

## Yankton College

# Hail! Yankton College!

## The Memory And Mission Of The Greyhounds Live On

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** This article first appeared (printed in two parts) in the PRESS & DAKOTAN'S "Her Voice" magazine earlier this year.)

Imagine the existence of the first Christian-based liberal-arts college, in Yankton, from where thousands of students, including nine Rhodes Scholars, emerged to become successful doctors, lawyers, theologians, educators, musicians, actors and athletes all over the nation and around the world.

Envision the centerpiece of the campus: the open-air Garden Terrace Theater constructed to seat 3,000 in a hedged enclosure and designed to produce epic Shakespearean plays or musical concerts, providing a new era of entertainment and culture in Yankton.

Picture Crane-Youngworth Field or Nash Gymnasium, the "Homes of the Greyhounds," where numerous record-holding athletes and undefeated athletic teams (named after the official Greyhound mascot chosen for speed and courage rather than physique) were trained by skillful coaches in football, track, basketball, cross-country or wrestling, as well as baseball, tennis and golf.

This college, like others, had its homecomings (referred to as Pioneer Day), student organizations, convocations and graduation commencements (not to mention panty raids, pranks and student protests). Devoted teachers, college presidents and staff demonstrated a standard of excellence and stabilizing influence to hundreds of students who came for their education from rural areas of the upper Midwest and other far-away parts of the United States like: Peoria, Illinois; Long Island, New York; Atlanta, Georgia; Belzoni, Mississippi and Hilo, Hawaii. Funding was endowed by wealthy benevolent followers, Congregational churches, a growing number of alumni and members of the Yankton business community to cover expenditures and scholarships. But this College, established against great odds, was continually encumbered with financial worries.

### HAIL! YANKTON COLLEGE!

Looking back, in 1881 Yankton College began in sparsely populated Yankton where Indians and buffalo still occupied the land; the iconic school that became the first educational institution of "collegiate grade" in Dakota Territory.

The vision of Yankton College stemmed from Joseph Ward, a clergyman from Perry Centre, New York, who, in 1868, was assigned by the American Home Missionary Society to "preach the Bible and open the new frontier" in Yankton and the surrounding area as part of the recently organized Congregational Church, an endeavor he and his wife, Sarah, accomplished. His assignment did not stop there. Ward had attended prestigious schools in the East (Phillips Academy, Brown University and the Andover Theological Seminary) and he dreamed of bringing their caliber of higher education to the new land, as his second mission.

Other territorial leaders joined Ward in this dream, traveling in harsh conditions over the Territory prairies to elect the first board of trustees, grant a charter and create the Articles of Incorporation that included the establishment of eleven ambitious professorships: Moral and Intellectual Philosophy and Theology; Latin Language and Literature; Greek Language and Literature; Physics and Astronomy; Rhetoric, English Literature and Elocution; Modern Languages; Music and Painting; Chemistry and Mineralogy; Geology and Natural History; Mathematics and Civil Engineering; and History and Political Economy.

