

Names in Stone

With this issue of TCNJ Magazine, as a part of our institution's 150th anniversary, we begin a series of articles about the past, present and future of the College. In each issue we will focus on several of our named buildings to highlight their origins and the people for whom they are named.

The Hillwood Inn

When the College relocated from Trenton in stages during the period of 1930 to 1934, it moved to an area of Ewing Township known as Hillwood Lakes, which had taken its name from dammed-up sections of the east branch of Shabakunk Creek that formed two attractive ponds. Some of the land and wooded sections along the creek, which evidently in the 1700s was the site of a water-powered sawmill, had been owned by Clement V. Hill; hence the name Hillwood Lakes.

In early 1921, Hill created "lakes" Ceva and Sylva and, in a grove of white oak and beech trees overlooking Lake Sylva, he built the Inn. It flourished as a local restaurant and inn with dancing on weekends. A large boardwalk along the lake, decorative lamp posts, and fencing gave it a relaxed, appealing atmosphere. The Inn enjoyed a fine reputation, but Prohibition may have limited its success, and maintenance proved costly. In any event, by the time the Trenton Normal School came looking for a new campus site in 1928, Hill was pleased to sell his 100 acres and buildings for \$85,000.

From the opening of classes in 1931 until 1955, when it was replaced by Phelps Hall, the Inn was second only to Green Hall as the focal point of college life. The state enlarged the building and installed a sewage treatment system,

allowing the Inn to serve as the main dining hall and meeting place for the student body. The College bulletin at the time optimistically called it a "temporary dining hall and social center." The wooden building, rambling in character, had an attractive lobby, main dining area, a separate "Princeton Room" for meetings and private dinners, and other offices and living space on the second floor.

The dining area was redecorated regularly for fraternity and sorority dances, usually scheduled from 6:30 to 7:30 P.M. Alumni from the 1940s and 1950s recall that Dean of Students Vernetta Decker made it her personal mission to keep the young men and women from dancing too closely. They also add, however, that she could not be everywhere at once. Students did not have assigned tables, but home games gave male athletes a chance to eat a special training meal together, and to

revel in their temporary celebrity. Just before Thanksgiving break, the women on campus took part in the "Priscilla Procession." They dressed in pilgrim attire, wore white hats, carried lighted candles, and sang as they made their way from their residence halls to the Inn for a special dinner by themselves.

On September 2, 1948, the Inn caught fire, delaying the opening of the fall semester about three weeks. It remained a center of college life another seven years, until growing enrollment and safety concerns forced its replacement in the fall of 1955 by Phelps Hall. It remained in use as a maintenance building for a while, and in 1973 it was bulldozed to make room for a parking lot near Forcina Hall.



Green Hall

It is difficult to imagine Green Hall as it must have been back in the early 1930s. Today one's footsteps echo down long, wide corridors, off of which dozens of doors lead to offices in which carpets muffle the planning, meeting, analyzing, and decision making that administrators do. A few students come and go, but mostly, it's an island of calm in a sea of activity.

Seventy years ago Green Hall was almost the whole sea. When it opened for classes in September 1931, it was the first new building on the new campus of the College. Nearly everything academic that was happening on campus happened in Green Hall. Most of the classrooms were there: the science labs, art studio, business, and history classes met there; both administrative and faculty offices had space there, along with a museum, a bank, school store, supply rooms, and separate rooms for men and women commuting students. Lockers lined the walls as in any school in the country, and there surely was a terrific coming and going all day long.

Green Hall is a large (290-by-90-foot) building, made to last, and in spite of clanking radiators and the occasional over or underheating, has been through numerous remodelings and



reorganizations over the years. The transition from all-purpose college building to administrative and communications headquarters has been essentially smooth, providing a reliable architectural anchor for an increasingly diverse community.

James M. Green, the pioneer educator for whom the building is named, had himself attended the Normal School, graduating in 1870 and going on to teach, serve as a principal, attend Dickinson College, and earn a doctorate at Illinois Wesleyan. He returned to New Jersey and served as principal of the Normal School from 1889 to 1917.

He arrived at a time when enrollment in public schools was rising rapidly, along with demand for teachers. High schools were not yet common, but all the trends suggested a need for many more well-trained teachers. At the time, young women and a few men were entering the Normal School at age 17, staying two years and going off to teach. At age 21, Green himself already had two years of teaching and was serving as a school principal while enrolled at Dickinson College.

Green brought an optimism and idealism to his alma mater that allowed him, over his 28 years as principal, to lift it into the position of producing the best-prepared teachers of any institution in the state. Over time, he eliminated

the two-year track for graduation, tightened admission standards, made certification more demanding, improved student living conditions, added courses, and campaigned endlessly with the state government for money to build such basics as an assembly hall, science labs, and gymnasium. He kept close watch on what was happening in other states, arguing New Jersey's commercial future was directly related to the quality of its public school teachers. He was especially proud of creating an alumni association and watching it develop as an advocate for the school and contributor to its programs.

