



CELEBRATING OUR SESQUICENTENNIAL

The Years of Change

1910 | 1960

Palmer Eide, professor of art, 1931-1971.

By 1917, Augustana College had called the city of Canton, S.D., home for more than three decades. It appeared that, after a tumultuous beginning that included four major geographical moves in 24 years, the College was finally beginning to establish roots.

That's how it appeared, anyway.

Twenty-five miles to the north in Sioux Falls, city and business leaders were lobbying hard for Augustana to relocate once again. Sioux Falls, and the College, could make an unstoppable team, city leaders argued. The city's economy could benefit from the student population and the College, they contended, would certainly increase enrollment and attract even better faculty members in a growing metropolitan area.

By 1918, church leaders had been persuaded. They made the decision to merge Augustana College in Canton with the Lutheran Normal School in Sioux Falls under the name Augustana College and Normal School (ACNS).

Following the move, Rev. Dr. Charles Orin Solberg was named Augustana's 11th president in 1920. He took office with a fierce determination to expand the liberal arts curriculum of the College and improve the quality of the faculty.

"He was really one of the decisive individuals who changed the whole flavor of the curriculum – he really made it a liberal arts school," said Dr. Lynwood Oyos, professor emeritus of history. "At that time, some classes were still taught in Norwegian. He was against that – he believed everyone should be speaking and learning in English."

"Solberg really understood what a liberal arts college needed to be; what it needed to offer. He was responsible for bringing Pat Blegen to campus," Oyos said, referring to the intellectual and somewhat eccentric Dr. Helmer (Pat) Blegen, arguably among the most talented foreign language professors in Augustana's history. In addition to his classroom teaching, Blegen was also known for engaging community members in lively discussions on current events and world affairs over coffee and cigars at cafes in downtown Sioux Falls.

By 1927, the same year Blegen arrived, the wheels behind Solberg's ideas were in motion.

Music programs were growing in size and intensity. Dr. Carl Youngdahl had founded the Augustana Concert Choir and, in 1922, Augustana helped to create the South Dakota Symphony Orchestra. The College had joined the South Dakota Intercollegiate Conference in athletics, became known as the "Vikings," and chose blue and gold as the official school colors.

The first homecoming (known as "Homecoming" at the time) was held in 1924; three



President Granskou (seated) assists with freshman registration in 1940.



The 1926 senior class of Augustana College and Normal School.

years later the first baseball and football teams were formally organized. And in 1929, students, alumni and community members celebrated homecoming as the first official Viking Day.

In 1928, after a successful presidency marked with many achievements, Solberg accepted a position at Chicago Lutheran School and the College named Dr. H.J. Glenn interim president.

Changing Tides

The advancements of the early and mid-1920s shadowed in comparison to the gloom

and doom that followed the historic collapse of the stock market on October 29, 1929 – four days after Dr. Ove J.H. Preus was installed as Augustana's 13th president.

The unprecedented economic spiral that followed the stock market crash proved especially challenging for Augustana. Enrollment was a concern, investments tanked and drought and insect plagues attacked agribusiness owners with a vengeance.

"From 1930 to 1933, Augustana was really on the ropes. Faculty members were cashing in their insurance policies to help finance the

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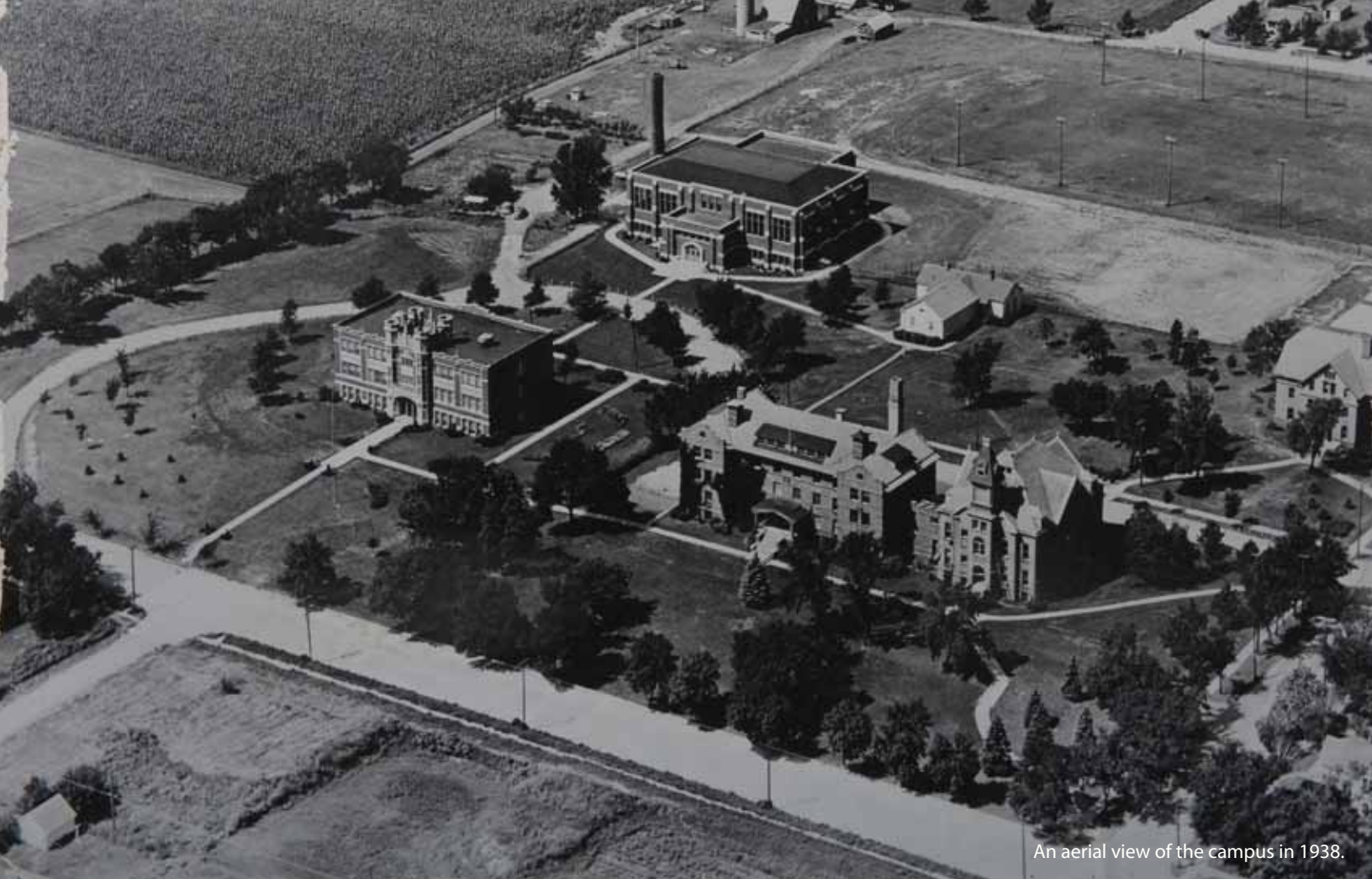
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An aerial view of the campus in 1938.

