THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF GEORGE BENSON
TO CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

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The problem is to examine the contributions of George S. Benson to Christian education. The study presents data obtained by personal interviews with George Benson and people who have been close to him, extracts from letters written by former students, teachers, and board members, minutes of the Board of Trustees of Harding College, books, articles, speeches and newspapers.

George Benson was born September 26, 1898, in Oklahoma Territory, in what is now Dewey County, Oklahoma. He learned very early the meaning of hard work and self-reliance. His father gave him responsibilities beyond his years and George accepted them.

He received his elementary education in the one-room country schools of Oklahoma. His secondary education was taken at Kingfisher, Oklahoma and he received undergraduate degrees from Oklahoma A. and M. and Harding College. While still in high school he dedicated his life to God and determined he would one day serve him, as a missionary in a foreign country. This came true in 1925 when he sailed for China as the first missionary for the Churches of Christ.

He remained in China for eleven years before returning to assume the duties as president of Harding College.
When he returned to take over the duties as president of Harding, he assumed that his task would be almost wholly financial and administrative. The college debt was $67,000; it had no endowment and no certain sources of income. He discovered that the difficulties which beset Harding College were only local symptoms of a nation-wide moral, social, and economic breakdown.

On his return from the Orient, Benson was dismayed to observe the paralyzing change, he believed, had come over the American people. It seemed to him they had lost their old self-confidence. His job as college president suddenly took on new dimensions. He vowed to himself that he would do what he could to arouse America.

In the spring of 1941 he received permission to testify before the House Ways and Means Committee. His presentation made national news. He told the congressmen where they could find $2 billion in funds without raising a single tax. This was the beginning of a national reputation for George Benson and Harding College.

He became sought after as a speaker for local and national organizations and started writing a weekly news column in the mid-1940's that ultimately reached thousands of newspapers. From this beginning grew the National Education Program, which was separated from Harding in the early '50's.

In the years of his development of Harding College into one of the best known small colleges in America, he was called upon by virtually every other
Church of Christ college for counsel and actual work in fund raising. In the '50's an appreciation dinner was given for him by these colleges. A bronze plaque was presented him by each of the presidents. In each of the presentations, Benson was recognized as having done more for Christian education than any man of this century.

In retirement he has pushed the frontiers of Christian education to Africa. In three years he has raised $250,000 for the building of a high school. It would be typical of him to maintain all of his interests and to add new ones so long as he lives.
THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF GEORGE BENSON
TO CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
North Texas State University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

By

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Denton, Texas
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CHAPTER I

EARLY PREPARATION FOR SERVICE

Ancestry

In the early 1890's, an eighteen-year-old dark-haired, brown-eyed girl and her widower father left their farm in a rural area of southwestern Missouri and started west. Traveling in a one-horse buggy loaded with their most prized possessions, they were searching for a likely-looking spot in the eastern Indian (Creek Nation) Territory (Oklahoma) to stake a homesteading claim. They were Emma Rogers and her father, John. Emma's mother had died when she was three, and John Rogers had brought the daughter up as a partner and helpmate (2).

That same year a young man named Stuart Felix Benson left his father's farm in the Shenandoah Valley near Staunton, Virginia. Like the Rogers, he was seeking a land claim on which to build a new life -- and perhaps more. These hardy pioneers were among an estimated 100,000 who rushed into the Indian Territory over a period of four years as parcels of the vast acreage were officially thrown open for white homesteading by a series of Presidential orders (7, p. 246).

Emma Rogers and Stuart Benson, when they each had settled for a while in the eastern section of Oklahoma Territory, were not-too-far
distant neighbors; and the very first long gaze by Stuart at Emma, at a Sunday picnic, made an impression. The five-foot five-inch tomboyish Scotch-Irish lass and the sinewy, twenty-three-year-old five-foot eight-inch Virginian, he too, of Scotch-Irish parentage, were to fall in love and marry and endow some of their five children with unusual characteristics and talents.

Near the end of 1894 John Rogers and his daughter picked up their belongings, hitched their horses to a buggy and a wagon, and moved away westward. The father drove the wagon, and Emma drove the equally heavily-loaded buggy. They had heard of richer valley lands in the Cheyenne country. And President Benjamin Harrison had just officially opened the sprawling Cheyenne-Arapaho reservation in northwest Oklahoma Territory for white homesteading (7, p. 249). The Rogers forsook their place on the eastern plains. They went into a fertile valley between the North Canadian and South Canadian rivers, about one hundred miles northwest of the rowdy little frontier town of Oklahoma City, later to become the capital of the State. Their claim was in what later became Dewey County. John and Emma had hardly begun to string a barbed-wire fence around their 160-acre homestead when young Stuart Benson arrived in the community. Luckily, as the Rogers and Stuart saw it, he was able to file for and claim a 160-acre homestead adjoining the Rogers' land. This was the winter of 1894-95 (2).
Stuart, ambitious and unusually industrious, was so preoccupied with establishing a first-rate bottom-land farm that his courting of Emma had to be done on evenings spent with her and her father in the Rogers' modest farm home. But the young Virginian was determined, and after the spring row-crops were planted on the few acres made ready, Stuart took Emma in wedlock in a quiet family ceremony at the Rogers' place in 1895 (2).

Within two years Stuart Benson, aided far beyond the call of duty by his capable wife, had begun to make the 160-acre homestead into a revenue-producing acreage. As the opportunities arose more rooms were added to the original dwelling. Stuart, brought up behind the plow on his father's Shenandoah Valley farm, the thirteenth child in a self-reliant energetic farm family, had many capabilities. He was an adequate carpenter and thus could build a good barn and smokehouse, as well as a comfortable dwelling. His blacksmith shop became the envy of the whole farming area. He shaped his own plows, shod his horses, did his welding, and repaired the somewhat primitive farm machinery with which he was obliged to begin. He was an amateur cobbler and kept the family shoes half-soled; he knew how to find water and dig his own wells, and keep the water pure; and, until the family produced some able-bodied young men, he and Emma did the clearing, plowing, sowing, cultivating, and harvesting. The rich land grew cotton, corn, maize, castor beans, and wheat, and a lush vegetable garden tended mostly by Emma.

Stuart leaned heavily on livestock to prepare a food supply in the smokehouse
and add, at times, a little cash income; he began with a few swine and cattle
and a small poultry flock. He put in an orchard that later produced peaches,
plums, pears and apples. Emma, particularly when the children began to
swell the family's needs, preserved and canned the garden produce, the
orchard surplus, and all the berries that could be picked from the surrounding
countryside (2).

Boyhood

To give the couple added inspiration to work, and make their happiness
more complete, the first baby, to be christened Laura, arrived March 4,
1897. Eighteen months later (September 26, 1898) Emma brought forth a boy
baby who was promptly named George Stuart Benson. Earl, the second son,
came along in December, 1900; Bertha, in October, 1908; and John, named for
Emma's father, in 1914 (2).

At a very early age George was put to work and riding horseback. Most
of the 160 acres were gradually coming into cultivation, with a meadow left
for livestock, plus a good tract of timber. At the turn of the century life
was rugged and primitive; and as the family expanded, more income was
required. The only marketplace and nearest railroad were at Kingfisher,
fifty miles to the east, and most of their "cash crop"produce had to be
hauled there. Later Stuart Benson rented additional land, and farmed it to
try to go beyond making ends meet. The family never felt poor, although by
any measurement their living mode was frugal (2).
Until he was eight, George followed his father wherever he went, learning the chores, working in the fields, observing the wonderous magic of growing things, maturing into a jack-of-all-trades on the farm. By the time he reached eight, he didn't need to travel in his father's shadow; he was at eight a fairly good farm hand, and he assumed larger responsibilities each year.

George's youngest sister, Bertha, made the following comment: "George must have been not more than five or six years old when mother came to depend on him and allow him to assume responsibilities far beyond his years. She often said to me, 'George was never a child. He always had the head of a man.' She sometimes felt that my father was too demanding and critical of our brother, Earl, two years younger than George. Earl was a normal boy, and maybe father did unfairly expect too much of him due to George's unusual early maturity" (3).

George had just turned nine when Oklahoma became a state, and some people today who have followed the George Benson career suggest that the founding fathers must have been watching the Canadian-river-valley Bensons when they chose the new state's motto: Labor Omnia Vincit. Hard work and faith in God seemed to be a trait of the Benson family (4).

Religious Training

Both Stuart and Emma Benson were devout Christian people. They and their children attended church services on Sunday and prayer meeting on
Wednesday night, usually at Taloga, a small community about six miles distance and around a bend in the South Canadian river. Services at Taloga were held in the one-room schoolhouse.

The family made these trips in a wagon; worship was as much a part of their life as was their meals. The schoolhouse church at Taloga was a Methodist congregation, but none of the Bensons paid attention to the denominational aspects; their interest centered on the Bible. It happened that both Emma and Stuart, earlier, in their native states, had joined the Christian church. But the schoolhouse church in Taloga constantly was the scene of "protracted meetings" held by itinerant preachers who identified with the Methodist, Baptist or Holiness movements, and the Bensons never missed any of these teachings or meetings.

George himself was later to join the Methodist church at age sixteen, and to become that same year a teacher in the Bible school and very soon superintendent of the Sunday school; but the center of attraction for him was not doctrine but the Bible. He dreamed of becoming a preacher and, like Paul, spreading the Word of God to the world. The opportunities in the missionary field excited him powerfully (2).

But his religious life did not achieve a deep and abiding passion and life-time direction until in 1916 a traveling Church of Christ preacher, Ben J. Elston, came to the area and arranged to hold a meeting in the Independent schoolhouse nearby. George, now seventeen, had been obliged to
interrupt his high school education two years earlier to work on the farm and replenish his personal savings for further educational pursuits. He picked up a modest sum teaching school at Independent (an eighth grade education qualified one to teach) and doing extra farm work for some of the neighbors. When he heard about the visit of Ben Elston his searching curiosity about all religions led him to attend the Elston meeting. Another factor was his desire to be a spiritual inspiration, as well as an academic teacher, for the children in his school. He saw that they, too, attended (2).

George Benson discussed this experience: "As I listened to him and closely followed his discussion about the undenominational aspects of the church and the restoration of the New Testament church, I became very interested" (2). Characteristic of the man in his later life, the young George Benson did not permit himself to be overwhelmed by the logic and passion of Ben Elston’s sermons. He went back to his Bible and began to read it with a new understanding. "That winter," he recounts, "I was baptized into the church of the Lord" (2).

Because of his prominence by now in the Methodist church (superintendent of Sunday school, Bible class teacher, and leader of Sunday night services), his renunciation of Methodism was a shock to the community, especially among the congregation. He felt obligated to the congregation to explain his action, so the stewards called a special Sunday afternoon meeting.
Fifty-five years later, George Benson vividly recalls the dramatic meeting:

They came with Bibles under their arms and expected to show me where I was wrong; they hoped I would thus decide to stick with the Methodist church. I talked that afternoon for an hour, trying to explain what I understood by the restoration of the New Testament church -- the undenominational aspect of the church. I presented the best arguments that I knew how to present for the steps I had taken and why I felt all denominationalism was wrong. Not one of them responded; not a question was raised. The meeting adjourned and everyone went home. For more than a year they treated me like I was a dangerous person. But within five years I had had the wonderful experience of baptizing most of those Methodist people into the Church of Christ. The Methodist church ceased to exist in the community (2).

Young George Benson had found a driving mission. Almost immediately after his baptism by Ben Elston, he began frequently to conduct services ("just religious talks, really; not sermons") (2) in the schoolhouse, and to take a leading role in building a Church of Christ congregation. The preacher of this new-born church was Walt Briggs, but as so many frontier Church of Christ preachers were doing at the time, he was traveling from church to church; and this made it possible for the young convert to begin his lifetime crusade to attract all people to Bible Christianity. He was admittedly not a preacher; but he knew now that he would turn over the earth if necessary to become one, at least to voice the truths of the Bible to everyone he could reach. His formal preaching career was to begin a few years later at Harper College, Harper, Kansas.
Early Education

It had required an extraordinary amount of personal desire and parental encouragement for the frontier youth to prepare himself for college. In the early days in western Oklahoma the only schools were one-room grammar schools offering work from the first grade through the eighth, with one teacher conducting all classes. Teachers were scarce, although one could obtain his teaching certificate by completing the eighth grade and then passing an examination. There were no conveniences for the students, who usually walked a long distance or rode a horse to school.

The small one-room Bonto Grammar School was three miles from the Benson farm home. Its full term ran from four to five months. When George Benson reached six, his mother, Emma, walked with him to school at Bonto on his first day. To make it fun, his mother suggested a foot race for about half the distance (2).

"I thought I was doing pretty well," recalls the George Benson of 1971, "when I could run that three miles in thirty minutes. I would be doing chores when the thirty minute bell would ring (a big clapper bell that could be heard for miles). I would run to the house, change my overalls, and then run that three miles by the time the next bell would ring" (2).

In his third year in elementary school, his father turned over one of the horses to the eight-year-old. It didn't "spoil" him; it permitted more time at the chores in the morning and in the fields in the later afternoon.
The boy attended the eight years at Bonto, and although the term was very short, the schooling was crammed (2).

The farm work out in the open, and the miles of walking and running to school, gave the boy a hard, sinewy body and an appetite for sports of all kinds. He was later to play sandlot baseball, win events in college track, and coach the major sports for a short period.

Two incidents in George Benson's boyhood (or "young manhood," as his mother would have said) reflect his rapid maturity into a "mainstay" of the frontier family, and his ability to meet crises, of which he was to face many in later years.

In the early winter of 1910 (George was 12), he was helping to augment the family's cash assets by cutting, chopping, and hauling wood the six miles to Taloga. Wood was the source of heat as well as the fuel for cooking throughout the frontier, and in winter there was an ever-ready market in Taloga. Fording the South Canadian River about halfway to Taloga was often an exciting experience. There were deposits of dangerous quicksand that had to be bypassed, and sometimes the river ran as a torrent after heavy rains.

Stuart Benson had worked out a route avoiding trouble in fording the stream, and young George had been able to follow his lead. This day George's mother wanted to shop in Taloga, so she accompanied George in the wagon, loaded with wood and pulled by one of their best teams of horses (the elder Benson had gone to Kingfisher). When they reached the river they saw the water was
unusually high; but they were undaunted, and George drove the team into the ford. They were midway across the powerful stream when the current swung the wagon off course. George and his mother saw that the back end was headed for one of the quicksand areas.

Benson relates:

We instantly realized that the wagon would turn over — it was so heavily loaded. But as it sank down in the sand, the surging swift water came up over the bed. We were trapped. I could swim, of course, and so could mother. But our chance of being swept away would be about fifty-fifty. We decided to stay with the ship as long as possible (2).

