

# Names in Stone III

*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 some of our named buildings to highlight their origins and the people for whom they are named.*

## Bliss Hall: It's seen 70 years of change



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The day it opened at the start of the 1935 fall term as a residence for 96 men of State Teachers College, the student paper reported that three-story red brick Bliss Hall produced "exclamations of approval by the new inmates (who) rushed about to survey their new abode and marvel at the comfort which the bedrooms and recreation room promise."

For four years, the male students attending the College had been living in decaying dormitories on North Clinton Avenue in Trenton and were transported daily to the Ewing campus aboard "Miss Hillwood," the school's bus. For many of the students, whose families had been hard hit by the Great Depression, their

new home away from home was nothing short of a gift.

Dean of Men **Michael Travers** supervised the dorm and lived with his wife in a ground-floor apartment in those early years. **Richard Conover '40**, who lived in Bliss and has written a memoir about those times, describes Travers as "a tough customer with little sense of humor." Travers later became chairman of the business department, served 40 years at the College, and eventually gave his name to one of the towers in the Travers/Wolfe complex.

**Don Carroll Bliss**, for whom the new colonial-style building was named, had retired in 1930 after seven years as

principal of Trenton State Normal School and a career of 38 years as a school administrator. A native of Vermont, he graduated from Dartmouth in 1892 and went straight into educational work. He served as superintendent of schools in Michigan, Massachusetts, New York, and New Jersey. Along the way, he earned a master's from Columbia and a doctorate from Dartmouth.

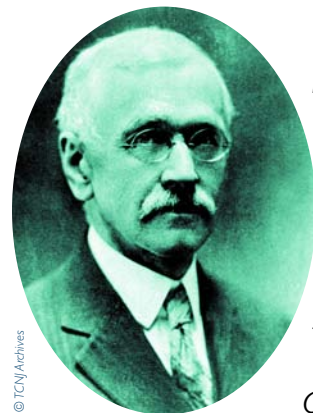
As principal in Trenton, Bliss was well-liked by his co-workers, who described him as a "gentleman's gentleman," a warm-hearted friend, and a fair, competent leader. Students felt likewise. The classes of 1929 and 1930 had a portrait painted of him, and at a retirement dinner in

Philadelphia, William Warner '30 told the guests, "We may take our problems to him with the assurance of his friendliness and sincere attention. He is one of us and one for us."

During the final years in Trenton, Bliss instituted a full four-year curriculum which granted students a Bachelor of Science in Education degree, explaining "...Two years is a wholly inadequate time to prepare the teacher for the mental growth of children." He also planned 15-week extension classes for teachers without training in a "normal school."

On the other hand, Bliss knew college should offer more than course work. He recognized that most of students' time was spent in residence halls, and in 1924, he appointed the first dean of women, Charlotte Marshall, to "promote the ideals of right living." He worked hard to encourage extracurricular activities and said students need more than "a prescribed curriculum."

Although the state commissioner of education wanted him to stay, Bliss retired on the 75th anniversary of the school in 1930. He was proud to have the new dormitory named for him, but remarks he made at the dedication revealed something basic in his understanding of education and people.



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"A new hall will not make a good college," he said, "but the spirit of the men can."

Few campus buildings have undergone as many changes as Bliss. For its first 25 years, it continued to be a men's dormitory, but with the construction of other residence halls in the 1950s, its student rooms became administrative and faculty offices with very little remodeling.

Then, from 1979 to 1981, to satisfy an urgent need for more classroom space, a new structure was built adjacent to the west end of Bliss. Called the Bliss Annex, it contained 12 classrooms that at first were used mostly for business classes and was joined to Bliss Hall by a glass-enclosed walkway. Nearly 20 years later, the annex was itself enlarged at each end to add bathrooms on three floors and more spacious stairways.

After years as an office building, in 1997 Bliss was converted back to dormitory use for one year, and then underwent total reconstruction. The shell was gutted and rebuilt from top to bottom, with additions to its original wings, enlarged third-floor dormers, air conditioning, an elevator, and redesigned offices and seminar rooms for the English department.

## Gone but not forgotten: Bray, Crowell, and Phelps

*Editor's Note: Three buildings on the current campus, each of which had a major role in the life of the institution for a full generation, have been demolished in recent years and replaced by more functional structures. As we celebrate our Sesquicentennial, we did not want to ignore these former landmarks or the great teachers for whom they were named.*



## Bray Hall: Miss Bray stayed away

Mabel Bray, the daughter of a Midwestern clergyman who declared that singing was an "unstable and unladylike" profession for women, almost single-handedly built the music program at the College. She did it through the force of her personality, her demanding standards, and her relationships with the right people.

