The University of Minnesota attained high rank during the administration of President Cyrus Northrop. It was my privilege to meet him several times. On one occasion while at Glencoe I served on a committee of school superintendents who discussed University entrance requirements with a faculty committee headed by Dean John F. Downey. Dr. Northrop was present. The suggestions made by the school men were adopted. 

Later agitation favoring the establishment of a College of Education at the University led me to address a letter to President Northrop which is too long to include in this book. A dinner meeting followed attended by Dr. Northrop, the Board of Regents, many of the faculty and by a substantial group of school administrators. It was an impressive occasion which led later to the establishment of the College.

The students of the University seldom missed "Chapel" exercises, during his presidency. Whether he made the principal speech or merely introduced the speaker
made no difference. His reputation for eloquence and humor reached to every state. It was a delight to hear him. Oft-repeated is the story of the Cornell banquet where Chauncey Depew was toastmaster. Northrop was introduced as the tornado of the Northwest. Northrop said this reference was a new one to him but it must be true coming from a gentleman who is generally recognized authority on wind.

I attended the reception tendered his successor Dr. George E. Vincent and there much to my surprise Dr. Northrop recognized me and gave me a friendly smile and said, “I hear good reports about your work at the Crookston School, young man.” The very fact that he recognized and spoke to me made a lasting impression.

Near the close of his long service as the University’s president he said:

“I am an old man now and I have seen many things in the world. If there is anything that a man of 80 years of age could say to a people among whom he has spent the happiest days of his life, it is this:

“We live in the most blessed country in the world. The things that we have accomplished are only the beginning. As the years go on, and always we increase our strength, our power and our wealth, we must depart not from the simple teaching of our youth.”

2.

Dean Albert F. Woods had a most important part in the development of the institution at Crookston. He was given a royal welcome to Minnesota and was accepted at once by all who wanted the University’s Department of Agriculture to become a leader in that field. I think of him as a statesman in the field of agriculture. He served seven years as Dean and Director and during that period laid the foundations for the present Department of Agriculture of the University of Minnesota.

I owe my appointment to him. He was always firm in his support. He never interfered with details of administration. He placed responsibility on his staff and helped them in every way to attain their objectives. He served the University and the state greatly.

When Dr. George E. Vincent succeeded President Northrop as the University’s president, both he and Woods envisioned the entire state as the University’s campus. He was keenly aware of the importance of the state’s agriculture. He bent every effort to support Dean Woods in his monumental task.

Before long the people of the state were thrilled over Vincent’s rapid-fire speeches and his lightning-like responses to introductions. They are classics in our University lore.

It was my privilege to be present at his first appearance as president before the University’s faculty. The institution’s Registrar who also was secretary of the Alumni Association, E. Bird Johnson, was seated on the platform. Vincent began his address, “President Northrop, members of the Board of Regents, faculty members,” and turning to Mr. Johnson, “and rara avis.” This brought down the house, for the Registrar knew everyone by his or her first name. His memory was almost beyond belief. He was, indeed a rare bird. Vincent established himself at once as the man who would brilliantly occupy the position held for 27 years by the revered President Northrop.

On another occasion he was listed as the last speaker at one of the forenoon meetings of the Minnesota Education Association. The three preceding speakers occupied the time until five minutes of twelve. The audience was restless.
Then President Vincent was introduced. He rose and raced to the platform. “In conclusion” were his first words. Then in five minutes he gave a ringing speech that brought the audience on their toes. Then he stopped. The roof nearly fell in.

Another incident happened at the Opera House, Crookston, where the Northern Minnesota Development Association held a meeting, attended by a large delegation from St. Louis County, famous for the Iron Range and the peerless city of Duluth. C. M. King, father of Minnesota’s present state auditor was president of the Association and chairman of the meeting. He made a rather long speech, in which he repeatedly referred to and eulogized highly the delegation from St. Louis County.