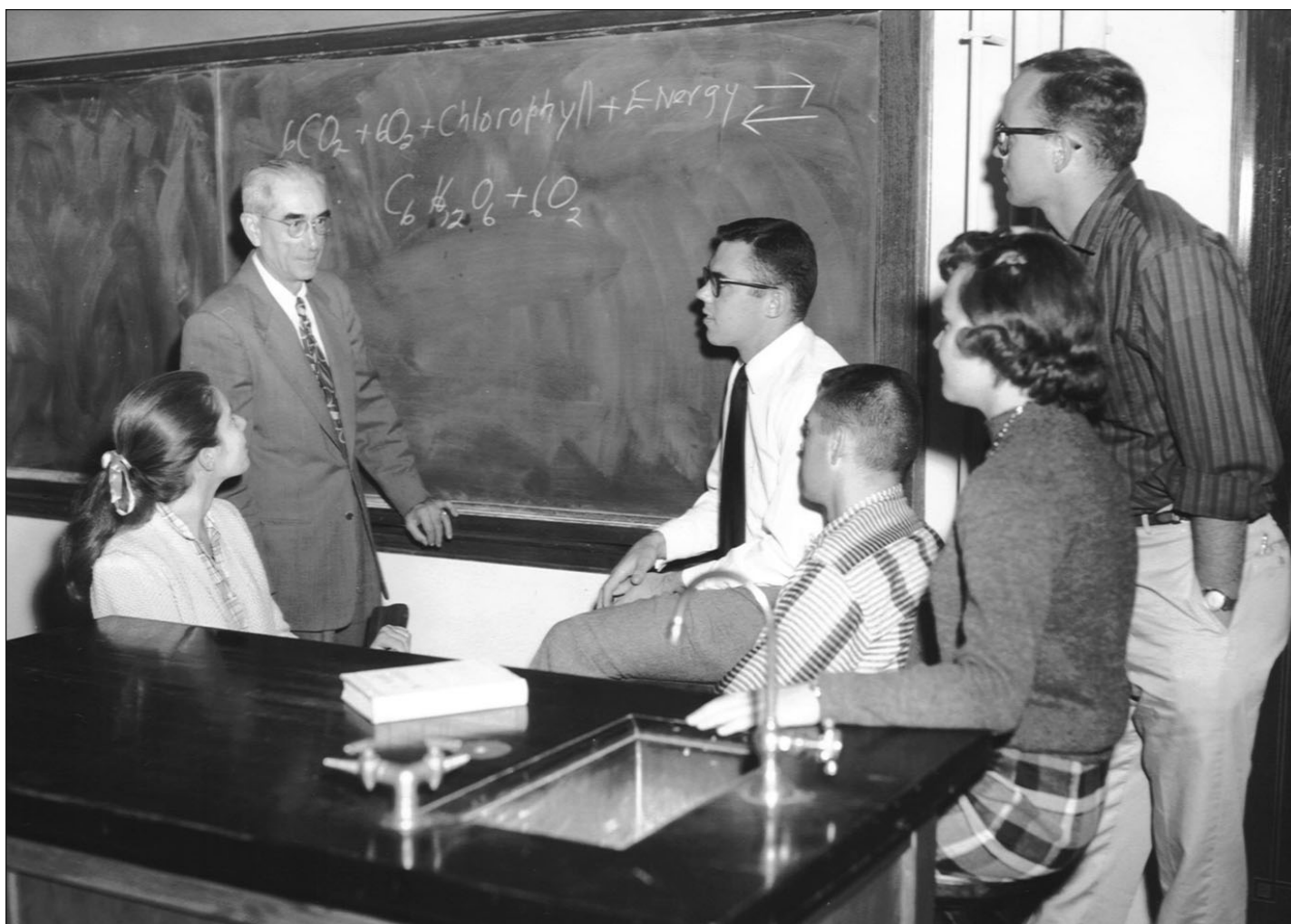
For the campus site, 20 acres were donated and members of Ward's congregation pledged most of the seed money, beginning a long history of financial support from the Congregational parishioners. By the end of the first year, 41 students had signed up to attend classes in a three-room house located at 417 Walnut while the first building, Middle Hall, later known as the Conservatory of Music, was under construction on the bare bluff, then located north of the town. Ward was inaugurated as the first president of Yankton College upon completion of the permanent structure and gave the remainder of his life to the college and to other historic developments.

During those first years, "Christ for the World" became the college motto, the Yankton Student, the college newspaper appeared and two student organizations, the Literary Society for men and the Aristonian for women (a literary society) were formed. The Athlon Club (later known as the Y-Club) was created to foster athletic interest for young men and the extra-curricular activities included debate and baseball by the time Edward Hinman Pound, the first and only graduate, attended the first Yankton College Commencement in 1887.

