Names in Stone II

With this issue of TCNJ Magazine, as a part of our institution’s 150th anniversary, we continue the series of articles about the past, present, and future of the College. In each issue we will focus on several of our named buildings to highlight their origins and the people for whom they are named.

Allen, Brewster, Ely: the first three residence halls

When the State Normal School and State Teachers College at Trenton moved to suburban Ewing Township, the site of the new campus was always referred to as "Hillwood Lakes" or, simply "Hillwood." One of the more choice locations on the College's 180-acre site was a mature woods of white and pine oak, maple, and even a few chestnut trees on a slight rise overlooking Lake Sylva. It had been part of a small farm owned by Miss Susan Titus, known throughout the area until her death in the 1920s, for her sharp wit and staunch independence. It was this site that was selected for three connected residence halls to be occupied for the young women then living in dormitories on Clinton Avenue in Trenton.

The term "dormitory," however, was being discouraged so as to emphasize a sense of congenial community on the new campus. Construction contracts were awarded in 1930, and in the fall of 1931 the first contingent of about 140 girls took up residence in Elizabeth Allen House, Alice Brewster House, and Sarah Ely House. As usually happens, however, the building group soon became known by other names: the Hillwood Dormitory, or Hillwood Houses in 1931, the Hillwood or Allen Unit in the 1940s, the Lakeside Houses by the 1990s, and today, simply by the acronym ABE, standing for Allen-Brewster-Ely.

In the fall of 1931, some 900 students were enrolled in the institution that was in the process of becoming Trenton State Teachers College. The move from Clinton Avenue to Ewing Township took a number of years to accomplish. Many students of the time continued to live in the Clinton Avenue buildings, and ride buses out to Hillwood for their classes.

In 1930 the three structures, later connected by covered brick walkways, cost state taxpayers about $350,000. Built in the modified colonial style then popular on so many American college and university campuses, they were designed to echo the look being established for the library, administration, and auditorium buildings already under construction. By comparison with the decaying, grim-gray, and code-violating dormitories left behind in Trenton, these structures provided students with comfortable accommodations, gracious common rooms, and beautiful views over wide lawns to Lake Sylva.

Residents of each building were encouraged to establish their own activities and governing bodies, which over the years gave each house a character and personality that shifted with the times. The attractive and spacious Allen House drawing room continued for many years to serve as a location for special meetings, receptions, fashion shows, holiday song sessions, and public issue discussions, most organized by the students. Allen House regularly sponsored a Valentine Tea Dance; Ely hosted an annual dance at The Inn; Brewster was known for its get-togethers after its regular house meetings. Before the Thanksgiving holiday each year, the women from all three halls, dressed in what passed for facsimiles of Pilgrim garb, marched in a candlelight "Priscilla Procession" to The Inn, where they reenacted the first Thanksgiving. In the 1950s, senior men and faculty were invited to take part.

Today the houses look virtually the same as the day they were built, except for new windows and interior modernization. In recent years individual houses have been occupied by first-year students in the honors program, but enrollment growth combined with other construction has prompted many shifts in occupancy over the years.

Until the mid 1970s, the three buildings were reserved for women students, but soon after the new Travers/Wolfe towers were opened in 1971, with men and women on separate floors, the ABE complex went coed by room as well. Today virtually all student housing on campus is coeducational.

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Elizabeth A. Allen

The woman for whom Allen Hall is named, Elizabeth A. Allen, is best known for her long career of advocacy for teachers’ rights and financial security—work that made her one of the major figures in the history of New Jersey public education.

She was one of that early group of children whose parents, while not wealthy, knew the value of schooling and took advantage of the new Model School associated with the 11-year-old New Jersey Normal School in Trenton. "Libbie" enrolled there in 1867 at the New Jersey Normal School in Trenton. She crossed the Atlantic 54 times, and her students and the teaching profession.

Her challenge was more difficult than today’s reader might imagine. Efforts to organize employee groups often were seen as the work of foreign agitators that would lead inevitably to socialism.

When liberty of speech and of legitimate action is withheld, the matter is taken into court and Miss Robbins had to testify, thus incurring the ill-will of her Principal. She came under the ban, also, of one of the Trustees because, it is asserted, her father had declined to give him political support. Miss Robbins, a State Normal School graduate, has been teaching in Port Norris five years, and her Principal, who has not yet been there one year, made it his ultimatum that either she or he must go, though offering her the highest recommendation. It is a shame to the Port Norris Board of Education that the Principal was not dismissed and the teacher retained.

