

History of Hunter College

Hunter College had its origin as a part of the movement to provide for the education of teachers. In 1851 the Board of Education of New York City was authorized to organize "normal schools for the education of teachers." In 1854 a grant of power was made to the Board of Education to continue the Free Academy (now City College of New York) and to establish a similar institution for females. Attempts were made soon thereafter to establish normal school training but without success until the organization of The Normal and High School for Females was entrusted to Thomas Hunter by the Board of Education in the fall of 1869. Dr. Hunter was an able schoolmaster fired with zeal in his undertaking and definitely committed to the need of more basic liberal education for the teachers of the city.

With a total staff of twenty-seven (including President Hunter) the Normal and High School had its formal opening on February 14, 1870, St. Valentine's Day, in leased quarters at 691 Broadway, corner of 4th Street. The tenants on the lower floor had a carriage store and an armory used the upper floor! The student body numbered 1105, all admitted by competitive examination and of these 300 proved capable of doing high school work.

The first graduating class completed its work in July of 1870.

Rapid growth proved the need for more adequate quarters and after a period of overcrowding and much detailed planning by President Hunter, appropriations were made for a college building at 68th Street on the site of Hamilton Park. Shortly after the formal opening of the institution the name was changed to Normal College of the City of New York and it was by that name that the Gothic building on Park Avenue was dedicated on October 28, 1873.

Through the years that followed, Dr. Hunter was the inspiration to a growing staff and student body. During the early years the curriculum was gradually expanded from a three-year course to include courses of college grade in addition to the methods courses which continued to be most important in fulfilling the major purpose of the college. As early as 1905 a system of majors and minors, required work and optionals was introduced.

Although the students in the first classes were very young (a regulation was made in the second year to establish fourteen as the minimum age of applicants), with the expansion of the curriculum and increase in length of course the graduates were very soon young women in their later teens and taking their places as high school teachers.

Following Dr. Hunter as president came George S. Davis who had already won recognition as superintendent of New York City schools. In his first commencement address he suggested a change of the name of the college to Hunter College to honor its first president and to add to the prestige of the college which had come to be considered by some as just a technical school for training teachers. With the help of the Associate Alumnae, President Davis succeeded in bringing about this change of name on April 4, 1914 by Act of the Legislature of New York State.

During the presidency of Dr. Kieran, who had for many years been professor of Education at college, Hunter's Bronx Buildings were erected on the Jerome Park Reservoir site and for the first time, Hunter students enjoyed the advantages of campus life.

One of President Colligan's first undertakings was a reorganization of the curriculum to give more freedom to students in choice of studies. During his period of office the construction of the new modernistic building on Park Avenue was begun.

Dr. Shuster's installation was coincident with the dedication of the new building on Park Avenue. His term of office has likewise included the dedication of the Sara Delano Roosevelt Houses to a program of Interfaith activities and experience in democratic living and the release of our Bronx Campus to the Navy for use as a Naval Training Station for the Women's Reserve.

In spite of the limitations put upon the college by the circumstances of war Hunter continues its progress.





