

# History of the College

A liberal arts education in colonial America was a privilege enjoyed by few individuals. The nine colleges that existed prior to the American Revolution did not mean to be popular institutions. But the Revolution altered this state of affairs, and as the floodgates opened to the rising democratic tide, numerous colleges and universities were chartered in the young republic. The westward movement, growing populations, increasing wealth, state loyalties, and denominational rivalries all played a part in the early expansion of American higher education.

Perhaps as many as 100 colleges tried and failed before the Civil War. Allegheny, founded in 1815, is one of the hardy survivors that testifies daily to the pioneer determination and vision of higher education in America.

## Foundation and Early Years

Allegheny is situated in Meadville, Pennsylvania, which was founded in 1788 in the French Creek Valley, astride the route traversed by George Washington on his journey to Fort LeBoeuf a generation earlier. When the College was established, Meadville was still a raw frontier town of about 400 settlers, of whom an unusually large number had come from Massachusetts and Connecticut. These pioneers had visions of great things for their isolated village, but none required greater imagination than their dream of a college that might bring the educational opportunities of New England to the frontier.

One of the citizens most dedicated to the project was Major Roger Alden, a Revolutionary War veteran who had fought from Lexington to Yorktown. He believed that a liberal arts education was the best way to equip individuals to meet with judgment and moral justice the problems they might be called to face in life; and he proposed the name of his kinsman, the Reverend Timothy Alden, as an individual well qualified for the task of organizing a new college. A Harvard graduate, the man selected to lead the new college was an intriguing blend of scholar, minister, antiquarian and pioneer.

Timothy Alden and his family arrived in Meadville in April 1815. Within two months the College was founded, and Alden was named its first president. He was also personally responsible for recruiting the first freshman class—among the four students who matriculated the following year were two of Alden's sons. Initially classes were held in Meadville's log courthouse and in Alden's home. Within half a dozen years, however, Alden had succeeded in attracting sufficient funds to begin building a campus, having travelled throughout the eastern states seeking support for a planned library and classroom building. John Adams headed the subscription list of donors from New England, where many of the leading families expressed an active interest in the College. Perhaps the most significant donations were the fine private libraries of Dr. William Bentley, Judge James Winthrop, and Isaiah Thomas. The 1823 library catalogue lists some 8,000 titles, a number of them unique today, making this collection one of the finest held by any of the early colleges. None other than Thomas Jefferson wrote to express his envy at the size and quality of the book collection and to express his hope that one day the University of Virginia might be so fortunate!

The need to properly house the library led to the construction of Bentley Hall in the 1820s, today a leading example of early American architecture. This handsome structure still crowns the hill on which the campus is located. Its harmonious proportions, balanced lines, and elegant columns give it a simple grandeur. For 10 years the people of Meadville gave generously of their time, money, and materials to add to

the contributions that Alden had collected in the East.

Despite such generous gifts, however, the first years were difficult ones. Both students and funds remained in short supply, and in vain the trustees turned for support to the Legislature of Pennsylvania and the Presbyterian Church, of which Alden was a minister. Over Alden's vigorous protests in the name of a classical liberal arts curriculum, the trustees even entertained a proposal to turn the College into a military academy in order to attract support. The plan was never implemented, but Alden nonetheless reluctantly resigned in 1831, by which time conditions had become so desperate that the College closed its doors for two years. Alden spent the remaining eight years of his life moving restlessly to Cincinnati and back to Pittsburgh. He undoubtedly died in the belief that he was a failure.

In truth, Alden's dedicated efforts to speed the building of Bentley Hall and his acquisition of Allegheny's excellent library were to provide the salvation of the College. In 1833 Allegheny reopened with the financial support of the Methodist Church, which was deeply interested in the cause of education.