Green's retirement due to illness in 1917 brought an outpouring of appreciation, none of it more well-informed than these words from his faculty: "Resolved that the profession he so modestly but impressively influenced, will miss the cooperation of a prudent and progressive leader, distinguished for cheerful, patient industry and heroic devotion to duty."

Roscoe L. West Library

The second academic building to be occupied on the new campus was the library, constructed in 1931 and opened for use in February 1932. A classical brick building in the Georgian style, it offered a grand, two-story general reading room on the main floor, along with a reference reading room, a children's literature room, and three classrooms. When it opened, the College owned only about 18,400 volumes, 20 percent of the intended capacity of the new building. Upstairs and toward the back were more classrooms, seminar rooms, offices for the English and social studies departments, and for *The Signal*.

The main reading room has remained largely in its original condition for 72 years, including the 1910 mural by Richard Blossom Farley, "The Peace Council of New Jersey and the Indians, 1858." It had been brought from the Normal School's auditorium in Trenton to a new position of honor in the library.

Under the leadership of Felix Hirsch, professor of history and, from 1955 to 1972, the librarian, an extensive remodeling took place in 1960–61,



adding stacks in the basement and using classrooms for library purposes. In 1968 a large modern annex was completed that about doubled the building's original size and added air conditioning.

When Roscoe L. West, the first person to hold office as president of the College, and the man who had supervised the rapid development of the Ewing Township campus, retired in 1957, the library was named for him. His 27-year presidency was extraordinary in terms of both physical and academic change. He was a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Harvard who had taught in Maine and Massachusetts before becoming director of elementary schools in Trenton. This led to being named director of teacher training for the entire state, which made him responsible for planning the new buildings that were to be called the New Jersey State Teachers College at Trenton.

When he arrived, the campus was little more than patches of woods and meadows. When he retired, it occupied 185 acres. His administration built five residence halls, a power plant, six other major buildings, and exceptional athletic facilities. He promoted and oversaw the transition to a four-year curriculum, initiated summer and graduate programs, added the nursing school, and guided the College as it struggled through World War II, and with issues of racial discrimination.

Intensely devoted to the College and its students, he had close personal friendships with many of the faculty, often playing enthusiastic games of golf, tennis, and bridge with them. While most people who could do so vacationed at the shore, West, who lived in Trenton, preferred staying in house close to the campus, where he loved to picnic with his family on pleasant summer days.

Readers with personal memories of campus buildings are invited to submit them for possible publication to The Editor, TCNJ Magazine, Green Hall 202, The College of New Jersey, PO Box 7718, Ewing, NJ 08628-0718.

Kendall Hall

Balancing the new library at the opposite end of the lawn in front of Green Hall was a structure designed to provide a theater and assembly hall for the student body as well as an academic home for the speech and music departments. Dedicated with considerable pomp in June, 1932, it opened that fall with two auditoriums: a main one seating 1,063, and a smaller one seating 182. Music practice rooms, two classrooms, offices, and a costume shop completed the interior space.

By 1963, the College gave the interior a general facelift, adding a modern stage lighting system and new drapes to enhance the auditorium's suitability for the many major events held each year. Then, in 1988, the danger from asbestos used in the original building forced closure of the entire structure. During the four years it took to remove the hazard and complete a major renovation, the Kendall Hall faculty moved to three trailers parked between Packer Hall and Brower Student Center. The theater program relocated to Phelps Hall, which had been closed as other buildings took over its functions. Resurrected temporarily, Phelps became a theater by painting the interior black and buying 100 pink plastic



chairs, some of which are still gathering dust in the Kendall Hall basement.

The asbestos crisis provided the opportunity to make major improvements in Kendall. When it reopened in 1992, a complete interior redesign had produced space for a new studio for radio station WTSR, a television studio, and improved seating in the main auditorium. Today it houses the Department of Communication Studies and is used for all stage events drawing larger audiences.

Kendall Hall was the scene of one of the most puzzling and troubling incidents ever to occur at the College. On Sunday morning, September 4, 1977, a campus security officer discovered the body of a severely beaten, murdered young graduate student, Sigrid Stevenson, wrapped in a heavy cloth next to a piano on the main stage. She apparently had just returned from a hitch-hiking trip to Canada and New England and was preparing to resume her music studies at the College. The crime never was solved.

Calvin N. Kendall had served from 1911 to 1921 as state commissioner of education. Governor Woodrow Wilson had appointed him after the legislature agreed to centralize control of the entire state education system under a governor's appointee. A widely known and respected figure in public education, Kendall had been a teacher, a high

school principal, and a superintendent of schools in Jackson, MI; New Haven, CT; and Indianapolis, IN, before taking on the entire New Jersey system—for what was then the attractive sum of \$10,000 per year. During his tenure, he became known for welding what had been a patchwork of local institutions into a solid state system, which remained under the firm control of Trenton until the 1970s. He had been in office for a decade when he resigned due to illness and died of kidney disease in 1921.



