Western at 75

By

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When the central portion of Old Main was completed in 1896, stumps and fallen trees littered the campus. Many had already been removed when this photo was taken.
FOREWORD

On September 6, 1974, Western Washington State College will round out its first 75 years of service to the people of the State of Washington. This brief narrative will present the sequence of events leading to the opening of the institution in 1899, trace the main lines of development and indicate the successive stages of progress through more than seven decades, and, in the spirit of Tennyson’s Ulysses, interpret the past as “an arch wherethro’ gleams that untravell’d world” of the future “whose margin fades for ever” as we move.

The project in those parts dealing with the first 50 years was mainly the work of a faculty sub-committee set up in the late forties by the Golden Anniversary Committee. On the sub-committee were Edward J. Arntzen, Sanford E. Carver, Nora B. Cummins, Herbert R. Hearsey, Merle S. Kuder and Arthur C. Hicks, chairman. The last-named prepared the text; the others participated in the planning and the tasks of research. Miriam L. Peck was mainly responsible for the design of the cover, and Ruth A. Burnet assisted in the selection and placing of illustrations. To many others — faculty members, alumni, and friends of the College — acknowledgements were also due.

The additional material incorporated into the chapters dealing with the first 50 years and the text of the chapters devoted to the history of the institution since 1949 are the work of Dr. Hicks. Ramon T. Heller, Director of Public Information, has selected and placed the illustrations for the work as a whole; other members of the Diamond Anniversary Committee, together with students, and members of the faculty, administration and staff, and friends of the College have been consulted in various stages of the work.
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Dr. Edward T. Mathes, principal of New Whatcom State Normal School from May, 1899, until July, 1914, history, psychology and philosophy of education.

John T. Forrest, who held the chair of mathematics, had been superintendent of schools at Chehalis.

Francis W. Epley, sciences, had occupied a similar position at Wisconsin State Normal School.

Miss Jane Connell, English literature and Latin, had served as acting president of a college at Sheridan, Wyoming.

Miss Avadana Millett, elocution, drawing and physical culture, had occupied a similar position in the Seattle schools.

Miss Sarah J. Rogers, superintendent of the Model Training Department, was previously superintendent of a model school in Dillon, Montana.
THE NORTHWEST NORMAL SCHOOL, 1886 - 1892

The first recorded suggestion that a publicly supported normal school be established in Whatcom County was made in November, 1886, when the Whatcom Reveille proposed that the Northwest Normal School of Lynden, which had opened its doors the previous month, receive an appropriation from the Territorial Legislature. The sequel to this proposal makes clear that the Northwest Normal School was an important factor in creating the demand for a state-supported teacher training institution which eventuated in the founding of the New Whatcom State Normal School, now known as Western Washington State College.

In the summer of 1886 the energetic J. R. Bradley from Missouri, who was generally called Professor Bradley by his acquaintances, proposed to the citizens of Lynden, a community of about seven hundred souls in northern Whatcom County surrounded by heavily forested, marshy country, that a normal school be established with local resources. It was even suggested that some former members of the University Faculty might be available for teaching. By July the community was in a receptive mood, and in August a meeting was held that...
brought Professor Bradley's proposal to a head. Holden A. Judson, a pioneer of Lynden who had arrived in Whatcom County in 1872 and had since achieved recognition as the town's leading citizen, donated a block of ground by the Nooksack River, a building was immediately planned and financed, and the construction was let to a local builder, E. J. Robinson.

The five-room building was ready for use by the opening day — October 5, 1886. Tuition was set at eight dollars for a course of ten weeks, the school year being divided into four such periods. Board and room could be secured in the town for three to four dollars a week. The entrance requirements were not high, girls being admitted at the age of 14, boys at 16. There was a preparatory course of one year, admission to which depended on the ability to read, write and work decimal fractions. The regular course was planned to extend over a period of four years, although there was no graduation and no certificate was issued. It must be borne in mind that Whatcom County in 1886 had no secondary and few elementary schools. A person could qualify at the age of 16 for a teaching certificate by passing examinations in the common branches offered at the territorial capital in Olympia. In 1888 the age was raised to 18.

