CHAPTER XII

THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

The University was not very popular in its early days. The legislature would grant little money for buildings. At one time a petition was presented to the legislature to abolish the University and distribute the income from the University fund to the various private colleges in the state. The local press favored the measure. One of the regents of the University actually introduced a bill to that effect in 1855. One regent proposed at a meeting of the board to suspend the University for a time.

The University was for many years handicapped by real poverty. The land which the federal government gave to the state to support the University was sold off in a hurry at low prices. The small funds obtained from the sale were not managed very well. They were lent, sometimes, to irresponsible persons. The result was that while Wisconsin had twice as much as land as Michigan for its University fund, Michigan realized more than twice as much from what she had. The University of Wisconsin was thus dependent on the bounty of the legislature from year to year at a time when the state felt too poor to give much. First there was a panic, then came the Civil War.

At first, the University was open only to men. During the Civil War, however, the men students left in such numbers that the doors were opened to women. When the war was over, the women stayed. Coeducation, however, was not pleasing to President Paul Chadbourne, who placed them in a separate normal department. The young men and women recited to the same instructors, but at different hours. The president would hear the six or eight young men of the senior class in philosophy and the next hour would step into an adjoining room and hear a class of six or eight women. In 1874, after President Chadbourne left, the women were given the full privileges of the University and put into classes with the men. None of the dreadful things expected came to pass.

From 1874 to 1887 the University had a president, John Bascom, whose influence upon the young people of the state had much to do with making Wisconsin a center of political and social pioneering. "He stamped high purposes deeply on the men who came under his coinage," said Frederick Jackson Turner.

Every senior at Wisconsin came into classroom contact with President Bascom. One of his students, Senator LaFollette, has told what that contact meant.
"His addresses to the students on Sunday afternoon, together with his work in the class room, were among the most important influences in my early life. It was his teaching, iterated and reiterated, of the obligation of both the University and the students to the mother state that may be said to have originated the Wisconsin Idea in Education. He was forever telling us what the state was doing for us, and urging in return our obligation not to use our education wholly for our own selfish benefit, but to return some service to the state. That teaching animated and inspired hundreds of students who sat under John Bascom."

President Bascom was known as a reformer. He was a courageous advocate of coeducation, of prohibition, and of labor reform at a time when these subjects were not popular. He also had his own ideas of vigorous administration of the university. He came into conflict with the regents and returned to the east where he taught until his death. But Wisconsin has never ceased to feel his influence. His close friend, Dr. Edward A. Birge, former president of the university, bears the same testimony of his work as do his pupils:

"I question whether the history of any great commonwealth can show so intimate a relation between the forces which have governed its social development and the principles expounded from a teacher's desk as that which exists between Wisconsin and the class room of John Bascom."

The state of Michigan was the first to establish a college of Agriculture. Wisconsin was the first to establish a College of Agriculture as a part of the State University, on the same grounds with the old established colleges of Letters and Science, Law and Medicine. Wisconsin was also the first to have a dairy school within the College of Agriculture.

For many years, the farmers of the state paid little attention to their University. Most of them were too poor and too busy grubbing up stumps to think of sending their children to the University. When the bill was up in 1858 to establish the Agricultural College, there was great opposition. The senator from Rock county declared that the farmers he represented did not want it, and that the bill contemplated "only another institution like the enormous pile on yonder hill which is an eyesore to the people of the state,—another institution to plunder and rob the treasury." This can be taken with a grain of salt, however, as this senator was a partisan of Beloit College, and not anxious to see the rival school at Madison develop very rapidly.

Even after the College of Agriculture was established, it was many years before there was any considerable number of four-year college students in the department. Before people became much interested in the Agricultural course, several things had to be done. First, the professors had to put their knowledge of scientific principles into language which the farmer could understand and send it out in bulletins to help the farmers on practical questions. Second, farmer's institutes were begun, the professors going out into the state to meet the farmers. There were many distinguished lecturers, among them the Honorable Hiram Smith, a regent of the University, who worked out the problems of the dairy business on his own farm, and was able to defend modern scientific methods by pointing to the results on his own place. W. D. Hoard was another. Professor W. A. Henry did much to make the institutes a success, organizing programs on such practical subjects as: Restoring the fertility of the farm; the manurial value of different kinds of feed; clover as a fertilizer; plowing and cultivation; how to improve our country roads; how I feed dairy cows; how to avoid losses of butter fat in butter making; cooperative creameries; pig pens; construction of the cow stable; ventilation and sunlight in our stables.

