

CHAPTER III

From Normal School to College for Teachers 1890 to 1915

When the Normal School was founded in 1844 it had been a pioneer. That was no longer true by 1890. Albany had lost its dominance if not its preeminence in training common school teachers. Seven new normal schools had been established in New York between 1866 and 1871, and by 1883 Albany enrolled only one-sixth of the students in the eight institutions. The academies and teachers' institutes were also training common school teachers. At the same time the new public high schools were expanding dramatically and posed a new challenge to teacher education.

Change at Albany was inevitable. The agent of that change was William J. Milne, who succeeded Waterbury as President in 1889. The symbol of change was a new name, the New York State Normal College, adopted in 1890. The substance of change was a new mission: to develop the curricula, faculty, and students to prepare secondary school teachers.



(Opposite) Student culture began to emerge in the late 1800s. The 1904 editorial board of *The Echo*, a monthly newspaper/literary magazine, begun in 1892, included Elizabeth Shaver, '04, (second row, third from the right), who later joined the College staff as a history supervisor. Above: the cover from the October 1907 issue.

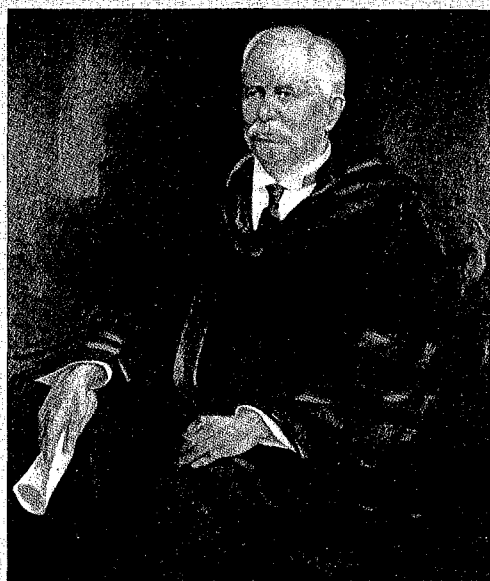
On Waterbury's death in August of 1889 the Executive Committee quickly mounted a search for his successor. The key figure in the Executive Committee during these years was Andrew Sloan Draper, a lawyer who had served as a Committee member since 1883 and as its chair since his election in 1886 as State Superintendent of Public Instruction. Draper chose William J. Milne, professor of moral philosophy and didactics and principal of the Geneseo Normal School since its opening in 1871. Milne promptly accepted, assuming office in October 1889. Although Milne had been Draper's chief competitor for the position of State Superintendent, the two came to respect each other and worked closely together to reshape the school in the next quarter century.

Anna Pierce, '84, (kneeling front row right) began her long career at Albany in the primary department of the model school. Aurelia Hyde, '95, first grade primary department teacher, is on the left.



The first step was the name change. The shift from "School" to "College" marked a change in both status and function. Albany had become one of the first normal schools in the nation to make the transition to collegiate status. The initial programmatic changes were, however, very uncollegiate. True, standards of admission and the minimum age of students were raised to a level more in keeping with the school's collegiate status, and the Normal College hoped to enroll graduates of liberal arts institutions. But the course of studies shifted from the traditional liberal arts toward "purely professional" studies. After 1892 only courses in "foundations of education" and in methods of teaching were offered. Students in the new programs would qualify as high school teachers and would have the proper credentials for teaching future teachers in normal schools and secondary training classes.

The transition was not easy. The Normal College introduced new "English" and "Classical" curricula, varying somewhat in content and length. Both granted a teaching license and either a diploma or a degree (Bachelor or Master of Pedagogy). The College added a cluster of programs to attract



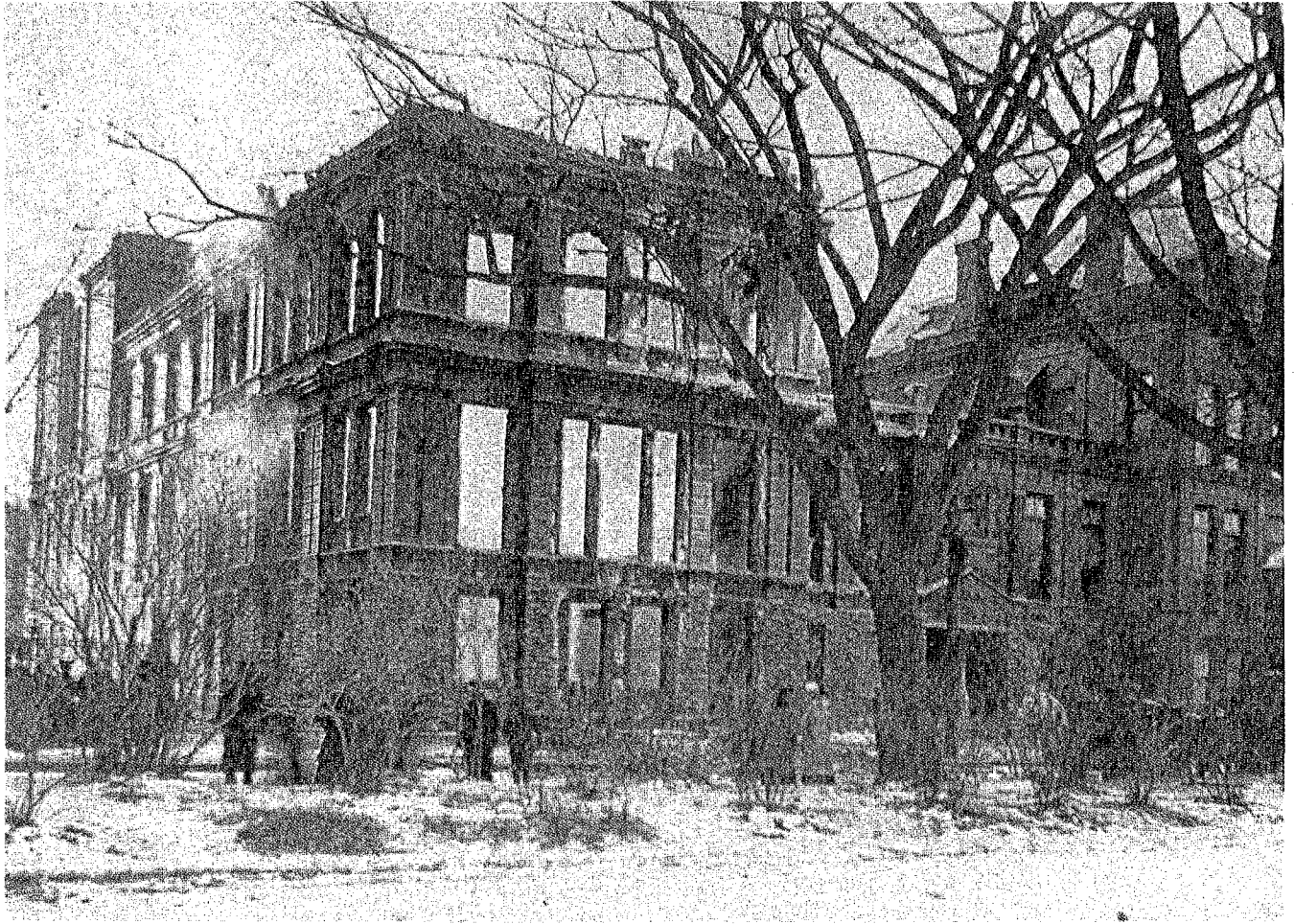
(Top) William J. Milne, President from 1889.

