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Whitworth's Sumner Alumni Speak From the Distant Past

BY JANET HAUCK
WHITWORTH UNIVERSITY ARCHIVIST



Inset Photo: Dr. George Whitworth, founder of Whitworth College in Sumner, WA (also pictured), now located in Spokane.

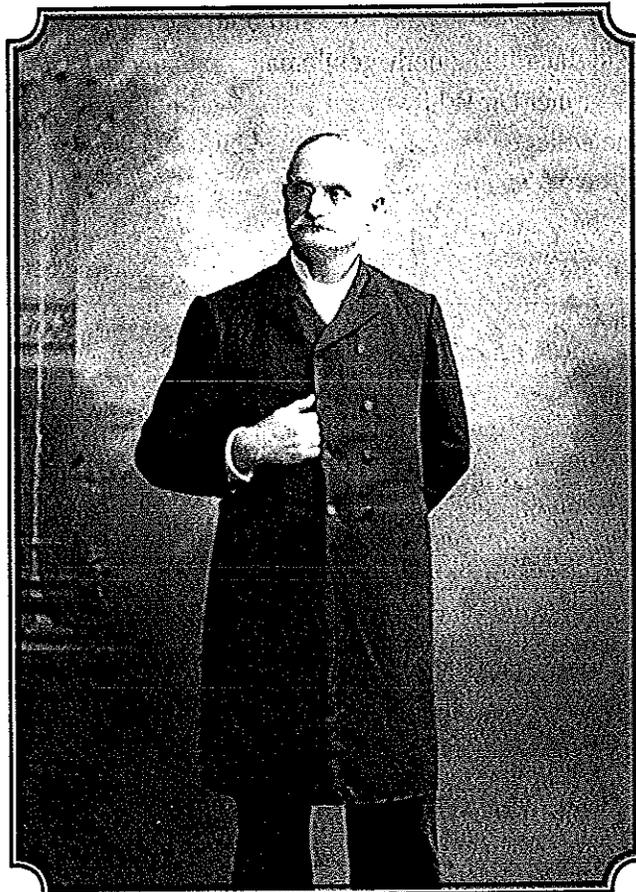


Fifty years ago, three loyal alumni from Whitworth College's campus in Sumner were interviewed separately about memories of their college days. This lively set of gray-haired folks included two alumni from the Whitworth class of 1896 and one from the class of 1898. Let's imagine what their conversation might have sounded like had they all been sitting in the same room. In one chair sits Calvin W. Stewart, Jr., a Sumner native who tells us, "My father was selected as the first president of Whitworth College when the Synod of Washington got a charter for the college in 1889. My father accepted the presidency, which became effective in September 1890."

In another chair sits Amy Johns Ryan, who lived at home in Sumner with her family while attending Whitworth. "I don't know what the boarding students thought of the rest of us, who lived here in the valley," says Amy. "I know I wore a calico dress to school, and I never thought anything about it. I remember that dress so well. It was a black dress with blue and yellow stripes in it."

Amy laughs as she remembers an incident regarding that striped dress. "I was sitting in the chapel studying one day," she says, "when Robert Montgomery walked down the aisle and stopped by me, and he said, 'I think it's wonderful, Miss Amy, that you're willing to come to college and wear a calico dress.' And I had never thought anything about a calico dress not being the thing to wear. I was so interested in study that I cared little about other things!"

Sitting quietly in the third chair is Archie Cameron, who traveled all the way from Howkan, Alaska to attend Whitworth College, and ended up remaining in Sumner for the rest of his life. When asked about his favorite memory, Archie replies, "I want to talk about the literary society." He continues with a twinkle in his eye, "We boys enjoyed more than



Calvin Stewart, Jr, left, Whitworth class of 1896, and his father, Calvin Stewart, Sr, who became President of the college in 1890 (pictured right). Photos courtesy of the Whitworth University Archives.

anything when all the girls and all the boys would come up from town. All of them who lived in town would come up to the literary society, and we had the privilege of getting out Friday evening and taking these girls home. I remember that very well."

Two of the interviewees, Calvin and Amy, were members of Whitworth's very first graduating class of 1896. As one might imagine, both the College and that first graduating class were smaller back in those days. When asked about the number of students in his class, Calvin replies, "I think it was five that got diplomas." The question then arises about the total number of students at the school. Calvin says,

"My best recollection was that there was in the neighborhood of 65 students. A great many of them were from the local community, but there were other students from all over the state, and various parts of the state."

Amy interjects, "Most of us that went to Whitworth had to pay our tuition with all sorts of things. We took pounds of butter and dozens of eggs and bales of hay and paid our way, and the boy and girl who came down from Carbonado paid their way with coal that came from the coal mines at Carbonado. Dr. Whitworth had an interest in those coal mines." Rev. George F. Whitworth founded Whitworth

College late in his long life, and both Calvin and Amy remember the elderly gentleman well.

"I met Dr. Whitworth frequently when he visited the college during the time I was there," says Calvin. "I heard him address the students at chapel services in the morning on several occasions. He was a very interesting speaker, but at that time he was getting up toward his 80s, and he was not as active as he had been over the years before." As to George Whitworth's physical appearance, Calvin mentioned, "He was a man of medium height, well built, with a very good shock of gray hair. He was a vital and intelligent man, very active for his age. He was very much interested still in the success and development of Whitworth College."