In three bare, ill-equipped rooms instruction began. The preparatory course included little more than the common branches — spelling, reading, grammar, arithmetic, geography, vocal music, penmanship, United States history and drawing. The regular course was made up largely of academic subjects — elocution, composition and rhetoric, algebra, physiology, Latin, drawing and bookkeeping in the first year; American literature, natural philosophy, geometry, Latin and physical geography in the second; general history, trigonometry, botany, Latin, logic, chemistry and analytical geometry in the third; and political economy, geology, English literature, moral philosophy and astronomy in the fourth. The professional courses were confined to principles and practice in teaching in the first and second years, civil government and school law in the second, school management and psychology in the third, and history of education, institute work, and mental philosophy in the fourth.

Professor or Principal Bradley was a man of vision and ambition, interested in young people and their problems, although not disposed to coddle them. Before establishing the Northwest Normal School he had taught in the elementary school at Everson. He was especially interested in the subject of Elocution, which he handled in the Lynden institution for a while along with Intellectual Science and Didactics. Among the members of his faculty during a period of six years were Frances Cleveland, who afterward became the wife of Dr. W. H. Axtell of Bellingham and the mother of Mrs. Burnet, already mentioned in the foreword, and Delisca J. Bowers, instructor in language, who later became the wife of Hugh Eldridge, also of Bellingham. Music, which received special emphasis in the curriculum, was taught by Lillian Heiney, who in 1891 was principal of the Music Department, Miss Cleveland, Professor A. Griffin, who also handled mathematics, Mrs. Griffin and Maude B. McFarland. Instruction in art was given by Miss Bowers, Clara B. DeCan and Miss McFarland. Also on the faculty were Associate Principal W. M. Heiney, who taught natural science and history; and Vice Principal F. G. Franklin, whose subjects were Latin, mathematics and bookkeeping. To round out the instruction Principal Bradley made assistant teachers out of certain normal school students in the fourth-year course.

In the student body there was an approximately equal division between boys and girls. Most of the students were zealous and eager. There was little time for play because of their absorption in the process of learning, even holidays being given up for the sake of studies. The physical education program was confined to the boys, who walked or ran around the school building with Professor Franklin for exercise. The assembly programs consisted of singing, exhibitions of elocution.
and devotional exercises. Professor Bradley, who was a good Methodist, required the boys to sign a pledge not to smoke, chew gum, play cards or attend theatrical performances; and on one famous occasion expelled eight or ten students for violating the last item of the pledge. However, nearly all were reinstated after conferences with the Principal. In the school itself there was little social life, although considerable interest was shown in literary societies.

As time passed it became clear that the Northwest Normal School could not continue indefinitely as a privately supported institution. The citizens of Lynden, to be sure, were loyal and generous. Special interest was shown by Phoebe N. Judson, the wife of Holden A. Judson, who was so prominent in the pioneer phase of the community as to earn the title of "Mother of Lynden." Nevertheless enrollment from year to year was not particularly encouraging. Only 16 students were in attendance on the opening day. The second term began on January 3, 1887, with a "larger attendance." When the figure climbed to nearly 100 in July, the Principal decided to add a department of music. The work of clearing the Normal School block was completed in June, 1888. By September of that year however, it was evident that the school had not consolidated its gains, for only 30 students from seven different towns were enrolled on the opening day in spite of the efforts of E. B. Ebey, who had been employed to recruit, and the lure of new patent seating which had been recently installed. A campaign to raise funds for a new building brought in $4,000, and the new structure was proudly advertised for its dimensions of 56 by 90 feet, two stories, five rooms, Literary Hall 20 by 60 feet, and tower 86 feet high. An additional subscription of $2,000 brought the building to completion by November 20, 1889, but the enrollment in the preceding February was just 56 and by July had reached only 71. During the next year the Principal was obliged to deny rumors that the Northwest Normal School was to be moved to Blaine. However, the spring quarter of 1891 began encouragingly on April 14 with an enrollment of 120, which Professor Bradley said was higher than that of the State Normal School at Cheney, which had admitted students for the first time in the preceding October. Nevertheless, he had decided by January of 1892 that the school should be closed since it had never been profitable. Professor Heiney bought Professor Bradley's interest, and the latter established himself in New Whatcom as the proprietor of a bookstore. Thereupon certain citizens of Lynden promoted a plan to bond the town for $7,000 to maintain the school as a municipal enterprise, but without success. The eight-week summer term of 1892 with Professor Heiney as principal brought the career of the Northwest Normal School to a close. The new building was given over to other uses and later, after undergoing alterations, served the citizens of Lynden as the Odd Fellows hall.

