Chapter 3

PRESIDENT BOMBERGER’S ADMINISTRATION
(1870 – 90)

Despite all difficulties Ursinus carried on its work. The first commencement, though no degrees were awarded, was held on June 27, 1872 in Trinity Church. The night before, the anniversary meeting of Zwinglian Literary Society was held in the Masonic Hall (now the Grange Hall) in Trappe. “The procession formed at the college, from which place it marched to the hall in the following order: Board of Directors, Faculty, Orator and Speakers, Zwinglian and Schaff Literary Societies, and created quite an imposing appearance as it moved to its destination.” The student speakers were the “recipients of some fine bouquets, bestowed by the fairer portion of creation, of whom there was a good representation present.” At the Commencement itself, conducted with the same pomp and circumstance, the members of the junior class orated on such topics as “The Evils of Modern Society,” “Papal Encroachments,” “American Civilization,” and “Military Glory.” There was a valedictory by one of the theological students, full of “appropriate and well-timed allusions to scenes and enjoyments now about to be left to others.” President Bomberger in his remarks, which naturally were addressed to the theological students, since they were in effect being graduated, said “we are not in search of truth, we claim to have already found it” after which he “very appropriately presented a volume widely known throughout the world, and containing this truth to each of the Theological graduates.” At the conclusion the Board, faculty, students, choir, visitors and other guests enjoyed a “splendid collation” at the President’s residence.

The year 1873 passed without incidents of great note and was concluded by the second commencement, on June 26. A few months earlier the senior class had planted a Siberian arbor vitae on the campus, beginning a custom which was followed by succeeding classes for over sixty years. To the ceremonies of the commencement week “Friends, in large numbers, flocked in from every point of the
compass, some coming nearly two hundred miles for the sole purpose of cheering the College by their presence.” All five members of the class of '73, the first collegiate alumni of Ursinus, spoke, on such topics as “The Limits of Human Knowledge” and “Literary Criticism.” A special feature of the week was the formation of the Ursinus Union, an organization devised to gain greater financial support for the College and the students studying theology. It flourished for some years and did bring in some contributions. Thirty-seven persons were listed as enrolling at this time.

A sensational contrast to the even tenor of life in Collegeville, or Freeland as the bitter enders still called it, occurred in February of 1874 when a freshman student, Abraham L. Hunsicker, was accidentally shot to death at the home of Dr. James Hamer (now Isenberg Hall) in the rehearsal of a “dramatic exhibition by which it was hoped to serve the cause of temperance.” The pistol was “not thought to be loaded.” His classmates resolved to attend his funeral as a class and wear the “usual badge of mourning for thirty days.” The College made it clear to its constituency that the play being rehearsed was not a college activity.

Apparently the efforts to hinder Ursinus’ progress as an aftermath of the victory in General Synod in 1872 continued, for after stating that enrollment in the fall of 1874 had increased over that of preceding terms, a writer in the Reformed Church Monthly asserted that

This will be gratifying intelligence to our friends, and especially to those of them among whom it seems from tidings which have recently reached us, the rumor was circulated that many of our regular students would desert Ursinus and seek more congenial quarters. It really has transpired that efforts . . . were made by personal visitations and appeals to draw away our students. Such means were used with quite a number of those new to us. So far as we know, but two were thus prevailed upon.

Later efforts took the form of whispering campaigns that the College was about to close.

In 1876 President Bomberger, who had been living in what is now Fetterolf House, bought a plot of ground from Abraham Grater and built, with the encouragement but not the financial assistance of the Board, a “good house suitable for the President of the College.” There was a gentleman’s agreement that if it was ever to be sold the College would buy it. The L shaped, mansard-roofed house he built was called Zwinglihof. After his death it did become college property in September, 1890. Professor Henry T. Spangler rented it because Acting President Super had his own house. After Dr. Spangler became president it was called the President’s House, still later College House, and ultimately Shreiner Hall. It became a women’s dormitory in 1909.

1876 was notable also for a mild assertiveness on the part of the senior class, recounted in reminiscences by the Rev. Silas M. Hench '77:

The event of greatest interest . . . for each class was its Commencement. . . . Until 1876, the exercises were held in the College Chapel of East Wing. But 1876 was the Centen-
Zwinglihof was built in 1876 by President Bomberger as a “good house suitable for the President of the College.” After his death in 1890 it became college property, being called President’s House, College House, and ultimately Shreiner Hall. It became a women’s dormitory in 1939.

