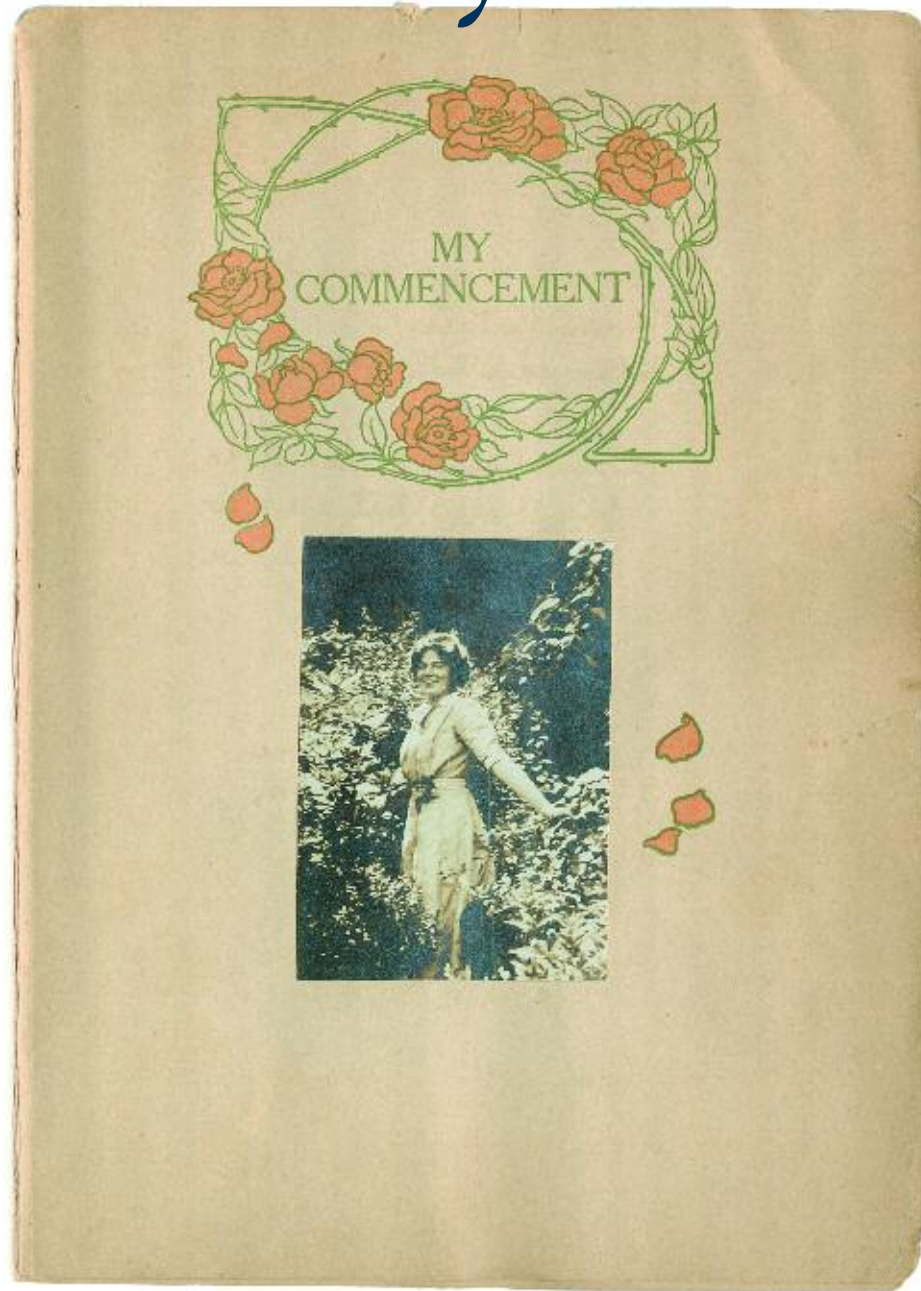


The way it was



in 1910

by Bruce B. VanDusen

Edith Swan Cooper was about to turn 17 when she was given a copy of *My Commencement*, a book published by Dodd, Mead and Company in New York, in which students could record the memories associated with their final weeks in school.

An attractive, dark-haired, popular girl from a professional Trenton family, her father was a successful physician. Edith was graduating from the New Jersey State Model School in June of 1910. She had been attending the school, located just a few blocks from her home on Perry Street, since the age of six and was graduating after 11 years. She was an only child, an older brother having been killed before she was born in a collision with a horse-drawn coal wagon as he rode a bike to school. She was an excellent writer for her age and a self-confident observer of her school, her fellow students, and her teachers.