1 Pyre. Wisconsin, p. 10.
Fourth, farmers and their wives and daughters were invited to come to Madison for a few days or weeks or months to study the farm problems in which they needed help. If they could not spend four years working for a degree, the University was willing to give them all it could for the time they had. Today, in addition to the four year course leading to a degree, there is a two year course known as the “middle course;” a short course in agriculture consisting of two winter terms of fifteen weeks each; a winter dairy course of twelve weeks; a summer dairy course of ten weeks; and five courses of one week each, known as Farmer’s week; Women’s Week in Home Economics; a special Dairy course for cheese factory and creamery operators and managers; the cow testing courses; and Young People’s Week.

A fifth influence which has made the College of Agriculture popular is the success of university professors in making discoveries and inventions so clearly valuable that they win the respect of the farmers of the state. Professors, apparently, are not all “high brows” with their heads in the clouds, but men whose work means money in the pockets of Wisconsin farmers and prosperity for the whole state. Here are some of the things they have done:

They have produced a kind of corn which can be grown in the northern part of the state.

By planting orchards in the northern part of the state they have shown the farmers there that they can have a variety of fruits.

They have found ways of getting rid of noxious weeds.

They have worked out new methods of cranberry culture, increasing the production of cranberries from a range of one to ten barrels per acre to one of seventy to eighty barrels per acre.

They introduced the use of the round wood silo to the country.

They have produced varieties of grasses and legumes which formerly could not be had in the state.

They have worked out scientific rations for cattle; new methods of making cheese; new methods of blasting and pulling stumps; and a new system of ventilation for stables; and many other things.

They study constantly the insects and diseases which prey upon plants and are able to tell farmers how to control many of them. Some of the pests against which they have taught farmers to wage war are cabbage maggots, San Jose scale, cranberry insects, grasshoppers, the potato leaf hopper, cucumber beetle, codding moth, grain rust, tobacco wild fire blight, and bee diseases. The most widely known contribution of these agricultural professors is the Babcock test, which has saved millions of dollars to dairy farmers not only of Wisconsin, but also all over the world. In Denmark, in Holland, wherever there is dairying, the Babcock test is used.

Before this invention, farmers in Wisconsin as elsewhere had suffered great loss in selling their milk. “Milk was milk” and rich milk received no better price than poor milk, although more butter and cheese could be made from it. In 1890, Dr. Babcock found the way to help the farmer find out what he was really selling and the buyer to know what he was really buying. His invention, the Babcock test, is used to measure the butter fat in milk. Thus farmers are able to sell their milk for what it is, rather than what it appears to be; to study the effect of certain kinds and amounts of feeds; and to weed out the “boarders,” as the cattle which eat too much in proportion to the butter fat they produce are called.

Instead of patenting the invention in his own name, Dr. Babcock turned it over to the public.
The fight against tuberculosis in cattle began at the College of Agriculture. Dean Russell started it in 1890 by bringing over from Dr. Robert Koch's laboratory in Germany the first tuberculin in the country. The first herd tested in Wisconsin was the Experimental Station herd of twenty-five animals, all of which reacted. Since that time the fight against tuberculosis has never ceased. The annual loss through tuberculosis in cattle and swine in Wisconsin has been estimated at $3,000,000.00 a year. Since 1890, several methods of control have been tried. The law now provides that if 60 per cent of the cattle owners of any county petition for it, all the herds in the county shall be tested, and diseased animals destroyed, with partial payment to the owner from state and federal funds.

One method of reaching the farmers is through the county agricultural agent. The Legislature of 1909 provided for a committee to study agricultural and other vocational education and to report in 1911. Dr. McCarthy of the Legislative Reference Library, a member of the committee, was sent to Europe to investigate methods used there. The report which the committee issued recommended the employment in each county of a sort of traveling teacher of agriculture, or farmers' assistant. The university was thereupon empowered to grant state aid to any county which employed such an agent. The university cooperates with them, so that in a way they represent the University in the community.

These men are the business agents of the farmers of their county. They organize farmers for the sale of their crops and the buying of supplies. They have charge of exhibits of the products of the county within the state and outside of it. They hold conferences on pressing problems of production and marketing. They attempt to meet the requests of individual farmers for advice and assistance. They help the Agricultural, Marketing, Dairy and Food and other state departments to reach the farmers of their county in the most effective way.

In addition to the thousands who come to the University at Madison every year, there are other thousands who are served by it without leaving their own homes. For the University sends out to those who want it, information on all sorts of subjects. High school students, club women, anyone who wants help on a speech or paper, may obtain it by writing to the Department of Debating and Public Instruction of the University Extension Department.

More than that, anyone who wants to study at home along almost any line, can obtain from the Correspondence Division of the University Extension Department an outline for study, and even the service of having his papers marked. It is hard work and lonely work, but a persistent person can obtain a grade school and high school education and make some of his credits toward graduation from the University by taking the correspondence courses which the University has prepared. In some cities classes are organized in subjects for which there is a demand, and University Extension lecturers teach the classes.