The class of ’77 numbered six, one of whom was a son of the President. As Dr. Hench wrote, a large tent was later used for commencements until Bomberger Hall was built, and though the classes remained small, attendance at graduation festivities was large. The Philadelphia and Reading Railroad sold excursion tickets for commencement week.

The first permanent scholarship fund came to the College in 1877 through a bequest of $1,500 by John Carson of Newburgh, Cumberland County. And the first sizeable gift of books for the as yet non-existent library came that same year when Mrs. Susan Good gave about 400 books from the collection of her deceased husband, the Rev. W. A. Good of Reading. The books, characterized as “valuable”, were mainly of theology.
The need for a library collection had been voiced early by Dr. Bomberger, but no funds were available. The first statement to appear in the catalog (1878–9) is that the “Library of the College is yet in its incipiency. But the private libraries of the Faculty are always accessible for reference, thus making the whole number of volumes available for use about 10,000.” The catalogs of 1882–4 give the figure as 1,000 and the catalog of 1884–5 makes it 6,000, which figure appears in several succeeding issues. The Alumni Association in 1882 resolved to establish a library “for the free use of all persons connected with the College.” It requested a suitable room, and the Board gave it the use of one in the East Wing basement. Its collection was apparently smaller than the ones which the literary societies, Zwing and Schaff, were building for their members (Schaff had nine hundred in 1887). This inconvenient situation of three small coexisting collections ended in 1888, when Dr. Edmund Morris Hyde, then professor of Latin, persuaded the societies to pool their holdings with those of the Alumni Association.

All parties concerned agreed to the merger on condition that a larger room, not in a basement, be provided and furnished with glass cases for safety. This the Board agreed to and Professor Hyde was elected the first librarian. He resigned in December to join the faculty of Lehigh University, whereupon Professor Moses Peters, who taught chemistry and natural history, was chosen to succeed him. A student assistant, Mayne R. Longstreth '89, was appointed, to be paid “not less than $20 per year.” Professor Peters reported at Commencement that the library contained about 3,300 volumes, more than 800 of them theological. It was still a pooling of collections, for the societies continued to own and add to their own holdings. As a final note on this part of the College, to be examined further in later eras, the catalog of 1888–9 states that the library is “open to all students for reference and the drawing of books from 1 to 1:30 P.M. every day except Saturday,—when the time is from 7:30 to 8:30 A.M.—and Sunday.”

As the decade of the '70s came to its close, enrollment dropped. In the first years it had varied between 116 and 120 (total for all three departments). But from 117 in 1877–8 it dropped to 69, little more than half, in 1878–9, and rose only slightly, to 76, in 1879–80. At the annual meeting of the Board in June of 1878 President Bomberger reported that “small amounts as donations were received.” The College had to tighten its belt. After discussing the matter for a year the Board in June of 1879 reluctantly reduced faculty salaries by twenty-five per cent and took other measures to reduce expenditure.

This financial crisis set the stage for a brief and peculiar episode. In 1878 a Peace Commission was formed by the General Synod meeting at Lancaster. Its purpose was to bring together the two factions of the Church, heal the wounds of controversy, in short unite the Reformed Church in spirit. A sign of this new irenicism was the election of Dr. Bomberger as president of Eastern Synod, which six years earlier had censured him. But even though the dove of peace was hovering near, the old feelings were not dead. In December of 1879 a proposal to consolidate Ursinus and Palatinate College in Myerstown, which also was having financial difficulty,
was made to the Board, with the recommendation of the Peace Commission that it be accepted. The more Dr. Bomberger looked into the proposal the less he liked it, and in February of 1880 he pressed upon the Executive Committee of the Board his conviction that it should be categorically rejected. His reason was that if the proposal was accepted, the merged college would be at Myerstown, Ursinus and its School of Theology would be closed, the charter would be revoked; in effect all that he and his associates had worked for would be destroyed. His view was accepted, and the proposal fell to the ground. But the College was momentarily hurt, for rumors of its closing got about and prospective students went elsewhere. In a sense this ebbtide was symbolized by the fact that the graduating class of 1881 had only two members. Better days, however, were soon to come.

