

A GLANCE AT THE OLD DAYS

On February 14, 1870, a small procession formed at P.S. 47 in Twelfth Street near University Place and headed by Thomas Hunter, Lydia Wadleigh and a few picked teachers marched down Broadway to the corner of Fourth Street, to quarters on the second floor of a building occupied on the first floor by an armory and on the third floor by a carriage factory. This was the beginning of Normal College, now the Hunter College. Thomas Hunter had been principal of P.S. 35 in Thirteenth Street near Sixth Avenue and Miss Wadleigh had been the principal of P.S. 47 in Twelfth Street. These two public schools were considered the finest in the city. Miss Wadleigh had established, in the Twelfth Street School, supplementary classes which went considerably beyond the regular public school curriculum and the young women from these classes formed the new college classes. Thomas Hunter, the president of the new college, had long held the opinion that teachers for the children of the public schools should have higher training. He was backed in <sup>these</sup> ~~this~~ at the time, new ideas by William Wood, the President of the Board of Education. The teachers who went with Thomas Hunter into this new venture, Lydia F. Wadleigh, Eliza Woods, Lavinia Holman, Helen Morgan, Mary A. Mathews, Laura E. Leal and Jessie McGregor, had given up their positions as school principals to cast in their fortunes with the wonderful teacher, Thomas Hunter. They were a devoted band and the new school prospered and soon outgrew its first home. President Hunter persuaded the city to allow the use of the land on top of Lenox Hill for a new building which he, himself, planned.

It was considered absolutely idiotic to put a school so far north practically out of the city, to get to which the students would



have such a long journey in the horse cars but President Hunter had vision and the new beautiful Gothic building was built as he planned it, an immense clear ground floor where the entire body of students could walk around at recess, three floors above with a beautiful assembly room called the Chapel on the middle floor and a public school building on the Lexington Avenue end to be used as a training school for the would-be teachers. Isabelle Parsels was the fine principal in charge of this training school. In those days all the students were preparing to teach. That was the purpose for which the new Normal College was established. The girls admitted from the public schools were required to get 75% average in the entrance examinations. Examinations were taken in Arithmetic, Grammar, United States History, Elementary French or German, Geography, Composition and Spelling.

There were seven departments:

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|---------------------------------|-----|-------------------------------|
| 1. Education                    |     | in charge of President Hunter |
| (Latin, Greek                   |     |                               |
| 2. (English, English Literature | " " | Arthur <sup>H.</sup> Dundon   |
| (History                        |     |                               |
| (Political Economy              |     |                               |
| (Mathematics                    |     |                               |
| 3. (Physics                     | " " | Joseph A. Gillet              |
| (Chemistry                      |     |                               |
| 4. German                       | " " | Charles Schlegel              |
| (Natural Science                |     |                               |
| 5. (Geology                     | " " | Edward Day                    |
| (Physiology                     |     |                               |
| 6. French                       | " " | Eugene Aubert                 |
| 7. Music                        | " " | George Mangold                |

Of course, as the college grew <sup>(many)</sup> many fine teachers were added to the staff. Outstanding among them was Mary Willard, a wonderful teacher of History; Emma Requa, in later years the head of the Mathematics Department; Fredericka Constantini, with the Department of German; Betsey B. Davis, in the Latin Department and many, many others. Professor Dundon was a tall, stout man weighing about 250 pounds but as light as a feather on his feet. His way of teaching English Literature was to place a fine portrait of the



author under consideration before the class and lecture, not only on his accomplishments as an author, but also on him as a man, until those taken up in the course became living personalities to the students. In the Latin classes, after the students had struggled through their immature translations of Horace and Tacitus, he would often read to his classes the most beautiful translations. It was a privilege to be in such classes. When he passed away in 1900, President Hunter took over the Political Economy and History (later to be in charge of Edgar Dawson). George Whicher came in for Classics and Helen Gray Cone came in for English and Literature.

When President Hunter retired in 1906, and Professor Gillet was made Acting President, Mathematics was taken over by Emma Requa, Physics and Chemistry by Lewis D. Hill, the Chemistry to go later to Charles J. Moore. Professor Gillet had jet black hair and a very long black beard. When he became Acting President, we had an opportunity to learn learn that he was not only a master of Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry but that he had also a wonderful command of beautiful English and gave us the benefit of many fine pieces of poetry. He was greatly beloved. President Hunter, in his earlier years, had jet black hair and beautiful blue eyes. He always wore a frock coat. As he stood on the platform addressing the assembly, his head always seemed to me to bear a striking resemblance to Shakespeare. It was his habit to spend much time visiting classes. He knew the work of every teacher well. He frequently took time to talk to the students much to their profit.

Miss Wadleigh was a very tall, large woman, with the most piercing eyes one ever saw. A new student was almost frightened but soon learned that Miss Wadleigh was every girl's true friend. She



was a strict disciplinarian and life at Normal was orderly and well managed. The pictures we have of these early teachers are exceedingly good likenesses.

As the college grew, the large open ground floor was cut up into class rooms and, as the college continued to grow, the roof was raised nine feet <sup>so as</sup> ~~so as~~ to allow for more class-rooms, and as the college kept on growing, annexes were started in whatever quarters the Board of Education could give us.

In the old days, the students assembled every morning in the Chapel at nine o'clock. The first bell rang at 8:45 A.M. for every one to be in her own class-room, second bell 8:50 A.M. for silence, third bell at 8:55 A.M. lines started for Chapel. There was an opening hymn, bible reading, singing in lighter vein, quotations recited by students and then President Hunter talked, sometimes at length until the 9:50 A.M. bell. If he did not talk for what was called the "half-hour", different grades had singing period and others had exercises in the class-rooms. Recitations began at 10:00 A.M. with forty-five minute periods and ended at 2:00 P.M. There were four grades; Freshmen, or as they were called, "Introductories", Sophomores, Juniors and Seniors. All classes of a grade had the same subjects except for a choice of French or German. The ground covered, while not so intensive as at present under the specializing system, compares very favorably with what is done today; for instance, in Latin Tacitus was regular required work for Seniors although today it is considered work for graduate students only.

The Assembly and way of doing in the old days may seem to have been very primary but the general result was that the college was like a large and very cooperative family. As a student advanced through the grades she had in turn all the teachers. When the register reached fifteen hundred,



the building seemed packed; some of the younger classes were assigned to the Chapel for headquarters and went to different rooms for recitations. They were aptly called, "wandering classes". The classes remained, except for lecture hours, in their own class-rooms and the teachers went to the room of the classes assigned to them. Class-rooms regularly accommodated forty-eight but in the lower grades, registers frequently <sup>had</sup> went up to sixty. A teacher's program was regularly twenty <sup>periods a</sup> hours week. A teacher was fortunate to get one free period on her program.

Lydia Wadleigh was the first Dean of the College; the title in those days was Lady Superintendent. She held that position for eighteen years. Eliza Woods, a very fine teacher of Psychology, was the second Dean for twelve years, then Laura E. Leal, a fine Mathematics teacher, held the position for six years, and then came myself for twenty-eight years. I was originally a Mathematics teacher with a good many French classes and then Head of Department for French in the High School at the time of my appointment as Dean.

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