(Bottom) Andrew Draper. (Photograph by Gary Gold, '70, of Edward P. Buyck painting hanging in the State Education Building.)

Milne and Draper

William J. Milne and Andrew Sloan Draper were chiefly responsible for converting the Albany Normal School of 1889 into the New York State College for Teachers of 1914. The two had been the chief candidates for the position of State Superintendent of Public Instruction in 1886. Draper won the appointment, but three years later he was influential in choosing Milne, longtime principal of the Geneseo Normal School, as President at Albany. Returning from the presidency of the University of Illinois in 1904, Draper served as New York's first Commissioner of Education.

The two educational leaders transformed the Normal College of 1905 into a four-year liberal arts college for teachers, the first of its kind in the country, and provided the College with its classical Western Avenue campus. Both died within a year of each other, Draper in 1913 and Milne in 1914.



The Willett Street building in ruins after a fire on January 9, 1906. Charles Wurthman, the janitor, saved the statue of Minerva, but otherwise all records and facilities of the College were lost. The fire led to construction of the first buildings on a new campus between Western and Washington avenues.

particular groups of students: a kindergarten program, a one-year self-designed program for college graduates, and special courses to upgrade practicing teachers.

At the heart of the new enterprise was the conviction that “subject matter” and “professional methods” could be separated and that the Normal College could effectively focus on the latter. Many other American educators, however, believed that subject-matter knowledge was all-important, that “professional methods” were mostly irrelevant, and that the graduate of any good liberal arts college could teach effectively. The controversy between the advocates of subject matter and of methods heated up in the 1890s, and partisans on both sides pushed their ideas to extremes.

On this subject Milne was a partisan. One of his students later quoted Milne as telling one of his classes in the philosophy of education that “you high school teachers need not know much chemistry; if you

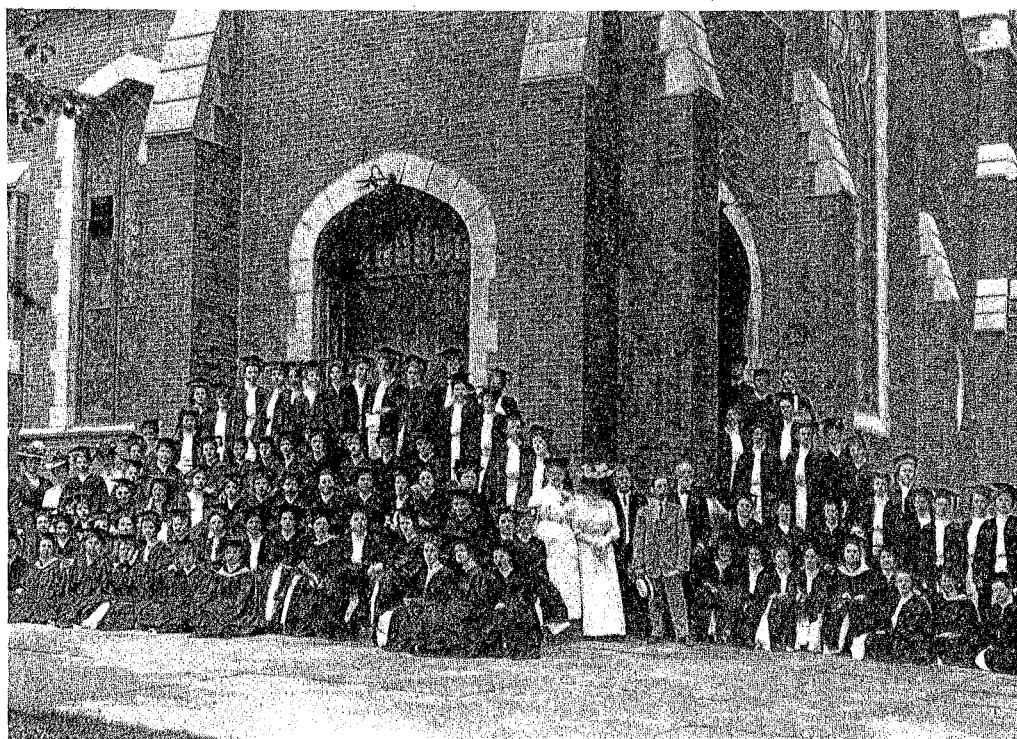
only know the methods of teaching chemistry, you will get along creditably."

The results of the new curricula were disappointing. The change in direction produced some painful adjustments in the faculty, particularly among the female-dominated lower ranks. Enrollments fell, although the percentage of graduates and the average age of students rose. For the most part the Normal College attracted few graduates of liberal arts colleges. A 1906 analysis by Second Assistant Commissioner Dr. Edward J. Goodwin concluded that two-thirds of the Normal College's graduates failed to gain secondary school posts because they did not "possess a sufficient knowledge of the subjects taught." No more damning comment on the 1890 curricula could have been offered.