George considered several escape maneuvers. He stepped out into the water on the up-river side of the team and got the horses loose. He and his mother were trying to figure out how they could mount the steeds when fortunately a neighbor drove up on the far side of the river in a wagon. They finally managed with his help to tie a rope around Emma Benson and, with George riding and swimming with the horses, pull her to safety. The wagon and the wood were forever lost. The wagon seat remained for a long time above the water and quicksand as an incongruous reminder to travelers and as a lifelong reminder to George Benson, as he says, "not to get in over your head" (2).

By the age of fourteen, George was marketing the farm produce as far away as Kingfisher. One time, astride the iron gray pony whose high spirits pleased the boy, George drove fifteen head of cattle the fifty miles to Kingfisher. That meant that he had to camp with his animals two nights en
route. "On each of these nights," he recalls, "I managed to turn the cattle into a road that had a good fence on each side; then when I quit urging them forward they soon lay down to rest. I put my horse out to graze and then I could lie down beside the cattle, propping my head up on my saddle for a pillow." He rode back home in two days carrying six hundred dollars in his pocket. On the way home a Model-T Ford rounded a sharp curve in the road and bore down on George and his young spirited colt. The colt whinnied and reared and started acting up. "It occurred to me that he couldn't cut capers or bolt if he were blinded," recalls George Benson. "So I reached forward and put my hands over his eyes. He pranced around a little as I yelled, 'Whoa, Whoa!' and finally settled down as the Model-T swept by and disappeared noisily down the dirt road" (2).

In the fall of 1915 George found a place nine miles from his home where he could work for his room and board and attend high school in Seiling, Oklahoma. On weekends he would walk the nine miles to be with his family. The next year his job was not available, so he arranged to get his second year in high school at Claremore, Oklahoma. He had obtained a sixteen-dollar-a-month janitor job to support him during the school year. He rented a little one-room house for two dollars a month and did his own cooking. On the sixteen dollars, pinching and scraping, he made it through the school year (2).

For the next two and a half years, however, he had to postpone his further schooling in order to work full time and help the expanding family.
He was able to make a substantial contribution to the welfare of the Benson family and at the same time save a little money, looking toward his college expenses.

His first teaching job was at the Guy School in Dewey County. The schoolhouse was located four and one-half miles from the Benson farm. He was able to stay at home, covering the four and one-half miles back and forth on horseback. He taught all grades at Guy School, with the exception of the sixth grade, which had no students.

The school board thought he did not have quite a full load without students for the sixth grade; so they asked him if he would teach two ninth grade students — one was his younger brother, Earl.

"I knew I could not give them proper credit for their work so I reached an agreement with the superintendent at Seiling. My students were to take the final exams there, at the end of the term, and if they passed them, they would be given credit by the Seiling School" (2). Both students did exceptionally well and were given credits for the ninth grade.

At the close of the year, Benson was offered the school again for the coming year. He also had opportunities for two other schools in the community. He decided not to teach in the fall of 1918 and instead made a little money sowing wheat on a farm fifty miles from home. When he returned home he found that the Independent School nearby was without a
teacher. He was offered the job and accepted. The school was located about two miles from the Benson farm.

His salary was twice as much as the year before. He had received forty-five dollars a month at the Guy School; at the Independent School, he got ninety dollars. He spent two school terms, 1918-19, 1919-20 at the small Independent School.

He returned to high school for his third year, in September, 1920, but it took some "doing." His uncle, Marion Benson, had followed Stuart's trail and had come out to western Oklahoma from Virginia to claim some acreage near Kingfisher, a trading center about fifty miles east of the Stuart Benson farm. George was glad to get work with his uncle, for the Kingfisher school had much better facilities than the others he had attended.

Few frontier boys and girls found an easy road to schooling, but George Benson's third year in high school at Kingfisher must have made the plight of many seem easy by comparison. In good weather and in season, he would be in his uncle's barnyard at daybreak, hitching the horses to some of the farm equipment; then he would spend an hour in one of the fields before walking the two miles to his Kingfisher schoolhouse. Once in a while, though, he got a ride.

"I would sometimes load a wagon load of wheat, drive the two miles into town, take it to the elevator and unload it; and then drive my team to the high school, unhitch the horses and meet an eight o'clock class" (2).
Long before this school year opened, George knew he would have to miss the first three weeks of classes, since his uncle raised a considerable acreage of wheat and it had to be sown the first three weeks in September.

Realizing that it was going to be his most strenuous year in school, George decided to combine his junior and senior years into approximately eight months and finish high school. He did it, and on the records showing his completion of nineteen high school units in the three years, were fifteen units in which he achieved "A's" (8).

Now he was ready for college. He chose to enroll at Harper Junior College in Harper, Kansas, because it was a Church of Christ institution with daily Bible instruction and it provided a wide-open opportunity for prospective teachers and preachers. Here at Harper, he felt, could be built a stronger foundation in Bible truths and a greater effectiveness in communicating the story of Christ and the founding of His church -- from the pulpit and in the missionary field. In his first month at Harper he began preaching.

Within a few weeks he had found a small community nearby that needed a regular Sunday preacher. It was a community much like Independent, Oklahoma, where he had made his first "talks" from the lectern. He preached there every Sunday during his year at Harper College; and, as he tells it with a grin nearly fifty years later, he preached with youthful "vim and vigor." When he returned home in the spring of 1922, the elders at
Independent insisted that he hold a ten-day meeting. This was the first out-
reaching of his mission:

I used a limited amount of notes. I was pretty enthusiastic about the message I was trying to pass along. I had a good deal of drive and talked rather fast. I baptized twenty-two people in this meeting. I remember how much I regretted the end of the meeting. For me, it was such a wonderful beginning (2)!

For twenty-five years thereafter, when not abroad in the missionary field, he went back and held an annual meeting in the area. He speaks of that first meeting now as if it were virtually the beginning of his life. From it he was projected into an extraordinary church mission carrying him from his beloved Oklahoma frontier to China, as a pioneer missionary for the Church of Christ, and to other regions of the world. And even more important to the Presidency of Harding College at Searcy, where he established one of the most influential world-wide citadels of Bible teaching. He also developed the National Education Program, which became a powerful and far-reaching voice in America promoting the fundamental principles of freedom.

If George had a problem his freshman year at Harper, it was the study of Greek. His Greek instructor was the President of the college, J. N. Armstrong. He credits Armstrong not only with pulling him through a difficult language course, but also with having a lasting influence on his preaching career. "He was a man of very profound convictions and was a superior Bible teacher," says George Benson. George had other excellent teachers at Harper; and one coached him to victory in the college oratorical
contest. This was the first of a series of oratorical victories won during
his college career (2).

Digging for knowledge and preparing his classroom assignments in his
freshman college year at Harper was only one of his many activities. He
worked regularly at Walker's Dairy in Harper, and tutored the two Walker
children on the side in return for his room in the Walker home. He threw
himself into the intramural sports program. One of the literary societies
he joined did very well in literary events, with George Benson leading a
winning debate team, but the club never seemed to win at sports.

"I was elected to be in charge of the athletic events," he says, "and
decided to turn the tide." As spring approached, he fielded a "track team"
and drove them relentlessly. There were no middle and long distance runners,
so George started training for the quarter mile, the half-mile and the mile.
"I wore a pound of shot on each ankle for about three months and also
trained in heavy shoes" (2).

Then came the track meet. The Benson-coached team swept the boards
in most of the events, winning the meet handily. In the quarter mile, the
half mile and the mile events, George Benson, running as if the school bell
at Taloga had just rung, led the pack in each race by a wide margin. This was
costly, in a way. His fame as a runner-coach led to the offer of another job:
baseball coach for the college. And later, in 1924, at Harding College in
Morrilton, Arkansas, he coached basketball, baseball, track and football
while serving as principal of the Harding High School and manager of the boys' dormitory.

In his college junior year, at Oklahoma A & M (now Oklahoma State University) at Stillwater, he won the college oratorical contest and was selected to represent the college in the Kappa Delta Oratorical contest and on the debate team sent to the Phi Kappa convention. The team won the debate competition -- but to George Benson's chagrin, he did not place in the oratorical contest. This served to challenge him in the immediate years ahead.

He had worked in the wheat fields through the summer months to bank a fund for his Oklahoma A & M year, and worked throughout the school year. Perhaps his most remunerative job was paper boy for the Daily Oklahoman. He carried the longest route in Stillwater. He had found a problem at Oklahoma A & M and in the community of Stillwater that led to a typical Benson reaction and also his first experience in institutional money-raising.

I found the Church of Christ was very weak in Stillwater. There were only a dozen members and they were meeting on the third floor of an Odd Fellows Hall. Each Sunday morning we had to clean it up, air it out and try to get rid of the beer smell and the cigarette butts, etc. I was asked to preach for the group, and did regularly through the year. They offered to pay me a few dollars each Sunday, but I told them to use it as a starter for a building fund, that we had to get out of that Odd Fellows Hall (2).

And what did George himself do about the proposed fund? He borrowed his uncle's Model-T Ford and started the rounds of Churches of Christ in
neighboring towns. He did not miss one. He got a substantial fund started for the growing Stillwater congregation.

At the end of the Stillwater year, in which he had piled up toward his A. B. degree many more credit units than normal for the junior year, George was asked to join the faculty at Harding College, at Morrilton, Arkansas. Arkansas Christian Junior College at Morrilton was very small and poor, but it had survived through the years. J. N. Armstrong of Harper, in consultation with church people in both locations, decided to accept the opportunity of combining the two colleges. The faculties were combined and the two junior colleges thereby became a senior college. George Benson needed ten hours to qualify for an A. B. That year at Harding, in addition to his many duties as coach and instructor, and regular preaching responsibilities, he made up the ten hours, and was a member of the first Harding graduating class in 1925. He immediately transferred his credits back to Oklahoma A & M and was awarded a B. S. Degree from that institution. While home on a furlough from his China missionary work, he earned his Master's Degree at the University of Chicago in 1931.

A number of memorable things happened to shape George Benson's life while he was at Harding in Morrilton. One of the most dedicated teachers in the high school at Harding that year, and to George Benson's eye the prettiest thing on the whole campus, was Sallie Ellis Hockaday. Her family lived in Granite, Oklahoma, where her father was a hardware merchant.
George found time to court Sallie and share with her his dreams of a missionary venture into China. He had considerable competition, but at the end of the school year Sallie Hockaday became the wife of George Benson on July 2, 1925.

The missionary zeal had become his greatest desire. He had studied countries all over the globe while at Harper and Oklahoma A & M and had made the choice of China before associating with Harding at Morrilton. "I chose China," he explains, "because I felt it was the place where the greatest need existed since we had no members of the Churches of Christ in missionary work there, and yet it was the most populated nation in the world. The challenge was clear and undeniable" (2).

Sallie, the bride, joined George wholeheartedly in his great mission. She hardly had had time to change from her wedding gown, when she and George were aboard a Pacific liner headed for Hong Kong (6).

While the Bensons were in China, George taught English for one year at Sun Yat Sen University in Canton, China. He felt this was perhaps his most fruitful year in China.

Perhaps Benson's early teaching was done because of availability or necessity. The evidence indicates that he had a natural feeling for the classroom that was recognized by his former teachers, J. N. Armstrong and L. C. Sears. "I was well impressed with him," says Sears, "as a student and later as a teacher at Harding College in Morrilton" (5). Armstrong
tried to persuade George Benson to join the Harding College faculty, but the young man with a mission felt the great challenge for him was China (1).

It would be difficult to measure the amount of influence that history, family background, geographical milieu and education had on George Benson. We can assume that it served as a cutting edge to mold and form the personality and characteristics that exist today. It gives us evidence of how self-reliance, industriousness, living within one's means, energy, and stamina became a part of George Benson. It points out his love of a challenge and his competitive spirit. Perhaps most significant of all, it gives some insight and understanding of those things that might have had a direct influence on his thinking.

Benson is proud of his frontier heritage, his family background, and his life as a boy. He is proud of the qualities instilled in him through this early training.

The reflection of Benson's pride in his past can be found as one listens to him tell about his family background and boyhood in Oklahoma territory. Chapter two will point out and examine three consuming interests as they developed in the life of George Benson.
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CHAPTER II

FROM DREAMS TO DEDICATION

Missionary to China

George and Sallie Benson's boat trip to China in 1925 was not cost-free; nor would they be able to live on the excitement and challenge of their great adventure. They would need food, clothes and shelter, and other things, and these would cost money. George Benson typically had not only foreseen such needs; he had done something about the problem. In the spring and early summer as he and Sallie made their China plans while at Harding in Morrilton, he had worked at the financial problem. He visited many congregations to give heart-warming talks about the wonderful opportunities for the Church of Christ in a China of hundreds of millions of people, none of whom had yet discovered what George considered to be the true Word of God. The appeal of his call for help did not always start the flow of money, but it usually made an impression and was remembered (3).

This was his first "structured" campaign, and it was characterized more by zeal than by know-how (the extraordinary know-how was to develop later). It was the beginning of a money-raising career that may ultimately reach, in all its ramifications, a hundred million dollars for an untold number of Church of Christ institutions, for hundreds of missionary projects, for
benefits, and charities, for innumerable good deeds -- reaching into Europe, Asia, Africa, around the world.

When the adventurous and determined Bensons boarded the Pacific ocean liner in San Francisco, George had the assurance of $100 a month contribution -- from the church in Granite, Oklahoma, and some individuals from whom he had received firm commitments. He was sure some of the other churches would give support, and some of them did. By the time the Bensons arrived in China, seeing everything in every port en route, their support had grown to $150 a month for living expenses, with a small extra amount to be used as a working fund. The $150 a month remained his salary throughout the family's eleven years in China and Asia, although the missionary contribution from the states grew substantially, allowing expanded activities (3, 30).

Great lessons were learned by George Benson in China, lessons that were to shape the future course of individuals and institutions in America whose lives he has touched and influenced. He saw a heathen nation filled with great poverty. He saw the anti-Christ, anti-God Communists at work undermining what little strength the weak and fragmented government in China had and propagandizing the people so they could be manipulated with deceptive cunning. He learned practical lessons in human relations. He learned how to organize, and build. And above all, as he and his family made their way into many regions of Asia, he learned how blessed were the people of America, how priceless was the American heritage on which the American
way of life has been built. He realized that individual freedom, backed by the institutions of a democratic republic, is mankind's greatest blessing (3).

