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# A Century of Success

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# A CENTURY OF SUCCESS

In 1914, Whitworth was on the brink of closing. A bold move and a host of believers changed the course of history.

By Dale Soden

Next year we will celebrate the 125th anniversary of Whitworth's founding. But this year, in 2014, we are celebrating Whitworth's 100th year in Spokane.

In a simple sense, Whitworth's move from Tacoma in 1914 allowed the institution to survive. At first glance, this was because people in Spokane donated land and raised money. But the college also survived because students, faculty and trustees fought for Whitworth.

Tacoma, nicknamed the City of Destiny, seemed a perfect fit for Whitworth. The school undoubtedly enjoyed the most beautiful setting of any college in the Northwest: the campus overlooked Mount Rainier, the Olympic and Cascade ranges, and Puget Sound. The Ladies Residence Hall occupied the grandest mansion in the city; Whitworth had a new gymnasium; the baseball team had defeated the University of Washington; the football team had defeated the University of Oregon; and Whitworth had produced a Rhodes Scholar.

Everything appeared to be so *good* in Tacoma, but by 1912 student enrollment had stalled. Not enough people believed in Whitworth; not enough students and donors stepped forward. The college began sinking fast.

Jay P. Graves, one of Spokane's leading entrepreneurs, became aware of Whitworth's financial difficulties. He, along with Presbyterian leaders, city officials, and Whitworth trustees J. Grier Long and the Rev. Hugh McMillan, put together an attractive offer. Long and McMillan agreed to spearhead a \$100,000 building fund: Spokane's citizens launched a campaign that netted \$70,000, and the Synod of Washington pitched in \$30,000. Graves set aside 640 acres he owned, designating 40 acres for a campus; 40 acres to be sold to support the building fund; and the remaining acreage platted and sold, with roughly 50 percent of the proceeds going to the college.

Whitworth trustees accepted the offer and moved the college nearly 300 miles. Unlike the idyllic location in



Tacoma, Whitworth's new campus had to be carved into a dense forest more than two miles north of the city limits. Whitworth's groundbreaking took place in May; that August, 200 people attended the dedication of the Young Ladies' Dormitory (now McMillan Hall). To satisfy accreditation requirements, trustee Aubrey White orchestrated a campaign to add 8,000 volumes to Whitworth's library, housed in McMillan.

When classes began, in September, the college welcomed 40 students and 14 faculty members, four of whom had relocated from Tacoma with President Donald MacKay. At the time, World War I, which had erupted in July, loomed in the background; *The Spokesman-Review's* daily headlines shouted about the fierce fighting. Five days after classes began, trustee J. Grier Long, who had been instrumental in Whitworth's relocation and had provided much-needed vision and leadership, died after a sudden illness.

Long's fellow trustees were so uncertain the college would survive that they decided to merge with another Protestant college in Spokane. It appears they had approved the merger, but it fell apart at the last minute.

Students and faculty pressed on to fight for Whitworth's success. School spirit helped sustain the fledgling campus through tough times, as students brought with them traditions from Tacoma, including Mayfest, the Colonial Party, and Campus Day, which is now Community Building Day. Faculty not only taught classes; they also filled multiple other roles. One such professor was David Guy. A 1909 alumnus, Guy was a true believer in Whitworth. He taught math and civil engineering, coached the athletics teams, was campus surveyor and dean of men, and sang second tenor in Whitworth's quartet.

Whitworth suffered a major setback in 1917, when the U.S. entered WWI. Thirty male students had enlisted, and the college was in debt; the trustees decided to close the campus for the 1918-19 academic year, releasing the president and faculty to find work elsewhere. The trustees leased the campus to the Army, to be used as an auto and tractor school.

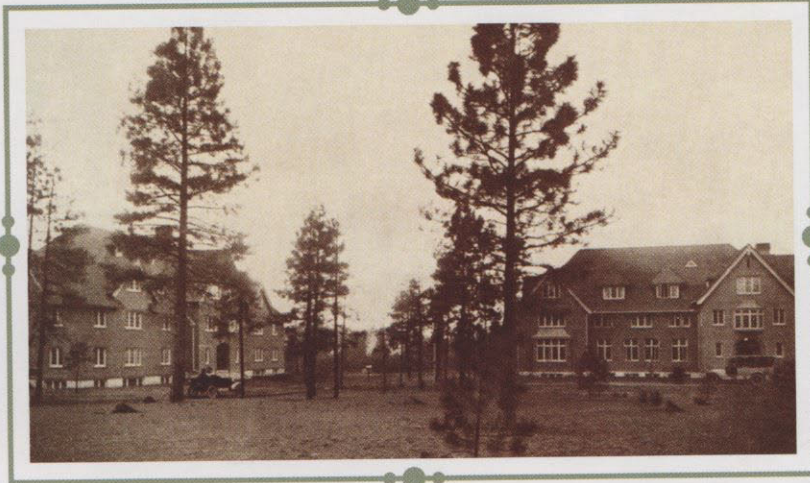
By the end of the year, the buildings were in shambles and the football field's turf had been destroyed; Whitworth College existed in name only. But the trustees rallied: They raised funds and named a president, the Rev. Arthur Y. Beatie, who began recruiting faculty from the East Coast. Classes restarted on Sept. 16, 1919, with 98 students enrolled, the new student body fueled in part by war veterans eager to earn degrees.

We often have the sense that history is inevitable, that events and institutions turn out the way they do because unseen forces propel them. But that view obscures the many people – and the choices they make and the actions they take – who largely determine the outcome.

As we celebrate Whitworth's 100th anniversary in Spokane, let's raise a toast to the committed community leaders, citizens, students, faculty and trustees who believed Whitworth was worth fighting for. They changed the course of history for Whitworth, and for the countless believers who followed.

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*To read Soden's spring 2014 Convocation presentation about Whitworth's move to Spokane and to view accompanying photos, visit [www.whitworth.edu/whitworthtoday](http://www.whitworth.edu/whitworthtoday).*



More than 300 guests gathered at the Lincoln Center on March 15 to celebrate Whitworth's 100 years in Spokane. The evening included a performance by the Whitworth Choir, citations by community leaders, a presentation of the 2014 Alumni Awards, and a toast in honor of the university's enduring mission and those who have supported and sustained Whitworth across 100 successful years.

Above left: Groundbreaking for McMillan Hall, May 22, 1914

Left: Members of the Class of 1915, Whitworth's first graduating seniors in Spokane: Ora Lee Landis, George Takaku, Ruth Lee

Above: Ballard Hall, left, and McMillan Hall, 1915

