try harder to measure up to his belief in us.

No words could have touched him more, since his Alma girls meant so much to him. He felt in all sincerity that the life and strength of the school flowed from the students who lived within its walls. On June 17, 1963, the alumnae unveiled the Dobson Memorial Window in the chapel as a tribute to him.

*Alumnae
Givings*

By 1964 the Warner Endowment Fund had reached, \$43,000. Several bequests had been made to the Fund, one of them from the estate of Ida Haydon Huntly, and one from Mrs. Ada Brunner. Many further gifts were received from alumnae friends in memory of Phyllis Lounsbury Praxmarer. In January, at the semi-annual meeting in Kitchener, Council voted to add \$475.00 and in 1965 they voted another \$1,000 bringing it to \$44,475. Over the next two years Council gave \$500.00 to the school to purchase Canadian Provincial Plaques for the new Barbara Heck Dining Hall. In the same year Council gave \$1,500 for much needed audio visual equipment for the academic department. In 1971, \$500.00 was voted for gymnasium equipment and trampoline.

*Johnston
Memorial
Scholarship*

At the alumnae banquet in 1964, a special tribute was paid to Miss Mary E. Johnston, who was retiring after thirty years as head of the Commercial Department. She never missed an alumnae banquet and "was always there to love and cherish", as one of the members put it. The Council President presented her with red carnations, and asked if she would allow the alumnae to establish a scholarship in her honour. "Johnny" looked up quickly in amazement the way she does, smiled and said, "I guess that would be all right."

The Mary E. Johnston Scholarship is now awarded each June to a student for general proficiency in Commercial Studies.

*Swain and
Knowles
Scholarships*

When two more beloved teachers, Reta Swain and Lila Knowles, retired from the faculty, to honour them Council established two scholarships of \$500.00 each, to be presented at June Convocation. All this time the Sisk Memorial Bursary Fund was growing steadily. When many donations were made to a Jane Merrill Memorial in 1969, Kay Lawrence proposed that such funds should go to the Alumnae Memorial Bursary Fund to be administered by the College Board. Dr. Kennedy made a generous contribution to the fund in 1970 and the total now stood at \$4,900. By 1974, there had been 335 donors to the Bursary Fund and the total had risen to \$10,763. Two further gifts of \$25.00 were made, one in memory of Dr. Sifton's mother, and one in memory of Miss Bone's father. The first bursary given by Alma Daughters in 1902 was \$28.00. The bursary in 1976 was \$1,000. The winner is always the daughter of an Alma graduate.



Mary E. Johnston



Reta Swain



Mrs. Lila McGillivray Knowles

*Dr. Sifton's
Influence*



In the years that Dr. Sifton was principal, she proved her competence as an administrator, and her intelligence and warmth in her relations not only with the students and staff each year but with the alumnae as well. In no time she seemed to know every "old girl" who visited the school, responded to the many invitations to speak to branch meetings and annual dinners, and appreciated the evident loyalty and interest of each member. She was careful to keep the alumnae up to date on building plans, and quick to enlist their help in achieving short-term and long-term goals. During her term of office, as in Dr. Dobson's, the alumnae contributed to each separate expansion project — the Perry Dobson Music Building, the Timken Athletic Centre, the Dobson Memorial Library, the W. F. Thomas Arts Theatre, and the Barbara Heck Dining Hall. The Council minutes give an impressive record of alumnae co-operation on every page. Dr. Sifton deserves a great deal of credit for keeping up the interest and enthusiasm through these years.

*Testimonial
Dinner*

In June, 1970, Dr. Sifton resigned as principal. At the Annual Alumnae Banquet, she was honoured by a great show of affection from all attending branches and friends from all over the country. At a testimonial dinner in the Timken Athletic Centre, hundreds of friends gathered around tables bright with red cloths, silver and spring flowers. A flight bag, heavy with silver dollars, representing gifts from all her friends, was presented to her by Dr. Harold Vaughan of the United Church to encourage her to travel as Alma's Ambassador—perhaps to England and South America and the West Indies, where so many alumnae were waiting to welcome her. She set off the next year and visited dozens of Alma girls who gave her much more than an ambassadorial welcome.

*Toronto
Farewell
Party*

Another gala party was given in honour of Dr. Sifton in Toronto by a distinguished member of the alumnae, Judge Edra Sanders Ferguson, in her spacious and hospitable apartment. Over two hundred alumnae travelled to greet her that day — from Owen Sound, St. Thomas, Windsor, Sarnia, London, Brantford, Woodstock . . . There were flowers everywhere, casseroles and cakes and coffee, and Flora's friends arriving all afternoon and evening. It was a party with a heart, thanks to Edra, and it went on for hours. No one wanted to say goodbye and everyone wanted to say thank you to a person who had grown to be very much a part of the alumnae of Alma College.