## A New Beginning

The Methodists understood an important truth when they embraced Allegheny: For an institution of higher learning to become great, for it to endure the vicissitudes of social change and accommodate the evolution of knowledge—to be of service for centuries, not just years or decades—its faculty and students must be free to travel the path toward knowledge wherever it leads, unconstrained by the view of a particular faith. The Church insisted that Allegheny would be nonsectarian in its curriculum and in trustee decision-making, though at the same time deeply committed to building character according to Christian values and ideals.

The new President, the Reverend Martin Ruter, was an outstanding figure in his church and in the field of education. He inspired confidence and attracted new financial backing. When he departed for a mission in the Southwest four years later, the future of the College seemed secure. The second building, erected in 1853, was named in his honor.

In the period before the Civil War a critical feature of Allegheny's present-day character was formed, for the College's founders stressed from the beginning the importance of science and mathematics in a liberal education. Over half the courses were in science or mathematics.

The Civil War brought difficult times for all American colleges, including Allegheny. Almost all of the College's students went off to war, and because there was significant enrollment from several southern states, Alleghenians fought for both the North and the South. One-

third of the Allegheny student body was killed during the war and another third wounded. Among those who fought was a future United States President, William McKinley, who had just begun his college career. Reconstituting the College after the war was a struggle, but it was accomplished, and Allegheny began to grow again in enrollment and financial resources.

In 1870, partly as a pragmatic response to a need for enrollment, but also because it believed that women should have access to the same form of higher education available to men, Allegheny opened its door to women. Those who opposed their admission—and there were some—were surely surprised at Commencement five years later, when the first and second honors went to women. In 1880 half the senior class officers were women, including the president.

One of the most prominent Alleghenians who graduated before the turn of the century was Ida M. Tarbell, Class of 1880, the well-known biographer of Lincoln and a leading “muckraker” in the campaign for social and economic reform of the early 1890s. Tarbell’s papers still attract researchers to the campus each year. Through the efforts of President Lucius H. Bugbee (1874-1882), Marcus Hulings, and other friends of the College, women students found a suitable home in Hulings Hall, which was built in 1879 and remodeled 60 years later to form the nucleus of the present Brooks Hall.

In 1876 the first College newspaper, *The Campus*, was published, followed in 1889 by the *Kaldron* yearbook and, seven years later, by the *Literary Magazine*, now published as the *Allegheny Review*. In 1891 Allegheny competed for the first time with athletics teams from other colleges.

### **The Progressive Era**

The coming of President William H. Crawford in 1893 began an era of unprecedented growth. During his 27 years as President, the College gained a national reputation and grew dramatically in size, as well as endowment. Within five years the faculty had doubled; and by the time Allegheny celebrated its 100th anniversary in 1915, the Observatory, the Chapel, Reis Library, Cochran Hall, Carnegie Hall, and Alden Hall had been built. Students’ increasing interest in athletics led to the construction of Montgomery Gymnasium, and when Allegheny played its first intercollegiate basketball game, the sport itself was only five years old. The establishment in 1902 of a Phi Beta Kappa chapter testified to the growing strength of the academic program.

During World War I, many students and faculty left the campus for military service. The first contingent of the American Expeditionary Forces to land in France included several Alleghenians, while those who remained behind felt the impact of the war when a unit of the Students’ Army Training Corps was established.

The academic reputation of the College and the present Allegheny campus owe much to Crawford’s restless energy and dreams. The College continued to expand in the 1920s; by the end of the decade, Arter Hall, with its excellent Little Theatre, had been constructed; Caffisch Hall was built to house freshmen; and Reis Library had been enlarged.

Yet the 1920s ended on an ominous note, as the national Depression worsened. Educators everywhere feared that enrollment would drop precipitously. The ambitious building program of the 1920s had left the College in a vulnerable financial situation. Moreover, the arrival of the new president, William P. Tolley, in 1931, gave Allegheny the distinction of having the youngest college president in the country. Many must have wondered if youth and enthusiasm would suffice in guiding the College through troubled times.

Fortunately, Allegheny survived and even grew during the 1930s.