Finally, he introduced President Vincent, who in his characteristic way strode rapidly to the front and said, “Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen,” and turning to the Duluth delegation, “and benefactors from St. Louis County.” Those in the audience roared and none more than the delegation from that county.

President Vincent was interested in every movement for the benefit of the state. He came to Eldred, Minnesota, a small village 12 miles south of Crookston and encouraged that community to form a consolidated school. He won every person to the support of the project though it had been previously opposed by several influential persons in the community.

Later he and Mrs. Vincent attended the annual banquet of the Fairfax-Andover Social Circle, a pioneer farm club and spoke feelingly on the subject of rural social life. He and his wife were our guests on this occasion. He strongly advocated adding a fourth year, called the advanced course, to the three-years’ course at the state agricultural schools.

The Northwest School owes much to its teaching staff. It was indeed fortunate in this respect. All were experienced teachers who quickly sensed the needs of the students. Many of the students needed intensive drills in English. The teachers rose
to the occasion. Drills, drills, drills. The students hummed the drills on the way to and from classes. Many of them later stated the courses in English were the most helpful of all they studied at the school.

A political phenomenon almost rare enough to be unique resulted from a friendship between two Minnesota Swedes.

And Mike Holm, Minnesota's noted Secretary of State, has gone on almost like perpetual motion, to establish new records in office-holding and vote-getting because of the "Swedish" partnership.

When J. P. Bengtson was superintendent of schools at Roseau, Minnesota, Mr. Holm was a civic leader. The two men became fast friends. Then "J. P.," already a name in Minnesota education, came to the Northwest School to become a preceptor and instructor.

When Mr. Holm was swept into state office in 1921 he took his friend with him as assistant. The astute Holm had a genius for pouring oil on troubled waters. His assistant was his efficiency expert. The Secretary of State's Office became a model the nation over for effective administration. Holm became a byword in every hamlet, on every farm. The Holm-Bengtson team survived the Farmer-Labor era and broke all Minnesota vote-getting records when the Republicans came back in power. They are still at the St. Paul office, a remarkable example of efficient officialdom.

A stern disciplinarian, Mr. Bengtson quickly became known on the Northwest School campus as a great teacher. He originated a policy of "never letting lightning strike twice in the same place" and a student, who was subjected to the embarrassment of not knowing the answer to a question he had been asked maybe two weeks previously, never made that error again. Bengtson students generally became A students.

It is interesting to conjecture on what would have happened had Mr. Bengtson stayed in education. He was followed by another leader of youth, Arthur H. Larson, who was in addition, a skilled musician. He served in many capacities but a larger field beckoned. He is now at the Eastman School of Music, Rochester, New York.

The former students will also talk of many others who were so helpful to them. Oscar L. Buhr, my secretary for five years. He is now vice-president of Detroit Trust Company, Detroit, Michigan. Thomas M. McCall, horticulturist, now superintendent of the Northwest School and Station. Otto I. Bergh, agronomist, who later became superintendent of the school and station, Grand Rapids, Minnesota.

Miss Laura Franklin, preceptor and instructor, married. Miss Faith S. Brown, instructor of English, who originated her own methods to meet the special needs of her students. Mrs. Anna Funk Haig, instructor of English, who did the same. Miss Mabel H. Olsen, eminent instructor of Home Economics, who became principal of a special school in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and Miss Hazel Rockwood who succeeded her. Miss Grace B. Sherwood who had charge of the rural teachers training school.

I know I should not stop here but I am referring solely now to the teachers of the early days. Throughout all the years of its existence the Northwest School has attained distinction largely because of the caliber of its teaching staff. The fountain cannot rise higher than its source. Teachers are in the first priority in any school. They should always be persons of the highest ideals, finest character, abundant energy and possessed of the right spirit.

Buildings were voted by the Legislature at the rate of one or two each session until the immediate needs were met. I shall not enumerate them. They stand there on
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the campus for all to see. There were only three school buildings completed when I arrived in August, 1910. Two more were in the first stage of construction.