The Model School was the demonstration school operated by the New Jersey State Normal School at Trenton. While it was designed to be a laboratory in which Normal School students observed and practiced the art of teaching, it also was a first-rate school with a full program of courses and activities. It attracted children from in and around Trenton whose parents wanted a modern, quality education for their offspring, and who were prepared to make the day student tuition payments of \$26 to \$58 per year (depending on the grade level) that made the school self-supporting.

My Commencement offered space and an organizational outline, making it easy for a student to record a personal memoir of one's senior year. But Edith, whose graceful penmanship seems to have reflected a respect for her unknown reader and her dedication to artful narrative, went well beyond what Dodd, Mead and Company anticipated. She included essays by her classmates (copied in her own hand), original poetry about faculty and friends, student and Trenton newspaper clippings, student play programs, and dozens of photographs that capture the innocence of youth and the aspirations of faculty mentors.

Following her graduation from the Model School, Edith, who lived at 606 Perry Street, just a short walk from the Clinton Avenue campus, elected to continue her education at the Normal School. It is not clear whether she actually planned to be a teacher, but she was a good athlete (basketball and track) and graduated in the winter of 1914 with a specialty in physical training. While she kept no "Commencement" book during her college years, occasional references to her do appear in the monthly *Signal*, of which she was editor-in-chief from September 1911 to January 1912.

Edith completed her studies at the Normal School in 1914, graduating in January of that year. She never did become a public school teacher, but instead used her college "specialty" in physical training in a staff position at The Young Women's Christian Association of Trenton, which provided a variety of recreational and leadership programs.

By sharing portions of Edith's record of her senior year and beyond, we hope to provide a glimpse at the early life of our school.

The academic program

In her senior year at the Model School, Edith was taking the following courses: English (four periods a week), German (three periods), Advanced Algebra (three), Virgil (six), Latin Composition (three), advanced German (three), public speaking (one). Her highest grades were in English, where she averaged 95 and 93; her lowest were in algebra, 80 and 79. Overall she had an 88 average her first term, and an 87 for the second.

She apparently enjoyed Latin, for this item appeared in *The Signal* her senior year:

We, Seniors, feel highly honored at having had in morning exercise essays delivered by two of our number, Miss Hamlen and Miss Cooper, both of whom have received personal commendation for their work by Dr. Green. Miss Hamlen's essay, "Arithmetic Methods, Past and Present," was printed in one of Trenton's daily papers, and Miss Cooper's, "Why Study Latin?" is soon to follow it.

Public events of the time often were an occasion for displays of literary or musical achievement, and the June 15, 1910 Commencement of the State Model School certainly was typical. On the program, in addition to the awarding of diplomas and address by a visiting Princeton University academic, were three student orations, three recitations of poetry, seven musical numbers, and three student essay readings. The latter included one by Edith

Editor's note: It was perhaps 10 years ago that the brother of alumna **Maria Calderone Kenner '83**, while cleaning up some trash in Lawrence Township, found Edith's *My Commencement* and some related papers and sent them to his sister in Kentucky. When TCNJ's Sesquicentennial rolled around, she sent them back to us, where they remain safely in our library archives and have formed the basis for this article.



But Edith, whose graceful penmanship seems to have reflected a respect for her unknown reader and her dedication to artful narrative...

Cooper entitled "My Book World," in which Edith dealt with the many rewards of reading classic works, including the Bible.

While Edith clearly enjoyed reading and writing, not all her classmates found "literature" all that rewarding. Here is another item from *The Signal*, referring to the time-honored efforts by students to ease their burden by dropping a troublesome course. Published anonymously, the poem borrows from a sonnet by Milton. The names refer to two veteran professors: Wandell B. Secor, a math teacher and academic supervisor, and Charles Austin, an apparently strict teacher of English literature and Latin.

On Our Literature Class

When we consider how our days are spent
In writing foolish themes on this and that,
On which Professor Austin flunks us flat
We long to give our outraged feelings vent.
To 'Fessor Secor's office we have bent
Our footsteps: there uneasily we sat
To drop our English was what we were at.
Professor Austin, quickly, to prevent
That murmur, stern replies: "The school requires
Each Senior must have eighty points to pass;
The English course each one must take in full."

Student life

Edith's *My Commencement* contains numerous photos of her teachers, mostly women and nearly all of them with an upswept hairdo, secured at the back with pins or a comb. All wore ankle-length dresses or skirts and some wore large hats with decorative bows or artificial flowers. Both men and schoolboys generally appeared in suits with three-button coats, white shirts with stiff collars, and dark neckties.

Clearly the students were being trained to dress conservatively and formally as they prepared for the day when they would stand before a classroom, serving as a model of proper dress and decorum. Under teacher supervision, the girls rehearsed for their commencement exercises to make sure when they sat, their ankles remained invisible. And even when she dressed for basketball or a relay race, Edith and her friends were fully concealed in bloomers and long stockings.