THE STRUGGLE FOR A STATE NORMAL SCHOOL IN WHATCOM COUNTY, 1886-1899

ESS THAN THREE years after the Whatcom Reveille made the suggestion that the Northwest Normal School receive state support, the citizens of Lynden became warmly interested in the proposal and secured the introduction of a bill in the last Territorial Legislature to convert their school to a state institution. This received the approval of the House but failed of passage in the Senate by two votes, chiefly through the opposition of Senator Thomas Page of Mount Vernon. Undiscouraged, the friends of the school called a mass meeting in Lynden on May 8, 1889, which resulted in a plan to raise a bonus of $1,000 and to offer this amount together with a site to the state. In the meantime Professor Bradley had become convinced that his school must eventually close unless it received state support. He...
made a statement to this effect in 1889 to Michael Anderson, who suggested that another appeal be made to the Legislature. In December, 1890, just before the opening of the session, Lynden again became active in behalf of the project and appealed to Bellingham Bay, that is, Whatcom and Fairhaven, for support. When the Legislature convened early in January, 1891, the Whatcom County delegation was ready to fight for a State Normal School. Representative E. C. Cline spoke especially for Lynden and made an offer of a site, the new building of the Northwest Normal School and a bonus of $1,000. Anderson was by this time a member of the House and had become enthusiastic about the Lynden project. Together with Professor Bradley and Representative Tiffany from Whatcom County, who was a member of the House Normal School Committee, Anderson prepared a bill similar to that of 1889, which was introduced by Tiffany. However, it soon became apparent that the latter was not heartily in favor of the measure. Anderson thereupon took charge of the orphaned bill and worked with Professor Bradley to secure its passage. It was called up in the House by a special order of business toward the end of the 1891 session and failed by only four votes.

There was another complication in the fight for the Lynden measure in the Legislature of 1891. By this time, Bellingham Bay had its own axes to grind. On the occasion of Washington's admission to statehood, November 11, 1889, T. G. Nicklin, a prominent county politician, proposed to the Whatcom Chamber of Commerce that a movement for the establishment of a State Normal School be at once organized. He did not specify Bellingham Bay as the site, to be sure, but in December, 1890, the possibility of locating such an institution at Whatcom was discussed by the same body. Edward Eldridge offered to donate a half block for a building if Pierre Cornwall would do likewise. It was finally decided, however, that the Chamber would endorse the Lynden proposal. Yet the claims of Bellingham Bay were not thereby shelved in the ensuing legislative session, for Fairhaven offered to the State a bonus of $10,000 and a nine-acre site. The lack of unanimity among the Whatcom County members was the true reason for the defeat of Anderson's bill.

Some impetus was given to the movement for a state institution in Whatcom County by the closing of the Northwest Normal School in 1892. Anderson was re-elected to the Legislature in the fall of that year and returned to Olympia for the session of 1893 with undiminished zeal. His bill still specified Lynden as the location and carried an appropriation of $35,000. But he soon heard objections: Lynden was too remote from the centers of population and was deficient in transportation; the State was less than four years old, had established the Cheney Normal School in 1890, the Ellensburg Normal School in 1891, and the State College at Pullman in 1892, and could not support a third normal school.

At this juncture Representative Charles I. Roth from Whatcom conferred with Anderson concerning the possibility of some other location within the county for the new institution. Roth was convinced that Anderson was the proper person to father a revised bill because of his popularity with progressive legislators and his friendly relations with the members from Eastern Washington. Anderson was willing. Having secured a position on the House Committee of Normal Schools and University Grounds, he compromised by submitting House Bill No. 66, which did not specify the location and appropriated only $5,000 for the expenses necessary in securing title to whatever site might be selected by the commission to be appointed by the Governor for that purpose. Representative Edmond Meany, chairman of the committee and later a professor in the University of Washington, assisted Anderson in getting the bill returned to the House with the recommendation "do pass."