Changes were needed, and once again Draper provided the leadership. He had become New York's first Commissioner of Education in 1904 and was once again head of the Normal College's Executive Committee. He and Goodwin concluded that what New York's secondary schools needed were teachers who were college graduates with sound professional educations and well-qualified superintendents and teachers of training classes, training schools, and normal schools. Draper and Goodwin, working closely with Milne, in December of 1905 designed a new plan for the Albany school that would set its course for more than half a century.

The Draper-Goodwin plan included four elements. First, the school abandoned programs to train elementary school teachers and concentrated on preparing teachers for the burgeoning secondary schools. Second, the Normal College was converted into a genuine four-year institution with an admissions policy equivalent to those of "other eastern colleges of good standing." Third, to train these superior students the

For three years after the fire, the College occupied temporary space in various facilities, including Trinity Methodist Church on Lark and Lancaster Streets. In the center of the graduating Class of 1907 is a group of faculty including President Milne. (Center next to woman with flowered bonnet.)

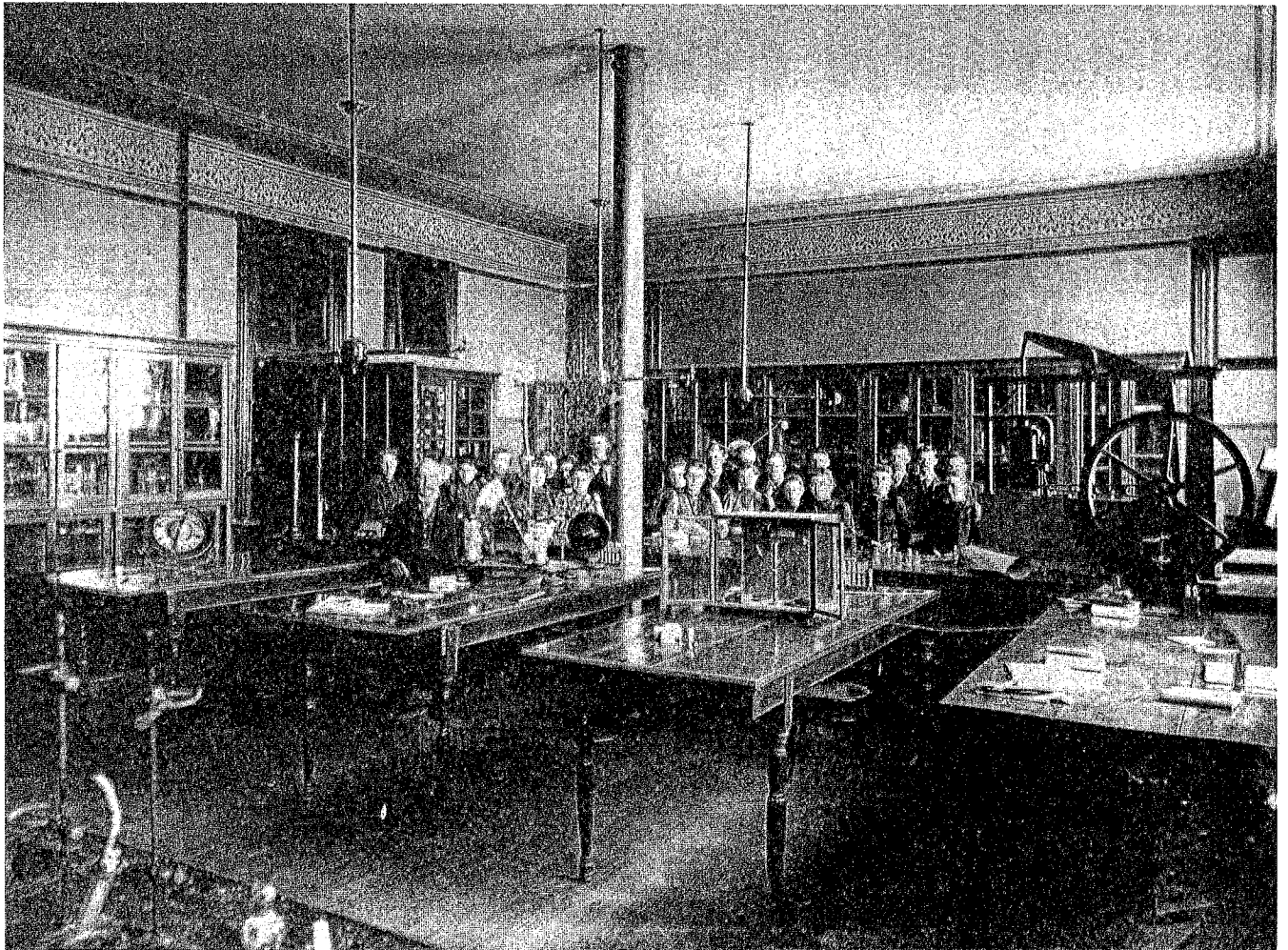


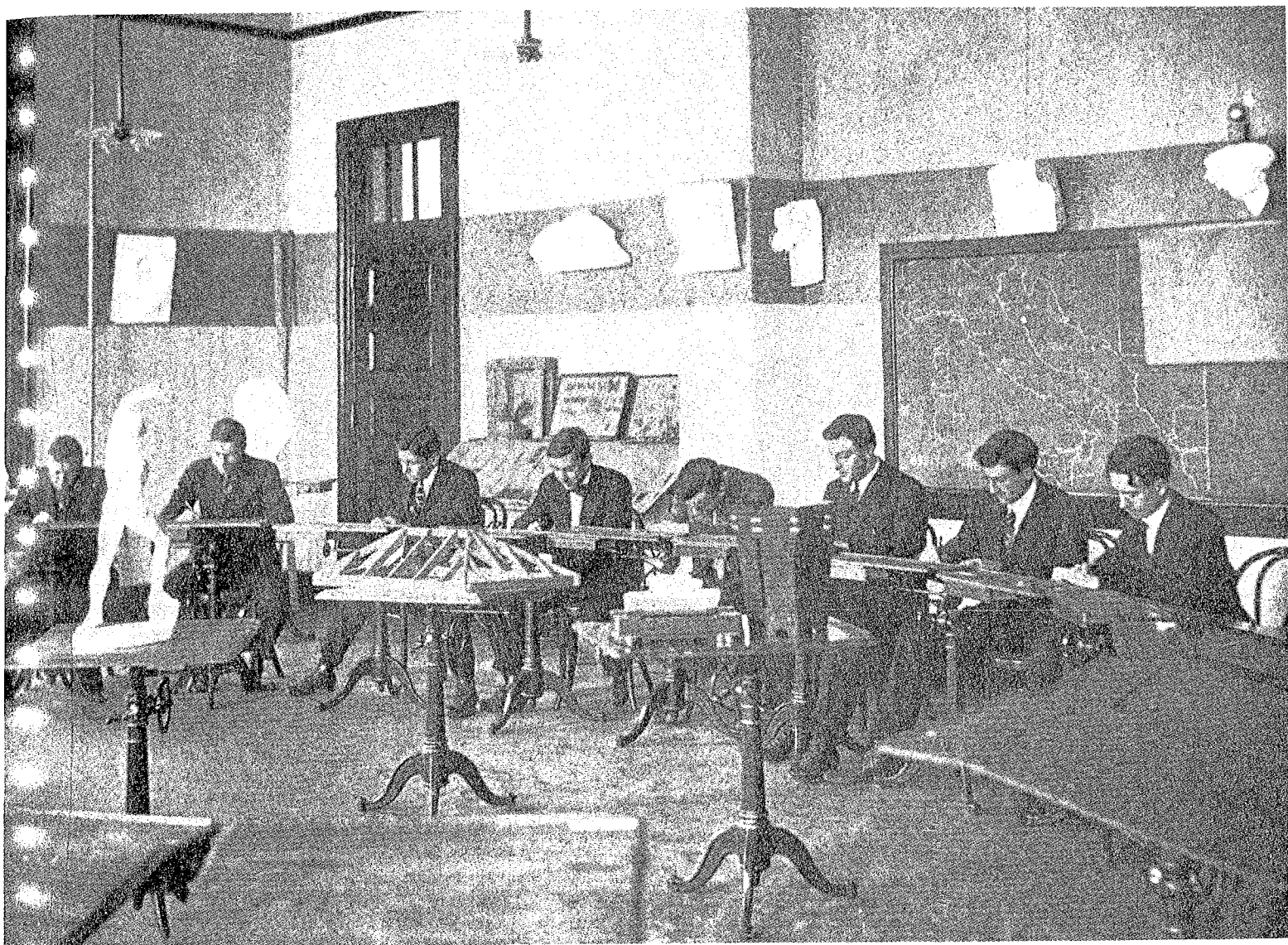
College established a four-year course "in the liberal arts and pedagogics" in which students pursued subjects essential to a liberal education as well as professional courses fundamental to the training of teachers. Finally, in recognition of the change in direction, the College was authorized to confer B.A. and B.S. degrees to graduates of four-year programs and a Pd.B. degree to college graduates who completed a year of post-graduate study. (The Pd.B. was changed to an M.A. in Education degree in 1914.)

The new plan was officially adopted in December of 1905. Just a few weeks later, on January 8, 1906, the Willett Street building burned. Ice-covered streets prevented the fire department from reaching the building until it was too late. Milne's residence and the structure housing the primary school were saved, but with these exceptions the building was a total loss.

Many thought the fire a blessing in disguise. Everyone mourned the

The Normal School and College had always included science in its curricula. Professor Wetmore and students are shown in his natural science laboratory in the Willett Street building.

