

MARSHALL UNIVERSITY

**AN INSTITUTION
COMES OF AGE**

1837-1980

BY

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²²The Marts and Lundy Report is on file in the Smith Papers, Morrow Library.

²³Stewart H. Smith to the Marshall College alumni, September 20, 1956 (letter on file in Smith papers).

8. In Quest of University Status

The agitation for designating Marshall College a "university" dates back to the middle years of the Shawkey administration. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, the Marshall Alumni Association had gone on record in 1927 as favoring "university status" for their alma mater; yet neither President Shawkey nor Allen had manifested any interest in acquiring university standing, and of course, there was no mention of it during the war-time administration of Dr. John D. Williams (1942-1946).

At the close of the first decade of President Smith's tenure, the institution had developed to the extent that the North Central Association (in 1957) classified Marshall as "a university-type institution." It was then that the Anderson-Kreger Report stated that: "The institution has now reached a degree of complexity and educational eminence that this clearly takes it out of the college class."¹

For some time, President Smith had been so overburdened with administrative minutiae that in 1958 he relieved himself of certain onerous executive duties when he appointed Paul Collins as "Assistant to the President." The following year (1959), Smith asked the Board of Education to accord university status to the institution. Buttressing his argument with both the Anderson-Kreger Report and the recommendation of the North Central Association, Dr. Smith declared that: "Unbiased observers . . . will be quick to recognize that it is only through the formal designation of Marshall as a university that the institution . . . can occupy its vital role in the future of higher education in our state."²

President Smith marshalled still other logical reasons as to why the college should be accorded the rank of a university. He contended that university standing would aid in both the recruitment and retention of abler faculty members and that it would also serve to attract a larger number of superior students. It was surmised that the enhanced prestige that would accrue to the institution would tend to lure new industries to the state. There were those who asserted that

university standing would render it easier for the faculty and students to procure financial assistance from both the Federal government and from private philanthropy. Then, too, it was observed that there was not an institution of university rank in the vast stretches of central Appalachia between Lexington, Kentucky, and Lexington, Virginia, or between Athens, Ohio, and Knoxville, Tennessee. A less persuasive argument was that there were more than a hundred universities in twenty states that had a smaller enrollment than did Marshall College.³

In spite of the validity of Smith's plea and the cogency with which he presented his case, the Board of Education, in 1959, rejected the Marshall proposal as premature. President Smith then proceeded to reorganize the administration in compliance with the Anderson-Kreger recommendation. A College of Applied Sciences (embracing the departments of engineering science, medical technology, nursing and military science) was created in 1960, with Dr. Ambrose E. McCaskey as the first dean. Dr. McCaskey had earned a doctorate in hydraulic engineering in the University of Wisconsin, and since 1953 he had been the Chairman of the Department of Engineering Science.

After a lapse of only a year, the Board of Education reconsidered Dr. Smith's overture, and in October, 1960, the board approved the "Marshall Plan." It was from that date until February 20, 1961, that the sectional battle within the state raged with ferocious intensity, and it actually did not abate for several years to come. In fact, the embers of the sectional cauldron had not been extinguished as late as 1968, when young Jay Rockefeller, a newcomer to the state at the time, declared that: "The bickering between West Virginia University and Marshall College is incredible and uncivilized."⁴ (Suppose Rockefeller had been in the state in 1961?)

After the Board of Education lent its support to Marshall, the forces arrayed against the college were both cunning and formidable. The West Virginia University faculty, students and alumni geared for action with no holds barred! The editor of *The Morgantown Post* no doubt reflected the sentiment of the university commu-

nity when he declared that: "Most of the time since the First World War Marshall College has been a disturbing influence on higher education in West Virginia by the recurring fever of empire building which it develops."⁵

Perhaps the most plausible argument employed by West Virginia University as to why Marshall should remain a college was that three reputable educators from outside of the state - Charles Judd (1929), George Strayer (1945), and John Brewton (1955) - had recommended that the state should concentrate all of its resources in one university. The friends of Marshall, however, considered these reports to be both specious and passé.

Dr. Irvin Stewart, a former President of West Virginia University, felt that the state could ill afford to support two universities. The immediate past president of the university, Dr. Elvis Stahr (then Secretary of the Army), fired his verbal salvo in a pontifical pronouncement before a legislative committee when he proclaimed that: "Marshall should be a first-rate college, rather than a fourth-rate university." The interim President of West Virginia University at the time was Clyde Colson, the Dean of the Law School. It was Dean Colson's studied conviction that should the Marshall proposal be executed, "the quality of existing programs of higher education in the state would be seriously affected." Moreover, Colson believed that: "The state colleges would likely feel the consequences most."⁶