A much needed physical education building, including a swimming pool was built during Superintendent Dowell's tenure and in Superintendent McCall's tenure (up to now) a large dormitory for girls. There are eleven school buildings in addition to a central heating plant, a complete array of farm buildings. In addition, the state provided several cottages and two apartment dwellings for the faculty.

Enrollment increased each year. In 1916-17, the enrollment in the regular three years' course was 160; in the junior short course, 47; in the summer training school for rural teachers, 145 and in the farmers' short course, 1824 or a total of 2195. Later the number in the regular course increased to over 300. During recent years this number has increased to 450, which is regarded as a limit for the school.

JAMES J. HILL BUILDING.

"Death intervened to prevent the gift of another James J. Hill Building."

The classroom building named the Hill Building was dedicated on December 5, 1912. On the same day three buildings were officially named as follows: Owen Hall, for the Farm Engineering Building, tender of name in behalf of the Regents, Professor T. L. Haecker; Robertson Hall, dormitory, tender of name, Hon. B. F. Nelson, president of the Board of Regents, response by Mrs. William Robertson; Kiehle Building, tender of name, Superintendent Selvig; response by Regent C. G. Schulz, State Superintendent of Public Instruction.

James J. Hill, president of the Great Northern Railway, was present at the main ceremony of the day when Hon. B. F. Nelson tendered the name, Hill Building, so designated in Mr. Hill's honor. He responded, giving early history of the Valley and stating why he had donated in 1895 the land now occupied by the Northwest School and Station. President Vincent's address closed the meeting.

A farm dinner was served the guests with Dean A. F. Woods, presiding at the program. Responses were made by Supt. A. J. McGuire, of Grand Rapids Station; Supt. E. C. Higbie, of West Central School and Station, Morris; L. A. Huntoon, Moorhead banker and leader; Supt. J. H. Hay, of the public schools, Thief River Falls; C. M. King, Deer River; Joseph Chapman, Jr., Minneapolis; W. A. McGonough, Duluth and on "The University" by President Vincent.
In the Red River Aggie for 1913, Mr. Hill wrote greetings to the class which shows the high regard in which he held the institution:

“Every institution engaged in giving instruction in modern farming methods is not only contributing to the advancement of an industry, which must always be the foundation of national prosperity and stability, but it is a guidepost pointing the way to what must and will be, for a majority of the young people of our country, the happiest and, if rightly followed, the most successful operation. In dignity and in practical worth, no department of the University outranks it.

I can wish no greater good fortune to the students of the School of Agriculture than that they may learn here to appreciate the dignity and the opportunities of the instruction open to them there, put it to good practical use by finding independent competence and happiness in work upon the farm, and achieve all the three ends of education that unite to make good manhood, good womanhood and good citizenship.”

(Dated, St. Paul, January, 1913.)

Sometime later Mr. Hill was the guest of honor at the Northwestern Minnesota Agricultural Fair, Crookston, a combined fair and horse-racing event which attracted large crowds. The Great Northern Railway offered to donate young bulls of beef type to farmers who wished to establish herds. Before the grandstand crowd numbering thousands he spoke of the need of having livestock, of getting away from one-crop farming, of having home orchards and gardens and of installing home appliances to relieve the over-worked farm women.

That evening a dinner was tendered him at Hotel Crookston. Memory of it remains vivid. I had a seat near him and could watch his expression as he talked for nearly two hours after the dinner. He related his early experiences in the Valley. I recall one incident particularly. He and another man were camped near the Red River. They slept in a tent. In the morning they were awakened by a noise indicating some living creature was trying to crawl under the tent side. Upon opening the tent-flap Mr. Hill looked straight at a large gray wolf which was hungrily eyeing them.

Another of his reminiscences stands out. There was no love lost between Mr. Hill and President Theodore Roosevelt whom he referred to several times as “King Theodore.” The White House Conservation Congress which the President called in 1908, enrolled the nation’s leaders including among many both Mr. Hill and Andrew Carnegie, whom Hill spoke of as “Andy” Carnegie.