In 1881 Ursinus became coeducational. The decision to admit women to the College and Academy came as a natural consequence of the closing of Pennsylvania Female College in 1880. This school was founded by Dr. and Mrs. J. Warren Sunderland in 1853. As a member of the faculty of Freeland Seminary Dr. Sunderland conceived the idea of opening a similar school for girls. The Rev. Abraham Hunsicker financed the venture and Mrs. Sunderland opened the Montgomery Female Seminary on April 7, 1851. Fifty-seven pupils were enrolled the first year. Then a new building for the school was erected, where the Glenwood Memorial now commemorates the site, to accommodate one hundred students. But Dr. Sun-
nderland's mind reached further into the possibilities of educating women, beyond the secondary level. He believed that they could with profit be instructed in the liberal arts. With this end in view he secured a charter from the Legislature for Pennsylvania Female College on April 6, 1853. Throughout its existence it gave both collegiate and secondary instruction. In the years before the Civil War it prospered, reaching a peak enrollment of 166 in 1861. In 1880, when it closed, the enrollment was 88, 56 undergraduates and 32 preparatory students. The reasons for its closing were lack of endowment, the decline in patronage by students from the Southern states, and the rise of the state normal schools. In its twenty-seven years of collegiate existence it conferred about one hundred and twenty-five bachelor's degrees.

The closing of Pennsylvania Female College meant that there was no school for women in the immediate area. Accordingly the Board of Directors received on June 22, 1881 an overture from the Faculty “recommending the admission of female pupils to the privileges of the College.” The Board approved the recommendation. The next catalog gave no indications that the College and Academy were now coeducational except the statement under “Scholastic Regulations” that young women “are furnished with boarding in private families” and the names of the women students in their appropriate places in the student lists. In the sophomore class was Minerva Weinberger, daughter of Dr. J. Shelley Weinberger of the faculty, and Bertha Hendricks, daughter of Rev. Joseph H. Hendricks, pastor of Trinity Christian Church, was a freshman. She caught up in her studies with Miss Weinberger, and in 1884 they became the first women graduates of the College. Of the twenty-eight women enrolled in the Academy in 1881–2, all but six were from the immediate area. In the next year there were three freshman women in the College and eighteen women in the Academy. In this year the Normal course was established, but out of the fourteen enrolled in it only two were women, indicating that at the outset at least this program was not designed for or did not attract women students. And the Literary Course for Ladies was not established until 1887.

Throughout the remainder of Dr. Bomberger’s administration there was no provision for the housing of women students on campus. In 1884 the proprietor of Prospect Terrace offered to board them at $4.00 per week, including heat and light. The men students got room and board only for $3.50 in the College dormitories.

President Bomberger was excused from his teaching duties for the year 1883–4 in order to act as financial agent (fund raiser). His report in June of 1884 indicated that he had collected $8,737 during the year. But successful as he had been, a better augury of prosperity appeared in the gift by Robert Patterson of $500 in 1883 for painting and renovation and of $5,000 in 1884 for the general use of the College. Mr. Patterson, a prosperous manufacturer in Philadelphia, had been elected to the Board in 1878, but only now did he show signs of becoming the first large benefactor of Ursinus. He followed the gifts just named by making an incentive offer of $5,000, to be matched by others, primarily to cover unpaid salaries owed to the faculty, in 1885. Greater generosity was to follow.

During the mid-eighties little needs to be recorded apart from the changes in
Prospect Terrace, located on what is now the campus (opposite Trinity Church), offered board to women for $4.00 per week, including heat and light, because there was no provision for housing women on campus. Men students got room and board only for $3.50 in the College dormitories.

Curriculum already described. In 1883 the Ursinus College Bulletin was begun. Published usually ten times a year it was the news organ for college, students, and alumni until it gave way to the Weekly in 1902. In a different aspect of institutional life the "privy connected with the College" burned in October of 1885 and the Executive Committee proceeded to the construction of a "commodious and convenient out house" on its site.

Except for a slight set-back in 1885–6, the total number of students increased steadily through the 1880's, reaching a peak of 180 in 1888–9. The classrooms and dormitories were filled to capacity. The dining facilities were inadequate, giving rise to the formation of eating clubs at the Perkiomen, the Alberta, Prospect Terrace, and in private homes (Kratz's). Clearly the time had come for a major step forward.