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College,” Oynos said.

Despite the economic conditions, life at Augustana did go on. The first night football game was played on campus in 1930 and the following year, legendary football coach Lefty Olson arrived to help build an athletic program.

1931 also marked the year that the infamous art professor Palmer Eide arrived on campus.

“I remember Paulie [Eide’s nickname] saying, ‘I don’t believe in hot-house art – selling something to someone just to display in their home or office.’ He believed that only limited the number of people who could enjoy the art. It’s why he preferred the liturgical arts,” Oynos said.

Music programs continued to flourish and by 1932 – the year Clemens Granskou was installed as Augustana’s 14th president – the College’s music organizations had increased to include a string quartet, 40-member band, 75-member orchestra and a 51-voice choir.

In 1938, the faculty organized itself into three divisions: Humanities, Social Science and Natural Science and later that year, an aviation minor was added to the curriculum,

directed by physics professor Dr. Albert Hoyem.

“Granskou did a splendid job keeping things together during the Depression,” Oynos said.

After Granskou accepted the presidency at St. Olaf College, Dr. Lawrence Stavig was named president in 1943, during the heart of WWII.

“1943 was really a crisis year. Things were coming to a head in Europe and the draft was in full force. Early on, students at Augustana had signed a pledge not to fight in the war overseas. But, when Pearl Harbor happened, everything changed,” Oynos said.

The war took its toll on Augustana. By March 1943, enrollment had dropped by more than 200 to 339 students and that fall, the College made the decision to drop its football program due to declining male enrollment. All 29 members of the previous year’s championship squad were in military service. Even Coach Lefty Olson enlisted in the U.S. Navy, where he became an instructor in hand-to-hand combat.

Following the war, things changed dramatically.

“Thanks to the GI Bill, veterans, in a sense,

flooded the campus,” Oynos said.

To accommodate the rapidly increasing enrollment, the College moved barracks from the Sioux Falls Air Base to campus to use for classrooms, offices and a cafeteria.

“My first office here was in a barracks building,” said Oynos. “I shared the space with Lefty Olson.”

Oynos said Stavig did a good job helping the College navigate through the wartime and post-war challenges. His “do-it-yourself” approach helped get things done.

“He definitely ran the show himself. I remember him telling me that he wanted me to teach a course in ancient history. He said, ‘don’t water it down just because you’re at a Christian school.’”

From the late 1940s to the early 1960s, the also campus took shape through various construction projects:

- 1948: An “H-shaped” barracks was moved to the east side of campus and became known as the Science Building.
- 1950: Tuve Residence Hall opened.
- 1955: Mikkelsen Library was dedicated.
- 1956: Solberg Residence Hall opened.
- 1959: Morrison Commons opened.
- 1964: Bergsaker Residence Hall opened.

1. On the left, Inman Hesla, '47, is congratulated by Rev. Henry Solem, the first person to be awarded a Bachelor of Arts degree by Augustana College in Canton, Dakota Territory, 1888. 2. In 1940, students model new Augustana Band uniforms. 3. Women’s basketball in 1925. 4. The cafeteria was located in one of the barracks which was converted to an art building when Morrison Commons was opened in 1959. 5. Professor Clara Lee’s speech class in Old Main during the 1950’s. 6. The Huddle first opened in the basement of the gymnasium-chapel-auditorium in 1939. 7. Ray Billie, class of 1954, takes on a Jackrabbit defender in 1953. 8. The first level of the gymnasium-chapel nears completion in 1932.