A photograph was planned. There was a great ado about where each one was to sit or stand. Mr. Hill chuckled when he told this incident. King Theodore wanted both “Jim” Hill and “Andy” Carnegie near him, but the canny Scotsmen had other ideas about that. “And we won that one against King Theodore,” he said exultingly.

Mr. Hill on the day of the dedication of the Hill Building said to me in the presence of J. W. Wheeler, president of the First National Bank, Crookston, and A. D. Stephens, president of the Merchants National Bank, Crookston, that when the state concluded its building program for the Northwest School and Station, “Come to see me at my office, and I’ll give this school a building or provide a fund for some unmet need.” I thanked him and informed him I had a long memory. His eyes twinkled and he said, “That’s all right young man; remember it, and you have two good witnesses.”

Not long afterwards, I accosted Mr. Stephens on the street and said, “Andy, when do we go to see Mr. Hill about that building?” “Just as soon as Mrs. Stephens
and I return from our trip to the Isle of Pines; I'll notify you." During that interim Mr. Hill passed away. He left a legacy for Northwestern Minnesota even if fate intervened in regard to the promised building.

6.

Music, public speaking, debating, Y.M. and Y.W.C.A. activities (later a Newman Club was organized), athletics and other courses and activities were added at the school. Many scholarships and annual awards were provided by interested citizens, farm clubs and by the school's alumni.

A fourth year's course, called the Advanced Course was added when President Vincent declared there must be no blind alleys in our schools. This course was devoted solely to academic subjects. The students were compelled to work hard to maintain the standards set by the school.

"Summer practicums," the first name which was later changed to "home project work," became firmly established in 1912. At the fourth annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Agricultural Teaching, in Washington, D.C., November 11, 1913, I presented outlines of our summer home work.*

Home project work made the school term twelve months, with six at school and six months on the farm or in the home. This became an established contribution to the agricultural school's program and exerted a strong influence nationally in the field of agricultural education.

It was in the course of visitations to the farm homes of our students that certain facts regarding country life during my first few years at Crookston became evident. Both Mr. Bengtson, school preceptor, and Mr. Larson, school registrar, reported there were many boys and girls on farms who never attended the nearest high school nor seem interested in proceeding beyond the seventh or eighth grade of rural school work.

In a general way this was common knowledge. I desired specific information and sought it in eight townships in the Valley, one in each of eight different areas. This "lag in school attendance" survey was made by Bengtson and Larson. The report is in the files of the school. They found a very large number of boys and girls under 18 in these eight townships at home; various reasons were given. It was an interesting report and both Dean Woods and President Vincent commended it highly.

Taking the figures from these rural townships in relation to the townships' population as a basis for estimating the number of boys and girls of school age who were not in school in the twelve Valley counties it was found that if only one third of them attended the Northwest School, its enrollment would be trebled. There existed a rural educational need to be met.

In this project as in many others Arthur H. Larson, preceptor, following Mr. Bengtson, proved to be the right man for the job. A graduate of Carleton College, Northfield, he was a musician, a gymnast, a group leader, an earnest Y.M.C.A. leader, an able instructor in debate (he led debate teams from the school all over the northwest) and a good organizer. During the last summer I was at the school he compiled four volumes of records of the Northwest School and Station, containing every printed program, bulletin and article issued from 1910 to April, 1927. The institution owes him much.

*See Agricultural Teaching, Bureau of Education, Bulletin 1914, No. 27, whole number 601, p. 49, pp. 27-84.
At about this time President Vincent resigned to become Executive-Secretary of the Rockefeller Foundation and Dean Woods to become the president of Maryland University. Later Dr. Woods became Chief of the Bureau of Plant Industry of the U. S. Department of Agriculture, followed by the Deanship of the Department's Graduate School. In all three positions he attained eminence.