The annual meeting of the Board on June 24, 1890 was a momentous one, for at it, although no one knew it at the time, President Bomberger gave his last report. Stern as he always was, dictatorial as he occasionally seemed, his remarks on discipline were especially interesting:

Our experience in this respect confirms the superiority of a mild but firm exercise of authority, with few simple and reasonable rules, and nothing like police espionage, governing young men and women by getting them to govern themselves.
The other significant proceeding was that a committee was formed to plan construction of a new building as soon as provision was made for clearing the encumbrances (mortgages) on the property. And then was read a note signed by “A friend of the College” which stated:

I hereby agree to subscribe $25,000 toward a new building for the use of the College on conditions that an equal amount be raised by other friends for the same purpose, the erection of the building to begin as soon as provision is made to remove all present encumbrances . . .

Everyone knew that the “friend of the College” could be only one person, Robert Patterson. It was fortunate that this generous offer, which was accepted with enthusiasm, was made when it was, to crown President Bomberger’s efforts for “his college”, for he was to die two months later.

To present student life accurately has always been a difficult task, seldom successfully achieved, as the falsity of so many novels and movies about college proves. The days of students and faculty alike pass in a regular, profitable monoton, often filled with temporary drama and significance to the participants but devoid of striking or colorful elements to those outside. Only the exceptional incidents tend to be recorded or emphasized. It must be understood, therefore, that campus life at Ursinus in the first two decades was busy, regular, habitual, and to modern eyes uneventful. In a small town so quiet that one of the amusements for students was walking to the railroad station to see a train come in and one of the boldest pranks was to steal a hen from a nearby chicken run to be cooked on one’s stove in the dormitory, life was tranquil indeed. To be sure, high spirits were not extinguished. The Rev. Albert R. Thompson, a student from 1874 to 1879, tells of a college mate who scandalized the faculty by interleaving playing cards in the chapel Bible and of filling Freeland bell with water which froze so that the bell could not be rung at 5:30 A.M. Doubtless many similar episodes were chuckled over by old grads but never recorded.

Extra-curricular activity centered for many years in the literary societies. On October 4, 1870, less than a month after the opening of the College, Zwinglian Literary Society was founded. It was named, at the suggestion of F. S. Lindaman, its first president, for Ulrich Zwingli, the Swiss reformer. There had been in Freeland Seminary the Chi Rho Delta Literary Society, which was dissolved after the College started. Some of this society’s former members became dissatisfied with Zwinglian, to which they belonged, and resigned on February 9, 1872 in order to form the Platonic Literary Society. In May the name was changed to Schaff Literary Society in honor of Dr. Philip Schaff, the celebrated nineteenth century theologian.

Zwing and Schaff, as they were referred to for sixty years, thus developed as friendly rivals, both meeting every Friday evening in term, Zwing in the fourth floor of Stine Hall and Schaff in the “Attic Hall” of Derr. Their activities were
parallel. Both, as has been seen, started libraries for their members and both devoted their meetings to literary performances of all kinds—readings, declamations, debates, anything that involved speaking. Alvin Hunsicker '84 recalled that his “second most pleasant recollection is the many pleasant evenings I spent at the meetings of the Schaff Literary Society. The momentous questions we used to discuss, and the weighty arguments we advanced, seem almost appalling as viewed from this vantage ground.” As time passed, the programs were not always on so elevated a plane. “College Notes” in January of 1886 complains that “Poor jokes are substituted for sound sense. Low slang is indulged in in contempt of good taste. The whole thing becomes a sort of negro minstrel show.”

The major events of the student year were the annual open meetings of Zwing and Schaff, the former usually in March and the latter in May. Held in the chapel in the East Wing to accommodate the whole college and interested visitors, these meetings became gala affairs with decorations, musical diversions, and much sober gaiety. A typical example is the open meeting of Schaff in May, 1887. After the opening devotions a mixed quartet opened the programme proper with a selection entitled “Welcome To-night.” G. P. Kehl then read an essay on “Good Breeding.” H. W. Spare rendered a declamation on “Charity,” and the quartette sang “Come and Join the Merry Dance.” An essay followed by W. F. Ruff on “Working with a Purpose” and the “Seminole’s Defiance” was declaimed by A. H. Eberly. Misses Rittenhouse and Kratz next sang, with entire satisfaction, a duet called “Murmuring Sea.” “Negative Quantities in Society” was the subject of an essay read by Jas. K. Freed, and this was succeeded by the reciting of “Thanatopsis” by E. S. Brooner. “Birds in Dreamland Sleep” was the title of a very melodious solo, by Miss Rittenhouse, which was heartily encored. The oration of the evening, on “Evil Effects of Avarice” was delivered by C. H. Brandt. . . . After a quartette selection, “Come Where the Wild Flowers Bloom,” the “Schaff Gazette” was read by the editor, G. H. Meixell. The exercises closed with the singing of the “Moonlight Dance” by the quartette.