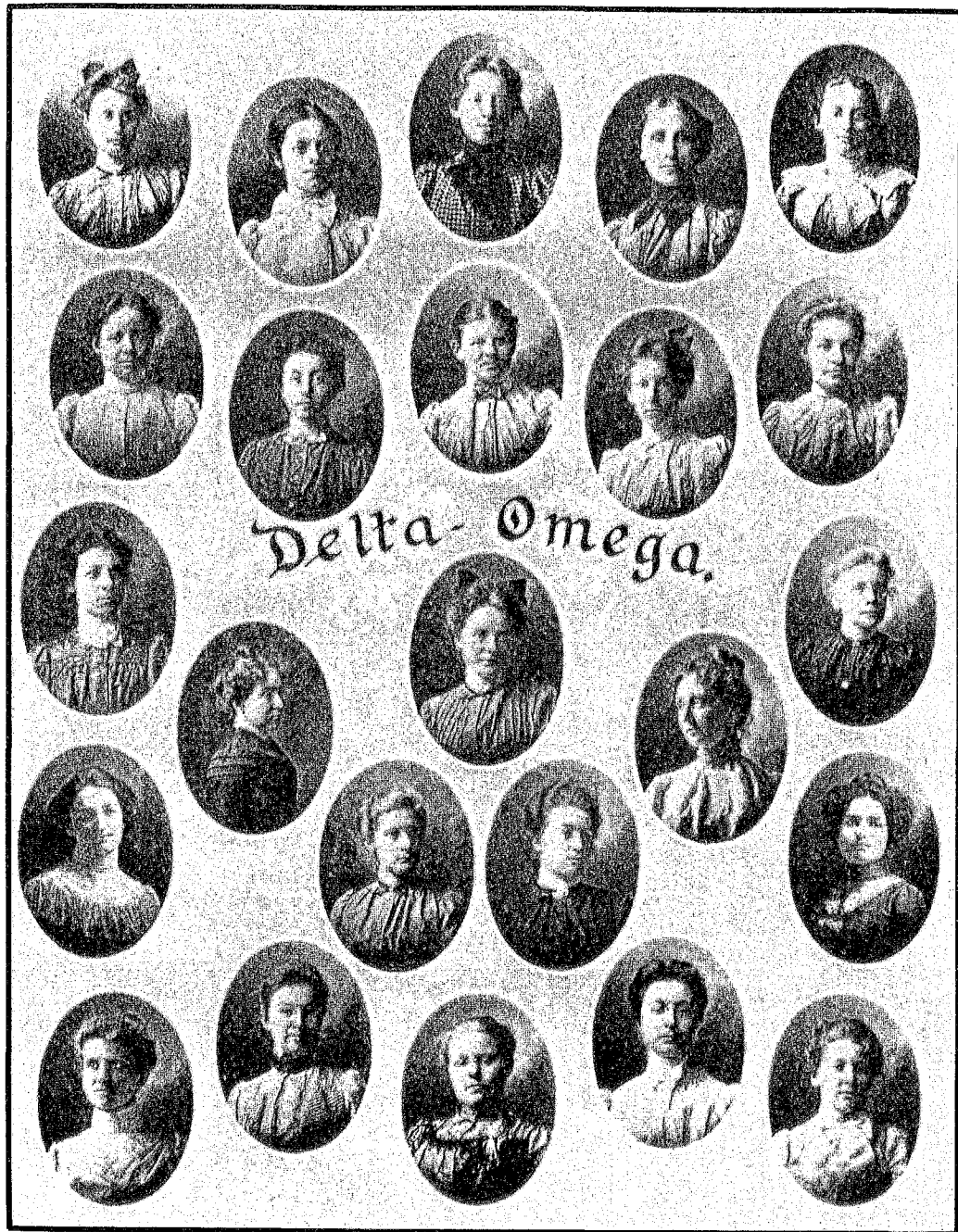




loss of the beloved Alumni Memorial stained glass window. But otherwise the building had long been an object of discontent. Attitudes were perhaps summed up by Draper when he observed that when he saw the fire burning "I was as officially affected as was proper, but my personal grief was not of the kind which is altogether uncontrollable."

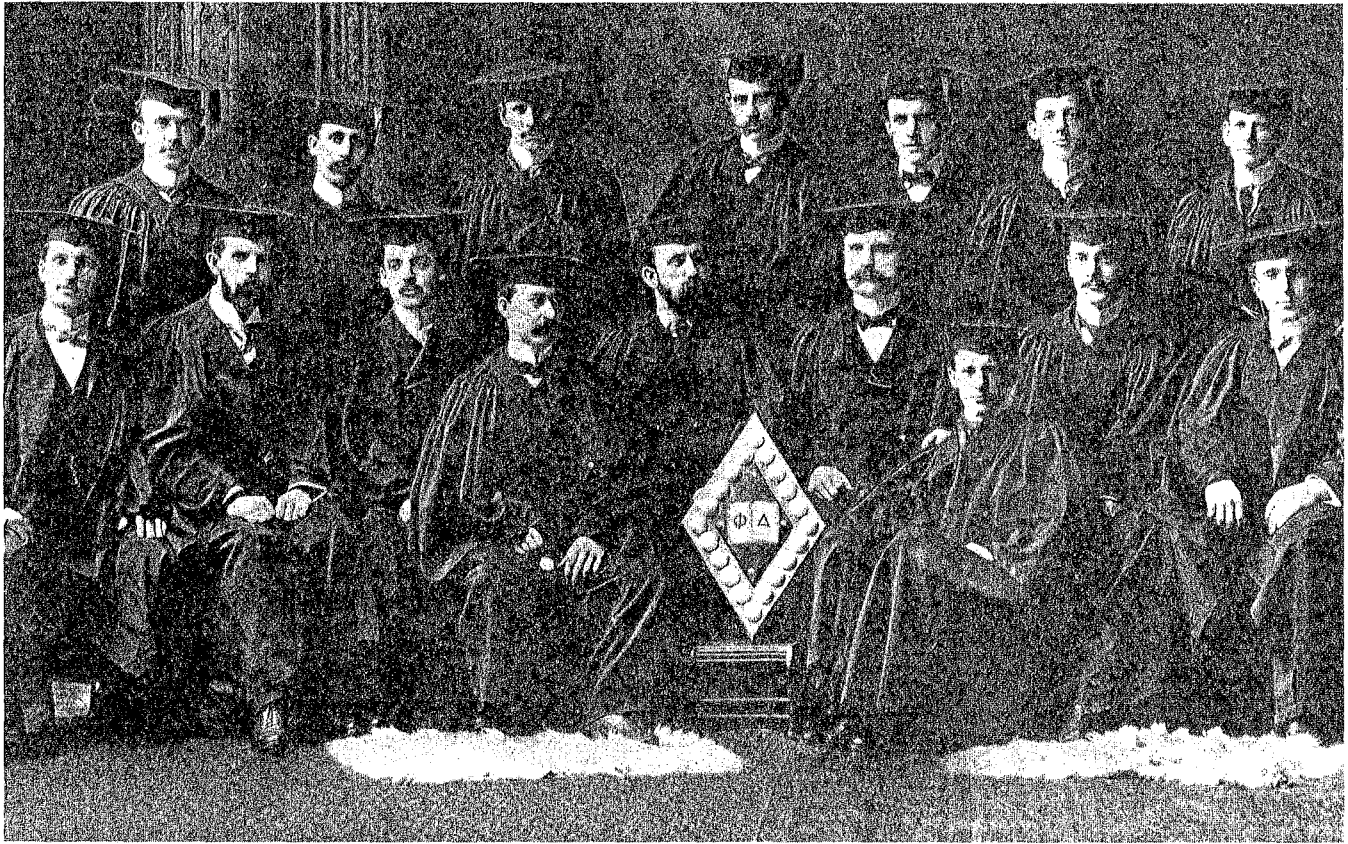
The College community rallied to the crisis. For three years the College made do with various expedients, supplementing usable space in the old structure with rooms borrowed from the Albany Academy for Girls, two local churches, and the Albany Orphan Asylum. The student editors of the *Echo* observed that the disaster had brought the college community together and had generated a kind of school spirit never seen before.

Because drawing was considered an essential skill for teachers, students worked in the "drawing room" on the new campus in 1911. (From the yearbook, *Our Book*, 1911.)



Greek life in 1900: (above) Delta Omega was the first sorority founded in 1890, and Phi Delta, (opposite page, top) the first fraternity at the College founded in 1892. Phi Delta was a successor to the Gentlemen's Literary Societies. Of the fraternities and sororities founded at the turn of the century, only Psi Gamma (opposite page, bottom) exists to this day. (Photos from *The Neon*, 1900.)