George Benson and his bride reached Hong Kong in September, 1925. No Chinese met the boat with bouquets of flowers or a reception party. George and Sallie were shocked when, as they rode through the streets of Hong Kong, they were confronted with signs that in Chinese language (they quickly learned) said the equivalent of: "Yankee Go Home!" and "Foreigners Not Wanted!" and "Missionaries Get Out" (3, 30)! While George had been raising the finances back in Arkansas and Oklahoma for their missionary adventure, the anti-foreigner, anti-missionary campaign whose seeds were sown by Communist agents throughout China had swelled to a state of such vicious actions that missionaries in the interior of southern China had already evacuated, some going back to America, some searching for a safe haven in which to continue their work. The Bensons encountered some of these fleeing missionaries during their stay in Hong Kong, which, due to the acute dangers, was extended two months. Among the refugees was the W. G. Smith family, who had been independent missionaries at Kwei Hoien in Kwong Si Providence, South China, for many years. The Smiths, while waiting out the trouble, began to help the Bensons get oriented and started teaching them the basic Chinese language. The Bensons had planned to attend a language school. The Smiths advised against it (3).
"The Smiths," explains George Benson, "told us that people who attended a language school never did achieve good conversational Chinese. They said the way to learn to communicate was to get out among the people."

The Smiths offered to take the Bensons with them to their mission establishment in Kwei Hoien, 500 miles into the interior; and George and Sallie felt this would be the best preparation for their work that they could possibly get. In November, 1925, the two families went by river boat first to Canton, then Muchow, thence to Kwei Hoien.

My wife and I, having not yet seen the viciousness of some of the everyday life in China, simply didn't know enough to be afraid of this trip, says George Benson. But we got a sample of it when my wife's good coat was stolen while we waited for the river boat at Muchow (3).

Finally established temporarily with the Smiths at Kwei Hoien, the Bensons employed a Chinese to work with them on the language. He spoke no English, so it was a difficult but practical course. "We started to work with the Bible as the textbook and a Chinese-English dictionary," says the now silver-haired Benson. "We spent six weeks on the first chapter of Mark" (3). Each day they would talk to a few Chinese and in their awkward way try to communicate. They stayed with the Smiths during the winter and by spring had mastered the language well enough to converse fairly well with the people; and they also had learned a great deal about Chinese customs that they had not found described in the books. As their skill in communication
progressed, they began to pursue the mission objective to seek out converts (3).

As spring came, the Russian Communists began a systematic campaign, through their Chinese comrades, to again inflame the people to "drive out the missionary devils." Their propaganda approach was: "These missionaries are foreign spies, spying on you so they can make you their slaves. They are devils. They must be driven out of China or killed!" Chinese Communists, recruited and trained in Russia, convinced millions in China that this propaganda line was the truth (3).

George Benson relates:

The Chinese people who were not completely taken in by the Communist propaganda were nevertheless afraid to come to our house or appear to be our friends. We got quite uneasy and sent for the Mayor. He was afraid to come in daylight. He waited until dark to come so that the neighbors wouldn't see him visiting us. Then he advised us to go down river to Hong Kong immediately (3).

The situation continued to get more and more tense, and it was decided the Bensons should take a boat down West River. The boat crews were afraid to take foreigners as passengers, yet nearly all travel in the interior had to be by river. Every time a boat docked, the Bensons would try to secure passage down the river. "We always received the same answer," relates George Benson. "We would like to take you, but we don't dare. Should we take you, our boat would be burned" (3).
This continued for about six weeks before passage was secured on a boat down river. The situation was complicated because Mrs. Benson was expecting their first child. The services of a doctor were impossible to secure and this added to the tense circumstances.

A Captain of a tug boat was persuaded (with a substantial cash persuader) to take them down river as far as Muchow. The Smiths decided to remain behind for a time. At Muchow the Bensons had to change to another boat, but they could find no one who would help move their rather large accumulation of luggage. George Benson had to move it all himself — on dock, to the other boat slip, and aboard the second river boat.

They continued down river to Canton, where they were to change boats again. This time they were to go aboard a British boat lying in the harbor. The Chinese would not allow anyone to help take them off the Chinese boat.

When things were looking very desperate, a man with a motor boat agreed to move them the 100 yards for $75 American money. George Benson challenged the high price, though he was prepared to pay it:

"That's pretty high, isn't it?" The Captain shrugged. "Yes, but this isn't any fun," he said, "the Chinese fired at me yesterday for taking off an American and I'll not touch it for less than $75." We handed him the money and were transferred to the British ship bound for Hong Kong (3).

They were forced to stay in Hong Kong for two years before they could return to the interior. Of the more than 6,000 missionaries who had been in
China during the summer of 1925, only a few remained a year later, when the Bensons fled from Kwei Hoien to Hong Kong.

A short time after they had arrived, the Communists took over Canton. "They held it for months and they were powerful, evil, and murderous throughout the southern interior," states Benson (3). Within a year, however, what was to become known as the Nationalist government drove the Reds out of Canton and got rid of their organized groups throughout the southern interior.

George Benson says with emphasis:

And they were never driven out of North China. They used North China as a base from which to regroup, retrench, retrain their infiltrating forces; and years later, with the help of Soviet Russia and, astonishingly, unwitting aid from the United States, Mao Tse-tung's Red armies swept down to take the whole of China and begin the most massive slaughter of human beings in the history of the world -- 22 million Chinese (official U.S. estimate) who were considered enemies of the people because they owned property (3).

After experiencing at first hand the cunning and skill of the Communists and the vulnerability of the Chinese people to propaganda lies told over and over again, George Benson foresaw the further decay of the government and the eventual takeover by the Communists. All the elements in this frightful development in world history remained vividly alive in his mind and influenced his work for more than half a century.

He found China to be a land of contradictions. The weakness of the government in such a teeming, sprawling nation seemed to him a fatal fault.
Benson states:

It did not protect the missionaries or other people. Chinese businessmen lived in constant fear of being captured by bandits and held for ransom. It was an everyday occurrence. Consequently, China's capable producers could not develop their own natural resources. So all the coal, oil, and metals that I saw in China were imported, even though China had an abundance of these resources. She had hard working people and also people of intelligence and ability. But they could not move because their weak government did not protect their freedom and property (3).

This eye-witness lesson in the proper role of government, in reverse, (he later was to attain his Master's Degree at the University of Chicago, in Chinese history) put a sharp edge on his understanding of a nation's strengths and weaknesses, an edge that never thereafter dulled.

The stories of deprivation, fear, failure to develop natural resources, and the constant encounters with the Communists were to give color and authenticity to his speeches, and even his sermons, years later back in the United States. His classic description of the Chinese coolie carrying two five-gallon cans of kerosene cross-country on a stick across his shoulders, for a wage of ten cents a day, in comparison to the American railroad worker, hauling kerosene at one-tenth the cost of transportation while making a wage of from fifteen dollars to twenty dollars a day, was a highlight of one of the Hollywood-made technicolor cartoon films George Benson produced for Harding's National Education Program in the 1940's (11).

The Bensons were busy in Hong Kong, working among the peasants, and, in fact, all classes.
The two years in Hong Kong were productive years for the Church of Christ. It was during his work there, waiting until the Communist menace was driven out of the southern interior of China, that George Benson began his writings that were eventually to be read in countries around the world. He wrote detailed inspirational reports to the various church congregations in America that were contributing to the China mission and had them printed by the Victoria Printing Press, 3 Duddell Street, Hong Kong. These reports were widely circulated in America. Later, in Canton, he conceived the idea of a China slick-paper magazine, published quarterly, the Canton Christian. He served as its editor-in-chief and publisher. It was an excellent journalistic project that proved invaluable within China as well as a vehicle to widen the American support for the China work. Within a year Editor Benson had changed its name to the Oriental Christian. Every Church of Christ preacher working in the Benson China effort had a by-line article in the magazine. There were good photographs of Chinese groups, many names of Chinese people. For the benefit of the American circulation, there was also a detailed financial statement on the receipts and expenditures for the overall work, broken down into specifics for each congregation.

His reports on the work in and out from Hong Kong during 1926 and 1927 were explicit and vastly encouraging. Sallie Benson always contributed to these reports, filling in some of the color and romance of personal incidents in the missionary work. Here are excerpts of George Benson's report (from
We got in touch with a group of Chinese Christians in Sham Shui Po who were carrying on their own work independent of any foreign influence. One of the members had been a member of the Christian Church in America and the Chinese preacher had worked three years in Australia with the Australian Church of Christ. They were using an organ in the worship, and having a woman preacher occasionally. Under the influence of our teaching, seeing that both were unscriptural, they removed the organ from the chapel and discontinued the work of the lady preacher. They seemed glad to listen to the Word of God in all things. . . Twenty more Chinese souls were added to the one Body, five of whom came from my English Bible class.

While the Sham Shui Po work was going forward we were looking for a location and for means of opening evangelistic work in . . . Hung Hom, just across the bay from Hong Kong Island. . . From the day of the opening we found every service crowded. . . At the end of the first week four young men and one old lady were baptized. . . (30).

After studying the Pacific and Asian areas for places where missionary work might be productive, the Bensons, early in their Hong Kong two years, decided to visit the Philippine Islands. They went during the first summer, in 1926. They found a most encouraging situation, and many responsive contacts were made. However, it was about two years later that they were able to start a mission work in the Philippines.

In April, 1928, George Pepperdine, founder and president of the Western Auto Supply Company chain of stores in America, decided to visit George Benson in Hong Kong. He knew George, and knew of his persevering work and his extraordinary capabilities. He knew that the Bensons had visited the Philippines, as he had once in 1927. Pepperdine had been
sightseeing in the Holy Land, and he decided to return to America through the Orient so that he could discuss the Philippine situation with George Benson. Grace E. Oldham, one of the Benson missionary group, reported:

We had been looking forward to his coming for sometime. . . . Brother Pepperdine came out to the Bensons and later we all went back to the boat with him and had a real nice visit with his mother (30).

And George Benson reported on the results of their discussions about the Philippines.

It was Brother Pepperdine's suggestion that Mrs. Benson and I go to the Philippines for the summer months and test out the opportunities. He thought that if the opportunities proved as good there as we both thought they would, it should not be hard then to get workers for that field. . . . Brother Pepperdine advanced four hundred dollars for travel expense for a three months' campaign in the Philippines. . . . During our work in Mindora, seventy-nine Filipino people were baptized into Christ. . . . (3).

The Bensons later returned to the Philippines and established substantial congregations in a number of areas; for instance:

At Piamalayan where we baptized fifty-five in all, the brethren furnished the materials and erected their chapel with only about four dollars help from us. . . . At Agsalin, the brethren are meeting in a private home. . . . At Paglasan the brethren brought in material and erected their own chapel without a cent from me. The buildings are not elegant. You might think them fitted only for wagon sheds. . . . Personally, I think that a chapel, ever so humble, which they have supplied themselves, is worth more to the cause in the Philippines than a temple supplied by foreign money (30).

George Pepperdine, when all the reports were in, was delighted with the success of the Benson campaign in the Philippines. Later, he was to
show his appreciation for George Benson’s capabilities with a most timely gift to Harding College when Benson called on him for help.

Benson’s concept of the magnitude of his work in China is perhaps best expressed in a paragraph of a report he made to his supporters in America while he worked in the Philippines.

Many are asking if we are not going to remain in the Philippines. Several seem to think that we should. The field is tempting in view of such immediate results. However, that is not our purpose at all. Our hearts are tied to China. We have spent three years there, have learned some of the language, and have learned to love the people. It is not wise for us to leave China unless it is wise for the Church of Christ to give up the idea of doing mission work in that great country. And China, with one-fourth of the population of the world, and just emerging from idolatry, and stepping forward to take a place among the nations of the world, is certainly not a field to be deserted. I shall return to Mindora next week with Brother Cassess, and remain until he has time to get somewhat acquainted with the work we have started, and then I shall return permanently to China (30).

Baby Mary Ruth Benson was born in Hong Kong in November, and Lois came along about two years later.

In 1929 the Bensons moved to Canton and began immediately setting up the headquarters for their mission work. They were to work out of this headquarters until they returned to the United States in 1936. Canton was a city of approximately 1,500,000 population (30).

The work of reaching Chinese minds and hearts with the Word of God was slow and sometimes painful, but the Bensons were undaunted. They worked at helping the poverty-stricken and otherwise tried to show their love.
Within a year they had formed several congregations in Canton and had reached into the hinterlands (3).

After only a few months' work, George Benson concluded that the Bible could be taught to Chinese most effectively in the English language. So a part of the work became the teaching of English. (Some of the young Chinese in families who were thus taught English later came to Harding College under the sponsorship of the Bensons, returning to China to become stalwarts in Church of Christ work) (3, 5).

In Canton George Benson made wide-ranging contacts -- in government, in what little civic life there was, among all kinds of religious groups, and within the educational profession. To give himself greater stature with the Chinese people he wanted to reach, he applied for and obtained a post on the faculty of the greatly-honored Sun Yat Sen University in Canton. He was given a year's contract in September, 1929, and taught English at Sun Yat Sen. This extended his acquaintanceship among many of the "higher class" Chinese; for only the comparatively well-to-do Chinese could attend a university.

Benson notes:

I learned much about missionary methods as a result of my year teaching at Sun Yat Sen University. When a missionary goes into a heathen land and begins immediately to say to them, "My religion is right, yours is wrong," and yet has not demonstrated any way in which he has been helpful to them in terms that they can understand as being helpful, he has a poor foundation from which to work (3).
Some of his students at the university became his most valuable friends and advisors, enlightening him in Chinese traditions and coaching him in the most effective ways of reaching the people of the educated class.

His experiences in following up these lessons on communication, together with his and Sallie's experiences with their first hundred or so congregational contacts, convinced him that a basic part of the job had to start with English language teaching in an English and Bible School. There were no public schools in China, so he saw the opportunity as wide open for attracting middle class people and peasants with a potential for leadership.

The need for a school of English in Church of Christ missionary work in China was one of the motivations for George Benson's return to the states in 1931. Several congregations were thriving and so many friendships had been made that Mrs. Benson and the two little girls felt perfectly at home and safe in Canton; and Sallie Benson was anxious for George to follow through on his determination to establish some English language schools in southern China. He came home to the United States and, as usual, he had a two-fold mission: to obtain a Master's Degree at the University of Chicago, and to raise sufficient money to finance the establishment of a school primarily to teach English (and the Bible) to the Chinese, and thus develop a leadership group for the expansion of the Church of Christ throughout China (3, 5).

In September, 1931, George Benson, China missionary, began his studies at the University of Chicago for his master's degree in Chinese
history. His experiences with the professors and his observations of attitudes and activities of the massive student body taught him other valuable lessons. The United States was in the beginning throes of the so-called "Great Depression." "Some of the professors at Chicago, who had secretly espoused Socialism but had been afraid to commit themselves publicly, began to talk about the end of the capitalist system," says George Benson, "and I saw that some of the students were listening" (3). He was to get the "big shock," however, when he returned to America five years later to find that many basic freedom principles had in his judgment been seriously eroded (3).

In spite of the growing unemployment, production curtailment, and "tight" money situation brought on by the depression, George pursued with determination his plans to raise the money in America for his English and Bible school in Canton. He spent every minute of time that he could be away from his university work in visiting Church of Christ congregations and contacting the leaders whom he felt were capable of assisting. His zeal, industry and perseverance were extraordinary; and long before he was awarded his Master of Arts diploma in June, he had secured enough money and pledges in the Midwest and Southwest to make his journey back to Canton an especially joyous one (3).