The women students who sang in this program were not members of the society. For them in 1885 a separate literary society, the Olevian, named for Casper Olevianus, another Reformer, was formed, which met on Thursday afternoons in the “President’s neatly furnished room”. There were eighteen women students when the Olevian Society was formed. It continued a separate existence until the fall of 1898 when women students were admitted to Schaff and Zwing, whereupon it dissolved.

This separation of sexes in the societies was a reflection of the College’s views about coeducation. Men and women were to be educated together in class. Contact outside should be severely limited. In the opening address of the winter term of 1885 Vice-president Super said “That there should be some commingling on the part of students of both sexes in society is of importance.” He gave as a reason that men students, being rough and boisterous, were in need of the refinement that social contacts produce. But too much study time could be spent this way. “Remembering the importance of the evening hours for preparation, the maximum time allowed for visiting and social calls, in our opinion, should not be more than one
evening during the week." It is not clear from this that Dr. Super was referring entirely to men calling on the coeds, but the underlying attitude is clear. Still they managed to meet, if nowhere else, at church and prayer meeting.

In 1886 the Ebrardische Literarisches Gesellschaft was organized for students who wished to improve their German. Inevitably it was named for a theologian, Johann H. A. Ebrard, and it flourished into the nineties. There was much interest in music but no organization until 1887, when under the leadership of Dr. Edmund M. Hyde the Arion Glee Club was formed. Within a few years a number of mandolin clubs, ocarina clubs, and orchestras of varying sizes, abilities, and longevities were to spring up.

Naturally in a college so permeated with the life and influence of the Church the Y.M.C.A. would have a prominent place. The Association here was formed in 1883. In October of 1885 it had 38 members. Besides holding prayer meetings on Sunday the Y held receptions for the new students and assisted in orientation as it has through the years to the present. It early organized deputation work to churches and to charitable institutions in the area.

When people outside colleges think of college life they usually think first of football games, organized cheering sections, and all the colorful display of big time sports. President Bomberger and his faculty could hardly have anticipated how collegiate athletics were to develop, but from the outset they viewed athletics with less than enthusiastic approval. After the reference to informal baseball in the picture of a college day in 1872 there appeared this comment in the next year:

The baseball and croquet ground is gradually becoming more solid, and it is enough to rejuvenate old muscles to see the zest and hilarity with which the young men avail themselves of the opportunities for such bodily exercises as are profitable, if indulged with due moderation.

After this indulgent and ponderous statement no comment on sport appears for several years.

The Rev. Silas M. Hench '77 describing life in his years at college says

Athletics at Ursinus in those days consisted of base-ball on the College campus. An occasional game was ventured with a club of some nearby town. The students found recreation in walks to the historic Perkiomen, or Trappe, and sometimes to Valley Forge, or surrounding country. In summer many went bathing in the Perkiomen, and some, at times, seeking fair companions, went boating by moonlight on its placid waters. In winter, when the ice was firm and smooth, skating furnished exhilarating recreation.

In other words, there were no organized athletics. This was still true in 1886. But a little over a year later, "The Ursinus College Base Ball Club has been meeting with signal success. In the last three games played with rival teams it has in each case come off with laurels of victory." The lack of identification of the teams played suggests that they were local rather than collegiate. The first specific mention of intercollegiate play occurs in November of 1886: "Two friendly match games of
baseball between the clubs of Muhlenburg and Ursinus College, played at Allentown and Collegeville, passed off so pleasantly, and gave both parties so good an opportunity of exchanging courtesies, that they smile criticism out of court.” The rather defensive tone of this news item suggests awareness of the administration’s lack of enthusiasm. In Dr. Super’s address a year earlier, already quoted from, he said “The quantity of outdoor recreation a student needs depends on the amount of ventilation he has in his room. . . . With pure air in his room and a gentle heat we are of the opinion that a student needs very little outdoor exercise.” And he declared roundly that “You cannot develop both muscles and brains to an indefinite extent. You must take your choice.”