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New Jersey’s Schools

Miss E. A. Allen calls attention to many stories of outrage in their official management

To the Editor of The New York Times:

From many points in New Jersey come stories of outrage in the official management of the schools. In Camden, Mr. Manness has been dropped without a hearing and without cause being assigned. This is alleged to be purely a matter of private revenge. The case of Miss Greenfield of Kearny is asserted to be political revenge on the lady’s father. Miss Reed and Miss Brennan of Orange have barely been saved, while the Teachers’ Committee of that city has dropped four teachers after the Board of Education had by a vote of 12 to 3 determined to retain them.

In New Brunswick five teachers are asked to resign, and the board refuses explanation of its action. From Port Norris I hear of the summary dismissal of Miss Harriet Robbins, a person whose high character as a woman and a teacher is certified to by her County Superintendent, the President of the Board of Education, and by the people generally. It seems that last Fall the Principal of her school, in the presence of Miss Robbins, struck a sickly, nervous little girl of six years, because he thought her inattentive. The matter was taken into court and Miss Robbins had to testify, thus incurring the ill-will of her Principal. She came under the ban, also, of one of the Trustees because, it is asserted, her father had declined to give him political support. Miss Robbins, a State Normal School graduate, has been teaching in Port Norris five years, and her Principal, who has not yet been there one year, made it his ultimatum that either she or he must go, though offering her the highest recommendation. It is a shame to the Port Norris Board of Education that the Principal was not dismissed and the teacher retained.

Frenchtown reports Superintendent Tomer and two old teachers dropped without notice and without reason being given. The Superintendent’s place has been given to a brother of one of the Trustees, the sister of another Trustee, and the daughter of the President of the Board replace the other two. No pretense is made that the change is for the benefit of Miss Robbins, struck a sickly, nervous little girl of six years, because he thought her inattentive. The matter was taken into court and Miss Robbins had to testify, thus incurring the ill-will of her Principal. She came under the ban, also, of one of the Trustees because, it is asserted, her father had declined to give him political support. Miss Robbins, a State Normal School graduate, has been teaching in Port Norris five years, and her Principal, who has not yet been there one year, made it his ultimatum that either she or he must go, though offering her the highest recommendation. It is a shame to the Port Norris Board of Education that the Principal was not dismissed and the teacher retained.
not the certificates required by law. From another place comes the same allegation. This is a matter worthy the official attention of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. Near Chatham, Miss Margaret Flynn, a successful teacher, a woman of high standing who graduated from the State Normal School with honor, has been dropped; and, while these lines are being written, she, poor girl, is unaware of the fact. She sent her application to the Board, which, I am informed, was not even opened. In Newark there is great unrest. The Board of Education is trying to keep its intentions secret, but enough has leaked out to cause general uneasiness. Joseph Clark, for many years principal of the Normal and Training School, has been voted out of his place, and the Principal of a grammar school. Edmund O. Hovey, for 29 years principal of the High School, has been reduced to the of the schools. Superintendent Tomer has been regarded as an able and successful school executive. It is asserted that some of the new Frenchtown appointees have not the certificates required by law. From another place comes the same allegation. This is a matter worthy the official attention of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. Near Chatham, Miss Margaret Flynn, a successful teacher, a woman of high standing who graduated from the State Normal School with honor, has been dropped; and, while these lines are being written, she, poor girl, is unaware of the fact. She sent her application to the Board, which, I am informed, was not even opened. In Newark there is great unrest. The Board of Education is trying to keep its intentions secret, but enough has leaked out to cause general uneasiness. Joseph Clark, for many years principal of the Normal and Training School, has been voted out of his place, and the Principal of a grammar school. Edmund O. Hovey, for 29 years principal of the High School, has been reduced to the

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Teachers never know that they are going to be dropped. It is done without note or warning at the close of the school year; thus depriving them of a chance to seek another appointment.
All this is a great wrong to the teachers, but a greater wrong to the people.

personally and as teachers. But they are public spirited, and have not hesitated to take an open stand for what they consider the best interests of the schools. Unscrupulous and inefficient Superintendents fear their influence; hence the oppression. I have spoken before of the sentiment of fear, something almost unknown in the olden time, that now pervades the rank and file of teachers. Recently a number from one of our large cities said to me, "We were delighted at your fight for Miss Reed, but we did not dare open our mouths." From another city came many words of encouragement coupled with expressions of fear that I would get myself into a "dreadful predicament." And why? I was pleading a cause that the press and people alike, not only of Orange, but of the whole State, and of adjoining States, pronounced just. The Orange Board of Education stamped its approval by rescinding, on a vote of 12 to 3, what they had enacted by a bill, (Senate 195) embracing many of the evil features of that defeated in New York, it ready to be presented at Trenton next Winter.