During my service in Washington, 1927-1933, I often lunched with Dr. Woods. We enjoyed talking about the years at the University where he was my superior officer. I lauded his steadfastness and courage, his loyalty to the interests of the farmers. I informed him the most serious deficiency in a leader is lack of courage of his convictions. So many are afraid of losing their jobs. His work in behalf of agriculture deserve the encomium of a grateful nation.

President Vincent was succeeded as University president by Dr. Marion Leroy Burton, a graduate of Carleton College, Northfield, Minnesota. R. W. Thatcher, Chief of Bio-chemistry at the College of Agriculture was elected as Dean Woods' successor. The press of that day reported several of the Regents voted to appoint me as Dean. I frankly stated I was very well satisfied to remain at Crookston and the deadlock came to an end. At about this time (1916) my name appeared in "Who's Who". This was entirely unknown to me until I received the formal notice. The first number of "The Northwest Monthly" published by the School and Station was issued in 1916. It has continued to this day with a recent change in name to "The Northwest School News".

The superintendents of the four state Schools of Agriculture became very well acquainted with the new University president and the new Dean of Agriculture. President Vincent had inaugurated quarterly conferences held at his home where subjects of interest to these Schools and Stations were informally discussed. This served to keep him abreast with developments, to learn first hand of needs and trends and gave us the benefit of his over-all view of the University. This plan was used by President Burton and Dean Thatcher, also, with benefit to all.

During this period the superintendents of the four state agricultural schools were: D. D. Mayne (designated principal) of the Central School, St. Paul; Paul E. Miller, West Central School, Morris; Otto I. Bergh, North Central School, Grand Rapids and the author. Mr. Mayne has passed away. He was a remarkable man. His leadership in agricultural education has not been adequately presented. It is my hope that a post-graduate student at the University of Minnesota will some day write a definitive account of his work and of his service to the state. He was prolific in new ideas. He was a real pioneer.

Paul E. Miller not only proved his administrative ability as superintendent at the Morris School but rose to assume the responsibilities of Director of the University's Agricultural and Home Economics Extension Service. In this work he has attained outstanding success.

We worked closely together for years. Our wives accompanied us the trip to Europe in 1931. Since then Mr. Miller has served one stretch as a member of the E. C. A. Committee dealing with agricultural problems in twelve European countries. At this writing he is on a "command" assignment as E. C. A. Director in Ireland. He works easily without fuss or feathers and gets things done. His work at the Morris School was outstanding.
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Otto I. Bergh was the junior member of the quartette that met at these quarterly conferences. He was promoted from agronomist at the Crookston School to become superintendent at Grand Rapids Station. There he organized the North Central School of Agriculture and established Station work of far-reaching importance to that vast area. Mr. Bergh proved to be a leader in North Central Minnesota's farm projects and did much work that has proved of lasting benefit. He retired to Florida where he is now living. President Burton's sincere interest in every phase of the University's work inspired his colleagues. It was a glorious era.

The University's building program was given great impetus during Burton's administration. I noted in the press recently that former State Senator Albert J. Rockne, Zumbrota, died at the age of 82. He was for many years chairman of the Senate's Committee on Finance. It was to him that President Burton made his plea. It was reported the meeting took place in the home of the University's President and that the evening session lasted until 2:00 A. M. Burton impressed all with his high ideals and his powers of persuasion.

President Burton spent part of his summers on Star Island, Cass Lake, Minnesota which was close to our summer home there. After Dr. Burton left to become president of the University of Michigan we often met during August at Cass Lake. The last time I saw him he was approaching with his wife and a group of friends on one of the roadways in the interior of Star Island. It was autumn. This scene I shall always remember. His clothing and uncovered head matched the autumn colors. He trod the path in majesty. I can use no other term. He was one of the kindest, loftiest men I have known. I compared him in my mind with the lofty Norway Pines that surrounded us, well-rooted, firm, solid, unpretentious, swayed by no meanness, disturbed by no trouble, undismayed, — here was a man! He passed away in the prime of life. His picture among the pines in the glow of the setting sun will remain with me always.