The matter was really exercising the administration, for in 1887 an ad hoc committee of the Board on baseball came to this conclusion:

After carefully considering this question in all its bearings, your committee gave it as their deliberate opinion, that the contests in question are liable to be fraught with moral and other harm to young men participating in them, and hence direct the Faculty to adopt such measures as may seem judicious to them to prevent the contests in question.

But the Board and the faculty were bucking against a tide too strong for them. Even before this report and decision the students had formed the Ursinus Athletic Association, and the comment was made that “The need of some such body was long felt.” And the popularity of baseball continued to grow though there was no regular schedule and no such thing as a uniform until 1890.

An entertaining reminiscence of these days is provided by the Rev. George W. Welch ’93. What he describes covers in part the next period of the College’s history but in spirit belongs here:

Athletics, especially, were in embryo. Well do some of the graduates remember the beginnings of base-ball and foot-ball. The writer’s first suit for base-ball, provided by the college, consisted of a pair of pantaloons costing twenty-five cents. So scantily were we provided that on one occasion, when we played at Bethlehem, we nearly froze on the diamond. On another occasion a Decoration Day game nearly bankrupted the management, because we broke a few bats, and friend Fenton [owner of the local general store] can bear witness that we would get our new balls on credit until after the game. . . . On one occasion a team from Philadelphia was to play a game with us, and the place was so well known that they got off the train at Norristown and walked out, arriving on campus at about five o’clock.

Student enthusiasm for sports and faculty opposition continued, with the student attitude gradually prevailing. In April of 1890 the Athletic Association petitioned the faculty to improve the improvised diamond on the south campus. The faculty refused to do so, for “excellent reasons,” whereupon the students leased some land from Dr. James Hamer which they declared was more level and suitable for the game. Pressing on they sponsored a concert and with the proceeds from it purchased uniforms for the team consisting of
a cap displaying a unique combination of the college colors, red, old gold, and black; white flannel shirt, with the word “Ursinus” in black letters across the breast; black knee breeches, black stockings, and russet leather shoe.

A schedule of seven games, four of them with colleges (Swarthmore, Haverford, and Muhlenberg), was played. Baseball was in.

Tennis became popular first in the spring of 1888, when the students organized a club and laid out “two fine courts” on the campus. As part of the Commencement week festivities the Athletic Association held a track meet. Organized teams and intercollegiate competition in these sports did not appear until some years later. Football, which the faculty apparently disapproved of most, was to become the center of athletic interest in a few years after appearing in a tentative form in the autumn of 1890.

In the description of the baseball uniforms purchased in 1890 the caps are said to have a combination of the college colors. The selection of those colors came from a suggestion, presumably by Augustus W. Bomberger ’82, then editor of the Bulletin, in December of 1887. He dropped the “hint” that Ursinus should have its distinctive college colors “as other seats of learning had.” Another editorial “hint” appeared in the February, 1889 issue, and the idea took hold. A spirit of pride and the desire to do what other colleges were doing showed in this and in other aspects of campus life. The upshot of the matter was a democratic choice:

At a mass meeting of the students held on Tuesday, May 8th, it was resolved after some discussion that a suitable combination of black, old-gold and red should be adopted as the distinctive insignia of our Alma Mater. It has since been discovered that these colors predominate in the coat-of-arms generally attributed to the Heidelberg Catechism, and the choice is accordingly regarded as an exceedingly happy one.

A happy choice indeed, though one is led to wonder why a catechism should have a coat of arms and whether the choice of what were undoubtedly Reformation colors was so accidental as it seemed.

Over all activities President Bomberger and the faculty exerted a firm control. They could occasionally be indulgent. The Rev. C. D. Yost ’91 records in his diary that on February 8, 1890 the students were excused from “afternoon recitations to go skating”. But the demarcation between what was allowed and what was prohibited was clear. Dramatics were forbidden. Indeed a debate in Schaff on the subject “Should theatrical performances be abolished?” in December 1888 resulted in a victory for the affirmative. Serious Ursinus students were agreed, or had been convinced, that the theater was a source of corruption. And dancing was too far beyond the pale to be even debated.

