



OLD WESTMINSTER HALL, 1854

# *Westminster College*

FULTON, MISSOURI

*1851-1951*



# *Westminster College*

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*Centennial Historian*

On a September day, 1849, the Presbytery of Missouri was meeting in the Old Auxvasse church, quite unaware that its session that day was foreordained to the most momentous in the history of the Presbyterian church in Missouri. In the course of the deliberations of the Presbytery Rev. W. W. Robertson, pastor of the Fulton church, offered the following resolution:

**RESOLVED:** that the Moderator appoint a committee of three to inquire into the utility and necessity of memorializing the Synod of Missouri, at its next meeting, upon the necessity of establishing within its bounds an institution of learning to be under care of Synod.

The resolution being adopted, the Moderator appointed Reverends W. W. Robertson and W. G. Bell with Elder Preston B. Reed of the Fulton church. No action was taken by the Synod in 1849 or 1850. Dr. Robertson, however, induced the Elders of the Fulton church to organize a college, being convinced that when the Synod finally did act that a "college in being" would have priority. February 18, 1851, as a result of Robertson's insistence, Fulton College was chartered. The first session of the college opened on the first Monday in October, 1851, with Professor Van Doren as its entire faculty. The college building was a two-story frame house standing near where Washington West House now stands.



**H**ARDLY had Fulton College begun to function when the Synod of Missouri formally declared itself in favor of the establishment of an institution of higher learning under its direction and adopted the famous resolution that "We rise up and build". Nine commissioners were appointed to inspect suitable sites with directions to report at the 1852 meeting of Synod held at Fulton. Four towns, Fulton, Richmond, Boonville and St. Charles, offered sites and cash donations. On the first and only ballot thirty-two of the fifty-seven members of Synod present voted for Fulton. Within four months after this synodical action Fulton College ceased to exist and Westminster College took over. The cornerstone of the first college building, Old Westminster Hall, was laid July 4, 1853. Later that same day, the cornerstone of the School for the Deaf was laid by the same officers of the Missouri Masonic Grand Lodge. The first faculty was composed of William Van Doren, A.M.; Rev. Samuel S. Laws, A.M.; Thomas D. Baird, A.M.; and James Smith, Tutor. The first commencement was in June, 1855 and at that time the Trustees elected Rev. Samuel S. Laws as its first President. President Laws quickly assembled an outstanding faculty including M. M. Fisher, Frederick T. Kemper, William Van Doren, I. T. Hughes and T. P. Barbour, an assistant. President Laws embarked on a campaign for endowment through scholarships; four years later his success was proclaimed through the newspapers that the endowment funds of the college amounted to \$102,898.78. President Laws' success was little short of spectacular. Westminster's endowment compared favorably with eastern schools and its enrollment was fourth in all the colleges of the Presbyterian Church.



OF outstanding ability as a minister, teacher and administrator President Laws was of a dominating personality brooking no interference. Coming in conflict with the Trustees over matters of discipline, he resigned in the fall of 1861 just as the War between the States broke out. The faculty fell apart; the scholarships (due to wartime conditions) became practically valueless, the student body diminished until at time there were probably not more than twenty-five in attendance, yet the college carried on during the whole time of the war. The faculty was reduced to two men, the next year increased to five with a sixth man, designated as Tutor. This appointment in 1863 started the career of John Harvey Scott who was to serve as Professor of Mathematics for sixty-five consecutive years, a tenure unequalled in the annals of American colleges. The enrollment in 1862-63 was only 89. The critical financial situation was recognized by the Trustees and they sought an outstanding man to conduct the affairs of the college; Rev. John Montgomery was elected President and served for two years, 1864-65. To add to the woes of the college the Synod of Missouri was outlawed by the United States military forces because of failure of members to take the oath. Thus in 1867 Westminster faced the future without any real endowment; without title to its buildings and campus. For seven years the Missouri Synod existed as an independent body until it joined the Southern Synod.

Dr. Nathan L. Rice was elected President in 1868 and began an energetic campaign to improve the financial position of the college. He established a theological school and, by his ability and personality, attracted increasing numbers of students. Dr. Rice was the first president to be formally inaugurated. Dr. Rice was



# Presidents of Westminster College

<i>Name</i>	<i>Term</i>
REV. SAMUEL S. LAWS . . . . .	1855-1861
REV. JOHN MONTGOMERY . . . . .	1864-1865
DR. NATHAN L. RICE . . . . .	1868-1874
REV. M. M. FISHER . . . . .	1875-1877
REV. CHARLES C. HERSMAN . . . . .	1878-1887
REV. WILLIAM H. MARQUESS . . . . .	1888-1892
DR. JOHN HENRY McCRACKEN . . . . .	1899-1903
REV. DAVID R. KERR . . . . .	1904-1911
REV. CHARLES B. BOVING . . . . .	1912-1914
REV. ELMER E. REED . . . . .	1915-1926
DR. M. E. MELVIN . . . . .	1927-1933
DR. FRANC L. McCLUER . . . . .	1934-1946
REV. WILLIAM W. HALL, JR. . . . .	1947-