Three generations of Alma graduates

*Alumnae
Records*

Over the past seventy-five years, Alma has spent a great deal of time and effort in the process of trying to keep in touch with her former students. It has taken diligence, imagination, patience, good humour and unremitting hard work. Addresses, letters, Christmas cards, records of all kinds have been kept and searched for those missing ones. But the results are worthwhile. The card file is by no means complete and many of the addresses are no doubt out-of-date almost as soon as they are recorded, but the active list has now passed the 3,000 mark, and that is no small family. The credit for this does not belong to one person alone, but to many who have helped all these years.

Since April, 1969, there has been one person, Helen Taylor Houghton, whose whole responsibility is alumnae affairs, and she deserves Alma's thanks and appreciation. She helps Miss Bone in editing the Alumnae Bulletin, sees that it goes out to the alumnae, arranges the class reunions each year, and deals with alumnae correspondence. Her work has been invaluable in these past few years when Alma has found herself in a financial crisis again and has needed to appeal to alumnae friends.

*Independent
Schools
Feel
Strain*

In 1970 Miss M. E. Bone became the new principal and faced new challenges. By 1972 it became apparent that all independent schools were feeling financial strain. Income from enrolment was dropping with the change in attitude of girls in the new found freedom of choice and at the same time administrative costs, food, supplies, and salaries were soaring. Alma suffered along with the rest. The Principal and the Board felt that an appeal must be made to the Alumnae to help their school in the emergency. At the fall Board meeting in 1972, the President of Alumnae Council, Billie Gough Grainger, agreed to send an "S.O.S." letter (Save our School) to all alumnae members asking for their individual help.

*Alumnae
Response
to Appeal*

In 1973, Chairman Frank Sanders went to the Council's January meeting in Kitchener to answer questions and seek solutions. As a result, the Council mailed special appeal letters to all the alumnae suggesting an annual personal donation. The results were startling. In one year, individual graduates and former students contributed some \$10,500.00 toward the S.O.S. Fund and by the end of 1975 the total had risen to \$20,000.00. The Alumnae Council finally reported that over three years \$27,000 had been raised — a tribute to the loyalty and generosity of hundreds of alumnae and their friends throughout the world, and a spearhead of encouragement and support to "Save our School".

The alumnae do care! In addition to funds for the immediate needs of Alma, contributions kept coming in for the Warner Endowment which by 1969 included Alumnae Memorial Bursary Funds to total \$180,000 from 1927 to 1976. It has been arranged that a member of the alumnae sits on the committee that makes decisions concerning their investment and the use of the annual interest of these funds. Those far-sighted "Alma Daughters" who organized in 1901 with such high hopes and purpose to keep in touch and help their Alma Mater would be gratified by the response and leadership of the alumnae of today.

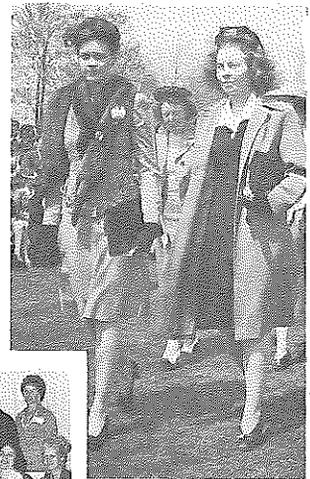
*The Alumnae
Pattern*

Over the years, a number of strong traditions have been established — annual branch dinners, climaxing four to eight meetings a year, with the principal as special guest to bring Alma news to the branch; semi-annual Council meeting and dinner each January hosted in different cities by that branch; annual Council meeting and banquet and class reunions at Alma each June. There are four reunion groups each year for those who attended Alma 5, 25, 40, and 50 years ago, hosted by a graduate of every year span, and they come into residence for the whole weekend as far as there is space — nostalgia, mischief and all!

This whole kaleidoscope of relationships and events has helped to create the sense of unity and purpose that Miss Sisk prophesied in 1901. Over and over again the alumnae have proven the truth of Council President Joanne Scarlett Turner's message in the Alumnae Bulletin of June, 1975:

“Coming together is a beginning;
Keeping together is progress;
Working together is success.”

JOAN GIBSON CHESTERFIELD



*Alumnae
Class Reunions*