Imaginative and determined recruiting efforts helped to increase enrollment, as did the College’s vigorous efforts to keep students in school by providing part-time jobs. In 1934, 48 percent of Allegheny’s student body were earning all or part of their college expenses.

Although weathering the Depression was a demanding task, the quality of education and student life at Allegheny remained the primary concern of the administration and the faculty. Subsidized athletics were phased out of existence and replaced by an amateur athletic policy and an extensive intramural program. Bousson Camp, a 283-acre tract, provided students with additional recreational facilities, as well as a field laboratory for biology classes. Allegheny’s curriculum took on a more progressive tone in keeping with the most promising ideas that emerged from Harvard, the University of Chicago, and other respected centers of educational theory.

While the 1930s had been challenging for the College, the 1940s also presented difficulties. America’s entry into World War II presented Allegheny and many other colleges with enrollment problems that were even more serious than those during the Depression. The resignation of President Tolley in October 1942 added to the College’s concerns, and the Dean of Men, John R. Schultz, took over as president while the search for Tolley’s successor proceeded.

The loss of many Allegheny men to the service was successfully offset by the admission of more women to the College and the inauguration of a Pre-flight Program under the auspices of the Army Air Corps. The completion of Brooks Hall (1940) and Walker Hall (1941) made it possible to admit more women students. In addition to their regular course loads, members of the faculty instructed the Pre-flight trainees in the summer and during evenings.

### **Building on a Progressive Tradition**

The post-war years brought striking changes to the College. Many veterans pursued college degrees with the help of the G.I. Bill, and a new seriousness characterized the atmosphere “on the hill.” During Louis T. Benezet’s administration in 1948, a building drive resulted in the construction of three new buildings—Baldwin Hall (1953), Quigley Hall (1953), and the David Mead Field House (1954)—as well as completion of Robertson Athletic Field (1949). Allegheny’s curriculum underwent significant changes when the concept of general education courses was implemented.

In 1955, following Benezet’s resignation, the Board of Trustees named Lawrence L. Pelletier the 16th president of the College. Pelletier’s administration was notable in many respects. During his presidency, the traditional liberal arts curriculum was strengthened, and faculty and students were allowed flexibility to experiment. Perhaps even more significant was the continual strengthening of the faculty.

The largest building campaign in Allegheny’s history was accomplished during the Pelletier years. South Hall (later re-named Schultz Hall), Crawford Hall, Ravine-Narvik Hall and Edwards House were built to house the growing student body. Murray Hall, Carr Hall of Science, the Maintenance Building and the Mellon Recreational Building were also added to the campus.

In the summer of 1971, the College occupied a new student center and fine arts building housing the departments of art and music, an auditorium seating 1,700, three art galleries, offices and meeting rooms for student groups and organizations, recreation facilities, and a dining room. In 1976 the Lawrence Lee Pelletier Library replaced Reis Library, which now, as Reis Hall, houses the Dean of Students’ offices, including the Allegheny College Center for Experiential Learning (ACCEL).

The student body has played an important role in the evolution of

the College and they have acquired a greater voice in the administration of the College, as well as the responsibility of upholding the Honor Code enacted in 1960. Allegheny has always been a competitive institution noted for the quality of its student body. The growing diversity of the College community serves to strengthen its commitment to excellence.

Like students everywhere, many Alleghenians were deeply troubled by the Vietnam War. But while many colleges and universities experienced tragic violence and debilitating ideological conflicts, the Allegheny community was able to debate tense issues creatively. The President's door remained open; and the dialogue among the faculty, students and administration averted much of the damage and estrangement that occurred elsewhere.

In 1980 Pelletier was succeeded in the Presidency by David Baily Harned. Under Harned's leadership, the College began the most ambitious capital campaign in its history, with a goal of \$20 million. These efforts resulted in significant improvements in faculty compensation and in financial aid for students. The College also added new degree programs in computer science and environmental studies, and initiated new study-abroad programs.