There is no doubt that a concerted movement is in the progress, not only in New Jersey, but throughout the country, to wrest the control of the schools from the people and place it in one of citizens and is submitted to, it will not be long before others are thus robbed, and from this, the road is easy to the condition pictured in the following extract from recent Berlin correspondence of a New York City paper describing the present reactionary tendency in Germany: "Baron Stumm, an intimate counsellor of the Kaiser, and the Agrarian leader, Von Karoloff, admit no rights for the laboring classes but those of earning a miserable pittance, and deny them the rights of coalition, of public meeting, of striking, and even of petitioning."

The resemblance of this condition to that of the public school teachers in many New Jersey cities struck me forcibly; a condition to which, judging from numerous indications, it is the intention of certain influences to reduce the teaching force of the State, while the way it is being prepared to place the entire educational interest of the Commonwealth in the hands of a State Commission of Education above the control of the people, the Governor, and almost all of the Legislature. It was only by a desperate effort that such a law was defeated in the last New York Legislature, while a bill, (Senate 195) for the rights of the schools and their teachers who have dared to take a stand, and of the public schools and their co-workers. It is a condition of affairs that boxes no good to republican institutions. When liberty of speech and of legitimate action is taken from one body of citizens and is submitted to, it will not be long before others are thus robbed, and from this, the road is easy to the condition pictured in the following extract from recent Berlin correspondence of a New York City paper describing the present reactionary tendency in Germany: "Baron Stumm, an intimate counsellor of the Kaiser, and the Agrarian leader, Von Karoloff, admit no rights for the laboring classes but those of earning a miserable pittance, and deny them the rights of coalition, of public meeting, of striking, and even of petitioning."

The future of the children of America is involved.

Alice L. Brewster

Alice Brewster, a native of New Hampshire, had graduated from Wellesley College in Massachusetts before becoming a teacher and relocating in 1891 to the girls’ department of the Model School, which served as a teaching laboratory for the State Normal School on Clinton Avenue in Trenton.

In an essay written for The Signal’s Sesquicentennial Edition in September 1955, Miss Brewster, then in her eighties, provided a revealing look at school life at the end of the 19th century. A mainstay of the English faculty at both the Model and Normal Schools for 42 years, she wrote:

"The Model School was located in the right wing of the old State Building on Clinton Avenue, opposite the boarding halls, the first floor for boys and the second for girls. A wide corridor on each floor had three classrooms on each side, closed in with glass windows. They served two purposes. Classrooms were always open for inspection, and restless eyes inside could enjoy corridor sights. This was a day before conventions had been shattered by war demands and the growing reach for individual freedoms. Dancing was taboo. Girls and boys must be chaperoned. At graduation seasons the senior girls were taken to the auditorium platform to rehearse seating themselves without showing the peep of an ankle below their long gowns."

"Climates have altered since those days and heating systems have improved. During winter we were all encased to our necks in wool or flannel. V necks were unknown. I recall one winter day when Miss Brooks, the vivid music teacher at chapel in the auditorium, appeared in a charming, thin, white cotton shirt-waist, looking like a May morning. As she raised her bonnet and dimpled at us, a silent, electric, ‘Me too!’ rippled from girl to girl. You just knew that every girl was going to do what she could to look like that!"

"Societies—not then called sororities—sprang up of themselves. The boys revelled in the fame of the Thencanic—the girls had their pride in Argumothrus and Philomathean. The Argumothrus was begun by members of the class of ’95—and their friends in Normal—and in all the societies as they came along, the Normal had a share. Silver-tongued oratory was the first purpose of Argumothrus, expressed in its name. Their meetings aimed at impromptu debate and ‘pure English.’ Later, drama made its appeal and nothing short of Shakespeare met their aspirations."

Elizabeth A. Allen
Principal Teachers’ Training School, Hoboken
1,217 Garden Street, Hoboken, NJ
July 3, 1899
In an atmosphere of such friendly contacts and under the influence of good teaching, friendships grew, loyalties were strengthened, and foundations laid which in later years determined fine citizenship, with leaders of the community life of Trenton as well as in service for the state.

Miss Brewster’s retirement in 1933 seems to have corresponded with the move from downtown Trenton to Ewing Township over a period from 1931 to 1935. She had served in the Model School program until it was disbanded by action of the state legislature in 1917, but remained at the Normal School for the rest of her career. Some further insight about the College and Miss Brewster in that early period comes from an article by Marion Lorenz Hoeman who graduated in 1931 with a major in music education. As she wrote in the Seniorgum, a magazine distributed in the Trenton area in 1985, “On the last night before the Christmas recess, it was customary for the women who lived in the dormitories to go caroling early in the morning. Faculty members who lived near the College were the recipients of our vocal endeavors and Christmas cheer. It was an individual decision to leave a warm bed in order to carol. At 4 A.M. the bell in Center Hall would ring loud and clear, waking not only the carolers but also everyone else in the three dormitories. We would assemble in front of Center Hall, numbering about 25-30 sleepy souls. Bundled up in warm clothing and armed with flashlights and music sheets, we would sally forth to bring Christmas cheer to the faculty (so we said). Several of the men students would accompany the group, giving us a sense of security and camaraderie as well as rendering some good robust bass tones which only a male voice can supply.