It was almost a year later, however, that sufficient gifts had been banked in Canton, and sufficient monthly contributions were coming in from substantial congregations in the States to convince the hard-headed
George Benson that it was "safe" to start building his "dream" institution -- the Canton English and Bible School. On December 1, 1934, the school was opened (30).

The tuition was relatively high, and George Benson felt that this was all right in the beginning, for it assured him that the young Chinese enrolled would be from fairly influential families and therefore would take leadership roles in recruiting the masses to God. He had planned from the beginning to seek influential recruits first, then branch out and establish some schools for the poor; and he did this just about on the time-table he had set in the beginning.

As he had expected, the English classes proved to be "feeders" for the Bible school. The Church of Christ in Canton began to make headway. Fifty or sixty people were admitted to the first classes. The Bible, the English language, and all the usual school subjects were taught (3, 4, 30).

George Benson says nearly forty years later:

Very quickly, we saw that our English language classes and the Bible School constituted the best thing we had done in China. We were really on the right track for getting established as a productive missionary body in China (3).

As he spread out into the interior from Canton with his English language schools for the peasants, and visitors carried the story of his work back to the States, George Benson began to be widely known in Church of Christ circles. He was able to recruit some splendid missionary helpers
from the States to work in expanding the reach of the schools, to establish congregations, to create goodwill among the populace (30).

One of the most significant facts about the George Benson operation in China is that it was, from the beginning until he left in 1936, a sound financial success. The considerable budget of the Canton Bible School was balanced; the bank account was never overdrawn; the teachers were paid on time; and with the profits, the small but important schools for the peasants were adequately financed (3, 30).

It would seem, in retrospect as a historian looks at events, that the China experience was an indispensable part of George Benson's training for his later work in education, in the church, and for his country. He says that secondary only to his proving of some basic ideas on successful missionary work and business management was the dramatic lesson he learned about the part government must play in the life of a nation and its people (3).

Benson says:

Throughout our years in China and our additional travels in Asia, the effects on a people of the failure of government was there before my eyes. The Chinese people were in a sense stagnated because of the failure of their own government to function in its basic responsibilities, particularly the protection of their freedom and property. I came away from China with the conviction that good government probably is the most important factor in the happiness and well-being of any people (3).

Later, in many of his endeavors, he continued to emphasize this conviction.
Birth of a College

The first antecedent of Harding College was established in 1901, with the founding of Potter Bible College, at Bowling Green, Kentucky. James A. Harding, who with David Lipscomb had founded the Nashville Bible School, established Potter Bible College. Harding and his son-in-law, J. N. Armstrong, accompanied by about half of the faculty and students of the Nashville Bible School, went to Bowling Green to establish Potter Bible College.

Harding, who was president, was able to keep Potter Bible College open for only twelve years. Because of financial problems and the failing health of Harding, the school was forced to close its doors in 1912. The school plant was turned into an orphan's home (14).

J. N. Armstrong and two other faculty members of Potter Bible College, R. C. Bell and R. N. Gardner, had left Potter in 1905 and established a new school, Western Bible and Literary College, at Odessa, Missouri. J. N. Armstrong was chosen president. Ill health caused him to resign two years later. By 1915-1916 it became clear that Western would have to close for lack of funds. The administration building was deeded back to the town. When the college closed, its friends turned to the support of Cordell Christian College, Cordell, Oklahoma (33).

The college in Cordell had begun in 1907. J. N. Armstrong had gone to Cordell after recovering from his illness at Western, and in 1908 he became
its president. On the faculty with him at Cordell were his colleagues who had followed him from Western, B. F. Rhodes and R. C. Bell. The financial problems that had plagued the administration at Potter and Western soon faced Armstrong and his associates at Cordell, and in the years 1914-1918, with World War I under way, another problem arose. The community of Cordell demonstrated strong feelings against the college and some of its young men who would not serve in the armed services. These two major problems caused Armstrong and the Board to close the college in 1919 (32, pp. 193, 194).

Armstrong and seven members of the faculty moved to Harper, Kansas, shortly after this. The Board of Trustees at Cordell, with no money on hand, allowed the faculty going to Harper to take the library, laboratory equipment, and other movable fixtures as settlement for their unpaid salaries (32, p. 185).

The college at Harper grew. So did the financial problems. By 1924, the growth of the student body made it imperative for the school to enlarge its accommodations, but Harper appeared to be too small a town to support a large school. Although student enrollment and faculty had expanded and the college was gaining academic recognition, administrative financial problems continued to harry its existence. The management of the college considered the possibility of moving the school to Wichita, Kansas. The fact that Harper College was seeking a new location came to the attention of another
junior college at Morrilton, Arkansas, headed by A. S. Croom. Negotiations began and a consolidation of the two junior colleges, to form a senior college at Morrilton, was effected in 1924 (32, p. 199).

The building which had been constructed by Harper College was traded for a hospital building at Morrilton near the college campus. All the movable equipment at Harper, such as the library, laboratory equipment, and dormitory furnishings, were brought to Morrilton (32, p. 200).

A. S. Croom, who was president of the Morrilton institution, suggested that the new senior college be called "Harding College" to honor James A. Harding; and to retain the several thousand dollars already pledged to a memorial building to Harding which was to have been built at Harper (32, p. 199).

The new board of Harding College was composed of most of the men who had been on the Arkansas Christian College Board at Morrilton and three members from the Harper College Board. J. N. Armstrong became president of the consolidated college, A. S. Croom, vice-president, and L. C. Sears, J. N. Armstrong's son-in-law, dean. By 1934 attendance at the college and high school had grown to 430 students and more room was needed to accommodate them. The college had no money with which to build, and the administration failed to raise enough money from among the citizens of Morrilton to enlarge the plant. Armstrong and the board looked around for a new location. At this time the Methodist church was consolidating three
of its colleges in Arkansas into one school. It was closing down Galloway College, a girls' school, at Searcy, Arkansas. It offered the Searcy plant for $75,000 (25, pp. 242, 243).

The old Galloway plant consisted of a twenty-nine-acre campus with a two-story brick dormitory which included a basement dining hall, a second brick dormitory of three stories, an old administration building of three stories, a one-story fine arts building, a small gymnasium and enclosed swimming pool, a central heating plant, a small commercial laundry, and four cottage homes (25).

The Board of Trustees made bank loans and purchased the property. They established a new college to be chartered as Harding College, Searcy, Arkansas. The year was 1934. Counting grade and high school enrollment, 461 students were present for the opening of Harding College. More of them were boarding students than had ever been on the Morrilton campus. The following year twice as many boarding students were in school. Likewise, the new school's faculty was stronger than that of any of the earlier colleges (32, p. 251).

J. N. Armstrong was elected president of the new Harding College. As he left Morrilton to take over the new post, he said to the faculty and students:

Our move to Searcy is a great move, we think. We are coming into possession of a real college plant and we believe our opportunities and possibilities will be doubled (32, p. 260).
But inevitably, there were headaches ahead, particularly the old plaguing college problem of insufficient finances. In its infancy, the new Harding College was becoming insolvent. In February, 1936, George Benson, in Canton, China, received a letter from J. N. Armstrong asking him to join the faculty at Harding. Before he could reply to the invitation, two additional letters arrived, one from L. C. Sears, and a second one from Armstrong. The second Armstrong letter asked George Benson to come back to America and accept the presidency of the new Harding College (22, 23, 24).

J. N. Armstrong wrote:

You as President and Sears as Dean would please me as no other arrangement could. As I have said before and want to say again, there has never been a man within my knowledge that I would as soon turn my mantle. I believe that you can raise money, and I can't. This will be the first thing for you to do (23).

Sallie Benson recalls the events that followed receipt of the second letter from Armstrong. "For several days after that," she remembers, "we were praying, and thinking, and talking, and laying awake at night trying to reach the right decision" (10).

George Benson's first inclination was to reject the idea of going to Searcy and becoming president of Harding College. He felt that the work in China was going well and he was most reluctant to leave. He was not sure he would be as useful to his church in the United States as he was in China. He felt that he was pioneering in many phases of missionary work and that its
importance could ultimately be priceless to the growth of the church worldwide. As he pondered the choice he had to make, the challenge of the new opportunity in America, with all its possibilities for service, outweighed the possible further results in China; and besides, he felt he could continue to have a hand in the China missionary efforts through the associates he had brought out from the States. Thus he decided to accept the appointment to the presidency of Harding.

Benson says of this decision:

I decided that one of the great needs was more training for Church of Christ missionaries. At that time we had not a single course on missions in a single one of our Christian colleges. Our missionaries were going out unprepared and half of them were coming home to stay within three years. I knew that at Harding, with the authority of the presidency, we could begin developing courses in missions and help spread these courses to other Christian colleges. This was really the decisive argument in my own mind for coming home (3).

On April 1, George Benson, China missionary, radioed the following four-word message to J. N. Armstrong:

"Proposition accepted, arriving August" (10).

"We hoped," remembered Sallie Benson, "that Armstrong wouldn't consider it an April fool joke." She added: "The die was cast. That night I slept like a log, and so did George" (10).

The Board of Trustees was called into session immediately upon receipt of the Benson acceptance. Armstrong resigned. The motion was made that L. C. Sears be elected president but he quickly withdrew and the motion died.
The motion was then made that George S. Benson be elected president of Harding College. It was a unanimous decision by the board. Armstrong continued to act as president until Benson's arrival in August (26).

In China, meantime, George Benson began to contemplate the problem of raising money, and to think through a number of ideas on which to base a fund-raising campaign. He was able to lay some groundwork that proved to be fruitful (3).

The Bensons left Hong Kong aboard the Conte Verde on June 28, 1936. They traveled by way of Egypt, Palestine, and across Europe before sailing into New York (7).

As George Benson read the New York newspapers, and talked to people, and listened, he concluded that the American public's attitude toward many things had changed. The depression was hanging on, and the leaders and the public seemed to be ready to scrap some of the basic founding principles. This worried the returning missionary. It continued to worry him as the family made its way toward Searcy. He knew that he would have to do something about this, personally; it endangered, he felt, the nation's progress and security (3).

Return to Harding

George Benson had asked Armstrong if he would call a board meeting for August 31, 1936, and it had been arranged. The Bensons arrived in Searcy on the 30th and the new president met with the board. His first
action was to sketch some plans for a drive to raise money. The college had a total indebtedness on the plant of $67,400, plus some smaller outstanding notes; and it wasn't "making ends meet." It was Benson's plan to first establish a solvent, pay-as-you-go operation while striving, secondly, to pay the debt in four years. This was to prove to be typical of his faith, determination, and love of a challenge. The paying of the indebtedness in full actually took two months over three years (3, 32, p. 262).

When George Benson returned to Harding in the role of president, he was returning to a school with whose antecedents he had been associated for years. Many of the faculty were his former teachers at Harper and Morrilton, and others were his fellow teachers in the faculty of 1924. He knew Harding, most of her problems, and above all the lofty purpose of the college.

Harding is a Christian college operated by members of the Churches of Christ. Bible is required each semester for every student. A thirty-minute chapel is held each day and attendance is expected.

All Harding administrators and almost all its faculty have been members of the Church of Christ. This is really the only connection with the church. The charter of Harding College does state, however, that each member of the Board of Trustees shall be:

A member of the Church of Christ in good standing, who believes in and adheres to a strict construction of the Bible and who opposes all innovations in the work and worship of the church,
such as instruments of music, missionary societies, Christian endeavor societies, all other human inventions not authorized by the Word of God (9).

The Church of Christ has no authorized body which shares with the Board in policy making for the school.

In collaboration with the faculty, Benson drafted "the purpose" of Harding College:

Harding College is a Christian college of arts and sciences. Its purpose is to give students an education of high quality which will lead to an understanding and a philosophy of life consistent with Christian ideals. It aims to develop a solid foundation of intellectual, physical, and spiritual values upon which students may build useful, happy lives (13).

During the first year of Benson's administration the enrollment in the college and academy increased to approximately 500 students. He set up a fixed salary schedule for the faculty (up to eighty-five dollars a month for Ph. D.'s) and met the payments promptly each month. The salaries had to be kept extremely low so that the college might meet its other obligations, but the faculty was assured of receiving the salary promised (3).

Benson installed a rigid program of economy and succeeded in retiring a part of the debt the first year, while at the same time meeting all the budget expense of running the college. It wasn't easy. He asked everyone he could reach for money, not once or twice, but constantly. It was a desperate period, but Harding's new president never doubted a successful outcome. The second year of his administration he set aside, from funds raised, another
$20,000 for retirement of the indebtedness. By November 30, 1939, enough money had been raised above expenses of the college to pay off the balance on the mortgage (27).

Money was not the only problem facing George Benson. Certain religious issues had placed the college in a precarious situation with the ministers and Church of Christ brotherhood (this will be detailed later). Some religious publications were criticizing Harding; some who had been friends of the college began to wonder where she stood on certain church issues. Benson says the situation was so bad that "I went into communities where they wouldn't even announce I was there. That was humiliating" (3).

How he tackled such problems and how he built a brand new college that was to become known world-wide are subjects for a later chapter.

Birth of the National Education Program

The broader work in citizenship education began almost immediately upon his return to America. His eleven years in China had sharpened his senses about the importance of government to the people it serves. He was more convinced than ever that the people of the United States were more blessed than any people in the world; yet the attitude of the people, as he measured it upon returning, was not what he had expected. It frightened him. He determined to do something about it as he worked to build a college and expand the church mission.
When he left the United States in 1925, the country was entering a period of prosperity. President Warren G. Harding had been swept into office by a multitude of voters seeking a return to normal conditions. Vice-President Calvin Coolidge, who succeeded to the Presidency at Harding's death, quickly won the confidence of the country, due mostly to his tight-fisted financial policies and the prosperity which enriched the nation during his administration (20, p. 165).

For many Americans the '20's were not primarily the post-war years, the period of Republican conservatism, or the age of the lost generation. They were, instead, the New Era of abundance, the years of prosperity. Many who recall these years remember first the time they moved to the new subdivision, the summer at Yellowstone or Yosemite, or the triumph of sending a son or daughter to college. For still more, this was the period when radio and the movies first brought a new breadth and excitement into constricted rural lives. Above all, this was the decade of the automobile, the time when a car, and for many families a fairly new car, became a matter of course, the first period in history, thanks to Henry Ford, and the American system, when the ordinary citizen became an automobile owner.

The central economic fact of the New Era, which was actually a short period from the end of the postwar depression in 1923 until the crash of 1929, was technological progress. Although radical change in politics or social customs might call forth frantic protest, innovation was the watchword in
technology. Research, invention, and reorganization drew rich rewards. The result was a thirty per cent rise in factory production (21, p. 821).