Packer Hall

In 1931, the state legislature appropriated \$250,000 to build a health and physical education building. When occupied two years later, it contained two small gymnasiums divided by rolling doors. Other facilities included recreation rooms, a clinic, an exercise room, a 25-yard, four-lane swimming pool with a spectator balcony, lockers for 1,000 students, showers, and team rooms.

At the opening ceremony in January 1933, some informal student exercises were led by the woman for whom the building later would be named, Marianna G. Packer. Packer, a Wellesley College and Columbia University graduate, had taught health and physical education in the Montclair schools. State Commissioner of Education Calvin Kendall (see Kendall Hall, page 33) had tapped her to be assistant director of the state department overseeing what was then a new state physical education curriculum. After three years in that post, she returned to Montclair, but in 1923 joined the staff at the Normal School in Trenton as head of the Department of Physical Education and Hygiene.



It is fair to say, as the late Roy Van Ness '43, director of athletics from 1964 to 1987, wrote many years later, that Packer was the "founder" of the College's physical education program, now recognized as one of the very best in the nation. Van Ness said she was "always a strict task master. Anyone coming in contact with her was inspired and knew that she represented something worthwhile in education. She lived the role and never let you down. Dedication to your work is not always unique in itself; however, dedication, capability, vision, organization, and elegance are indeed unique."

Others who knew her recall a tall, imposing woman with perfect posture, who often wore a hat and white gloves, and chided the young men who tried to get away without wearing a coat and tie to a Saturday morning class because they had a game in the afternoon.

By the time the new building was dedicated, Packer had held a variety of positions at the College, including assistant principal. By 1930 she headed the renamed Department of Health and Physical Education and in 1935 was given the title of "professor." In 1945 she retired, took up painting, and exhibited some of her work at the College.

Marianna Packer helps lay the cornerstone for an addition to the building in 1963.



In the face of constantly rising enrollment, the inadequacy of the athletic facility had been evident for many years. Finally, in 1960, a major addition provided a new dance studio, classrooms, a physical therapy room, fitness laboratory, a health service area, offices for faculty and staff, and a large additional gymnasium at the south end. It was at the cornerstone laying on Homecoming Weekend in May 1963 that Packer saw her name added to the building.

After the Aquatic Center was completed in 1985, it became apparent that large numbers of students wanted more recreational and intramural opportunities. This culminated in yet another addition to Packer Hall. Work was set to begin in 1993, but problems with foundation columns and asbestos from the original structure stalled construction for two years, while the entire lower half was gutted and renovated. When finally completed in 1997, this latest addition to Packer included two new team rooms, a general locker room, officials room, athletic weight room, physical enhancement center, health care center, equipment laundering facility, and a student lounge.

Learning to teach 'properly'

"Although taking classes in college was interesting, the institution best prepared me for the teacher field through the junior and senior practicum. The College made sure that we were placed in an actual classroom and placed with excellent teachers who in many ways became our role models. Each week we arrived at the elementary school, the teacher would let us do more and more work in the classroom. By the end of senior year, all of the undergraduates were teaching whole lessons in the classroom. This was how I actually learned to teach."

(Two years after graduation, I married and was teaching in Union Township, and became pregnant.)

"Today it is not uncommon for teachers to stay in the classroom until the day before their baby is due. Back in the early 1950s, this was certainly not the case. I remember going to school excitedly on a Monday morning and stopping into the principal's office on my way to class to announce the good news. The principal smiled at me; however, I was out by Friday. In those days, it was not considered proper to teach while you were pregnant."

Rhoda Gavornik '47

As pictured in their yearbooks, from left to right: Rhoda Gavornik '47, Ariel "Al" Riviera '67, Virginia Alverson Laird '68

Changing course

"During my first two years at Trenton State College, I was a music major. Performance-wise, I was pretty good, but when it came to fundamental aspects such as theory, I was lacking. Many of the other students in the music department could run rings around me when it came to hearing music and writing it down on the spot. I also remember one of my professors pressuring me about how I was not serious about playing the clarinet as my main instrument. I had never played the clarinet and came into the music department because I could play the saxophone, but sax was not considered an orchestra instrument and the clarinet was."

"During my Sophomore Professional Experience, I was assigned to teach at a school for trainable retarded students. At the time, I was playing guitar in a rock band and asked the school administrator if we could play for the school's dance. When I saw how these types of kids reacted to music, I was really amazed.... The next day I went to Green Hall and changed my major from music to special education."

Ariel "Al" Riviera '67



Awakening a social conscience

"I began my education at Trenton State College in 1964, 10 years after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, years that would drastically change my views on life and learning. The most memorable experience from my years at the College involves the times themselves. The Civil Rights movement, Viet Nam, and the assassination of Dr. King all shaped my, and many of my peers', lives. It was a time when we were encouraged to have a social conscience by professors such as Dr. Murdock. Mr. Melman, a language and communications professor, always challenged us to question and apply the knowledge we gained, not simply to regurgitate information. This is a technique that I continue to use in my classroom to this day.... Although primarily a teachers college, by including liberal arts courses such as art, music, comparative religion, and philosophy, I greatly expanded my horizons, benefiting me professionally and personally."

Virginia Alverson Laird '68