Several of the state college presidents shared Dean Colson's apprehension, for Dr. Smith encountered unexpected opposition from some of his colleagues in the State Association of College Presidents. But more threatening still was the unrelenting opposition of Lacy Rice, the President of the Board of Education and a loyal alumnus of West Virginia University. Rice's questionable thesis was that: "If the Board favored Marshall, it might also be disposed to grant university status to still other state-supported colleges should they request it." There were still other opponents who argued that if Marshall were accorded university status it would then aspire to establish professional schools. Smith's categorical denial of this assertion seems ironical today, but at the time he declared emphatically that: "In spite of our reiteration that we have no desire nor aspiration to establish professional schools they continue to repeat that charge. We desire only to be a small regional university."⁷

Dr. Smith said that he was appalled at the strategy employed by the friends of the university. "I never dreamt," he said, "that West Virginia University would stoop to using some of the tactics they employed against us." Smith accused Brooks Cottle, the editor of the *Morgantown Post* of writing a series of editorials which he said were "full of inaccuracies and deliberate distortions." Smith, furthermore, declared that: "Never before have I heard of a state university making such a vicious attack upon a sister institution. All of their claims are false."⁸ The *Huntington Herald-Dispatch* asserted that: "Every strategy and device in the book of politics were used against Marshall." Indeed, President Smith believed that the intemperate language used by certain West Virginia University supporters "alienated several people who might otherwise have opposed us."⁹

President Smith proved to be an articulate and indefatigable spokesman for the partisans of Marshall College. He not only presented the case for Marshall to every State legislator and senator, but also to countless other influential citizens. Nor were his efforts in vain. Smith received staunch support from the Huntington newspapers edited by H. R. "Punk" Pinckard of *The Huntington Herald-Advertiser* and by Raymond Brewster of *The Huntington Herald-Dispatch*. Brewster was especially helpful, since he was a member of the State Board of Education. *The Charleston Daily Mail*, of which Jack Maurice (class of 1935) was an editor, was likewise outspoken in favor of the Marshall position, as was another Marshall alumnus, James Comstock of Richwood, the editor of the *West Virginia Hillbilly*. Dr. Smith also felt deeply indebted to the Huntington Chamber of Commerce, whose legislative committee, under the chairmanship of Kenneth Stettler, engaged in skillful lobbying at the state house.

The emotional voltage generated by the Marshall University bill was as high as any ever recorded in the political history of the state. Alas, it was suggestive of the sectional rancor that had torn the state of Virginia asunder precisely one hundred years earlier (1861). The acrimonious debates in the legislative chambers often engendered more heat than light. Particularly distressing to Dr. Smith was an ill-advised Senate amendment which purported to postpone or to prohibit the establishment of professional schools of law and medicine at Marshall. But even the West Virginia University faction final-

ly realized that such a measure could be counter-productive. Even they felt the Board of Education - and not the politicians - should be allowed to determine educational policy in the state.¹⁰

To what extent "John Barleycorn and the demon rum" may have exerted a pivotal influence in the enactment of the Marshall University bill is still a moot question, since politicians seldom leave written records or tape recordings. The whiskey forces in the northern section of the state, whose leader was Delegate Ned Watson of Marion County, favored a bargain with the delegates from the south, who were sponsoring the Marshall bill. According to some spokesmen, the *quid pro quo* was simple enough; the southern delegates would lend their legislative support to a constitutional proposal to allow a referendum to be placed on the ballot which, if approved, would permit an amendment to the state constitution so as to legalize "liquor by the drink" in places of public accommodation. In turn, the northern legislators would agree to vote for the bill that would change the name of Marshall College to Marshall University.

Kenneth Stettler of Huntington, the chief lobbyist supporting the Marshall University bill, says that there was no formal bargain effected between Cabell-Wayne delegates and the Watson faction that was championing "liquor by the drink." Furthermore, Stettler asserts that he himself vigorously and publicly opposed any such *quid pro quo*. Stettler concedes, however, that since the liquor issue was a factor in the deliberations, there was inevitably some informal jockeying for concessions on the part of some of the delegates.

It is Kenneth Stettler's conviction that the Marshall University bill was enacted - not because of a bargain consummated in the "smoke-filled room" - but, instead, because of the widespread esteem that Marshall College enjoyed throughout the state - even in the distant Panhandle sections.¹¹

After the restrictive amendment, which the Senate had previously approved, was deleted by the House of Delegates, the Marshall bill was enacted by the Senate on February 16, 1961; and on February 20 the House acted accordingly. This was tantamount to victory, since Governor Wally Barron had already stated that he would sign the bill should the legislature enact it.