Raymond Philip Shafer '38, former governor of Pennsylvania and long-time member and former chairman of the Board of Trustees, became the acting president during the summer of 1985, after Harned's resignation. Under his stewardship, the College completed an important strategic planning process and the capital campaign begun during the Harned years. To honor his many years of exceptional service to Allegheny, Governor Shafer was officially elected Allegheny's 18th president at the end of his interim year.

In the meantime, the Board elected Daniel F. Sullivan to be Allegheny's 19th President, and he took office in August 1986. An enriched curriculum was implemented in 1990 and streamlined five years later, combining the new Liberal Studies Program with the traditional strengths of the Allegheny major and the Senior Project. Other courses and majors were comprehensively modernized.

Construction of a \$14.5-million science complex was completed in 1993. The project was funded out of Allegheny's Building for New Generations campaign. Steffee Hall of Life Sciences and Doane Hall of Chemistry serve as national models for undergraduate science facilities. The complex represents a giant step forward in a comprehensive program of facilities planning, maintenance, and construction, as well as campus beautification, that also comprises residential facilities and athletics and recreation facilities. The \$13-million David V. Wise Sport and Fitness Center and the College Court residential complex opened in the fall of 1997.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, notable advances were made in out-of-class programming, such as lectures, concerts, and theatrical performances, and in conducting one of the nation's most successful athletics programs from both a teaching and a won-lost standpoint. Allegheny's commitment to recruiting and serving a diverse student body—racially, economically, culturally, and otherwise—was reaffirmed as well.

### Entering a New Century

Allegheny's 20th president, Richard J. Cook, took office in August 1996. New forms of outreach to the Meadville community became an early hallmark of the Cook administration. A set of basic planning principles was designed to affirm Allegheny's commitment to its historical purpose and identity while outlining core strategies and related

initiatives that adapt the traditional strengths of a liberal arts curriculum to the changing needs of students and the new world that they will help create.

In 2002, Allegheny launched a \$105 million comprehensive fund-raising campaign to support strategic plan initiatives. By the end of the campaign in June 2006, the original fund-raising goal was exceeded by more than \$10 million.

Renovations to the Campus Center were completed in 2004, revitalizing the center as a hub of campus activity with new homes for the Merriman Bookstore, post office, and radio station. In 2005 the creation of the Patricia Bush Tippie Alumni Center restored Cochran Hall to its former elegance. Other major construction projects include renovations to the Doane Hall of Art and the development of the North Village, a set of townhouse-style apartments that opened in fall 2006. A major modernization of the Robertson Athletic Complex—including a new eight-lane competition track, a FieldTurf playing surface, scoreboard and lights—was also completed in 2006.

Major renovations to Pelletier Library enhanced the Learning Commons, a resource center encompassing academic support ranging from peer-to-peer tutoring to assistance from professional staff.

James H. Mullen, Jr. became the 21st president of Allegheny College in 2008, elected unanimously by the Allegheny Board of Trustees on the unanimous recommendation of the Presidential Search Committee. Mullen is a scholar of the American presidency who has taught history, public policy, and political science. With 20 years of experience in leadership roles in higher education, and a keen appreciation for Allegheny's history and traditions, he continues the work of earlier presidents in building community while at the same time enhancing the College's reputation as one of the nation's preeminent colleges of the liberal arts and sciences.

During Mullen's first year in office, we saw the opening of the Vukovich Center for the Communication Arts, designed by the world-renowned architectural firm Polshek Partnership, the 454 House, new home of the Admissions Office, and the Founders House in honor of Richard J. Cook and Teresa M. Lahti. The innovative Richard J. Cook Center for Environmental Science was completed in 2012.

Today, as the College prepares to celebrate its Bicentennial in 2015, Alleghenians are just as confident as the founders were that the College can equip young people to meet with sound judgment and moral justice the challenges they might be called on to face in life.