We don't learn much directly from Edith about what went on in class, but clippings from *The Signal* of 1909-1910 and original poetry and skits recorded in her book give us clues to some faculty behavior. From *The Signal*:

Since the last issue of *The Signal* the following new records have been made by various members of the faculty:

Prof. Austin gave a literature mark over 80.

Prof. Secor refrained from cracking a joke in algebra class for two straight recitations.

Miss Trapp returned a test to the class three weeks after it was given.

Edith wrote in her book under a photo of her coach:

Miss Wayman, the one who was the leader of so many of our good times our basketball coach and umpire, gym instructor, and confidante, all combined in one adorable person.

Social life at the Model School was geared to a student's affiliation with clubs and "societies." In the 1930s and '40s, these morphed into sororities and fraternities, but at the turn of the century, before the radio and telephone were omnipresent, they were an integral part of school life. Membership involved joining with friends in intellectual pursuits such as creative writing, public speaking, debate, music, and dramatics. Arguomuthos, Ionian Literary Society, Thencanic Society, Philomathean, and others met regularly, held contests among themselves, mounted an annual show of some sort, and challenged other societies to joint competitions.

Edith, a "Philo," entered her stories and essays in competitions to bring honor and prestige to her literary society. On "Class Day" in her senior year, she regaled those attending with an 18-verse dissection of the girls in her class. Here's a sample:

The girl over there so quiet and sweet
Is our Meta Webber so nice and neat.
Altho she never makes a noise,
She goes to proms with Lawrenceville boys.

Her book records a number of social events off campus as well. The senior end-of-the-year party on June 1, 1910, probably was typical: a picnic at the Lawrenceville home of classmate Marguerite Reeves and chaperoned by two faculty members. Everyone went by car, played baseball (the girls beat the boys, 7-4) and several other games. Edith noted in her book:

"... (The) relay race ended disastrously for me sprained ankle cherries sandwiches obstacle races between the girls and boys Ye invalid who was carried around in a chair the big fire toasted marshmallows songs and cheers around the fire home in autos."

Those "cheers around the fire" certainly would have included the Class of 1910's official "yell," which Edith quotes: "Hale-ke-nuk, ke-neek, ke-nen / Model, Model, 1910!" (It was to be repeated three times.) Also, possibly, this all-purpose fight song, sung to the tune of "School Days":

State Schools, State Schools,
dear old brave old State Schools,
Watch them as they quickly play;
They will win the game today;
So come let us give a hearty cheer;
Of losing you bet we have no fear;
We're proud as can be of the
State Schools Team;
Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!



"Of all the swans,
none sings so sweet
as Edith Swan
on Perry Street."

Of special note in Edith's book were these from the official list: "Most popular boy Norman T. Rogers." "Most popular girl Edith S. Cooper." "Adonis Norman T. Rogers." "Worst boy fussers (flirts) Edith Cooper and Helen Hewitt." "Most romantic Edith S. Cooper."

Of course it wouldn't be a senior class without a list of superlatives. Of special note in Edith's book were these from the official list: "Most popular boy Norman T. Rogers." "Most popular girl Edith S. Cooper." "Adonis Norman T. Rogers." "Worst boy fussers (flirts) Edith Cooper and Helen Hewitt." "Most romantic Edith S. Cooper."

The name of Norman Rogers surfaces regularly in *My Commencement* and, in a single poetic note in the book, above her signature, classmate Sara de Cou revealed: "Oh! Edie was a dear of girls / With grey-green eyes and chestnut curls. / She did a lad named Norman love / And they were just like two young doves." For his part, Norman signed Edith's book with this thought: "Of all the swans, none sings so sweet as Edith Swan on Perry Street." Norman was president of the Model School Class of 1910, but he seems to have passed out of her personal life after graduation.

