



# DENISO

## Then and Now

1905—1967

BY KARL ESCHMAN

*Professor Eschman reminisced before the Tuesday luncheon group of the faculty about his student days and the Denison presidents he had known and offered some advice for today's curriculum-makers.*

I FIRST saw Granville at the 1905 Commencement when my mother, who had attended the Y.L.I. (Young Ladies Institute) brought me over from Dresden, Ohio. There was no visiting Commencement speaker in those days; instead, seniors presented orations. Justin Nixon, who was to be the minister of the Brick Presbyterian in Rochester later, impressed me the most.

The next fall I entered Doane

Academy and the Conservatory at the age of fourteen. The Academy was a fine institution in those days with an interesting combination of boys like myself in knee trousers and old men of twenty-five or more who decided, late in life, that they wanted to become teachers or ministers and needed more education. Making friends with these older men in the Academy literary societies, Cicero and Irving, was good for us youngsters. If I enjoy talking to a class, Cicero deserves the credit, for we always had a student critic at the end of each week's program tell us our errors. We had an annual contest with Irving which had all the accessories of a sports contest today.

Another fine opportunity came my way because I could play the piano better than any man in the college at that time. I was made accompanist for the Glee Club and put on "tails" along with long pants the next spring. The club was quite an organization in those days, often travelling by special car on the railroad. I had never travelled before and the two Thomas brothers, seniors in charge of the club, took me under their wings; so I learned a lot, particularly as we were often entertained in homes of wealthy trustees and friends of Denison, the like of which I had never seen before.

Broadway in 1905 was often a sea of mud. The main roadway was heaped up in the center and rather wide and deep ditches were on either side. The Interurban was our only connection with Newark.

Someone from the economics department asked me the other day why I had not bought up a lot of land around Granville when I started teaching here. He said I would be wealthy now. The reason why I did not, is obvious. I had no extra cash. Property around Granville was even then valuable and relatively expensive. Flares from gas wells were burning all day and night around the town and natural gas was selling for 15¢ a thousand.

Doane did a lot for me; the high school in my home town was none too good; for instance, the superintendent read his German: "Rosslin, rossline, rossline, rot!"; so I

never went to high school. My mother stayed with me for the first term and we lived in the back part of the red brick next to what was then the Phi Gam house. I was an only child, my sister having died before I was born, and I had been kept in cotton batting; by the second term my mother decided that it was safe to leave me alone and this was an experience I needed. Long walks all over the country-side with Academy students like Edgar Phillips, a Jamaican, then a disciple of Elbert Hubbard, were wonderful. I'm afraid, with automobiles, there is not as much hiking now. Believe it or not, with Harmon Nixon, a younger brother of Justin, whom I mentioned, I walked to Buckeye Lake and back after Sunday dinner; that must be something like 22 miles.

I lived on the top floor of old Marsh Hall and boarded at eating clubs downtown. The one I liked best was the Hygiene Club which was in a small house near where the Alpha Phi house is now. It was run by Edgar Phillip's older brother George and our board cost us \$2.25 a week. George would buy cracked wheat from the mill down by the T&OC. I suppose it was what they fed the chickens but it made excellent breakfast food when well cooked. George had been working summers for E. I. Root, the beekeeper in Medina; so he brought back a hive of bees which he kept in the attic of Talbot Hall. Through the open windows they could range the countryside and we enjoyed their honey.

My instruction in music, I consider excellent. Miss Farrar, my piano teacher, had been a pupil of Matthay in London and his relaxation methods of playing were exactly what I needed. Miss Farrar did not let me play in public until almost a year had passed, which she spent in untying my tightness and improving my tone.

The director of the Conservatory was Arthur Judson, now the head of a booking agency for artists in New York City; at one time he managed the Cincinnati, Philadelphia and New York Symphonies all at the same time. He was an excel-

lent violinist and I remember his playing all the Beethoven violin sonatas with Mrs. C. B. White who lived on Mt. Parnassus. When no better accompanist was handy, I played for him and I remember one daylight occasion, which I thought was so important that I borrowed my father's old Prince Albert coat to wear. I must have really looked funny.

When Judson left for New York City and "bigger things," Carl Paige Wood became director. He was a Harvard graduate, A.B. and M.A.; so he brought excellent standards to the theory department, standards which can be seen in his books. He went from Denison to Vassar and the University of Washington, also as director.

After I graduated in '11, I too went to Harvard. It took me two years to get their Master's degree but they let me spend the second year in Berlin. It was there that I received a cablegram from Wallace Cathcart, chairman of the Trustee's Instruction Committee, asking me to come back and become director of the Conservatory. My salary the first year was \$900. The next year, perhaps because I got married, they raised it to \$1100. This was not bad, since the full professors in those days got only \$2000. Besides, I had the organ and choir job at the Baptist Church and later at Trinity Episcopal in Newark.