Amy fills in, "I also remember Dr. Whitworth. We were always pleased when he came out from Seattle to give us a lecture because his lectures were very instructive and very interesting." Both Amy and Calvin also seem eager to talk about their favorite professors and the classes they were required to take. "Professor Amos T. Fox was a wizard in mathematics," Calvin relates, "and the mathematics department was a great success because all the students were interested in him as well as in the courses which he conducted. We also had Professor Swezey during that period, who was a professor of Greek and Latin, and he was a very able man."

Amy chuckles as she remembers a humorous incident involving Professor Swezey and the young man who would eventually become her husband, one Harry Ryan of the class of 1898. About Harry, Amy says, "He was a practical joker. I remember when we sat in chapel and I sat near the door doing my spelling. I didn't need to study spelling very much because we had spell downs at home and always practiced. But he was sitting across just one seat between us and I had some wooden croquet balls on my desk, and he motioned to me to hand those

croquet balls to him. Of course all the others were in the chapel, the chapel was full of boys and girls sitting there studying."

Amy laughs, "I handed the croquet balls to Harry and he took his hand out from under his desk and let them drop down to the floor, and they rolled clear down the full length to where the professors were sitting up on the platform!" She continues, "Well, that evening Professor Swezey asked me if he could walk home with me. I lived two miles out in the country. And as we walked along, he said, 'Miss Amy, I wish you wouldn't have anything more to do with that Harry Ryan because he'll always play jokes on you as long as you live.' And years after that, when we came back, I went to Professor Swezey and said, 'Do you remember how you advised us not to be married?' And he said, 'Well, life isn't over yet.'"

After a hearty laugh, the interviewees continue relating stories about academic life during their Whitworth days. Calvin remembers, "I took Latin and had the life of Joseph, *Jacobus habuit duodecim filios, quorum unus erat Josephus.* 'Jacob had twelve sons, of which one was Joseph.' That was the first lesson I had in Latin. I didn't take Hebrew, but I took Greek."

"It was required that everyone that attended college had to take spelling," Amy recalled. "Every morning we would enter the chapel and sit down, and everybody would have a spelling book open and we'd all study our spelling. I think it would be a good thing if they had a requirement for spelling today because of the way some of our young people spell." She continued, "We always had a paper edited, and everyone in the college was supposed to contribute articles for it. There were very few who did that, so the ones who edited the paper usually had to do every bit of the writing. I always seemed to be one of the editors. Fred Whitworth, the grandson of Dr. Whitworth, and I were editors of the paper for two years, I think. I still have old Whitworth papers,

the Gleaner and the New Era. We used to name them each year whatever we thought would be an appropriate name."

When asked about the social life on campus, all three interviewees smile and want to talk about it. "We had a very good football team," Calvin remembers, "which, strange to say in those days, beat the University of Washington! I remember seeing that game. We had athletic sports, the high jump and hundred yard dash, 220 yard dash, and we met with the University of Washington and with colleges and high schools in Sumner and Tacoma and so on."

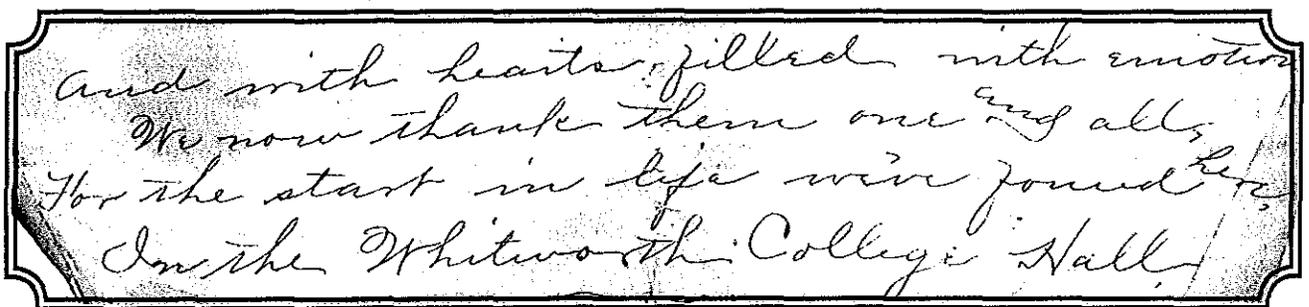
Amy remembers the social life for some of the female students. "One of the things especially interesting to Sumner people was that the girl students were not allowed to leave the college grounds. It was just the size of a whole

block, the campus," she says. "They were not allowed to leave without Miss Mary Edmiston accompanying them. A familiar sight was Miss Edmiston walking up and down the country roads with these girls; these were the boarding students."



Amy Johns, senior picture. Photo courtesy of the Whitworth University Archives.

Last but not least, quiet Archie's thoughts turn once more to the young ladies. He says, "I remember when we used to go to church on Sundays, and we boys would come out first and wait for the girls to come out, and we'd ask to take them home. Sometimes we'd get lucky." Too soon, the conversation draws to a close, and Amy sums up everyone's thoughts when she says, "I'm so happy that we have Whitworth College today. It's a school I'd like to have all of our young people attend." Fifty years ago, and it seems like just yesterday! ☁



"And with hearts filled with emotion ... We now thank them one and all for the start in life we've found here ... in the Whitworth College Hall." From *the Gleaner*, Amy Johns, Editor. Photo courtesy of Whitworth University Archives.