But youthful spirit will express itself in one way or another. Two episodes may give some sense of how students capitalized on opportunities or made them. In the 1870’s there was no contact between the students at Ursinus and Pennsylvania
Female College, though the two schools were only a few hundred yards apart. The boys had no opportunity “to meet or even recognize” the girls of P.F.C.

But lo! the unexpected happened, and their opportunity came. On Sunday evening Pennsylvania Female College was discovered to be on fire. All the students of Ursinus hastened to the rescue. Some bravely fought the fire with buckets, while others went up into the main building, and assisted the girls in packing their trunks and bringing them and their books, etc., down, and out to a safe place on the campus. Then they sat down and had a chat with them. The fire, however, was extinguished without injury to the main building. Then the boys assisted the girls in replacing the trunks in their rooms.

Needless to say, this emergency did not change the status ante quo. It was, in fact, easier for the boys to meet local girls at church and secure them as dates for the Schaff and Zwing anniversary meetings, where alone such socializing was allowed.

The other episode, recorded in the class history of 1891, begins in a dormitory room. Readers of this history will, it is hoped, indulge an act of filial piety.

Rules were adopted for the government of the class, and as a regularly organized body it dates its existence from Tuesday evening, October 8, 1887. When we see those first minutes headed “Fry and Yost’s room”—one of our secretaries once read it “Fry and roast’s room”—they carry our minds back to the little den in the northeast corner of the main building, third floor, where you might have found the Freshmen congregated as thickly as flies upon a grocer’s sugar barrel.

The work in all departments went along smoothly and well, reaching forward into the University Algebra as far as “Permutations and Combinations”; yes, even into “Commensurable Roots” and “Derived Polynomials.” But the Latin part of Classical Literature was a pill that was sugar-coated upon the wrong side. Using the old Fiske’s Manual as a textbook, the professor would frequently remark that he thought he should soon become an expert dentist, the “drawing” process being such a predominating feature of the recitations. The end came at last. So great was the joy among the boys that they determined to cremate “Old Classical” and do him up right. One of them “bagged it” half a day to make a suitable funeral pyre and stuff up some old clothes to resemble as nearly as possible “a noble old Roman.” Another one had previously, from a block of wood, shaped a model of Fiske’s Manual, even to the gilding and lettering. The time for the show arrived, and on Wednesday evening of commencement week, 1888, just as the alumni orator pronounced finis, there was to be seen filing from the shades behind the college a solemn procession of Freshmen, wearing steeple hats, and marching to the music of a fife and tin pan, moving across the campus and down the street. Having arrived at their destination, and having given the “late departed” a liberal application of coal oil, “the only original John,” an irregular Soph, made an inflammatory speech. Whether this set the pile on fire or not we shall not attempt to argue, but about this time the flames took hold of it and soon it was no more. To this day, in the middle of the little open lot just one square below, can be seen the bits of charred wood and about a quart of rusty nails, which is all that is left to mark the spot where took place the great pow-wow closing the Freshman year for the class of ‘91.

The historian does not record President Bomberger’s reaction to this “ceremony.” One trusts that, unlike Queen Victoria, he was amused.

The class of 1891, numbering sixteen, was the largest graduating class up to that time. The historian records some statistics which, assuming their accuracy, reveal
some interesting differences between students of eighty years ago and those of today:

The average age of the class is 21 3/4 years. The average height is 5 feet 6 inches, the tallest member overlooking us from an elevation of 5 feet 8 3/4 inches, while the shortest smiles up at the rest from a height of 5 feet. The average weight is 142 pounds, the extremes being 105 and 154. The average length of time spent at college is 4 7/12 scholastic years, the extremes again being 6 1/3 and 1 1/3 years.

The logical deduction from this evidence is that the first Ursinus football team in the fall of 1890, must have been at best a light one. The extremes in time spent at college suggest that some members of the class were either in academic difficulty from time to time or, as was said earlier, could not pursue their college career without interruption because they could not afford to.