Thomas Nixon Carver of Harvard was one of the leading academic heralds of the New Era. His description of the Economic Revolution in the United States is typical of most literature of the period. Carver points to the "wide diffusion of stock ownership," especially among employees as a specially striking sign of the emergence of a new society. Carver might have exaggerated the importance of this, but it had its unhappy consequences a few years later, when the savings of thousands were swept away.

One of the greatest achievements of the period was a mass production of the automobile. The effects it had on the American culture are almost too complex and vast to understand. Carver recalled that Preston W. Slasson wrote in 1930 that the automobile:

Replaced the parlor and the porch as the courting grounds of the new generation. . . did more in two decades to revolutionize the areas of local government than all the events of history since the battle of Hastings. . . It opened a new age for the Nomads (8, pp. 3, 14).

This was the United States that George Benson had left in 1925. During the next eleven years while he was out of the country, times changed and so did the attitudes of the people.

A gradual decline in the stock market proved to be a signal in the summer and fall of 1929, though few people interpreted it correctly. Then suddenly on Thursday, October 24, panic hit Wall Street. Stock prices
plunged drastically. Down with them went the hope and confidence of the whole financial establishment. Few could believe that it was actually taking place. Yet the steep downward slide continued, and spread beyond Wall Street. Among the people it turned from panic to deep depression, bringing with it bank closings, lower wages and prices, declining sales, poverty, mass unemployment, and other miseries. In time it led to disillusionment, self-examination and new departures in politics, government, and economics.

George Benson in China was not touched personally by the change in thinking and attitudes of the people. But the nature of his work caused him to be aware of the decline of prosperity in America. Some who had been sending him support were not able to do so during the depression years. Even this did not have its full impact on him, for he was able to secure others to help support his work. When one considers that missionary George Benson was able to raise enough money from 1931 to 1933 to build a school in Canton, China, one wonders if he was really aware of the effect of the depression in America. He ignored it, of course, while crusading for funds to establish his Bible school in Canton.

As the returning George Benson saw so clearly in 1936, the depression years changed the mood of the people toward government and economics. But the people themselves, he felt, were scarcely aware of the change in thinking. The Republicans had been in office for the decade of the twenties. In the
early thirties Hoover was not able to slow down the depression and did not produce results quickly enough to save him at the polls.

The victory of the Democrats in the 1932 presidential election was not so much a vote of confidence in the Democratic party and its leaders as a measure of resentment against the Hoover administration which caught the blame for economic collapse. The spell-binding oratory of Franklin Roosevelt was also a factor (20).

As Congress in the spring of 1933 enacted the measures which President Roosevelt deemed essential to his "New Deal," it became apparent that the government, using strict controls, was endeavoring to establish a balance in the nation's system among conflicting interests and classes. But, George Benson asked in 1936, would the radical new governmental devices be permanent and would they cripple and perhaps kill the incomparably productive private ownership incentive system (20)?

Americans still considered the country to be a land of opportunity. But many observers believed, with Richard Hofstadter, that their thinking had been modified:

In case, just in case, economic opportunities did not knock, they wanted to be sure that the mailman would be around with a social security check. In case, just in case, the social ladder proved too steep, they wanted laws which would guarantee that they would not be left on too humiliating a rung (16, p. 335)

The effects of the New Deal on the people were great and far reaching. The American people had always been dedicated to free enterprise economy.
The profit motive had long been a part of their heritage. Now this had been modified to a degree by the New Deal legislation. Some of the old feeling of self-reliance had been replaced by a dependency on the government to provide (3).

These were the attitudes and conditions that existed when George Benson returned from China in 1936:

I was dumbfounded, to find people so rabid in their criticism of American industry and American "profiteers" . . . Even the National Education Association magazine in the fall of 1936 carried a paragraph stating that the greatest service educators could render would probably be in helping conduct a program of mass adult education to prepare the minds of the people for Franklin D. Roosevelt to take over the industries of the nation. To me this was about the worst thing that could happen (3).

Establishing the National Education Program

The fact that George Benson reacted with grave concern over the changes that had taken place while he was in China, seems, in retrospect, a natural reaction for an individual with his background, and experiences. The results of this reaction led to the establishment of the National Education Program, with the announced purpose of bringing about a better public understanding of and appreciation for the basic principles of the American governmental and economic systems. The organization did not become an entity of its own until 1941, but Harding's new president began its functions, personally, with the very first civic club speech he made in 1936 (3)."
two basic factors that brought on our National Education Program," he says, "were my experiences in China and my observations upon returning to the United States" (3).

Through the years, the National Education Program, as George Benson expected and predicted, was to be criticized, attacked, slandered, smeared by an amazing assortment of people and organizations who questioned its motive and sincerity, or who became jealous of its stature, or who viewed it as a danger to their goals. Benson believed that some of the goals of these people included the disintegration of the American system and the establishment of benign or totalitarian socialism (Communism) (3). The national newspaper of the Communist Party, USA, The Daily Worker, attacked Benson of Harding College as "a fascist" and the National Education Program as a "creature of Wall Street." This Communist attack continued into the 1970's (17). In the 1940's, 1950's, and 1960's the attack upon the National Education Program by the Socialist, Norman Thomas, many Communists and Communist "fellow travelers" set off some elements in the press. Some of these described the National Education Program as a "Propaganda mill for big business" (29). All this George Benson had expected, and, as he said over and over again publicly, it was to him an assurance that the National Education Program was effective, that it was "hitting where it hurts those who wished to see the American system replaced" (3).
George Benson was disturbed, however, when from time to time some people whom he felt should have been supporting the Program's work instead criticized it or sought subtly to undermine its founder. Especially rankling were the challenges to George Benson's sincerity, and the charges (which he found to be the most ridiculous of all) that through the Program's work he was "prostituting" Harding College. He was certain that the college was "hurt" in the eyes of the small minority who did not support the basic American principles and the teaching of the Bible, and helped in the minds and hearts of the vast majority of American citizens who, when they understood the capitalistic system, supported it wholeheartedly. He feels, in 1971, that this still is true. Two or three of his detractors suggested that with its great success, George Benson was taking credit for something he did not himself originate. These people put forth the name of Clinton Davidson, long-time Church of Christ member, as the founder of the National Education Program. Davidson did work on two or three minor fund-raising projects with Benson in his first few years at the college, and helped him obtain several important contacts and engagements (3).

In the minutes of the regular meeting of the Board of Trustees of Harding College, Searcy, Arkansas, November 25, 1937, were reports on one resolution:

A motion was made by L. C. Sears and seconded by B. F. Rhodes that the Board adopt a resolution commending President Benson for his untiring efforts in the financial
campaign and assuring him of our confidence and fullest support in his future work. The motion was carried unanimously (28).

Clinton Davidson, of New York, was one of the foremost life insurance producers in the nation; and upon his retirement from active selling, he established the Fiduciary Council, an organization whose main business was the handling of investments for large estates. He was said to be very wealthy. His assistance to George Benson at Harding was in introducing him in 1937 to a number of corporation executives who would normally be interested in a college which supported in its basic philosophy the fundamental principles of America's private ownership, competitive market economic system; and later in making for him one political contact in particular. No large amounts of money were raised as a result of the relatively few contacts arranged by Clinton Davidson, and apparently the only contribution he himself felt he made toward creation of the National Education Program, which became an entity several years later, was to remind George Benson in 1936 that his outspoken support of the American system should attract some gifts from industry and business (17).

Twenty-five years after Clinton Davidson's brief association with George Benson, the New York Times reported:

The propaganda operation (the National Education Program), exclusive of the College, is budgeted at $200,000 a year, of which an average of $5,000 monthly is spent on postage.

In a sense, the story of Harding College, and the National Education Program (for all practical purposes
they are one and the same) is a testament to the free enterprise system that Dr. Benson extols as an integral part of his doctrine. For they have been built virtually from scratch by the determination and industry of a single man -- which included the ability to obtain large contributions from people of wealth (29).

Yet, Don P. Garner, in his Study, George S. Benson, Conservative, Anti-Communist, Pro-Americanism, reported: "Clinton Davidson claims he was responsible for the founding of the organization." Garner reported that in a talk to the Harding Chapel in 1952, Davidson stated that he "formed the basis for the program" (12).

In giving credit to Davidson for some ideas, contacts and some work in money raising in the first year or so, George Benson notes that the New Yorker had reportedly come to Harding just prior to his return from China and had made a personal gift of $5,000 to the college with a suggestion to the Trustees that a fund-raising campaign be launched. According to the report, Davidson urged that a motion picture on Harding College be produced, to be used in a campaign, and pledged himself to pay for it (an estimated $10,000) (3).

George Benson says:

They (the Trustees) decided to wait until I came, and I suspect that Clinton Davidson advised that too. After I met with the Trustees, Davidson had the motion picture produced, and it obligated the college for the $10,000 cost which he guaranteed, but which the college paid. Then he had some publicity booklets and so forth, produced, and he directed a kind of hit-and-miss campaign. The record reflects that all the money that was raised as a result of his efforts and the motion picture, didn't quite pay the expenses of the effort.
And it soon fizzled out. Later, though, he performed an invaluable service. He contacted a member of the House Ways and Means Committee to open the way for my testimony before the Committee. But fearing that I might bungle the appearance before such an august Committee of Congress in such a widely reported series of hearings (on a Presidential request for $3.5 billion in defense spending), Davidson asked me not to mention his connection with my appearance (3).

Benson Gains National Stature

This Committee appearance established George Benson's national stature. Important doors all over America were thrown open to him. But as the war came, it spread a stifling damper over virtually all activity in America except those geared to the war. This did not dampen George Benson's determination to keep Harding adequately financed, through donors, and to prepare the ground for Harding's continuing growth.

As he vividly recalls the time:

During World War II, as a result of my earlier speeches and travel, and the wonderful publicity from my appearances before the Ways and Means Committee, I began getting speaking engagements from really important national organizations. I spoke in every major city in America, and, of course, Clinton Davidson made none of these contacts. These contacts, and others made later in our Freedom Forum projects, formed the basis of growth for the National Education Program as well as a source which I found I could tap later for gifts to the college. I spoke to the Iron and Steel Institute which has one of the richest memberships in America, the American Bankers Association, the National Association of Real Estate Boards, etc. I kept this up all through the war years. Of course, I was aware that through this work I was making potential donors for Harding; however, I would have kept up my crusade for better public understanding of our American heritage if I had not received a dime from so-called "Big Business." Harding's stake in the preservation of the American system is survival. That was so in the 1940-70 period. It is the stake today (3).
Benson continues to explain about Davidson:

As the war subsided, and without Mr. Davidson's advice or counsel, because he wasn't doing anything in connection with the college, I employed a New York firm to help us direct a fund-raising campaign for Harding College. I had enough contacts by then to enable us to really begin to raise substantial money for the college and still be able to go to my friends for funds to expand our National Education Program work (3).

George Benson had opened the door to national recognition with his presentation to the House Ways and Means Committee. It had proved to be a dramatic happening in Washington, one that aroused the news corps and drew the instant acclaim of the Congressmen sitting on the Committee.

President Roosevelt, watching Hitler's powerful war juggernaut lay waste to Poland, invade and sweep across central Europe and appear to be geared for world conquest, had called for an additional $3.5 billion in national defense spending. He was ready to settle for a tax raise or whatever it took to get the money. Witnesses, in the drawn-out hearings, talked against a tax increase, and many suggested that the Roosevelt demand for huge spendings on national defense was provocative toward war. (Just a few months later, the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor shocked the world -- and found the United States sadly unprepared for the vicious war into which it was plunged on two fronts.)

The unknown George Benson from the unknown Harding College in the little town of Searcy, Arkansas, was one of the last witnesses to be heard by the House Ways and Means Committee. Witnesses who preceded him on
this particular day had not succeeded in arousing the press or the committee.

The Arkansas Gazette next day described what happened (in an Associated Press dispatch):

Dr. Benson's first words from the witness chair startled the audience. He said the country must prepare to defend itself and three and a half billion dollars was a cheap price to pay for freedom. ... Where would the money come from? That was a simple problem: Two billion already were on hand (and he explained where); the remainder could be made available for defense by shutting down the WPA, the CCC camps and the National Youth Administration. He made a brilliant and logical plea for drastic economy in non-defense spending (2).

This was the essence of his testimony. He filled in his 15-minute presentation with facts and figures. But the attributes that so impressed the Congressmen and the press were his rifle-shot economic logic, his clear view of the world scene, his grasp of governmental finance, and his proud patriotism which, he told the Committee, had been enriched by eleven years in China.

As he thanked the Committee at the end of his presentation, a rare thing happened: the Congressmen applauded.

The event projected him (and Harding College) into national headlines. He was described in newspaper feature stories and editorials as the "Voice of Thrift Crying in the Wilderness," "A One-man Economy Crusade," "Champion College President." There were some, however, not so complimentary. James Richmond, president of Murray State Teachers College in Kentucky, was quoted in the Harding Bison newspaper as saying: "That's
some two-by-four college down there where everybody has found a way of getting his name in the papers." Aubrey Williams, Director of the National Youth Administration, called George Benson "the ring leader of a so-called economy drive" and sought to discredit him. Williams later was ordered by no less an authority than the White House to apologize to Benson for some of his comments (6).

Benson began to receive a flood of speaking invitations. Wherever he spoke, he described his "crusade" as a project, in connection with his presidency of Harding, designed to bring about a better public understanding of the American system and to stimulate a "rebirth" of the virtues of self-reliance, thrift, personal industry, humility before God. He said that he felt that a college in a free society had a responsibility to its nation, to help preserve its basic principles and ideals. His hosts at Rotary Clubs and other civic group appearances sometimes got up and said that Benson's off-campus work in "Americanism" could be expanded only if those who believed in what he championed "put your money where your mouth is." Donations to the college or the National Education Program usually followed (3, 17).

At a Rotary Club luncheon one day in Indianapolis, George Benson made a stirring speech on the "American Heritage of Freedom" and had admonished his largely businessman audience that, as business and industrial leaders, they were not giving sufficient time to explaining how the American economic
system works and how well it produces. A man sitting a few seats from the lectern, at the speakers' table, came up to shake hands.

"Dr. Benson," he said, "would you be kind enough to come to my office at three o'clock this afternoon? My name is Eli Lilly." He handed George Benson his business card, with the office address scrawled across it in ink.

Benson arrived at the sprawling Eli Lilly Pharmaceutical Company plant, one of the largest in America and was ushered into Eli Lilly's office precisely at three p.m. Lilly greeted him warmly, and they sat chatting for a few minutes. Then the industrialist got around to the motive of his invitation.

"You are performing a priceless service to our country," he said. He picked up a white envelope and, rising from his desk chair, handed it to his guest. "Here's a little gift to help expand your great work." George Benson did not open the envelope. He thanked Lilly and after some further talk about the need for greater public understanding of the American system, he left the office. He didn't open the envelope in the taxi carrying him back to his Indianapolis hotel; he guessed a little about the amount, and hoped that it would be a substantial gift of maybe $500. In his hotel room, he opened the envelope. The check was for $20,000 (3, 17).