Before arriving at the New Jersey State Normal School in Trenton in 1918, she studied privately with six instructors in music and voice. She herself had taught public school classes in three states, founded a school to provide music teachers with continuing education in

the field, performed operatic roles in Europe, and made a national reputation as supervisor of music in the Westfield public schools.

At the College she was determined that her music majors would have a thorough preparation for careers in public school music education. All of them had to take part in the College chorus, orchestra, and marching band. All took piano, violin, and voice lessons. All developed a working knowledge of 26 instruments and practice-taught for 12 weeks in their final two years. Her severe, autocratic manner rarely wavered, and

steered students to districts where she had confidence they would be hired. Until her retirement in 1948, she boasted a 100 percent placement rate for her graduates, even during the depths of the Great Depression.

It was natural, given this background, that when the building boom of the 1960s produced a new home for the music department, it would be named for Mabel E. Bray. And it was entirely in character for the proud and demanding



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was a topic of much student discussion, along with regular changes in the hue of her orangey-red hair. As Franklin Grapel '33, who wrote the music and lyrics to the College Alma Mater, recalls, "She was very efficient and ran the department with an iron hand, but pleasantly so. Our chorus, which she conducted, was excellent."

It all paid off for the students and the College. Bray knew most school superintendents in New Jersey and

educator to refuse to attend the dedication in 1964, because, she said, the understated dedication language made it appear "I never did anything."

The new building, located at the south end of Green Hall, was an undistinguished, two-story brick structure designed with a flat roof like other public buildings going up around the state. It cost \$338,000 and contained a rehearsal room, eight practice rooms,

four classrooms, and offices for 24 faculty members—at least double the space occupied by the department in Kendall Hall prior to 1964.

Jane Perlin, a music major who graduated in 1968 and went on to teach elementary school for 32 years, remembers Bray Hall with great fondness as being entirely different from other campus buildings. She recalls sitting in the recital hall, looking out at “majestic oaks, maples, and naked birches dotted with gray-green assorted bushes” while listening to Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony

coming from a stereo at the front of the room. She watched the “lacy snowflakes floating freely and topping the patches of grass. The hush of the room elicited a sense of security and I felt the tensions of the day flowing like bubbles.”

Bray Hall, later expanded with a four-classroom addition, served the growing music department for 29 years. When the new Music Building was occupied in 1993, Bray became the home of the English department until it moved to Bliss Hall in 1999. Demolition of Bray took place that year, and the site was

prepared for the new Social Sciences Building.

Miss Bray retired in 1948, having impressed 30 years of students with her dedication to excellence in music education and her negative feelings about marriage, contact sports, alcohol, and tobacco. Eleven years later, at age 81, she moved to a California retirement home where, for the next 14 years, she taught music appreciation classes and gave occasional concerts for other retirees. She died in 1979 at age 101.

From 1955 to 1989 the center of the campus was occupied by a sprawling student union building known officially as Phelps Hall. It took its name from William F. Phelps, the first principal of the New Jersey State Normal School. The term “principal” was the 1855 equivalent of today’s “president” or “chancellor,” and was the title of the person who hired the faculty, managed the property, and ran the school under the guidance of a board of trustees and the state commissioner of education.

Phelps was a product of the brand new Normal School movement in the United States, having attended the first class of the Normal School in Albany, NY, in 1845, and taught in its Model School. He served as principal in Trenton from October 1855 to March 1864, when he took a similar post in Minnesota.

His philosophy, he once said, was that “education, true education, the only education that is worthy of the confidence and support of either citizens or the community, deals with the entire being of man, physical, emotional, intellectual, and moral.” In his nine years in Trenton, he continually sought to broaden the curriculum, and to strengthen his students’ social and intellectual skills, as well as their values and leadership abilities.

Everything he did, of course, was being done for the first time in New Jersey. While he was hired to head a public school, he instituted a program of selective admission to ensure that future graduates would be highly skilled. Even so, he found most of his early students needed a stronger basic education themselves before they could be allowed to take over a class. He instituted the Model School and used it to expose Normal School students to good teaching practices. In time, these students would go on to demonstrate the value of this approach. When they did, Phelps turned to research-based marketing of his product. He sought out and analyzed data on what impact Normal School graduates were having as teachers, and used those encouraging results to convince the legislature to renew the school’s charter for another five years.

Phelps Hall was the successor to the Hillwood Inn, which had served as a dining hall and social center from the time the College began its move to Ewing until growing enrollment and fire safety concerns forced its closure in 1955. Phelps was built primarily to serve the growing commuter student body during the week and to house a variety of student activities all year long.