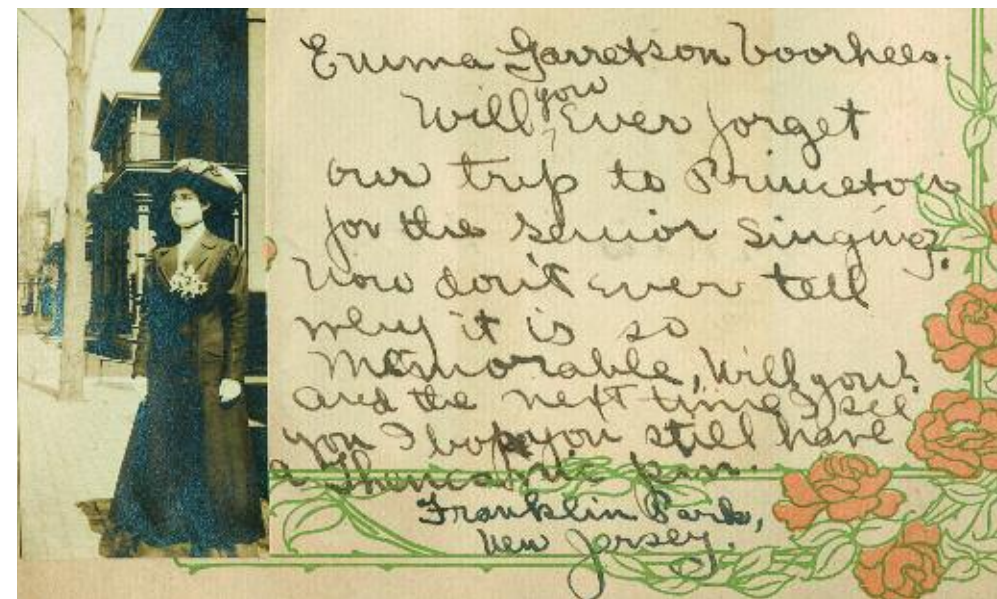
College and beyond

Many of Edith's friends went off to college following their Model School experience. One girl, writing a note in Edith's book, expressed the hope they both would be attending Wellesley College near Boston. Other friends went off to Swarthmore, Vassar, Mount Holyoke, Georgetown College, Lafayette, and Princeton. Perhaps because her father had died in 1906, leaving her mother alone, or perhaps for financial reasons, Edith remained in Trenton, and completed her education in the Normal School. There she was captain of the basketball team, a staff writer for *The Signal*, and president of her senior class of 1914. The class poet, Ellen Griffenberg, gave her this send-off in the pages of the student paper:

*Here's to our president, vigorous and merry,
With eyes that sparkle, with lips like the cherry;
Wholesome in body, in mind and in soul,
Fame she will find in the athlete's goal.*

As she was leaving the Normal School, Edith became involved with the Alumni Association that had been organized many years before. Notes penned into her memory book reveal she took part in the 22nd annual meeting of the association in 1910. In 1920 she was on the planning committee for the 10th reunion of her Model School Class of 1910, and kept a list of those who joined her at their 40th reunion in 1950 and the 50th reunion in 1960.

After college, Edith secured a position with the Trenton YWCA, which enabled her to attend a regional conference of YWCA and YWCA professionals at Lake Champlain in upstate New York. It was there she met a young YWCA staffer named Lafayette Horner. "Fay," as he



The family picture above shows Lafayette Horner, Jr., Edith Swan Cooper Horner, Edward 5, David 7, Robert 4, John 6.

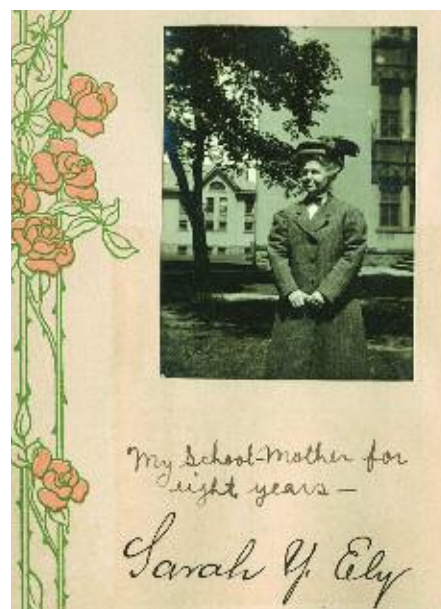
was known, had just returned from service with the U.S. Army in World War I, where he was one of many soldiers caught in mustard gas attacks on the battlefields of France. The two married in 1921, moved into her widowed mother's home at 106 N. Hermitage Avenue, where they raised four sons. Her husband had taken a state government job dealing with inheritance taxes and was well known as an amateur pianist until he died in 1953. Their eldest son, Edward, graduated from the College in 1952, worked as a district director of the YMCA for over 30 years and is now retired in Cleveland, OH. The other sons also have retired, David in Lambertville; John in Winter Springs, FL; and Robert in The Woodlands, TX.

Three years after Fay died, Edith Horner married a second time to Henry Johnson, a retired Baptist minister. They moved to Hopewell Borough, where they lived for 10 years before he died in 1966. It was during the Hopewell years that Edith was involved in an auto accident that left a young child permanently injured and left Edith seriously traumatized as well. Following Rev. Johnson's death, she moved into the Baptist Home of Riverton where she often entertained her fellow seniors on the piano until she died in 1988 at age 95. She was survived by her four sons, 11 grandchildren, and a lifelong association with the school that became The College of New Jersey.

Bruce B. VanDusen is Editor of TCNJ Magazine.



Mrs. Horner at the far left, with some of "the girls" at the Centennial Celebration, 1960.



Sarah Y. Ely, who served the Normal School for 47 years and gave her name to a residential hall on the Ewing campus, was Edith's "school-mother" for eight years.