This was evidence enough to George Benson that an effective, diversified educational program reaching out across the nation with the facts about the American system, and the "old virtues," would attract substantial
financing. He was certain, too, that it would enhance the image of Harding College. But, at this stage in its infancy, the National Education Program was composed of just one zealous man, working part-time as a crusading lecturer. Benson, preoccupied with the growing problems in his basic mission -- building Harding College -- let the National Education Program activities "grow like Topsy" for a while. And grow they did, like Topsy.

As his fame as the "American Crusader" spread and his engagement book began to fill up with dates all across the nation, the Arkansas Democrat in Little Rock commented editorially:

How strange that the head of a small Arkansas college should become a national figure overnight by the simple act of pleading for economy in non-defense expenditures; less than a year ago he was unknown outside a small circle of people who were familiar with his work at Harding. Today -- as a result of a trip to Washington, network broadcasts, nationally-circulated articles, and addresses before scores of organizations in many of the larger cities east of the Rockies -- he is probably the most widely known citizen of Arkansas (1).

Twelve years later, George Benson, continuing to expand prestige and influence, was elected in a state-wide poll of the citizenry, conducted by this same Arkansas Democrat, as "Arkansan of the Year." The award plaque was presented at a state-wide dinner in Little Rock by Senator John L. McClellan who said: "George Benson is one of our greatest Americans" (17)!

George Benson, who in thirty-five years had talked to millions of Americans about the cunning deceit of the Communist propagandists and how they were able to use non-Communists to unwittingly do their work, noted,
in a 1971 interview, that in the late 1940's immediately after World War II, the press of America began gradually to turn away from those supporting and promoting "Americanism" education, and began gradually to echo some of the propaganda line of the left wing. Newspapers which once had heralded the National Education Program's work began to lend themselves to persons and organizations who criticized and, in some cases, sought to discredit it. People who pointed out the true nature of Communism were being labeled "hard core anti-Communist" or "Far Rightist" and slandered in influential segments of the news media (3).

One day in the winter of 1941 Jared Trevathan came to see George Benson in his office in the old (Galloway) classroom building. Trevathan was from Batesville, and was editor of a weekly country newspaper. Batesville is an Ozark mountain town about fifty miles northeast of Searcy (3).

Trevathan had heard Benson speak at a Rotary Club meeting and had been reading some of the articles written by him. He told Benson he was impressed with what he had read. He asked Benson to write a column for his paper and he would promise to get four or five other papers to use it.

George Benson said, "I'm not a journalist, Mr. Trevathan." The country editor-publisher said: "Just put down some of the stuff you told us Rotarians and send it to me. That will be good enough" (3).

This was the beginning of a syndicated newspaper column that was, upon their request, mailed to more than 3,000 newspapers, some of them
metropolitan dailies such as the Cincinnati Enquirer, the Memphis Commercial Appeal, and even the Nome (Alaska) Nuggett (3).

At still another civic club speech in Memphis the manager of radio station WMC was among those who came up to shake the speaker's hand. A few days later he telephoned Benson and asked him if he would be willing to do a 30-minute radio program one day a week. Benson consented to do a 15-minute program (3).

So one day a week, George Benson drove to Memphis and taped a 15-minute talk on the American way of life, editorializing on current events and relating them to some of the national problems.

Two weeks after the initial Benson program went on WMC at Memphis, he received a telephone call from the manager of radio station KARK, Little Rock. They wanted a Benson program of their own, could he come down once a week and appear live or make a tape? He could -- a 15-minute tape (3).

And this was the beginning of the National Education Program's nationally syndicated radio program, Land of the Free, which in the years ahead was beamed to approximately 40 million people over more than 300 radio stations coast to coast. The program, featuring Broadway actors, was a dramatized true story of a well-known American who had achieved extraordinary success in the land of the free, and through the application of the great virtues which George Benson preached in all his lectures. The program ended, each week, with a commentary by Benson of Harding.
Throughout the years of World War II, Benson continued to build strength into the foundation of Harding College and to go out across the nation speaking for the freedom system and the "old fashioned" virtues. He widened his intimate friendships in the Senate and House of Representatives in Washington, became a member of the Board of the National Thrift Club, and Chairman of the Public Expenditure Committee for the Arkansas State Chamber of Commerce. Virginia's Senator Harry Byrd, known up until his death as the "financial conscience" of the United States Senate, was a particular friend of George Benson. Frequently, they discussed together some of the economy proposals for which Senator Byrd became famous (17).

During the war years a semi-official national organization was formed that was to play a part, for one year, in one of the most effective National Education Program projects. The Association of National Advertisers (ANA -- including Campbell Soups, Quaker Oats, General Motors and the other auto manufacturers, International Harvester, and about 1,000 of the biggest corporations in the nation) and the American Association of Advertising Agencies (AAAA -- which encompassed the top advertising agencies in America) were asked by President Roosevelt to draw up and conduct nationwide advertising and publicity campaigns for scrap metal (so badly needed in the building of America's capacity to fight the Axis forces) and for the selling to the public of war bonds, and the preparation of the public for the rationing of food and other items. The two great nationwide organizations formed the
Joint Committee of the Advertising Council for this wartime work. It proved to be very effective and President Truman commended it in 1947 for its contribution to America's victory in the war.

At the end of the war, the Joint Committee looked around for some peacetime project on behalf of the nation. Many of the persons on the Committee had heard and had been impressed by George Benson's challenge to business and industry "to tell the story of America to the American public." One of these was Don Belding, President of Foote, Cone & Belding, one of the biggest advertising agencies in the country. He made his home in Los Angeles, where his firm maintained one of its many offices. A man in the Belding Agency who had impressed the executives with his capabilities was Kenneth D. Wells. Belding discussed with Kenneth Wells an idea for a Joint Committee project, a nationwide seminar to attract business, industrial and professional leaders to discuss the basic internal problems of America and plan perhaps an educational campaign to reach the public.

One day in the fall of 1948 Benson received a telephone call from Don Belding. He indicated that he and Ken Wells had been talking over an idea and would like for Benson to come to Los Angeles as soon as possible to discuss it with them (3).

Benson rearranged his schedule to respond to the appeal. In Los Angeles, Don Belding explained the Joint Committee's search for a worthwhile project, and the idea for a seminar to launch a nationwide educational program:
We need to reach the working people of America and the home owners, particularly, and all the others in our population with the facts about our economic system, our constitutional government, and our spiritual heritage. And one way to do it is to get business and industry to provide in their advertising and in-plant programs educational materials for their employees and the true facts about our system to reach the general public (3).

George Benson saw the idea for such a seminar as an extension of his crusading efforts. In the next few hours the framework was built for the first Harding College Freedom Forum. George Benson was given the assignment of developing the program. The first Forum would be co-sponsored by Harding College and the Joint Committee. Invitations would be sent to every corporation and every state business organization in America, to union labor organizations, to universities and colleges, to civic and fraternal organizations -- in other words, to a cross-section of the American society. Kenneth Wells, a dynamic one-time oil field worker, would serve as Forum Director. (Later he and Don Belding were leaders in a small group of Americans who conceived the idea for and created Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, to provide national award recognition each year for individuals and organizations working to "bring about a better public understanding of the American way of life." General Dwight D. Eisenhower, while President of Columbia University, became the first Honorary President of Freedoms Foundation and until his death was the Foundation's most zealous backer and booster. Kenneth Wells became first the Executive Vice-President, then President of the Foundation.)
The first Freedom Forum, held in the auditorium of the Harding College Academy, February 15-19, 1949, could accommodate only 160 people. It was a full week's seminar, and the conferees, drawn from all sections of the nation, were housed in homes of Searcy residents. The conferees were top executives of top American corporations, heads of professional societies, educational institutions, civic and fraternal groups. While invitations were mailed, the publicity had stressed that the Forum was open to "one and all" (up to the limited capacity of 160) (3).

This was the beginning of economic education programs and courses in schools and colleges as well as businesses and industries, civic and fraternal groups all over America. It also was to become for George Benson another giant step forward in getting himself and his mission known to people who had the means and the degree of patriotism to help the National Education Program and Harding College in their joint missions.

The whole thrust of the Forum project is most dramatically revealed in the story of two conferees who came from Swift and Company's executive headquarters in Chicago to attend the first Forum. After George Benson had closed the Forum with his "Challenge to Take Home," the two Swift conferees, A. F. Steffen and J. L. Fike, executives in Swift's management family, came up to him. "Can we borrow a typewriter and a place to work for a full day?" they asked. "We've got to report on the Forum to our president when we get back to Chicago, and we've decided to make it a flannel board
presentation. (The flannel board had been demonstrated at the Forum.)

We'll write the script and make the flannel board symbols here, and next
Monday morning we'll be ready with our report for John Holmes (President
of Swift)" (6).

They got the typewriter and a room in which to work. They were
talented men. Within a day, they had roughed out a set of symbols to
illustrate the salient points in their report, and a script. They gave the
report the title: "This is Our Problem."

The problem as they viewed it was the preservation of the American way
of life from internal and external forces working to destroy it. Key forces
of destruction, as the Forum saw it, were public apathy and lack of under-
standing. The solution of the problem as the two men from Swift reported
it out of their Forum experiences, was to be the "practice of citizenship."
Here is the way their flannel board told this segment of the Forum's thrust.

The report given to John Holmes and his executive family in the Chicago
offices had an impact on all who saw and heard it. Holmes immediately called
for the training of fifty Swift people to give the program, the production of
the symbols and boards and scripts necessary so that all 150,000 Swift
employees throughout the nation and the world would see and hear it. The
Association of Commerce in Chicago asked permission to train people to
present the program throughout North-Central Illinois. Finally Swift and
Company, flooded with requests from throughout the nation, asked Benson to
take the presentation, polish and refine it, produce the boards and symbols, and offer it to all comers. When the presentation had run its course years later, a careful estimate was made setting the total for those seeing the program at sixty million. It had been carried on every television station in America at least once, sponsored by the John Deere Company, and had been used by an untold number of industries and organizations (3, 17).

One of the features of the first Harding College Forum was a series of four Hollywood-produced technicolor animated cartoon movies on the American way of life, the scripts worked up out of George Benson's speeches. The cartoon films (there were to be ten in all) were put together by John Sutherland, one time Disney Studio artist-executive. They were expensive, but they were the most effective educational vehicles ever produced on the American way of life. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's short subjects editor saw the first cartoon in Sutherland's studio, and immediately contacted George Benson and asked that MGM be permitted to distribute the films through the 15,000 theaters across America which MGM served. The permission was granted, and the Harding cartoons became the most popular short subjects ever distributed by MGM. Fred Quimby, director of short subjects for MGM, made the following statement in one of the leading film journals:

Never before in the history of the MGM's shorts department have so many letters been directed to my desk praising an effort. The letters are not only from a very pleased public, but actual raves from almost every exhibitor who has played the shows, pleading for more of this type, and promising not only more playing time but more important
billing because, as one exhibitor put it, "I have never had such audience enthusiasm for a short reel picture" (3).

Look Magazine said: "Make Mine Freedom" (first of the cartoons) is a witty and convincing attack on political "isms" (17).

Harry Greenman, manager of New York City's famed Capital Theater in Times Square reported: "At the end of each showing, there is spontaneous applause" (31).

Production and financing of the technicolor animated cartoon series reveal another story typical of the manner in which George Benson got things done. He had always felt that to put across economic education in films would require light Disney-type animated cartoon techniques. As a matter of fact, he first went to Walt Disney in Hollywood asking for help in such a project. Disney was overloaded with work, but he was enthusiastic over George Benson's ideas. He steered his visitor to John Sutherland, who had just set up a cartooning studio in Hollywood after years with Disney Studios. Sutherland could do the job, and was enthusiastic about the possibilities of such a unique series of short subjects. One problem arose: the first cartoon would cost approximately $80,000.

George Benson made a careful study of foundations. He came across the Sloan Foundation in New York and noticed that its purpose was "the dissemination of economic education." Alfred P. Sloan, the retired board chairman of General Motors was the Foundation's creator. George Benson pursued the problem in one of New York's skyscrapers. Sloan had heard
glowing reports from some of his General Motors colleagues on the one-man crusade of George Benson. He said to Benson, after hearing his ideas:

This is about what we set up our foundation to accomplish. You get with Sutherland and work out your first script and animation sequences, and our foundation will foot the expense bill. If it looks like a good way to get the facts over to young America, the Sloan Foundation will pay for several such films (3).

George Benson had a series of ten in mind. He found another likely foundation -- the Falk Foundation, headquartered in Pittsburgh. He got a fine reception there too, and his cartoon film project was off to a good start. The total cost ran to about $1 million. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer handled the first four through its theaters, after which the National Education Program of Harding College did the national distribution in 16 mm. (More than twenty years after their production, they are continuing to be widely used.)

As the weekly editorial columns began to spread out through the press of America, house organ editors in business, industries, and trade associations asked George Benson to do a short version of each weekly column for their publications. A short column was prepared entitled: "Listen Americans!" A copy was sent out to a list of house organ editors, and within a short time approximately 600 were receiving the Benson weekly short column at their request.

The various Benson writings and radio programs brought in more and more mail. A great many of the people who wrote George Benson said they wanted to enlist in his crusade, and what could they do? Many asked for some
of his writings from which they could get facts and quotations for speeches; some of these requests came from top business executives. It was this flood of mail that had to be answered that finally led to the first issue of the National Education Program Monthly Letter. Its mailing list was begun by simply mailing a copy to all people who wrote in. Within two years, there were more than 10,000 receiving the Letter, which utilized some of the material from the columns and additional material on subjects of current national interest. In 1971, the monthly letter mailing was approaching 50,000 and it included many of the leaders of government, business and professions. Some members of Congress receive it regularly. It was being distributed in the press release racks in the National Press Club in Washington. Frequently an issue of the Letter was being inserted in the Congressional Record by a Congressman or Senator. It was being quoted widely throughout the country (3, 17).

Activities of the National Education Program could be listed in 1971 as follows:

Weekly editorial columns — "Looking Ahead" and "Listen Americans" — going to approximately 4,000 publications.

The National Education Program Monthly Letter — mailed on subscription to approximately 50,000 addresses coast-to-coast.

April Freedom Forum — bringing together conferees from the fifty states for a week's seminar on the foremost problems confronting the people
of America. Nearly 10,000 conferees have attended thirty-four forums (some years, more than one has been held). The Forum project has been established, by George Benson and his staff, at George Pepperdine College, King's College, Carrol College, Purdue University, and other institutions, under co-sponsorship, and has continued to be an annual event in many places.

Youth Citizenship Forums -- held during the summer high school vacation months, these had spread to ten states by 1971. Most are co-sponsored by State Farm Bureau Organizations, Civitan and other civic clubs, Chambers of Commerce, etc. An estimated 50,000 young leader-calibre boys and girls had been reached through this project. One has become a permanent Harding College feature in June, attracting 500-600 conferees from a number of Southwestern and Western states.