But let's go back for a little more of my undergraduate experience. There was no theatre or speech department and we had to depend upon an occasional visit of someone from a Pittsburgh or Boston school of oratory. The man would come for a week or two and try to put on Shakespeare, believe it or not, I remember a "Julius Caesar" when I was Cassius (I had the "lean and hungry look" in those days), in which George Williams, the Caesar, was carried out on his bier with his Walkover shoes showing below the sheet. In the "Comedy of Errors," Kirtley Mather and I were the two twin Dromios. The rest of the time, theatrically, we were left to our own resources; but I must say we had some good performances. They were all segregated

in those days: men had to play women's parts and vice versa. I saw some fine Lydia Languishes and Mrs. Malaprop played by men — and Toby, Malvolio or Falstaff, by women. The senior girls always gave a Shakespeare play at Commencement. Since love scenes between men and women were forbidden, I can only imagine what the deans in those days would have thought of the production of "Marat/de Sade" this spring or the production of "Desire Under The Elms" last year. Understand: I am not in favor of censorship in the Arts and I have nothing but congratulations for our theatre department.

Speaking of George Williams reminds me of a clipping which Percy Wiltsee sent me in 1961 taken from the "Fifty Years Ago" column of the *Cincinnati Enquirer*. George, Horace Hunt and I formed a debating team in our senior year. We debated the Income Tax, before it was instituted, with the University of Cincinnati, and we won. We were on the negative and vehemently "agin it" though we never realized what amounts of money it would take from us today. I think Percy was tickled because he was probably on our side!

One thing we did not have in our day was student government. We had class officers but no one to speak for the entire student body. I've always been thankful that there was no temptation to go into "student politics." When I saw the time my daughter put into revising the Constitution in the forties, and then the ten or so revisions since that day, it seems almost a waste of time unless a student intends to be a politician after he graduates. I realize a good student government takes a lot of responsibility off the shoulders of the administration, and we have had good governments and fine student officers; but the question is, would the student's time have been better spent on other activities?

Another thing I have always been thankful for: I did not know such an organization as Phi Beta Kappa existed until I got the invitation to join and then I had to ask what it

was, because the Denison chapter was founded in the year I graduated. So I was not tempted to neglect my piano and organ (which in those Dark Ages received no college credit) in order to make grades. I remember the initiation dinner was held in Dr. Colwell's home, the present funeral home on Prospect Street.

Dr. Colwell was the dean of the College, a position which I think had nothing or very little to do with administration (as at present). He was probably merely the professor with the longest tenure or the most respected by the faculty. He taught Greek and I remember some fine Sunday School classes he held in the Baptist Church, where he read the New Testament in Greek and translated. As I had had "doubblers Greek" in the Academy under "Bunny" Spencer and we always had a good pony, the Bible, handy, I got a lot out of it, as well as out of President Hunt's senior required course in "Evidences of Christianity," which combined theology and philosophy.

Well, you may imagine what an awakening it was for me to attend my first faculty meeting two years after I had graduated. There sat these gods on Olympus showing their clay feet. Prof. "Willy" (English) always with a handkerchief over his bald head, I suppose to keep the flies off. He was always the first one to shout: "Move we adjourn." Prof. William Hannibal Johnson (Alfred's father) had taught so much Latin that he could not speak in English without accenting it like: *Arma virumque cano Troiae qui primus ab oris*. Then there was Prof. W. A. Chamberlin who had taken my college roommate, Quincy Main and me on a bicycle trip through Germany in the summer of 1912. We slept in quaint places, including a jail because the inn was full; his fine German smoothed the way for us and yet he did not charge us one penny or get his transportation paid by selling us tickets. He did it out of the kindness of his heart.

The curriculum, from the present point of view, was lacking, I suppose. There was very little history

or psychology, if any, and no economics. I suppose it is the lack of the latter which accounts for the fact that I do not own a stock or a bond in the world. But science was strong even then because of Prof. Herrick and others.

By the way, it may throw a side light on the fine man whom we honor in the Herrick Lectures when I tell you that the only instruction I got in sex hygiene, while still in the Academy, came from this great scientist and neurologist in some lectures for men, quite apart from his regular teaching.

One of the two finest teachers I have ever had was Charles B. White, instructor in Latin in the Academy. (The other was Irving Babbitt at Harvard, but that's another story.) "Swipes" White had us build models of Caesar's bridges and really made Latin come alive for us. He also was an authority on Amerindians, snakes, birds and Granville history. Read his miscellany in the Library!

If you ask me for a comparison of the student body then and now — I would say that, fundamentally, there has not been much change in character. Denison has been fortunate in the type of student coming here. I realize that some of you will bewail this uniformity of which I speak and it is your right and privilege to do what you can to break it up, enlarging the range and individual types both Left and Right.

