

OCCIDENTAL COLLEGE

Occidental college has been an integral part of life in Highland Park for 42 years, for it was in 1898 that the little Presbyterian school, then struggling to stay alive, moved into its small but hopeful campus built at what is now Monte Vista street and Avenue 50.

Today the college is the greatest asset to the great and growing Highland Park community, with its over 100-acre campus on the sloping hills just north of York boulevard and on the much-disputed "boundary line" between Highland Park and its sister community of Eagle Rock.

But, while the college now has moved its campus nearer to Eagle Rock, Highland Park still calls the college "a Highland Park institution," for now it is more a part of the community than ever before.

CAPACITY ENROLLMENT

At the present time Occidental has capacity enrollment of 800 students, a faculty of 65 of the outstanding teachers in the nation today, and carries on a diversified program of student and faculty activity that often includes participation by the residents of Highland Park and the surrounding territory.

Occidental college was founded in 1887 by a group of Presbyterian church ministers, with its first

campus in Boyle Heights. And for some 11 years it struggled against great odds, came very near to dying when its one college building was destroyed by fire. At that time Highland Park was little more than a pasture land, with sheep runs, although considerable amount of activity was going on around the Garvanza section, at what is now Avenue 64 and Pasadena avenue.

TO HIGHLANDS IN 1892

After the fire that destroyed the Occidental campus in Boyle Heights, a seven-acre tract of land that is now bounded by Avenue 50, Marmion way, Monte Vista street, and Avenue 51 was acquired and the new three-story college building, stucco in construction, containing class rooms, laboratories, administrative offices, library, and an auditorium, was erected, and Occidental "came to Highland Park." That was in 1898.

As recorded in Dr. Robert G. Cleland's "History of Occidental College," the moving to the Highland Park campus was a turning point in the college's history.

"Between 1900 and 1906 the fortunes of the college underwent decided improvement," writes Dr. Cleland. "This was due to several factors. The Presbyterian church as a whole came to have a more intelligent and proprietary interest in its welfare. The support of a group of influential men, both ministers and laymen, gave to it new prestige in the community, financial resources, theretofore sadly lacking, and a spirit of stability and self-confidence which affected every branch of the college.

NEW BUILDINGS

"During these years the campus was enlarged, two major buildings erected, a small endowment built up, and the faculty materially strengthened. At the same time, the student body grew not only in numbers but in self-confidence and solidarity as well."

After acquiring additional property for the Highland Park campus, plans were made for a hall of letters, on property between the Santa Fe railway, Avenue 50, Pasadena avenue. (now North Figueroa street), and Avenue 51. On May 25, 1903, ground was broken for the new Hall of Letters, a red brick building which today still stands, is now being used as an apartment house, facing Avenue 50. Two years later the Stimson library was built, facing the intersection of Avenue 50 and Pasadena avenue. That building is now gone and an automobile agency building now stands on that ground.

JOHN WILLIS BAER

New growth came to the college for the next 10 years; and the one great personality at the college, known to all "old-timers" in Highland Park, was Dr. John Willis Baer, who took the presidency in 1906, continuing until 1917.

It was during this period that the Occidental academy, a college preparatory school of high school rank, was discontinued in favor of a public high school in Highland Park which later became Franklin high school.

Two events of importance to the college and Highland Park during that time were visits by two Presidents of the United States, William Howard Taft on October 11, 1909, while he was in office; and Theodore Roosevelt, March 22, 1911.

DECIDE TO MOVE

Then came another big decision on the part of the college trustees, one that has changed the history of the college and of Highland Park and its environs. Writes Dr. Cleland of that decision:

"The trustees made the revolutionary decision to abandon the campus and buildings in Highland Park and transplant the college to a more desirable location. In view of the previous peripatetic history of Occidental, the sentimental objections to such a move, and the heavy costs it necessarily involved, this action could be justified only on the most urgent grounds.

HEMMED IN BY TRACKS

"Those who viewed the situation dispassionately, however, and had intelligent regard for the future of the college, recognized the inevitable necessity of the change. Despite the recent acquisition of some additional land through the good offices of Lyman Stewart and John A. Merrill, the Highland Park site was poorly adapted to the college needs. Hemmed in by car lines and city streets and bisected by a transcontinental railroad line, no amount of imagination or ingenuity could make it an adequate college campus. Occidental faced the choice of finding a new home or dying of slow strangulation."

In January, 1910, the trustees decided to move the campus from what is now North Figueroa street and Avenue 50 and 51, to the college's present hillside site. Sixty-five acres of land were given outright to the college by a syndicate made up of James G. Garth, W. A. Roberts, Ralph Rogers, and Samuel McCray, and another 21 acres were sold to the college for \$13,500.

NEW CAMPUS, 1914

Construction of the new campus started in 1912, and in the fall of 1914 the school opened in its new campus of three buildings, Johnson, Fowler, and Swan halls. Later the athletic stadium and a few other small buildings were constructed.

The coming of Dr. Remsen D. Bird in 1921 ushered in another new era for the college, a period that Dr. Cleland refers to as when "the college comes of age." Enrollment has been increased from 500 students to 800 students at present; the number of faculty members doubled, to reach 65; the annual college budget has been increased from \$82,000 to a quarter of a million dollars.

And since 1921 no less than 13 major campus buildings have been erected, with two more to be built within the next few months. They include the president's house, Mary Norton Clapp library, Orr and Erdmann halls, women's dormitories, the Hillside theatre, Alumni gymnasium, Taylor swimming pool, campus homes for the vice president and the comptroller, Emmons Memorial hall, a campus infirmary.