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succeeded by Rev. M. M. Fisher who served from 1874-77. Financial troubles grew worse; in fact so little were the devoted professors paid that these seven years were called the "starving time". On President Fisher's resignation the Trustees elected an alumnus,

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Charles C. Hersman, as President of the college and Professor of Greek. During his incumbency the crushing load of debt was largely lifted; the campus and buildings restored to the Trustees; the endowment substantially increased. The enrollment grew and a second effort was made to induce the northern Synod to join in support of the college.

**I**N June, 1887, Dr. Hersman was succeeded by Rev. William H. Marquess, then pastor of the Fulton church. Dr. Marquess attempted to serve as pastor, teach courses in the Bible and act as President. Such labor was too great even for a man of his strength and energy. He was about to resign when a bequest of about \$125,000 from the estate of William Sausser to the college made it desirable that he remain as President until the Sausser estate was settled. Rev. Edward Clifford Gordon was elected Vice-President and Professor of Bible in 1892 and served with distinction for five years. Alarmed over the constantly shrinking enrollment Dr. Gordon resigned in 1897 and for two years Dr. John J. Rice was acting President. In the summer of 1899 the Trustees announced the election of Dr. John Henry McCracken—a layman only twenty-six years old—as the seventh President of the college. While he remained only three years they were momentous ones. He erected two buildings—Science Hall and Re-Union Hall; improved the existing facilities; raised collegiate standards and, most important of all was instrumental in firmly uniting the two Synods in equal ownership and control of the college. Rev. David R. Kerr was the eighth President. Dr. Kerr was a man of a high degree of culture; a devout Christian and a forceful leader and his administration was marked by a decided increase in the student body and a deeply religious attitude in the college.



ON September 9, 1909, calamity befell when Westminster Hall was destroyed by fire. In 1911 the present Westminster Hall was erected. Soon after President Kerr resigned being followed by Rev. Charles Brasee Boving as the ninth President and the third alumnus to be elevated to that position. Boving insisted on the preservation of Westminster ideals and traditions. He built up the enrollment and constantly endeavored to sell Westminster to each of the supporting Synods. However the burden of the current debt forced him to retire and the Board brought in Rev. E. E. Reed as President from Iowa. Dr. Reed was a real financier. He increased the endowment; successfully guided the college through the first World War; erected Swope Chapel and in every way proved himself an able and experienced executive. During the war period Dr. Reed engaged in a money raising campaign under the direction of Rev. M. E. Melvin, more than half a million dollars was obtained. Dr. Reed died in August, 1926.

THE Trustees lost little time in electing Dr. Melvin as the eleventh President. Dr. Melvin directed several other campaigns for endowment with varying success; built the gymnasium, the driveways and landscaped the campus. The depression years of 1930-1-2 forced him to resign and the Trustees turned to another alumnus, another layman, and selected Dr. Franc L. McCluer as the twelfth President. President McCluer brought the college out of debt and kept it so; a most remarkable achievement. He steered the institution through World War II, inaugurated the custom of bringing outstanding men to Westminster to give the Green lectures, climaxing his labors in this direction when President Truman and Right Honorable Winston Churchill visited our campus March 5, 1946, at which time Churchill delivered his "Iron Curtain" speech. On Dr. McCluer's resignation the Trustees were exceedingly fortunate to get Rev. William W. Hall, Jr., to accept the Presidency who now seems destined to go down in the annals as a builder as well as a great administrator.



# Second Century Needs



## ENDOWMENTS

Unrestricted endowment for general

purposes . . . . .	\$1,000-up
Scholarships and Fellowships . . . . .	\$4,000 to \$40,000
Loan Funds . . . . .	\$1,000 to \$100,000
Endowed Professorships . . . . .	\$200,000 to \$400,000
Library Funds . . . . .	\$100 to \$100,000

## BUILDINGS AND EQUIPMENT

*Library (\$300,000) Balance required . . . . .	\$10,000
Additional Housing Units . . . . .	400,000
Student Center . . . . .	200,000
Heating Plant . . . . .	100,000
Fine Arts Building and Auditorium . . . . .	300,000
Administration Building . . . . .	75,000
Additions to Science Building . . . . .	300,000
Infirmery . . . . .	100,000
Library Equipment and Books . . . . .	50,000
Laboratory and Classroom Equipment . . . . .	45,000

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\*Construction on the Library will start early in 1950.

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*More detailed information on any of the educational projects presented in this paper may be secured from President WILLIAM W. HALL, JR.*