The state hastened to provide new facilities. The first issue to be resolved was location. When the Willett Street structures were built, the College had moved west with the growing city. Between 1850 and 1900 Albany's population almost doubled, approaching 100,000, and the residential areas had steadily moved along Central Avenue and the borders of Washington Park. Two faculty members tried to persuade Milne to locate the new buildings on what is today the corner of New Scotland Avenue and Academy Road. While the site would have provided



William B. Aspinwall, '00, was professor of pedagogical literature, principal of the Model High School and Assistant to the President. He was a member of the faculty until 1913. M. Harriet Bishop taught elementary methods from 1893 until 1912. She left for the State Normal School in Worcester, Massachusetts, after Albany concentrated exclusively on preparing secondary school teachers.



considerable room for expansion, Milne rejected it on the grounds that it was too remote. New Scotland Avenue was still a mud road, and the site at that location was too far from the trolley lines used by students living in boarding houses. Instead, College authorities chose a four-and-a-half acre site between Western and Washington avenues. The state acquired the property from the Albany Orphan Asylum, giving in exchange the Willett Street property and \$75,000.

The same legislative act authorizing the property exchange appropriated \$350,000 for new buildings. Not for the last time the design of a new campus engendered controversy when the Executive Committee objected to the esthetics of the state architect's original plans. In the end the State Architect designed the interiors and an independent architect, Albert R. Ross, looked after the exterior. Once construction began, work proceeded quickly and was completed ahead of schedule. Thus in the Fall of 1909, nearly sixty-five years after the Normal School began its first classes in its State Street building, another ceremony, attended by numerous dignitaries and addressed by Gov. Charles E. Hughes and Commissioner Draper, marked the opening of the new facility.

The new campus (today the Downtown Campus) consisted initially of three buildings connected by one-story peristyles. The central administration building contained offices and classrooms. It was flanked on one side by a science building and on the other by the auditorium and gym. (They remained unnamed until 1929.) The Executive Committee's insistence that a second architect design the exterior paid off. Ross's conception produced handsome structures in a Georgian style clearly inspired by Jefferson's design for the University of Virginia.

It was a fine new facility for the College, but rising enrollments after 1909 quickly made it inadequate. Complaints focused on the gymnasium, by 1913 too small to accommodate men and women from both the College and the model school, and the library, undersized and containing too few books. The psychological laboratory remained unequipped, and the industrial arts department's apparently unslakable thirst for equipment further complicated problems.

When the new campus was occupied in the Fall of 1909 the last students under the old program had graduated, and the Normal College

proceeded to put in place the new curriculum called for by the 1906 plan. That curriculum involved a mix of 70 to 80 percent academic work and 20 to 30 percent professional studies, separated into different courses. Students flocked into academic courses such as English, languages, history, chemistry and mathematics. Departments were created in 1909, and what we think of as traditional academic patterns began to emerge. The integration of academic and professional work increasingly depended on the teaching practices of individual instructors and on practice teaching. To meet the special needs of rapidly growing secondary schools the College soon added "vocational" programs in physical education (1909), industrial and domestic science (1910), and business (1913).

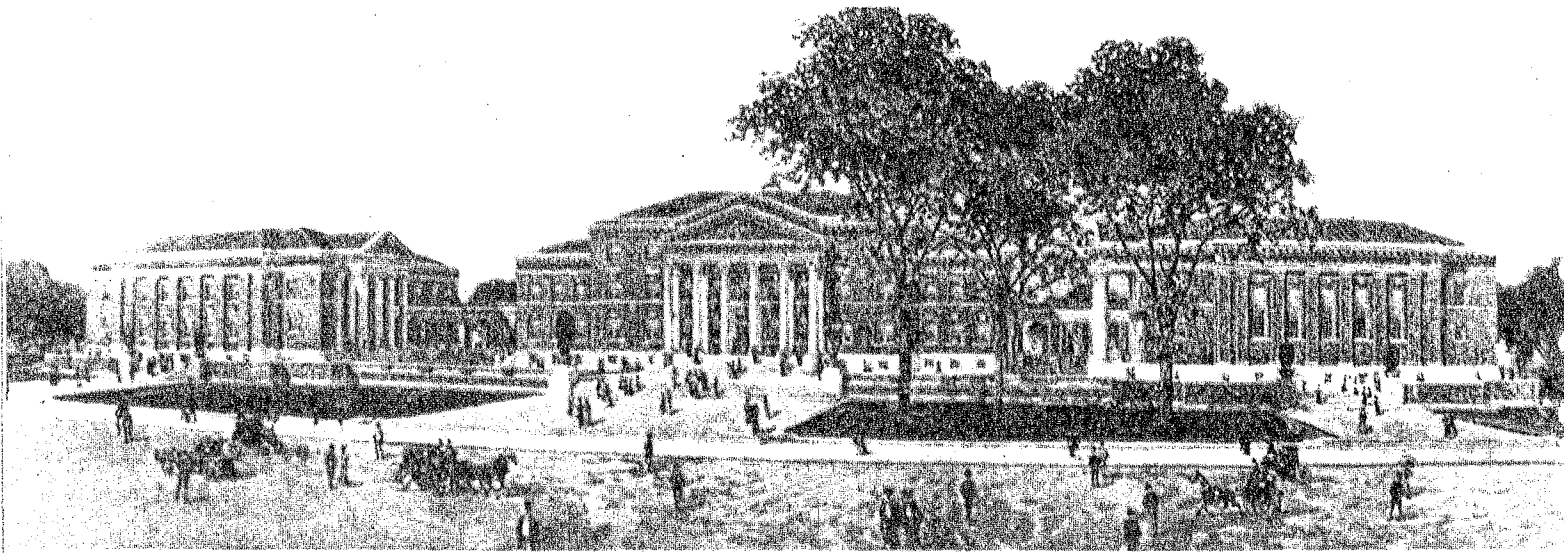


It was not an easy time for the faculty. Some were dismissed because they lacked the qualifications to teach in the new programs, others shifted to new subjects, and new people were recruited. Faculty lists around 1909 show names from both the late 19th Century past (A. N. Husted and Mary McClelland, e.g.) and the 20th Century future (Anna Pierce, Harry Birchenough, Adam Walker, John Sayles, and Adna Wood Risley, e.g.). By 1914 there were forty-four faculty members. Five had the Ph.D., nine the M.A., eleven the Pd.B., and seven a bachelor's degree. Ten (23 percent), mostly older faculty or instructors in the domestic and industrial "sciences," had no degrees; by contrast a 1904 study showed that 60 percent of the faculty in New York's normal schools lacked a degree of any kind. The distribution of faculty reflected the new curricula. Twenty-one taught traditional academic subjects, nine taught professional subjects, and fourteen served in other areas such as domestic science or physical education. After 1910, student/faculty



(Top) The varsity baseball team in 1900. Athletics were an important part of the new student culture, but lack of facilities and funds hampered their early development. (This earliest athletics photo is reproduced from *The Neon*, 1900.)

