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Edwin Anderson Alderman (1861-1931)

Edwin Alderman was a noted educator who served as the first president of the University of Virginia from 1904 until his death in 1931. During his administration, the university gained a reputation for being one of the most progressive educational institutions in the South, focused on professional education that served the needs of the state and stimulated commercial and industrial growth.

Alderman also sought to develop a coordinated educational system throughout the state that would lead to improvements in the public schools.

Background and Education

Edwin Anderson Alderman was born on May 15, 1861 in Wilmington, North Carolina. He was the youngest of three children and the only son of James and Susan Alderman. James Alderman was an inspector of timber that floated in rafts down the Cape Fear River. His father was an official in the Presbyterian Church where Joseph R. Wilson, father of U.S. President Woodrow Wilson, ministered. Though Woodrow Wilson was several years older than Edwin Alderman, Alderman had a great respect for the family and was a staunch supporter and close advisor to Wilson throughout his political career.

Alderman attended two private schools in Wilmington as a young boy, Burgess Military School and the Catlet School. He was also informally educated by his mother and older sister Alice. As a child, Alderman also was an avid reader. His college preparation was at Bethel Military Academy near Warrenton, Virginia.

Alderman enrolled at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill in 1878. He participated in literary societies and public speaking, winning a medal in his junior year for his speech on the subject "Ireland and Her Woes". He also won the Magnum Medal for oratory at his 1882 commencement exercise on the topic of "Corporate Power".

Early Career

Despite his aspirations for politics, Alderman took on a teaching position in the Goldsboro, North Carolina School system following graduation in 1882. He taught in the highest classes, corresponding to the eighth and ninth grades of today. Three years later at the age of 24 Alderman became superintendent of the Goldsboro schools. On December 20, 1885 Alderman married Emma Graves, daughter of noted schoolmaster Ralph Henry Graves. They had three children, all of whom died at a very young age.

In April of 1889, Alderman was appointed to the North Carolina Board of Education as an institute conductor and agent of the board. He resigned his post as superintendent and began traveling the state with fellow agent and former classmate Charles D. McIver offering training to teachers in pedagogy and informing the community about the needs of the schools and areas for improvement. Alderman and McIver submitted reports of their activities and recommendations to the Superintendent of Public Instruction. Through their reports and presentations, Alderman and McIver embarked on a campaign for more spending on public education and the creation of a training school for teachers, especially women. Their efforts resulted in the raising of the tax rate and the authorization of the Normal and Industrial School at Greensboro, North Carolina. Alderman's work as a conductor had a profound effect on his philosophy of education, a philosophy of professionalization and social progress.

Following the compilation of their reports to the Superintendent in 1891, Alderman and McIver were charged with establishing the Normal and Industrial School in Greensboro. McIver was elected president and Alderman was chosen as professor. The school opened in October 1892 with 200 students. Alderman taught history and literature at the school until he was approached by George T. Winston, a former teacher and now president of the University of North Carolina, and offered Alderman the position of professor at the university. Alderman accepted the appointment and began his tenure there in 1893 at the age of thirty-two.

Work in Higher Education

At the University of North Carolina Alderman taught history, English and philosophy of education. He was also charged with the library and for the first year of his term at the university held the title of librarian. Alderman served as the superintendent of summer school for teachers. Alderman helped to increase enrollment from sixty teachers in 1894 to 153 in 1896. As a history professor, Alderman made numerous presentations for meetings on local history and wrote a *Brief History of North Carolina*, published in 1896.

At the 1895 Atlanta Exposition meeting of the National Education Association, Alderman delivered a paper entitled "Higher Education in the South" which elevated him to a recognized spokesman for education in the society of the New South. Alderman called for an end to the contempt for higher education and greater service to the public good, overthrowing the tyranny of public ignorance. Following the speech, Alderman became established in the inner circle of southern reformers and was elected president of the University of North Carolina in 1896.

During Alderman's administration the university prospered in several ways. Enrollment increased notably, university buildings were renovated, and greater emphasis was placed on "modern teaching" methods that were less mechanized, stereotyped and formal. He developed many personal connections outside the state and brought in well-known speakers such as writer Walter Hines Page, and educator Nicholas Murray Butler.

In 1900 Alderman moved to New Orleans to become president of Tulane University. During his tenure, Alderman became actively involved in the promotion of public education through the Southern Education Board. Alderman worked tirelessly to increase government appropriations for schools and to raise the public consciousness for maintaining adequate public schools. Educational campaigns supported by the Southern Education Board were successfully carried out in many southern states, and Alderman was recognized as one of the Board's chief spokespersons.