The new measure also encountered strenuous opposition. Representatives from four other counties intro-
duced bills to establish state schools. Economic conditions gave force to the argument that the State could not afford another normal school. Representative Burton, a Populist from Snohomish, bitterly attacked the bill as a steal and a real-estate speculation. The chief opposition came from King County. To deal with this, Roth enlisted the cooperation of Senators Richards and Gilbert and of Representatives Sherman and Mead. These five, assisted by Anderson, worked tirelessly to bring the King County members into line, their chief weapon being the threat of opposition to King County’s pet measures, including some vulnerable projects. Their efforts were largely unavailing, however, since only one King County member finally voted for House Bill No. 66.

Meanwhile both Messrs. Roth and Anderson were concerned with the attitude of Republican Governor John H. McGraw toward the establishment of a third normal school. They feared a veto. Fortunately the Governor was more responsive to pressure than the delegation from King County. He was greatly interested in a tidelands bill promoted by King County and was in dismay when the forces marshaled by Roth defeated the measure. He therefore was amenable to the suggestion that he withhold his veto from the normal school measure on the condition that Roth and his associates support the reintroduced tidelands bill. The Governor would not compromise, however, on the issue of an appropriation for the new institution. In an interview with Anderson he protested violently against any increase in state expenses, although he was willing to allow $5,000 in the normal school measure to procure the site.

A minor complication was the discovery that a supplementary bill was needed for the governing and conducting of state normal schools. Fortunately Senator Frink of Seattle had prepared such a bill to present at the propitious time, and this was introduced. In spite of the Governor’s opposition, Roth introduced a bill for a supplementary appropriation of $30,000. Valuable assistance in maneuvering these three bills on the calendar was given by Mr. Nicklin of Whatcom, chief clerk of the House, and Frank J. Kindon of Fairhaven, assistant chief clerk of the Senate. The presiding officers of both bodies, Speaker Ainsworth and Lieutenant Governor Luce, were friendly. Nevertheless the vote was close, particularly in the Senate, where the main bill was approved by a majority of only one vote. The Governor vetoed both appropriations, as was expected, but on February 24, 1893, he signed the crucial measure, House Bill No. 66, which provided for the establishment of a state normal school in Whatcom County.

However, Representative Anderson’s labors in behalf of the new school were by no means over. His bill set the deadline of July 1, 1893, for the appointment of the commission that was charged with the duty of determining and securing a site. Assuming that the Governor would be duly cognizant of this time limit, Anderson went to Santa Monica, Calif., for hospital care. In the latter part of June he received word that the Governor had done nothing about his commission. In spite of ill health Anderson therefore returned to Olympia on the 27th and immediately established contact with the Governor, whom he strongly urged to abide by the terms of the law. The Governor at first showed little concern, but after a rereading of the law he decided on the 28th to take immediate action and on the 29th was at Bellingham Bay, where the commission was organized with the Governor as chairman. The other members were George E. Atkinson of New Whatcom and H. B. Bateman of Fairhaven.

In August the commission held preliminary hearings at the Fairhaven Hotel and then went to inspect the various sites proposed. Professor Bradley, W. R. Moultray and J. Hannum Jones appeared for Lynden with four alternative sites, including the property of the Northwest Normal School; Edwin Lopas in behalf of Professor Griffin of Ferndale, formerly on the faculty of the Lynden institution, offered ten acres on the east side
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of the Nooksack River; A. E. Mead spoke for Blaine in suggesting the old sectarian school property on which there was a brick building valued at $18,000; and E. B. Leaming presented the advantages of a site at Langtree Point on Lake Whatcom. But the commission finally selected a ten-acre tract in the neighborhood of Sehome Hill which was offered by Senator C. W. Dorr, Mayor Thomas Slade of New Whatcom and Nicklin as representatives of the Bellingham Bay Improvement Company, the Fairhaven Land Company and the heirs of the Lysle Estate. The City Council immediately vacated all streets and alleys in the plat, and the tract was then surveyed and set apart.

Yet, more than six years were to elapse before the New Whatcom Normal School was to open its doors for the instruction of students. In view of Governor McGraw's veto of the appropriation for construction and improvements which had been made by the 1893 Legislature, nothing could be done for the new school after the selection of the site until the session of 1895. Then Senator Dorr brought in a measure to provide $60,000, but this was reduced to $40,000 before it was adopted. The Senate passed the bill 26 to 4. It was steered through the House largely through the efforts of Representatives D. E. Biggs, J. H. Schively, and R. J. Glenn, reinforced by Representative Cline of Lynden after the latter's amendment to substitute Lynden for New Whatcom had been voted down. Governor McGraw signed this time without demur.