(Bottom) Most Normal College students continued to live in boarding houses. This 1901 photo shows a group of students in the backyard of their boarding house at 290 Lark Street. (From Alumni Memorabilia Collection.)



The three new buildings occupied beginning in 1909. From left to right: science, administration, and auditorium. The buildings were named Husted, Draper, and Hawley after the completion of Richardson, Page, and Milne in 1929.

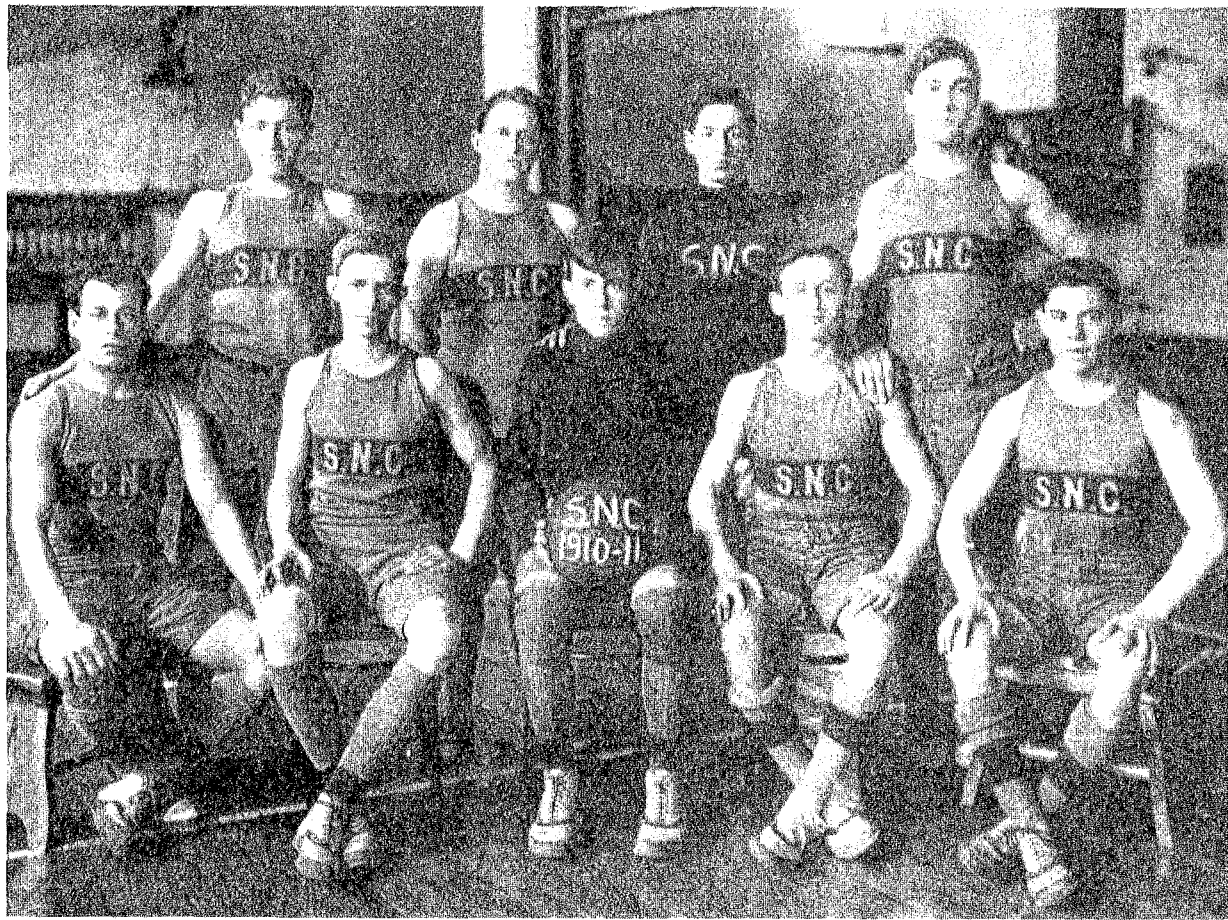
(Opposite) After the construction of the new campus, athletics surged. An athletic association for both men and women was formed in 1909 and divided into men's and women's associations two years later. Pictured here are the men's basketball team and the women's inter-class championship team in 1911. (Photos from *Our Book*, 1911.)

ratios stabilized in the range of twelve to fifteen to one. Faculty salaries were roughly comparable to those of teachers in urban public schools: high enough to attract good young people but not high enough to guarantee that experienced people would not leave for better paying posts in other colleges or in public schools. Indeed, the economic fortunes of the faculty were tied to those of secondary school teachers until the College's conversion to a university in the early 1960s.

The size of the College changed little from the 1880s, but program changes, not to mention the fire, produced sharp fluctuations in the number of students enrolled and graduated. After each of the major curricular changes in 1890 and 1906, enrollments dropped; as students scurried to complete old programs, the number of graduates briefly jumped, only to tumble sharply for two or three years. Enrollments between 1896 and 1906 fluctuated between 314 and 414, dropped to a low of 187 in 1909, and then began a steady advance to 590 in 1913.

The student body was overwhelmingly female; between 1890 and 1914, only 10 to 15 percent of the enrolled students and 2 to 23 percent of the graduates were men. Admissions standards rose after 1906, and most of those seeking admission qualified by submitting state Regents credentials. Almost all of Albany's students were of modest means, although the costs of attending even a tuition-free institution guaranteed that there were few students from truly poor families.

The College was still without dormitories, and students continued to live in local boardinghouses. The College's 1894 *Circular* assured



parents that "All boarding places are visited by some member of the Faculty, who inspects the house and its surroundings, and examines into the sanitary conditions of the premises." The long-standing tradition of *in loco parentis* was partially formalized in 1914 when Anna Pierce became the first Dean of Women.