National Speakers Bureau -- in addition to the average of 300 speeches a year by George Benson (sometimes as many as four a day in metropolitan school systems, other members of the National Education Program staff give lectures, present National Education Program films and other materials -- J. D. Bales of Harding's School of Religion, Perry Mason, Superintendent of the Harding Academy, Glenn A. Green, Executive Vice-President of the National Education Program, etc.

Educational Films -- through the years the Program has accumulated a sizable inventory of educational and documentary films -- written and produced under George Benson's direction. Production cost of the more than
forty titles ran to more than $1,500,000; and another $1,000,000 has been
invested in prints for sale and rental distribution. Some of the films --
such as Communism on the Map, Communist Encirclement, Revolution
Underway, Communists on Campus -- have set national records for total
viewing audiences. Most have been on television, reaching audiences into the
tens of millions.

Speech Kits -- the Structure of the American Way of Life -- a styro-
foam block presentation; and This is Our Problem, which evolved as a flannel
board presentation from the first Freedom Forum, continue to have wide
distribution and heavy usage. Other flannel board presentations are also being
distributed; and new ones are constantly being developed.

Speech Reprints -- approximately 100 outstanding speeches -- most of
them Freedom Forum presentations -- have been reprinted in booklet form
for national distribution. One speech alone -- on Communist brainwashing
of American prisoners in North Korea, by Major William Mayer -- has had a
distribution of more than 1,000,000 reprints; many have had reprint runs of
more than 100,000.

Tape Recordings -- more than fifty taped speeches, including Forum
lectures by George Benson, Senator McClellan, Major Mayer, Fred Schwarz,
Nicholas Nyradi, F. J. McNamara, Herbert Philbrick, Clarence Manion,
Roger Flemming, M. Stanton Evans, J. D. Bales, and others, have had wide
distribution.
High School Course Outlines -- these outlines to aid in the creation of auxiliary courses on government and history have gone out, on request, to schools throughout the nation; and this is a typical activity of the National Education Program calculated to reach young people and stimulate their appreciation for the American system.

After thirty years of expanding work in the National Education Program, George Benson, in 1971 said:

The continuing expansion of our work, the widening response from the American public, constitute the most encouraging sign on the national scene today, at a time when the demoralization of our country is visible in every facet of our society. More people are becoming aware of what's going on in their nation and the world, and it gives us a great deal of satisfaction to know that our work at Harding and in the National Education Program has been a dominant factor in this awakening (3).

He explained again that the purpose of every activity of the National Education Program, from its founding, has been to:

create a better public understanding of our American heritage, to create loyalty to it, to understand the threat of Communism -- so we can preserve the things that brought us the greatest measure of personal freedom and economic well-being the world has ever known (3).

The National Education Program has an annual operating budget of approximately $200,000. Some of the money for this operation has come from industry, in both the North and South; from a number of foundations, and from thousands of middle-income citizens who have approved of the program and have sent in $10, $25, or $100 contributions.
It seemed to George Benson that since the purposes of the National Education Program were to educate and create understanding, that it was appropriate for it to be a division of the college. "Every college in America ought to be proud to help preserve our American way of life," he says. The National Education Program was not started to help Harding College but to help preserve the system that protects Harding's freedom to exist. The program operated as a division of the college until 1945. At that time the college was applying for admission to the North Central Accrediting Association. The NCAA contended that the National Education Program activities were not in accord with the purposes of an educational institution.

George Benson explained:

They took the stand that liberal educators still hold, that we should not try to indoctrinate young people in morals or religion or government or economics or anything else but that we should, on the contrary, just prepare them for change and then let them find their own way.

It has been my contention that a Ph. D. professor should know more about what constitutes good government than a freshman in college and that, therefore, the professor has a responsibility to help direct the thinking of the young people to help them arrive at sound, logical conclusions. That's the essence of education, it seems to me. We have teachers and instructors; isn't it their responsibility to teach?

To me it isn't possible to tell the full story of Communism without the story itself being a condemnation of Communism and a teaching job pointing out the advantages of the private ownership system. On the other hand, a man can pick out the bad in capitalism and private enterprise and overemphasize that until he can make our system look worse than Communism -- and that's what a lot of educators have been doing! It is one of the reasons we have so much trouble in our schools and colleges today with young radical students seeking to destroy the American system, while glorifying Communism.
This is the motivation of the student mobs carrying Vietcong flags and resorting to riots and bombings and burnings, and even killings.

If our educational institutions had through all these years continued as they began by emphasizing the merits of the Christian religion, Constitutional government and private ownership of property, we wouldn't be in the troubles we are in today and we would be heading toward a standard of living twice as high as we even now enjoy (3).

With this unshakable belief, which he expounded from coast to coast, Benson made friends for Harding because most business and industrial leaders were in agreement with his thinking about the responsibilities of an educational system and his crusade for a better public understanding of the American system. On the other hand, he aroused the ire of many within the institutions of education. He believed that one of the primary purposes and responsibilities of a college was to build citizenship rather than to try to build a "mentality without commitment, that would leave people wide open to propaganda."

"The money which was given to the National Education Program, " emphasizes George Benson, "was kept totally separate from the college funds and none of it went for anything but the National Education Program activities" (3).

In preparation for his first all-out effort to use the National Education Program's reservoir of goodwill to help the college raise money, Benson formed a sponsoring committee of nationally-known men. They were to join in sponsoring a campaign for a million dollars for the college. Benson tells about it:
I went to friends of the National Education Program and said to them: 'The National Education Program has been in operation for twelve years. We have conducted a positive educational program of the advantages of constitutional government and private enterprise; the college has been perhaps the most effective base we might have had. Some of the people in various departments of the college have helped me with the National Education Program; therefore, is it your opinion that the friends of the National Education Program would be justified in supporting a capital funds drive for Harding College?'

Almost without exception, the answer was, 'Yes.' I then organized a sponsoring committee of nationally-known men to sponsor the campaign (3).

The men agreed to assist in helping to raise the money for Harding. The million-dollar campaign was a success.

This was the first of many big fund-raising campaigns for Harding.

There are, and have been, those on the Harding College faculty who have not been pleased with the National Education Program and the frequently distorted image which George Benson contends was created for the National Education Program and Harding College by some of the major press media. On the other hand, there are faculty people who support wholeheartedly the activities of the National Education Program. They feel, as does George Benson, that a false image has been created and find it difficult not to mention the nationwide goodwill created for Harding College. The National Education Program activities brought the few detractors on the faculty a splendid educational plant in which to work and to secure tenure, good salaries, available jobs for wives, easy-to-obtain homes, one of the most pleasant atmospheres for enjoying life and dedicating one's self, and one of the most
rewarding opportunities for service. The supporters also point out that, when the activities and purposes of the National Education Program are examined, the beliefs it propagates are precisely those supported by Harding College, as George Benson has always contended -- faith in God, constitutional government, private ownership of property.

Most of the left-wing and liberal press attacks upon the National Education Program (and sometimes, Harding), George Benson contends, "have been based on deliberate smear articles written by reporters who have never visited Searcy; statements in such articles have been picked up and spread around as fact by those publications or individuals who reject his evaluation of traditional American principles" (3).

The Reporter Magazine sent a reporter through Searcy to get the story of George Benson and Harding College. The reporter went through Searcy with only a 15-minute stop at Benson's home on the campus. As Benson recalls he introduced himself, talked in a friendly vein about the college and asked three or four easy questions. He went back to New York and with the aid of articles in other publications, wrote a comprehensive condemnation of George Benson, Harding College, and the National Education Program (3).

"Harding College is in many ways the intellectual center of all the new right-wing movements." The article implied that the writer had made a comprehensive firsthand investigation on the campus, of the National Education Program and its nationwide activities (15).
Benson points out that several of the articles were in publications recognized by informed persons as reflecting the left-wing liberal, socialist, or Communist viewpoint, and they tended to increase rather than decrease the financial support of both the college and the National Education Program. He also points out that the articles have not kept families from sending their sons and daughters to Harding, since the enrollment has increased year after year (3).

In May of 1961 the New York Times sent one of its staff reporters, Cabell Phillips, to Searcy "to get the true story of George Benson and Harding College." Phillips remained on the campus two days, and was given free access to probe into the National Education Program activities. He spent considerable time with George Benson and visited around the campus with other faculty members; and then, on May 18, he published his comprehensive report in the Times. The headline was: "Wide Anti-Red Drive Directed from Small Town in Arkansas." The subheadline was: "Dr. George S. Benson, Head of College and 'National Education Program' Aims to Alert the Common Man." The article was so factual that it was used widely by the National Education Program as a means of giving the lie to the reporting in other elements of the news media which was believed to be unfairly biased.

Phillips described all the National Education Program activities, and said:

A basic and constantly reiterated philosophical thread runs through all these activities, which can be summarized as follows:
The American way of life had two principal foundations: Christian morality and free enterprise economy. These doctrines are imbedded in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. They have given this country the highest standard of living in the world. But our country and our way of life are under ceaseless attack by international communism, since we are the last obstacle in its path of world conquest.

The cutting edge of this attack goes under the disarming guise of socialism. ('The origin of modern socialism is Karl Marx's Communist Manifesto, and socialism has advanced under such slogans as the Welfare State, Public Ownership, Government control, and so forth,') Where outright Communism has not already triumphed, as in Eastern Europe, China, parts of Asia and Cuba, it has achieved a strong foothold, as in Latin America, India, France, and Great Britain.

The incubus of socialism is particularly strong in the United States, where it is being actively propagated by a Communist fifth column. ('Thousands of Communists are infiltrated into our American institutions and are seeking to undermine our way of life.')

The moment of crisis is nearer than most people realize (29).

Phillips described George Benson as: "a gentle, zealous, gray-haired man. . . (with) a ruddy complexion and an air of determined serenity. . . he is a persuasive talker" (29).

The campus supporters of the National Education Program work consider articles such as that published in the Times as helpful to the image of both the college and the National Education Program. They contend that virtually the only opposition on campus was brought on by smear-type articles in the liberal media. The false image, they point out, was aggressively painted and circulated on campus by a newspaper close to home (17, 18, 19).

Some opposition on the campus to the National Education Program's activities has been based on the proposition that in its dealings in world affairs, the program has hurt the spiritual image of Harding. The facts
would seem to the contrary: In 1965, when George Benson retired, Harding had more graduates involved in missionary work and Christian education than any of the other Church of Christ institutions. In fact, many of the people who were in administrative positions in other Christian schools were Harding graduates.

Francis Bacon, the English philosopher, in one of his books, created a character, Cosmus, Duke of Florence, who said: "We read that we ought to forgive our enemies; but we do not read that we ought to forgive our friends." This quotation was cited by one of George Benson's supporters on the Harding campus. He said:

Dr. Benson has had his head bloodied most by those who represent themselves to be his friends. The Communists couldn't hurt him personally, because he knew that the minute he began an effective crusade to alert the public on the evils of Communism, he would be under constant attack, from then on, by not only the Commies but by their dupes and just plain stupid people. He is a big enough man to forgive those who have bloodied his head because of their misinformation or their faulty interpretation of some of his actions or words. He is certain they are either victims of the propaganda of his real enemies or simply unable to understand what's going on. He doesn't pity them, nor does he hate them; he forgives them in his own heart and goes on about his work (19).

And a vital part of his work -- his mission -- is the preservation of the freedom system which permits man to grow in stature and in image with his God. This has to be the conclusion of an objective study of his life and his career at Harding. He built the National Education Program, as the press, both pro and con, adequately has attested, into the greatest force of
its kind in America. And his work in the National Education Program has --
but only incidentally -- helped to lift Harding College to the stature of a
worldwide force for Christianity.
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When Benson returned to Harding College in 1936 to assume the responsibilities of President, he was faced with three major problems: the financing of the college, a religious issue within the brotherhood of the Church of Christ that turned many against the college, and replacing J. N. Armstrong, who had been one of the leading Christian educators of his time and had devoted his entire life to the development of a Christian college. Armstrong had begun his work in Christian education in 1896 at the Nashville Bible School in Nashville, Tennessee. In the years that followed, Woodson Armstrong, a daughter of James A. Harding, also taught at the schools where Armstrong served as president. Armstrong wrote:

She has been my full partner in these long years -- where I have been lacking she has been strong. I have said many times she has been worth more to our work than I have been (48, p. 318).

The Armstrongs' daughter, Pattie Hathaway, married L. C. Sears. He was with Armstrong at Harper College, Harding College at Morrilton, and Harding College at Searcy. During most of these years he served as Dean of Students, faculty member, and member of the Board of Trustees.

Armstrong, his wife, and Sears had been teachers of George Benson when he was a student at Harper College in 1921 to 1923. There were others
on the new Harding faculty who had been teachers at Harper during the years Benson was a student.

George Benson was aware that replacing Armstrong could become a delicate problem and under normal conditions might cause complications. Benson explains:

J. N. Armstrong and L. C. Sears were very unusual men or it would have been a difficult situation. Since all of us were trying to operate in the framework of dedicated Christians, and we all had similar long-range objectives, we were able to carry on without a serious break. I never had a serious dispute with either of them. J. N. Armstrong was a very wonderful and gentle person with great persuasive ability and influence on young people. Sears served as Dean of the college for many years after I became president. I had great admiration for him and his ability. During those first three years I think the entire faculty and student body were aware that Brother Armstrong and Dean Sears were backing me -- consequently, things went very smoothly (1).

Even though Armstrong was quite willing to step down and let him assume the duties of president, Benson knew that the task would be difficult.

"It is the natural inclination of young people and others," says Benson, "to continue to go to the previous management with their problems." Armstrong continued to serve as Dean of Bible and President Emeritus. Benson further explains:

This situation required me to hold a much tighter rein over the entire institution than I otherwise would have found necessary -- particularly because no one else felt they could resist their recommendations or requests. I felt I had to establish the authority of the institution in the president where it belonged (1).
George Benson subscribed wholeheartedly to the announced purposes of the college, and he felt that he had to create an atmosphere in which these purposes could most surely be carried out. This required that he establish a clear chain of command. He explains:

I had to pass information to a good many divisions that there were to be no exceptions to the rules except with my approval. I did it to get stronger backing for regulations and to hold firmer policies -- not because I wanted to "boss" everything. There seemed to be no other way to enforce stability (1).

George Benson's early background gives indication of his self-reliance. It points to his well-organized life, even as a young man, and his deep respect for discipline and organization. His years in China bring to focus his ability as an organizer.

He began immediately to set up a very strict economy for the college. Rigid policies were established in almost every phase of the school's operation, especially in the business office and in the purchasing of supplies and equipment.