However, I have been able to say — up to the present — that in the 62 years I have known this place, there have been no psychological tragedies among the students; no student has killed himself (though there have been three faculty suicides during that time); no student has willfully injured another student seriously; no student has disappeared, never to be found thereafter. There are other colleges in Ohio which cannot make these statements. If there have been student tragedies of these types, I have not known of them, and you know — in a town of this size, that would be unusual, to say the least. Accidental deaths, there have been, and there may be many more, but I think we have been spared the other types of

tragedy; how long the record will hold — with the increase in drinking among students and the possibility of drugs — remain to be seen.

There were as many pranks, as much letting off of steam in class rushes and so on, as today — less regulated or stereotyped since there were no D-days.

The remarkable variety in our athletic program today was, of course, unknown. Any student who was well co-ordinated played football in the fall, basketball in the winter and baseball in the spring. I have only praise for the physical education department today, which can field winning teams in so many sports, some of which the students can continue after graduation. Since we put our athletes into a dozen or so sports instead of only three, we must be content with a moderate balance on the winning side of those original three. I think this avoidance of overemphasis on one or two is a healthy situation.

I was not in any respect athletic. The only thing I did was to run a little cross-country and the only time I ever represented Denison away from Granville was at OWU — where we lost and I came in last. Maybe that's the reason why there is no school which I would rather see Denison beat than Ohio Wesleyan.

Back in my day, cross-country was often over a longer course than the one used today. I can remember when they used to take the train to Johnstown and run the 12 miles back; then later, they went only to Alexandria and ran the five miles back; I never did either, but I do remember that we used to run south of town, through Lover's Lane, before continuing the course on this side of Granville over the hills that they use today.

If there is any *one* thing I want to say to you as a faculty, it is this: Do not forget that there are two types of courses taught at Denison or any college.

There is one type of course for which inter-sessions, reading periods, short semesters, fewer teaching-hours than credit-hours, etc., are quite O.K., and even appropriate. I

am willing to wager that I could pass, after a week or two of intense reading and study many of your courses of this type, though I'll not offend you by naming them here.

On the other hand, there are courses that cannot be covered by me or by anyone in this way: Courses in mathematics, sciences, languages and I include harmony (because music is a difficult language). I beg of you not to make thorough work in this second type of course impossible at Denison from the freshman year on, by taking too much time for the glamour of seminars, discussing all the problems of the world at the expense of acquiring a precise and systematic technique in some subjects. Do not sell short the magnificent routines of these subjects by taking away weeks or days, the length of time needed for mastery, from the foundation on, in these fields.

A few remarks about the presidents under which I have served, and then I am done. My first president was Clark Chamberlin. He was a man with great visions, some of which were not realized. There was to be a tunnel from the head of Main Street to the new Deeds Field; and an elevator was to run from its center up into the foyer of a music auditorium on top of the Hill. (Just as an aside, it would take at least five fingers of one hand to name all the different plans for music buildings on which I have worked, with as many disappointments that I have survived.) Dr. Chamberlain did lay out three miles of beautiful walks and an outdoor stage in the woods of the campus. You can scarcely trace them now as they were not kept up and walking seems to have gone out of fashion.

Dr. Shaw, a former minister, was a wonderful person, beloved by all, the kind of a man before whom you felt like confessing your sins - always understanding and always forgiving.

He was followed by Dr. Brown, who lives his life by decades. Each decade has had its purpose which he steadily brings to pass. At Hiram, he had instituted the idea of teaching one course very intensively for a term and then a different course was taken up. At Denison, his im-

portant idea was general education which he successfully instituted. At the beginning Denison out-harvard-ed Harvard with more than half of the four years given over to this. Fortunately we were able to keep that other half spread through all four years so that the sequences in my second type of courses above could survive, although certain sciences suffered because generalized science was required instead. We have all seen the pendulum swing back to a more moderate position regarding general education courses.

After the acting presidency of Cyril Richards, Blair Knapp came to us; you all know his wonderful work for this college, its growing reputation, its great expansion in buildings and the rapid rise in the intellectual calibre of our students. As I had been faculty representative on the Board of Trustees' committee of selection, I was asked to make a short speech at the inauguration dinner. In Blair's first Chapel talk he had presented the challenge of honesty. So I said in my talk, *that's* a quality that can be very contagious" and I promised that if he would deal honestly with us, the faculty both individually and collectively would be absolutely honest in our dealings with him. I believe that this bargain has been kept, and that we always know - straight from the shoulder - what President Knapp means when he speaks. That's a wonderful quality in a college president.

At this same talk, I quoted from an aria in the first act of Strauss's opera, "Rosenkavalier:" "Die Zeit, die ist ein sonderbar Ding." "Time - it's a strange thing!" As I look back over the pleasant years at Denison, I can only repeat that fact. One never grows old in a college where a new generation of young inspiring students greet you every September.

---

*Karl H. Eschman '11 retired in June as Jessie King Wiltsee Professor-Emeritus of Music after 54 years on the Denison faculty. He is spending the summer in Germany and in the fall joins the faculty of Whitman College, Walla Walla, Washington as Lecturer in Music.*