Between 1890 and 1914 a self-conscious "student culture" began to emerge. The *Echo*, a monthly student newspaper/magazine, first appeared in 1892, and its pages reflected growing interest in student life. Student E. T. Van Deusen, writing in 1897, astutely observed that "More than most other forms of social living, the college is a world within itself; with its own characteristic public sentiment, its politics, its prejudices, and its body of traditional notions, maxims and usages."

Student cultures had emerged at American colleges in the 19th Century in reaction to faculty domination of student life, both in and out of the classroom. Students often fought the faculty, sometimes violently; riots were not uncommon. Since the students usually lost the struggles for power, they turned to the development of distinctive student cultures which gave them both an identity and a refuge from a perceived faculty tyranny. Albany students were often aware of what was happening at prestigious Eastern colleges and universities and may have imitated them. But at Albany, faculty-student relations remained amicable, probably because both groups felt themselves engaged in the common task of professional training.

Students supported an active arts program: The cast of the 1911 production of Sheridan's *The Rivals*. David Allison (standing, fifth from the left) played Sir Anthony Absolute. (*Our Book*, 1911; *Pedagogue*, 1914.)



At the heart of student culture was the notion of school spirit: "a force which tends to unify the students and cause them to magnify the institution and its traditions; perhaps college loyalty is the best synonym," wrote one student in 1898. "The New York State Normal College," he assured college mates, "is rich in history and

in present causes for college loyalty."

These were years in which Albany traditions emerged. Students composed college songs and fiercely debated the issue of College colors (purple and gold won out). Each class of students was formally organized. The older literary societies were supplanted in the 1890s by Greek fraternities and sororities; by 1898 there were four sororities and one fraternity, and they had already formalized rushing regulations.

Commencements were important celebratory occasions. By the 1890s they had become elaborate five-day affairs which began with orations, debates, dramatic performances, and music, culminated in the formal commencement ceremony, and concluded with a class banquet and reception. Baccalaureate services were a regular feature, and an outside commencement speaker appeared for the first time in 1897. In 1901 the graduating class debated and voted on whether or not to wear caps and gowns. The opponents of academic garb won on that occasion, but within three years the decision was reversed. Social activities were an important part of student life. Receptions, sponsored by both individuals and campus groups, were a popular form of socializing. They often included musical performances, recitations and readings, and the singing of college songs. Students often went some distance in search of social activity: the *Echo* reported bicycle and boat trips to Troy and elsewhere and railroad excursions to nearby places. Washington Park, of course, provided opportunities for smaller and often more intimate entertainments.

Conventional social activities often merged into more general cultural



(Above) Aurelia Hyde, '95, was a first grade primary department teacher from 1895 to 1907. She married William Aspinwall, assistant to President Milne and later president of the State Normal School, Worcester, Massachusetts.



(Top) Bertha Brimmer, '00, was active early in religious education. When in the 1920s her children attended the Milne School, she became very active in College affairs, becoming executive secretary for the Alumni Hall Residency Fund and serving into the 1950s as the executive for the Alumni Association.

(Bottom) Anna Boocheever de Beer, '12, became a major force in New York and Albany civic affairs and was very active in alumni(ae) affairs for more than four decades.

ones. Students found advantages to their Albany location. They could visit the state capitol, attend the YMCA lecture series, and hear oratorios performed by St. Peter's choristers or organ recitals at the First Reformed Church. In 1909 the staff of the *Echo* hired the Odd Fellows Hall and sponsored a performance of *The Merchant of Venice* by a group of itinerant actors who advertised that they performed plays "in the same manner as the plays were given in Shakespeare's time." Happily the performance not only elevated the cultural tone of the community but also made money.

Between 1890 and 1914, religious activities played a visible and significant role in the College's student culture. In 1893 the *Echo* observed that "Nothing is so needed in student bodies generally as strong religious life" and wanted "to see the college prayer meeting more generally attended." For several years the *Echo* published Christmas and Easter issues. Student religious organizations appeared. There was an active YWCA on campus and a "Newman Study Society" was organized in 1908. Student religious life not only upheld the traditional connections between religion, morality, and teaching but also reflected the notable increase in piety and religious concerns at many American colleges around the turn of the century.

The heart of student culture in schools like Yale and Harvard in these years was intercollegiate athletics. How did Albany compare? Not well, thought the editor of the *Echo* in 1893. "The State Normal College . . . lacks absolutely the distinctive characteristic of the American college . . . We have no base-ball team, no foot-ball team, no crew." Attempts were made to remedy that situation. A baseball team was fielded from 1896 to 1901, but it led a troubled existence, lacking a practice field and facing financial difficulties. It was not easy to find suitable opponents either; players complained of unsportsmanlike conduct on the part of a Castleton team and argued that the Oneonta team had far more professionals than normal school players.

One long-standing problem was the lack of a gymnasium, but after the new campus was occupied in the Fall of 1909 there was a notable surge of athletic activities. An athletic association for both men and women was formed in 1909 and divided into men's and women's associations two years later. Intercollegiate basketball (1909) and baseball (1912)

teams were formed, and the College sponsored an indoor track meet in 1912. But the development of intercollegiate athletics continued to be hampered by inadequate facilities, by uncertain financial support, and no doubt by the relatively small number of male students at the College.

Just as this period began with a name change, so it ended with another. The College had long been embarrassed by the term "Normal," which suggested it was still a two-year institution, hardly different from New York's other normal schools. Hence in April of 1914 the institution became known officially as the New York State College for Teachers. The new title clearly recognized the four-year collegiate character of the school and symbolized the momentous changes that had taken place in the previous twenty-four years.

Almost concurrently the architects of those changes passed from the scene. Andrew Draper died in 1913 and President Milne passed away in September of the following year, shortly after the symbolic name change and just after war had broken out in Europe. In the next forty-eight years, through two world wars and the Great Depression, the College was to realize the implications of the new directions it had taken at the dawn of the century.

The Normal School and College alumni(ae) were a loyal group; here the Class of 1911 attends its fifth reunion in 1916. (Photo donated by Ester Woodward, '11, Alumni Memorabilia Collection.)

