

ROBERT T. OLIVER
DEAN, CLARK COLLEGE, 1933 - 1935

CLARK'S FIRST TWO YEARS

When a junior college is opened up in the midst of the nation's deepest depression, without any kind of sponsorship, and with absolutely no financial resources, the word to describe its condition might be deprivation. We half dozen unemployed faculty members who gathered to open the college and stayed to conduct it had virtually no salaries (the first year about \$8 a month, the second year not more than \$18 a month). There was no library except our own books which all of us placed in a room of the college building for students to use. There were only a score of students, most of them unable to pay more than token tuition. A "fund drive" that we undertook in the community raised less than \$30. Only a very few Vancouver residents took our college seriously and probably none expected it to survive.

However, in my thinking about it at the time and also in retrospect, the word that to me best describes those first two years is not deprivation but quality.

There was the quality of the human spirit, that refused to accept defeat. We dreamed the impossible dream and we never stopped working to insure that whether the life span of the college should be one year or two or a hundred years or more, it would provide for every student a solid opportunity for substantial learning.

As a faculty we did not have impressive credentials--only masters degrees and very little experience. Nevertheless, we developed a curriculum that would offer students a rounded learning experience, rather than teaching only what we knew best. Homer Foster, teaching English and American history, and Ralph Hanna, teaching French, were strongest in their special preparation. Mary Oliver taught a course in personal hygiene, served as registrar, and also as librarian--with no training or experience in any of these fields. I taught a survey of English literature, English composition, speech, and social ethics--trying to learn enough to keep ahead of the students. We had small classes and we worked both them and ourselves.

The students, too, represented quality. Not in especially high intelligence or academic qualifications, but in sheer grit and determination to educate themselves. Clark College, in those opening years, was very far from being a glamorous institution. Attendance brought the students no prestige. They wanted to learn and we wanted to teach. I feel assured they got as much at Clark as they could have any place else. This was the goal our little faculty was determined to achieve. It was the foundation on which the continuing success and expansion of Clark College has been based.

Deprivation? Of course, But quality, above all.

Birth Date: July 7, 1909

Birth Place: Sweet Home, Oregon