The University of Wisconsin has for many years had a reputation outside the state for making its departments of economics and political science of practical use to the state. Among those who share the responsibility for this reputation are Richard T. Ely, John R. Commons and Edward A. Ross.

Within the shadow of the statue of Abraham Lincoln, and facing the beautiful dome of the Capitol a mile away, is a bronze tablet fastened to the wall of Bascom Hall, the building which crowns the main university hill.

"Whatever may be the limitations which trammel inquiry elsewhere, we believe that the great state of Wisconsin should ever encourage that continual and fearless sifting and winnowing by which alone the truth can be found."
The University of Wisconsin bids farewell to its graduates!

The stock pavilion of the University of Wisconsin has welcomed many famous guests and speakers. At this commencement in June, 1928, Lindbergh was made an LL.D.
This is the inscription on the tablet which was the gift of the class of 1909, in memory of the acquittal by the regents of the University of Dr. Richard T. Ely, a professor of economics, who was accused of having heretical economic opinions—opinions a little bit different from the ordinary economic views.

The world has caught up with, and, in some respects, moved beyond the principles for which Dr. Ely was considered dangerous in earlier days. But his trial and its outcome as well as his own constructive ideas attracted the attention of the whole country and helped to build up the reputation of Wisconsin for being forward looking.

Dr. Ely, who was born in New York state, had been a student not only in American Universities, but also in the Universities of Halle and Heidelberg in Germany, and Geneva Switzerland, and also at the Royal Statistical Bureau, Berlin. It was in Germany that he worked with the professors who were urging the collection of statistics to be used as a basis for legislative action; who were interested in the scientific development of administration; who were making a scientific study of government. These influences are all reflected in the government of Wisconsin; in the building up of efficient machinery of administration. Carl Schurz's zeal for civil service is one phase of this movement for efficient government. The men and women who have worked under Dr. Ely at the University of Wisconsin have gone out with a desire to do away with the cheapness of the old time politics and to substitute for it sound methods of administration in the interest of the whole public.

Another teacher who has helped to determine the character of the University is John R. Commons. In every great city of the United States there are teachers of industrial economics, labor managers for big and little businesses, officers for big and little industrial concerns, investigators of industrial conditions for the government, for labor organizations and for employers, who are trained and sent out by Professor Commons to help bring order and efficiency into industrial life.

When Professor Commons began to teach the labor history of the United States, he found that no one knew much about it. Before he could do much teaching, he had to dig out the facts. For many years he has been digging out the facts concerning
industrial conditions. He has trained his students and they have helped him. They have delved into old newspapers and books. They have interviewed employers and employees. They have travelled over the country alone or with Professor Commons looking at industry or becoming a part of it. They have made a science of the study of labor problems. Professor Commons’ students do not live in the past. They use the past to explain and interpret the present. They are thrown into contact with employers and employees. They assist the lawmakers in drawing bills. They get practical experience in industry and state departments. They go into industry as often as into teaching.

Business men as well as labor leaders seek the opinions of Professor Commons. He was made a member of the Wisconsin Industrial Commission when it was created in 1911 in order that he might help in the organization of its work. He was made a member of the United States Commission on Industrial Relations in 1914, which made investigations in the Colorado and Michigan mining regions, in the great cities of the country and wherever industrial unrest was most apparent.

Among the books which he has written, are Races and Immigrants in America, Labor Legislation, Labor and Administration, Industrial Good Will, and Industrial Government.

Three professors who have studied the activities and influences of the pioneers of the different stages of America’s history are Reuben G. Thwaites, Frederick Jackson Turner and Frederick L. Paxson. Dr. Thwaites has saved for us the stories and spirit of the earlier pioneers; Professor Turner and Professor Paxson have made vivid the pioneer spirit of the last hundred years, and have somehow made us feel the value of keeping that spirit fresh within us.

In connection with the work of these writers and active teachers of history who have drawn hundreds of students from all over the country, we should not forget to mention the men and women who have delved into Wisconsin’s past for the information which helps us to understand ourselves and our institutions. Lyman Draper, the first secretary of the Wisconsin Historical Society worked fervently to find and preserve all the documents available in private libraries and attics. He hurried from place to place interviewing people who could tell him of early days in Wisconsin. He was so busy collecting and saving precious information that he never took the time to put it together into connected history. He left that for those who would follow him. Reuben G. Thwaites, Milo Quaife, Louise Kellogg and others have continued his work of searching for facts and for people who have the facts; and they and others in the University as we have shown, are trying to use these facts to explain our life today.

One of the departments of the University which is now coming into close contact with the people of the state is the Medical School. Connected with this school are three hospitals, the Bradley Memorial Hospital, the Infirmary for students, and the State General Hospital, all on the University Campus. Interesting cases from all over the state and especially from the state’s own institutions are treated here and studied by the medical students who will be the future physicians of the state.