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When the news reached Huntington, there was much hugging and kissing in the Shawkey Student Union, and there were impromptu snake dances in the streets. Some of the students wanted to delete the word "college" immediately from all signs and letterheads. It seemed that the day of jubilee had finally arrived! Certainly, the reaction in the community was one of unbounded joy! This is how President Smith described his feelings:

I was in my office and didn't know the legislature had passed it. All at once we heard a terrific roar coming across the campus. Hundreds of students . . . came to Old Main. They called me out and asked me to make a speech . . . I couldn't talk; I couldn't form a word. I guess I finally said something. We had worked so hard We had almost given up getting it through the legislature. Then to have it happen was such an emotional shock.¹²

There were people in Morgantown who were also in a state of shock! The editor of the *Dominion News* (Morgantown) conceded that: "The University adherents have definitely lost an important battle. The 'enemy', as it were, has penetrated the first line of defense of the University of West Virginia and is surely equipped to follow up this advantage in every possible way . . . Who was asleep at the switch?" he asked. "Who was supposed to be Paul Revere and warn us?"¹³

A special file cabinet became necessary to contain the congratulatory letters and telegrams that descended upon President Smith's desk during these "days of wine and roses." Messages of good will came from President Kennedy, from numerous college and university presidents, as well as from alumni, state politicians and members of Congress. In fact, hosannas came from every direction - save from Morgantown.¹⁴

Among all of the myriad acclamations that Dr. Smith received, perhaps the most eloquently stated was written by Dr. Roger Tyler, the venerable Rector of Trinity Episcopal Parish in

Huntington. Dr. Tyler's epistle, which in itself is a minor classic, is quoted as follows:

To Stewart Brother Beloved - Oh, you Noble Roman; You've gone and done it again, but this was your most signal triumph. No Marshall University without your consuming passion. Our whole city is proud of you and we stand up to bless your name. More power to you and may God walk by your side . . . We all love you.¹⁵

Probably no alumnus was more elated over the Marshall achievement than was Jim Comstock, who had spilled gallons of printer's ink in the columns of the *Hillbilly* in support of the Marshall petition. Now that the goal had been achieved, Comstock in a state of euphoria was guilty of pardonable exaggeration when he proclaimed that: "No greater psychological lift has been given West Virginia since Abraham Lincoln signed the Statehood Bill."¹⁶

In a mildly cynical, and yet somewhat more realistic vein, the President of Morris Harvey College, Dr. Leonard Riggleman, sent President Smith a challenging note in which he expressed the "hope that the name change won't be an empty gesture, but that you will be able to fulfill the promise involved in it."¹⁷ This was a sober thought that merited reflection by the Marshall staff (and it was a thought that Morris Harvey, in the course of time, would also have reason to ponder.)

One of the memorable events in the history of Marshall was enacted in the new men's gymnasium on March 2, 1961. On this historic occasion, President Smith and Governor Wally Barron were, indeed, the cynosures of all eyes! When the President of the Student Government presented to Dr. Smith an engraved desk plaque as a small token of the students' esteem for him, Smith modestly stated that the recent achievement was "a team victory," but he said he would "be glad to accept the (gift) as coach of the team." Smith hastily reminded his audience, however, that: "There were a great many members on the team." Especially was Dr. Smith profuse in his praise of Kenneth Stettler, the President of the Marshall Foundation, who had

been a very effective liaison between the college and the legislature during the hectic days when the outcome was still very much in doubt.

By now the smoke of battle had cleared. President Smith, savoring the fruits of victory, could afford to be more magnanimous toward his opponents. Paraphrasing President Lincoln, he said he professed "malice toward none but charity toward all." Although feelings ran high," he said, "we must now strive to heal the wounds and work toward greater unity in building a fairer and happier West Virginia."¹⁸

Standing on a dais before a capacity audience of three thousand Marshall partisans, Governor Barron signed into law the act creating a second university in the state of West Virginia. Presenting a solemn and dignified demeanor, the Governor intoned that: "It is my privilege and pleasure to place my signature on legislation to change the name of this splendid educational institution from Marshall College to Marshall University. It is my sincere wish," he said, "that Marshall's future will be resplendent with new pride and progress . . . which I am convinced will aid all of West Virginia."¹⁹

During the days immediately following the victory celebration in the gymnasium, Dr. Smith observed that: "The achievement of university status electrified not only the campus but the entire community." Smith said he was "amazed at the new vigor and enthusiasm that this change has instilled in the students, the staff and the people of a wide area."²⁰ Alan Nevins, the Columbia University historian, once said that there is not anything that will stimulate pride in an institution as much so as the publication of its traditions and achievements. Apparently President Smith subscribed to that theory, for shortly after university status was attained he admonished his administrative staff that the institution should now appoint a scholar to chronicle the history of Marshall University.²¹

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Of course no magic metamorphosis was effected at Marshall University merely because the name of the institution had been changed. It was becoming commonplace throughout the country then for legislatures to designate state colleges as universities, some of which scarcely warranted the title. As Dr. Riggleman had queried: Would Marshall be able to fulfill the promises involved, or would the change in name