President of the University of Virginia

In September 1904, Alderman assumed his duties as the first president of the University of Virginia. Since the university's beginnings in 1825, faculty members rotated as executives to oversee the activities of the university. By the turn of the century the administrative affairs had grown to such an extent that the old form of government became too cumbersome. The appointment of Alderman brought a new era of progressivism to the university and service to the state of Virginia. In his inaugural address Alderman announced four objectives. First, the university needed to coordinate the state's educational system through the establishment of a school of education. Second, a greater understanding of society in the state should be explored through a school embracing the studies of economics, political science, sociology, and history. The result of this greater awareness would be Alderman's third objective, the establishment of schools of business and engineering. The last objective was to preserve the tradition of culture through school of English writing. In order to finance the objectives Alderman administered a large alumni fundraising campaign to increase the University's endowment. His aggressive solicitation of prominent citizens like Andrew Carnegie and philanthropic foundations including Rockefeller's General Education Board netted a total of over \$700,000 towards the campaign's goal of \$1,000,000.

In soliciting support from the General Education Board in 1905, Alderman outlined his plans for instilling the principles of southern progressivism. Efficiency, departmental rationalization, the coordination of state educational agencies, and the promotion of professional, technical instruction were the principle objectives. Alderman worked to increase the efficiency of the university by appointing five new deans and the merging of several of its medical schools. His recommendations for greater professional and technical instruction led to an increase of one hundred percent in the number of faculty by 1907. Alderman's vision for identifying the University more closely with educational life in the state was realized through the establishment of the Curry Memorial School of Education in 1905.

With the creation of the School of Education, Alderman worked to expand the University's outreach program to make its instruction and resources more available and serviceable to the whole state. A plan was developed to create a University Extension Bureau that would publish practical information, hold public discussion on social issues, offer correspondence courses, and form liaisons between university experts and government organizations. The Extension Bureau supported industrial expansion by preparing professionals and offering faculty expertise. The Summer School program was also established in 1906 for the continuing education of elementary and secondary school teachers. Both the Extension Bureau and the Summer School typified the University's to influence the state's educational and social policies.

An extended bout with tuberculosis in the winter of 1912 forced Alderman to take a leave from the university. He was a patient at Lake Sarnac in New York. He returned to his duties at the University of Virginia in the Fall of 1914. Upon his return, he received a request from the Virginia Federation of Women's Clubs to establish a coordinate college for women near the university. Alderman expressed his support for the idea but was met with great resistance from alumni and students who felt like the coordination would lead to integration. Legislation to create the coordinated college for women was defeated in 1916. In 1918 the University of Virginia began admitting women to its graduate and professional studies programs. At the same time, the College of William and Mary became the first coeducational college in the state of Virginia.

In 1924 Alderman received an invitation to deliver the memorial address on former U.S. President Woodrow Wilson before the joint session of Congress. This speech was the greatest achievement of his notable public speaking career. The speech received great acclaim from many politicians and fellow educators.

Alderman's tenure at the University of Virginia was very impressive. By the time that he ended his twenty-fifth year of service in 1929 the student body had multiplied by four and the faculty had

multiplied by five. The endowment had been increased from \$350,000 to \$10,000,000. He continued to be highly regarded as a great orator throughout the country. On the train to a speaking engagement at the University of Illinois on April 29th, 1931 Alderman suffered a stroke. He was rushed to a hospital in Connellsville, Pennsylvania where he died.

Alderman's legacy is spread over two centuries. It should be noted that he lived and spoke for more than a single institution or a single state. He played a major part in both the Reconstruction period and the New South. Through his leadership and orations he was the catalyst for great change and advancement for education in the South.

Related Web Sites:

The University of Virginia in the life of the nation -
<http://www.archive.org/details/universityofvirg00univrich>

Short History of the University of Virginia - <http://www.virginia.edu/uvatours/shorthistory/>
University of Virginia History for Kids - <http://www.virginia.edu/uvakids/history/>

Suggestions for Further Reading:

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Dennis, Michael John. *Educating the "Advancing" South: State Universities and Progressivism in the South*. Unpublished Thesis (Ph.D.). Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada, 1996.

Dennis, Michael John. "Reforming the "Academical Village": Edwin A. Alderman and the University of Virginia, 1904-1915". *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 105:1 (Winter 1997): 53-86.

Eaton, Clement. "Edwin A. Alderman – Liberal of the New South". *North Carolina Historical Review* 23 (April 1946): 206-221.

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