

Eisenhower College 1960 - 1982

In the early 1960's the Men's Coffee Hour was very active at First Presbyterian. Sunday School was held before church and this was the ideal time for men to gather for discussion and coffee. At this time baby-boomers were reaching college age (and with an increasing proportion wishing to acquire a college education) academic institutions were being stretched to accommodate them. Scott Skinner, MD, a church member began thinking of the possibility of a college in Seneca Falls.

Along with John Rosenkrans and Rev Kenneth Holmstrup he presented the idea of a small undergraduate, coeducation church-related college at a coffee hour in 1961. At the time there was no Presbyterian related college in New York State or in New England. The idea was for a college that would cater to a wide range of students, not just the academically gifted nor just to Presbyterians.

To bring the idea to fruition required more than enthusiasm, financing loomed large. A name that would bring recognition and hopefully generous donations had to be considered, thus the name Eisenhower College. Not only was Dwight David Eisenhower a war hero, President of the United State for 2 terms, he was also Presbyterian. Without receiving the absolute support from Eisenhower but with the support of local (Legislators, Congressmen, and Senator) Skinner and Rosenkrans proceeded to present a resolution to the Geneva-Lyons Presbyter which was accepted with enthusiasm and placed on the New York Synod docket in June 1962.

670 Presbyterian pastors across New York State were surveyed to help establish the need for a Presbyterian-related college. Of the 338 replies only 7 were negative.

A special meeting of the membership of First Presbyterian was called after the 11:00 am service on March 4, 1962 to consider a pledge to support the building of a college. Elder Philip Olmsted made the proposal, Harold Sanderson Seconded. After an hour of discussion Charles Hall called for a vote on the resolution, which read: "Resolved that the First Presbyterian Society and Church of Seneca Falls pledge the sum of one hundred thousand (\$100,000) dollars to be used solely for the construction of a New York Synod Affiliated liberal arts college for the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, to be situated in the town of Seneca Falls, New York, said pledge to be contingent upon the prior securing of sufficient funds by July 1, 1965 from other sources to ensure the completion of the planned project." The vote was 114 in favor and 32 against. The funds from an endowment fund were the first committed to the college.

Since January 1962 a planning group of community leaders met regularly. Those from First Presbyterian were, Scott Skinner; MD, John Rosenkrans; Charles Hall, DVM; Philip Olmsted; Frederick Huntington; Duane Snyder; Robert Morris, DVM; Paul Foote, MD; Rev Kenneth Holmstrup. Others of the 18 members were from Seneca County. The group incorporated May 10, 1962 empowering them to plan for chartering a College. A meeting with President Eisenhower's brother, Milton, on April 5, 1962 resulted in President Eisenhower consent to use his name. Both Milton and Dwight Eisenhower had been in academics and they approved the proposed compact curriculum stressing world affairs and a trimester calendar.

The June 1963 meeting of the Synod heard the report of a committee appointed the year before, which concluded that giving funds to found a college would jeopardize other programs so would not recommend endorsement. However the full Synod passed the proposal 104-50. Detailed planning began: (appointing a Board of trustees, hiring an architect, obtaining a charter, hiring a President and a fund-raising firm.) On Oct. 30-31st the entire committee traveled to Gettysburg for an 8:00 am breakfast with President Eisenhower where they received a well deserved endorsement of their labor.

On May 16, 1965 a special service: "Eisenhower College Sunday" was observed as 500 visitors and parishioners attended First Presbyterian. The \$100,000 check honoring the churches pledge in 1962 was presented.

The Charter Campaign now exceeded 1 million dollars and ground breaking was scheduled for Sept. 21, 1965. President Eisenhower, Governor Nelson Rockefeller and Bob Hope were among the speakers. Property had been purchased on East Bayard Street ext, and Route 89 extending to the Cayuga Lake.

John Rosenkrans was selected as the first President. Fund raising was difficult and the local trustees and committees to bring the college message across the country devoted much time.

The first cornerstone was laid Nov. 5, 1967. On Sept. 1, 1968 the first class of 304 arrived, the culmination of six years of hard and determined work by the group of men led by a dream for a college to serve capable students with a unique curriculum.

Funding always remained a problem and the college closed in 1982. The property and buildings are now the New York Chiropractic College.