“It was wonderful to walk along the silent streets, most of the time covered with a light fall of snow. The clear cold night gave a new dimension to familiar areas. The moon and stars were our only companions in this joyful activity. The cold air managed to dispel any remnants of sleep. We were going to carol! Following a list of addresses the group would make its way to a faculty residence, sing several carols and watch for the candle to be placed in the window. That was a sure sign of acceptance of our gift of song, followed by happy Christmas greetings called out by the listener. To be sure, we were very, very hearty in our greetings, too.”

“Miss Brewster, who taught literature at the College, was an admirable listener. Dressed in a ruffled high-necked gown and a frilly cap on her head, she would appear at her second-floor window with a lighted candle. Opening the window, she would listen to our group, clap her hands and ask for another carol. As she stood there, we couldn’t help but feel she was the living embodiment of a character in one of Charles Dickens’ novels. A Victorian picture of all times.

“As the morning light appeared and the sounds of the new day began, many of us would head down to Child’s Restaurant on East State Street for some scrambled eggs and hot steaming coffee. “As I celebrate my Christmas holidays, Miss Brewster is part of my Christmas memories—the silent night, the serenity of the heavens, and we earthlings, trying in our own way to add the measure of Peace on earth, good will to men! Thank you, Miss Brewster.”

As one of her Normal School colleagues, Alice Brewster, described it, the girls’ department was “the realm of Sarah Y. Ely, for she was the spirit of justice and mercy that held in her own, the hearts of all in her kingdom.” Above all, Miss Ely knew and loved her students. Years after they both had retired, Miss Brewster recalled Ely would sometimes “quick-step from her office at the end of the corridor to some classroom, to call attention to a bit of mischief, or plotted mischief, or even deeper offenses, but always with the light of understanding in her eye. How those girls listened! … Her motto was always, ‘Condemn the fault, not the
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Although Norsworthy was occupied in February, it was not until the following November that it was formally dedicated at ceremonies held in Kendall Hall. What was then a student group known as the Laboratory Theatre put on a dramatization of the history of women’s education, and a former dean of Columbia University spoke about the woman for whom the building was being named, Naomi Norsworthy ’95.

Long before she enrolled at the New Jersey State Normal School at Trenton at the age of 15, Naomi was determined to be a teacher. Her teachers recalled her as a small, highly intelligent, but frail girl who was known for being both clear after an interview with her, the offender was always penitent, assured of the justice and sympathy with which she had met.”

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thinking and ambitious. She completed her course work in three years, graduating in 1895. She then taught three years at Morristown before entering the Teachers College at Columbia University in New York. It was at Columbia that Norsworthy grew into her own. Recognized at once for her intellect and drive, she earned a bachelor’s in psychology in two years, was appointed an assistant instructor in 1901, and in 1904, doctorate in hand, joined the Columbia faculty as a full-time instructor at both the undergraduate and graduate level. It was not an easy time for her, however. Male students were not inclined to accept being taught by what they derisively called a “chit of a girl,” or a “slip of a woman,” but eventually accepted the judgment of other faculty that she was a fine teacher. She served as an adviser to women students, and became deeply involved with campus student activities. Most difficult for her, however, was the need to establish herself as a scholar while at the same time caring for her mother, who was terminally ill with cancer. By the time her mother died, Naomi herself had been diagnosed with cancer. Her academic career was cut short by the disease, and she died in 1916 at the age of 39. There is no doubt she was a promising leader in the psychology of educating children, a science that was in its infancy when she entered school in the 1890s.

Norsworthy Hall remained an all-women’s residence until the early 1980s and while it is still a popular coed dorm, its days are numbered. Deemed too costly to renovate with improved heating and air conditioning, Norsworthy is scheduled to be demolished and to be the site of a new, larger residence hall—one of a pair that will house the entire class of about 1,200 first-year students. The other unit in the pair will replace Centennial Hall, a large dormitory nearby that has been planned for demolition for several years. The goal is to have two new freshman residence halls forming a quadrangle at the ends of a large lawn bounded on the northeast by the lake. While we have learned to be wary of construction schedule announcements, work on the project could begin in 2006.