Before the end of the century, the "College on the Hill" added to its campus a dorm



**ABOVE:** The influence of musical instructor J. Laiten Weed was never forgotten by the students or the school. According to the Yankton Area Arts website, Weed was "one of the first professional string instrument instructors in South Dakota and was the director of the Yankton College Conservatory of Music. Weed was also instrumental in forming the South Dakota Honors Orchestra, which is still in existence today." **BELOW:** Biology professor Frank Jobes was one of an army of top instructors to teach at Yankton College through the years.



for female students, Ladies' Hall (destroyed by fire in 1914) and the Ward Hall of Sciences, which provided laboratories, recitation rooms, offices and a chapel. The brick Clarke Observatory was also built for studying astronomy with a 20-foot foundation, necessary to prevent shaking the seven-inch refractor-type telescope from the passing street cars and trains on the adjacent tracks.

### ON THE GROW

Enrollment grew and so did the Yankton College campus between Pine and Douglas Streets. Fargo Hall served as the gym for five decades before Nash Gym was erected. Lay Library held a growing collection of books before the more modern Lloyd Library was constructed. Forbes Hall of Science held a small auditorium, a 480-seat theater, faculty offices, classrooms and seven laboratories (which upon Ward Hall became administrative offices). The Warren Student Center housed the cafeteria, book store, meeting rooms and offices. The dormitories included: Kingsbury for women, Look and Elm for men and Durand was co-ed to meet the modern times of the sixties and seventies. The titles of each building were named in honor of donors, faculty members or the college presidents. The original bare bluff was to be consumed by the campus eventually becoming situated amongst a residential area of Yankton.

In response to war-time, Yankton College was involved. During World War I, a branch of the Student's Army Training Corps was located on campus where young men received their military training while continuing their education at Yankton College. The gym was

transformed into an army-style barracks, hospital supplies were made in Domestic Art class and teaching the German language was banned from class. During World War II, a Civilian Pilot Training course was available for Navy cadets. And the Vietnam era brought the activation of the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) and student unrest which led to protests. These wars, plus the ones in Korea and Iraq caused forty-four students and alumni to sacrifice their lives while in military service.

From 1881 to 1984, the history of Yankton College was generational. Each class had its own heritage, its own award-winners and its own memories. Student enrollment averaged at 350 per semester and peaked to nearly 700 in the late 1960's. Twelve presidents served the College, each contributing to the history of the institution. There were interim presidents too. Faculty members tirelessly educated their pupils for small wages and even opened their homes to students who could not afford travel during the holidays or who needed an occasional home-cooked meal, increasing their devotion. Classes were organized to fit the academic needs of obtaining two, four and five year undergraduate degrees in Arts, Science, Theology or Education. Students read the accounts of their school years in the student newspaper and the Okihii (later named the Greyhound) yearbook. The Yanktonias (later named the Bulletin) was a publication for the alumni. Organizations, clubs and other college events kept the students busy with extra-curricular activities, like: choir, orchestra and bands recitals, play productions, Christian Associations, senates, guilds, workshops and more. For extra fun, there were formal

dances, coronations, hootenannies, receptions, initiations (some included paddling) and pep rallies.

There is something very special about Yankton College and the small campus in the heart of Yankton, South Dakota, alumni will tell you. While it was still the "College on the Hill," students received the education that Joseph Ward had envisioned. Friendships and marriages were made, most lasting forever. And with their diplomas, young men and women set their eyes on careers or they furthered their education, well prepared with a liberal arts background.

The financial struggles of Yankton College ebbed and flowed throughout its history. The indebtedness seemed insurmountable by December of 1984, with no relief from banks, endowments or mortgages. Up until then, Yankton College had stoically survived the fiscal ups and downs through the decades, keeping a dedicated staff in difficult times and awarding degrees. At that time, an estimated fund-drive of nearly \$3,000,000 was necessary to save the school. After much deliberating, this option did not seem a realistic achievement, and the Board of Trustees made the fateful decision to close the campus doors "leaving in its wake broken hearts, dreams and careers." The impact devastated the students, faculty, alumni and the community.

### SUDDEN CLOSURE

It was December 1984, commonly a joyous time; Christmas and the end of the school semester were approaching for Yankton College, but the mood of those entering

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## Bernie Hunhoff ~ State Senate

*"Schools and churches were the first things our great-grandparents built when they settled here. We have a strong education heritage that must be preserved."*



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