The original rambling, one-story, flat-roofed brick structure contained one large

and one smaller dining hall, both of which could be subdivided with movable walls. It also housed a coffeehouse-style Rhodora Theater (later called “The Pub”), offices for what we now call community and residence life, special rooms for the George Jackson Center and Union Boricua student organizations. Over the years, uses of space in the building changed regularly, as did those in several temporary buildings erected nearby. For several years, the College Union Board (CUB) met in an oversized trailer next to Phelps called the Hillwood Union Building (HUB) where a popular snack bar, lounge, and pool tables were located.

James “Butter” Allen ’72, who has been employed at the College since 1980 and now directs the Office of Building Services,

said one room in Phelps was known as “The Union.” Fraternity and sorority students, who comprised most of the Student Union membership, hung out there. Faculty and staff ate in one of the smaller dining rooms, paying at a discount for their meals. The building was open for meals only on weekdays, because so many students went home on weekends. After the new Brower Student Center opened in 1976, social activity in Phelps dwindled, for the HUB, Pub (renamed the Ratheskellar), and bookstore relocated to Brower. In 1989 Phelps and the other “temporary” structures around it finally were demolished and a new Community Commons (later renamed Eickhoff Hall for the College’s 14th president) opened in 1992.

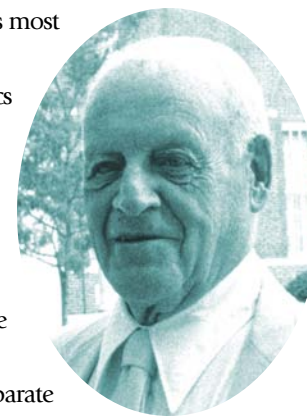
## Phelps Hall: CUB, HUB, Pub, and More



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## Crowell Hall: Science comes of age

For 30 years most science and mathematics courses had been taught in Green Hall, but by 1960 the two had become separate



majors, and planning was under way for an entire building devoted to those disciplines. By the time it opened in the fall of 1963, the College had reorganized the curriculum and established four new departments: chemistry, physics, biology, and mathematics. In addition, over 50 students were pursuing graduate degrees

in science and math. At first, it was called simply the “science-mathematics building.”

It cost \$815,847 and contained five mathematics classrooms, four science classrooms, 30 faculty offices, 14 laboratories, a lecture hall, and various small preparation and storage rooms. Lockers lined the walls and, with faculty offices in the same building, students had easy access to their professors, often eating lunch with them. A combination breezeway and faculty lounge connected the structure to the nursing building nearby.

Teachers of the time recall their new home as neither pleasant to look at nor to work in. The walls were of cement block; heating and cooling both were problematic; the basement and roof leaked; hot water rarely made it to the

third floor; and the electrical system was so inadequate that fuses blew constantly and power was shut down on weekends, sometimes requiring special lines to heat a fish tank and other locations.

With the need for scientific skills expanding both in education and commerce, and with entirely new fields such as computer science appearing, science enrollment soon required more space. In the mid 1970s, the state approved a three-story addition and completion of an observatory on the roof. The mathematics department moved to Holman Hall, freeing up some room, but

for another 30 years science instruction took place in a facility of marginal quality.

Science education was, for the 40 years he taught it at the College, largely the result of Victor L. Crowell's leadership. Shortly after he joined the faculty of the State Normal School at Trenton in 1928, he was assigned to head the science faculty and was asked to plan for its classrooms in what was to become Green Hall on the new campus in Ewing Township.

Crowell had graduated from Cornell, earned a doctorate at Rutgers, and taught in high school before coming to the

College. Here he became a major force in shaping the institution's standards, values, and reputation in the 1930s, '40s, and '50s. Crowell was a tough, demanding professor of what is known today as "the old school." He was tall, imposing, and plain-spoken. He never minced words.

Colleagues who taught under him remember he always called students by their last names, and addressed colleagues as "Dr. So-and-So," never by one's first name. He locked his classroom door to keep out late students and insisted his faculty wear coats and ties, never be late to class and, if asked to take on an extra duty, to do so. He once reprimanded a professor who failed to take off his hat in an elevator. He loved travel and when he returned to campus always gave a photo slide show for his faculty, all of whom were expected to attend. As one professor put it, "He was old-fashioned. When there was more freedom among the students, he had a hard time adjusting. He was a pleasant man if you did a good job. He gave credit where credit was due."

In 1968, Crowell retired, and the science department was divided into biology, physics, and chemistry, each with its own department head. The College was changing its teacher education emphasis to liberal arts, and it was then that the building was named Victor L. Crowell Hall. It was razed in 2001 to make room for the new Science Complex, which today houses the physics, chemistry, and mathematics departments. The biology department had occupied its own new building a year earlier.



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