The records evince the intense and complete loyalty of the students in the first decades both during their college years and after graduation. The Alumni Association was formed on Commencement Day, June 26, 1873 by the five members of the first class. Its purpose as stated in the constitution they adopted was “to perpetuate fraternal regard among its members and to promote the best interests of its ‘Alma Mater’.” Franklin F. Bahner ’73 was elected the first president, and each of the other founding members was elected to office except John A. Foil, who was a North Carolinian and could not be expected to attend meetings regularly. In addition to the collegiate alumni, graduates of the full theological course were eligible for membership. The President of the College and the faculty were members ex officio.

The Alumni Association in its annual meetings in Commencement Week did little for several years except revise its constitution and elect each graduating class to membership. Its first distinct action was to name each year, beginning in 1876, a member to deliver the Alumni Oration as a part of commencement festivities. In fact the first of the Alumni Orators was the Rev. Jacob A. Neff ’74 in 1878. In 1887 the Association formed the project of endowing an Alumni professorship, but this project languished because the membership was too small to underwrite it. Three years later when the Association’s treasury totalled $9.70 a motion was adopted that each member contribute ten dollars for this purpose.

A more significant development in the life of the Association up to 1890 was the establishment of the Alumni Library. As has already been told, there was no college library until Freeland G. Hobson ’76, then secretary of the Association, proposed at the annual meeting on June 27, 1882 that the Association establish and maintain a library for the use of the College. This proposal was adopted and a committee appointed to implement it. Gifts of books were solicited and small sums were collected for their purchase. For example, in 1883-4 the disbursement for books was $66.30 and in the following year $24.40. Despite these meager contributions this early interest of the Alumni body set the stage for the joining of the three campus libraries in 1888 and, more importantly, established the practice of library support by the Alumni Association that was to continue until World War II and
stimulated the generosity of individual alumni and organized classes that has continued to the present.

Direct participation of the alumni in the administration of the College began in 1880 on the initiation of the Board of Directors, which requested the Association to nominate four of its members for two vacancies on the Board. The Rev. David W. Ebbert '75, later to be elected president of the College (1904), and Jacob A. Strassburger '73 thus became the first alumni members. This policy was followed rather loosely until 1892 when the Board of Directors decided that the Alumni Association should have the right to nominate five persons for membership on the Board, one a year in a five year cycle, and that election to the Board should thereafter be for a term of five years. This pattern has remained to the present.

The election of the Rev. David Ebbert as one of the first alumni members of the Board was in a sense emblematic of the role played by clergy of the Reformed Church in building Ursinus and of the role played by the College in the life of the Church. Important as this was, and it can hardly be exaggerated, the College owed much from the outset to the devoted services of the laymen as well. Two members of the Board who were President Bomberger's constant and faithful coadjutors must be singled out. Henry W. Kratz was elected secretary and assistant treasurer when the Board of Directors was constituted in 1868. Four years later, upon the retirement of Abram Kline from the presidency, Mr. Kratz was named president of the Board and held that office until 1910, when because of age (he was 74) and declining health he resigned. A native of Trappe, educated at Washington Hall Collegiate Institute there, he was a school teacher for eighteen years and then engaged in various business and political activities, notably as a justice of the peace, clerk of the Pennsylvania State Senate, and recorder of deeds for Montgomery County. His presidency of the National Bartle of Schwenksville was helpful in solving the knotty problems of college finance and assuring other bankers that the struggling young college, despite all appearances to the contrary, was a good risk. The minutes of the Board through these years implicitly reveal his wisdom and fairness as a presiding officer and his unwavering support of President Bomberger.

The other strong lay member was Frank M. Hobson. Born in Limerick in 1830 he too was educated at Washington Hall and opened a general store in Freeland in 1856. He retired from this business in 1880, for in the interim he had become largely involved in surveying, conveyancing, and the administration of estates. Like Mr. Kratz he was involved in the direction of local banks, and his ability and experience in finance were early put to the service of Ursinus, for he was elected treasurer in 1873, one year after he joined the Board, and held that office until his resignation in 1899, when he was succeeded by his son, Freeland G. Hobson '76, who had sat with his father on the Board for six years. The most striking evidence of Frank Hobson's devotion to the College was his paying current obligations for it out of his own pocket when Ursinus was literally out of funds. And the Board minutes imply that he played a leading role in the administration in the unsettled years immediately after Dr. Bomberger's death. As will be shown, he was the chief administrative officer for the College in the erection of Bomberger Memorial Hall.