Since this bill provided that the Board of Trustees was to be selected from the citizens of Whatcom County, the Governor appointed Major Eli Wilkin from Fairhaven, who was elected president, and R. C. Higginson and Colonel J. J. Edens from New Whatcom. Each member was to serve under a bond of $20,000 and without salary. O. H. Culver, formerly editor of the Fairhaven Herald and World-Herald and at that time collector of customs at Bellingham Bay, was chosen clerk.

The first responsibility of the board was to decide on a site and a design for what is now the central section of Old Main. M. J. Carkeek, a landscape architect from Seattle, suggested the site. There was vigorous competition among architects for the design of the building. Fashionable at that time was a florid type of architecture loaded with non-functional towers and "gingerbread." The Board showed both courage and good taste in its preference for a functional plainness in its final selection of a design submitted by Messrs. Skillings and Corner of Seattle which was patterned after the Boston Public Library. Skillings had the distinction of designing the Washington Building at the World's Fair. Nevertheless feeling ran so high over the board's decision that a disgruntled architect used the local post office to display side by side his ornate design, with the caption, "This is what you might have had," and a newspaper clipping of the accepted plan, labeled "But this is what you get."

In 1896 the building was erected under the supervision of Skillings and A. Lee of New Whatcom, who later designed two of the additions to the original structure. Its dimensions were 56 by 150 feet. The basement and trimmings were of sandstone quarried on the ground, and the superstructure of three floors was of pressed brick. W. B. Davey was awarded the contract for $34,126, which proved sufficient for the finishing of the rooms in the basement and on the first floor. Difficulties arose between the board and the contractor, who collected periodical estimates in cash without submitting receipted payrolls and vouchers for materials. After a delay caused by a strike of brick and stone workers who demanded their pay, the contractor left the job for his bondsmen to clean up.

More serious difficulties for the new school developed in the legislative session of 1897. A campaign for reform and retrenchment in 1896 gave the Populists and Fusionist Democrats control of the state government, with Governor John R. Rogers pledged to a program of rigid economy. He was also convinced that all state
schools of higher learning should be brought to one center. Yet the Legislature was not indisposed to do something for the New Whatcom institution. On March 1 and 2 during the session a committee came to inspect the grounds and building. Senators Dorr and C. S. Reinhart and Representatives John L. Likins, J. P. de Mattos and Cline fought hard for the Likins bill appropriating $35,000 and secured its passage by both houses. The Governor applied his veto, however, and thus created a dilemma for the Board of Trustees. Since there was only $10,843 on hand to pay claims amounting to $14,599, the board was obliged to seek for a ruling from the State Supreme Court as to the proper method of meeting the deficiency. There was of course no money for equipment and maintenance, not to speak of a faculty and staff, so that the new building remained idle for a period of three years. There was nothing for the board to do but mark time until the next session of the Legislature. During this interval Major Wilkin resigned and left for Ohio, to be succeeded by Frank C. Teck. Higginson became chairman until 1899, when he was succeeded on the board by Jeremiah Neterer.

Between 1897 and 1899 educational developments in the State favored the cause of the new school. In 1898 the State Board of Education was obliged to issue permits or temporary emergency certificates to 499 persons who either had less than an eighth-grade education or were not considered "teacher material." With such obvious need for increased training facilities confronting the legislators in 1899, they could not fail to grant the minimum sums of $30,500 for equipment and maintenance and $3,000 for drainage and improvement of the grounds, and the Governor allowed the bill to become law without his signature. The 13-year fight for the establishment of the fifth of Washington's publicly supported institutions of higher learning had been won.

A pond remained on the north end of the campus for several years as a reminder of the swamp which once existed there.
The first library, located in the South Annex of Old Main. Mabel Zoe Wilson is seated at the circulation desk at left.

The first library, looking south. The picture on the wall at left can be seen at right on the photo above.

Mabel Zoe Wilson became the first full-time librarian at Whatcom State Normal School in January, 1902.