The dining facilities were not under the management of the college, but were managed by the "college club." The students paid their board separate from tuition and other fees. Sears records in his book:

On September 29, 1934, the "college club" at Searcy purchased a forty-acre farm east of the campus for the dairy. After Dr. Benson's accession to the presidency, in 1936, the "college club" was discontinued as an independent organization and the property was used for teachers' homes and a college park (48, p. 248).
Benson explains why the club was discontinued:

The "club" was not familiar with tax regulations and had overlooked paying the sales tax. Finally, a tax representative came in and figured that about $4,000 was due in back taxes from the boarding department. He brought the bill to my office and indicated he would expect the college to pay it. No explanation satisfied him; the college was responsible. I paid it but I insisted on taking over the boarding service from then on including the land they had purchased. The boarding service then became a source of income to the college (1).

The fight against J. N. Armstrong on the "premillennialism" issue by a small segment of the church brotherhood brought on the first sharp challenge of the Benson administration. It had started in 1924 with E. M. Borden and a small group of preachers arrayed against Armstrong on the issue, before Harding College at Searcy came into existence.

Sears says:

Because of Armstrong's outspoken defense of the Christian's freedom of conscience and freedom to teach, he became the constant target of this group (48, p. 281).

The controversy was renewed on February 21, 1935, when a letter from a teacher at Harding (who had actually been dismissed) was published in a church periodical. The apparently spiteful letter contained sharp accusations against Armstrong, challenging his tolerance of those who believed in the "premillennial" advent of Christ and accusing him of taking the stand solely as a means of expanding the enrollment of the new Harding College.

Armstrong responded publicly, giving his own views while standing by his "tolerance", and seemed to have quieted the attack. But when news
circulated throughout the brotherhood that Armstrong was retiring at Harding and that George S. Benson was succeeding him, a group of preachers began to exert pressure on Harding to disfellowship "premillennialists" and all those who refused to disfellowship them.

The so-called "premillennialists" interpreted the New Testament to declare that between the Second Coming of Christ and the millennium (in which the earth would be burned up) there would be a period of 1,000 years (premillennialism) and that the "righteous" people of all history would be resurrected and live with Christ on earth during this 1,000 years. Those who were attacking Armstrong said that he was accommodating this viewpoint, which they considered to be contrary to the scripture (1).

Armstrong said that he did not himself embrace premillennialism. He published another series of articles, but his explanations failed to satisfy the dissidents. The best known preachers in the brotherhood rallied around Armstrong. When George Benson stepped into the presidency at Harding, he was confronted almost immediately with the controversy.

Sears reports:

E. R. Harper of Little Rock (a leader among the dissidents) arranged an elaborate "preachers" meeting at Fourth and State Streets Church, for December 4-8, 1936, apparently for the purpose of putting pressure on the colleges, especially Harding College, to "line up" in disfellowshipping all 'premillennialists' and also those who refused to disfellowship them. E. H. Ijams, president of David Lipscomb College, James F. Cox, president of Abilene Christian College, N. B. Hardeman, president of Freed-Hardeman College, and George S. Benson were all on the program to speak on 'Policies, Plans, and Attitudes on the Kingdom question' (48, p. 282).
The dissidents did not succeed, but the meeting did create a great deal of pressure on those who attended. John G. Reese, president of the Harding Board, publicly offered his resignation as a member of the board because of the pressure exerted by Harper and his group. He did not wish to turn against Armstrong, and he knew that the Harper faction could close many churches to him (48, p. 285).

In April of 1939 Harper arranged another meeting, this one at Fort Smith. He was able to keep the real purpose of the meeting disguised until it opened.

Sears writes:

The attendants proved to be a picked group from over the state but included President Benson and me, Clem Z. Pool, then president of the college board -- Armstrong was markedly left out, with no invitation. Presuming the meeting was to build interest in the college in that area and unaware that Harper was back of it, we attended (48, pp. 285, 286).

During the meeting Harper accused Armstrong of premillennialism and demanded that he be retired on pension (from his place on the faculty). The president of the Harding Board, Clem Z. Pool, agreed with Harper. George Benson was faced with a test of courage. He met the challenge characteristically. He rose in defense of Armstrong. Sears records the dramatic episode:

The charge of 'premillennialism' was quickly refuted. Then Benson demanded bluntly: 'Are you men ready to say, Armstrong, you have given your life to the school; you have carried it through the dark years when you had to go without salary to pay the other teachers; you have given it your life-
blood; but now since it has become a great school, the enrollment increased, safety and permanence assured, and you can begin to enjoy the fruits of your long service, we intend to kick you out and take the school over ourselves. We didn't sacrifice to make it, but now since it is going well we want it. Is that what you men mean (48, p. 286)?

Harper's group lost a good deal of its prestige that day but they were to fight on.

Armstrong's letters and speeches continued to be misrepresented by the dissidents.

"Friends all over the nation," says Sears, "sympathized with Armstrong -- but few felt they could speak out" (48, p. 289).

As Sears suggested in his writing, most people today are not aware of the bitter fight that existed in the brotherhood of the Church of Christ during this period. Harding College and J. N. Armstrong were not the only ones that were caught up in this struggle.

In the beginning of George Benson's administration this struggle seriously hindered his fund-raising efforts within the brotherhood and made his most vital job, establishing financial security for the college and faculty, very difficult indeed. Sears writes of the first Benson fund-raising efforts in 1936:

Benson's first efforts to raise money among the churches were unexpectedly blocked by the opposition of B. G. Hope of Paragould and E. R. Harper of Little Rock (48, p. 260).
The opposition was not directed at Benson personally, but was used by Hope and Harper in the hope of getting Harding College to work with them in their fight against premillennialism. They engendered sharp enmity in many church congregations. When Benson refused to go against Armstrong or to yield to their pressure, many churches were unwilling to aid Harding College financially or any other way. A letter written to President Benson on November 2, 1936 is representative of many letters received about that time.

Dear Brother Benson:

Your letters to _________ requesting the ________ Church to sponsor a "Harding College Rally" were given me to answer.

The elders met yesterday with several other brethren who are interested in the church and the college, and after discussing the matter fully asked me to write you that for the present they are unwilling to sponsor such a rally. . . . Several things have arisen which have brought the school into considerable disrepute among many brethren. The church here is unwilling to invest further in Harding College until some of these matters are satisfactorily adjusted. For one thing the question of Brother Boll's speculations (premillennialism) has reacted most unfavorably. We know of course, that Brother Armstrong declared his own personal beliefs in the matter. . . but if Harding is ever to regain the confidence of the brotherhood she must do something more than she has done, something that will convince the Boll followers themselves that she is not in sympathy with them, either in doctrine or in their person.

Believe me when I say we are anxious to help the college and that this letter is not to be interpreted in any sense as an unwillingness to help. But we want to know exactly what we are helping before we do anything (12).

Armstrong was never able to satisfy Harper and his group. They continued to misrepresent him and Harding College each time an opportunity arose. Both George Benson and Armstrong were wiser than many who wanted
to keep a full-fledged battle going. They realized that every criticism and misrepresentation could not be searched out and refuted. They counted on the good judgment of church leaders and members to finally reject the attack. In the early forties the fight subsided. It ended entirely with Armstrong’s death in 1944.

Later, Benson himself was to publish a brief statement, "The Second Coming of Christ," which in positive terms set forth the message of the Scripture, as he understood it. The little flyer had wide distribution. In it George Benson sought to simplify the message of the Scripture with three points: the coming of the Lord will be universally recognized; his coming shall be accompanied by a general resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous and by a final judgment of both the righteous and unrighteous; and this world shall be burned up, destroyed, at His coming. The Benson statement said: "It certainly would be an inexcusable abuse of the language to claim that the 'good' would be raised first, and that a unique reign of 1,000 years take place before the 'evil' come forth from the grave."

George Benson had recognized when he accepted the presidency that he would be building all aspects of a college and particularly its influence in his church and nation. But he also knew that all of his plans would depend on properly financing the college. This, he knew, would be his biggest task. Both Armstrong and Sears had made clear that this was the pressing need of the struggling little institution. On March 3, 1936, Armstrong wrote to
Benson in China: "I believe you can raise money and I can't. This will be the first thing for you to do" (22).

Sears wrote in his book:

He (Armstrong) talked with me, and we both agreed that we needed a man who had the ability to raise money and would be willing to devote his time to financial promotion, a task for which I had no inclination (48, p. 257).

As Sears suggested, there had been a time when the president of a college had not had to worry about raising money for operation of the school, but could operate on the tuition and fees (48, p. 140). That day had vanished. It was no longer possible to operate a college on tuition and fees alone. There was a great need at Harding College for a man who was an organizer, who could raise money, and manage it after he secured it.

"The heart of an educator," wrote Sears, "is in the development of his students, and he begrudges the time he must give to other matters" (48, p. 140). No doubt the description fit Armstrong and his feeling about finances.

Sears gave more testimony to Armstrong's feelings about finances:

Looking back from these affluent times some have thought Armstrong must have been a poor financier. He would have denied being a financier at all; he was a teacher. He made no attempt to build endowments; he was a builder of men (48, p. 141).

Armstrong had enjoyed much success as a teaching college president. His influence and dedication had brought each of his schools through many bleak years. Each of his schools -- Western Bible, Cordell, Harper, and
Harding at Morrilton -- had grown in enrollment to the point of needing more room for classrooms and dormitories. This meant more money, and this was always his big problem. Money was not easily secured.

When Harding at Morrilton reached this point, Armstrong looked for a bigger plant. Old Galloway College at Searcy was available. However, two years after the opening at Searcy the school's enrollment had again almost grown beyond the plant's capacity. There were twice as many students as there had been the last year at Morrilton (48, p. 251).

"The college was now in the best condition it had ever known," wrote Sears. The faculty was stronger than ever (48, p. 256).

The original purchase price for the property in Searcy had been $75,000. A $7,000 down payment was made (48, p. 242).

When George Benson became president the total owed was $65,000. Thus the figures reveal that the $4,000-a-year payments had for two years not been met, that only $600 had been paid on the principal beyond the $7,000 down payment.

While still in China, Benson wrote Armstrong describing a plan he wished to initiate to raise money (22). His plan was to secure pledges of $50 or $100 or more from the churches (Church of Christ) in each community. The amount secured would depend upon the wealth of the community.

The overall state of the economy of the country was unstable in 1936. President Roosevelt's New Deal had not brought prosperity to the masses of
the country. Many were unemployed. Roosevelt's program for maintaining a balance among the main economic forces in the nation was not succeeding. From the right it was being attacked by the "conservative" leaders as unconstitutional, extravagant, and unsettling to business. From the left it was being denounced as a fraud by which the "have nots" received promise and the rich grew richer. There were leaders like Francis E. Townsend, promising the aged $200 per month, Charles E. Coughlin and various farm leaders demanding drastic inflation, and above all, Huey P. Long, the Louisiana Kingfish, proclaiming his Share-the-Wealth plan. The Kansas City Star recorded:

As a remedy for this depressing situation, he (Long) offered his 'share the wealth' program to give every family a homestead worth $5,000 and an annual income of from $2,000 to $2,500. "The Lord has called America to a barbecue," he exhorted, 'and 50 million people are starving' (21).

By 1936, Roosevelt had, to some extent, overcome the opposition from the left. He placed the emphasis upon benefits for unemployed and the aged, small businessmen, small farmers, and organized labor. The 'soak-the-rich' taxes even more alienated most well-to-do people, and conversely endeared Roosevelt to the underprivileged masses. They demonstrated their relative voting strength in the election. Roosevelt received 27,476,673 votes to 16,679,583 for his republican opponent, Alfred M. Landon, and carried every state except Maine and Vermont.
This landslide seemed to President Roosevelt a mandate for further reform. He declared in his second inaugural address on January 20, 1937, that the United States was far from having reached "the goal of our vision."

I see a great nation, upon a great continent, blessed with a great wealth of natural resources. Its hundred and thirty million people are at peace among themselves; they are making their country a good neighbor among the nations. I see a United States which can demonstrate that, under democratic methods of government, national wealth can be translated into a spreading volume of human comforts hitherto unknown, and the lowest standard of living can be raised far above the level of mere subsistence.

But here is the challenge to our democracy: In this nation I see tens of millions of its citizens -- a substantial part of its whole population -- who at this very moment are denied the greater part of what the lowest standards of today call the necessities of life.

I see millions of families trying to live on income so meager that the pall of family disaster hangs over them day by day.

I see millions whose daily lives in city and on farm continue under conditions labeled indecent by a so-called polite society half a century ago.

I see millions denied education, recreation, and the opportunity to better their lot and the lot of their children.

I see millions lacking the means to buy the products of farm and factory and by their poverty denying work and productiveness to many other millions.

I see one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished (21).

This description of the United States in 1936 indicates to some degree the difficulty a small unknown college in Arkansas would encounter in raising money. The average person in 1936 had very little money beyond that necessary for existence. Business and industry were extremely hard pressed for finances.
This was the situation that the 38-year-old Benson faced as he assumed the duties of president of Harding. Benson knew Harding College was not solvent and he realized there was not an easy source available to secure the money to meet current expenses, pay off the debt, and expand the plant (3).

The plan to raise money from churches and individuals, organized by Benson while still in China, was put into operation. "Gradually it became quite clear to me," concludes Benson, "that we were not going to be able to pay off that debt by money raised from among our brethren" (1). This was due to the combined circumstance of the nationwide depression and the criticism falling upon the college from within the Church of Christ brotherhood.

One of the nation's foremost insurance salesmen, Clinton Davidson, had visited Harding College in the spring of 1936. He made a $5,000 gift to the college. He reportedly had amassed a modest fortune before retiring. When he visited Harding he was president of a lucrative business, the Fiduciary Council, Incorporated, whose primary function was investment counseling and management of wealthy estates. Sears writes:

... He wanted Armstrong and Gardner to decide whether to use the $5,000 gift immediately for salaries, or to promote a campaign for further funds (48, p. 261).

Armstrong took it to the faculty for vote and they voted to use the gift to obtain larger funds from Davidson's friends. Since Benson had
already been elected president, it was decided to wait until he arrived on the campus to start a campaign.

In January, 1937, at a special called board meeting, the motion was made by L. C. Sears and seconded by Clem Z. Pool that the Board of Trustees of Harding College employ Davidson's Fiduciary Council, Incorporated, as financial advisors for the institution (23).

At the same meeting another motion was made by Clem Z. Pool, seconded by L. C. Sears, that the Board of Trustees confirm a contract with Tamblin and Tamblin of New York City to raise $600,000 for the institution for endowment and to help pay off the existing debt (23).

Davidson made the contract with Tamblin and Tamblin. He obligated the college to pay $10,000 to the company to prepare a movie and direct a campaign (48, p. 260). "He had some publications prepared," comments Benson, "which he directed, and all the money we raised as a result of the picture and the whole campaign didn't quite pay for the effort itself" (1).

This placed dire urgency on Benson's appeal to individuals and churches for financial assistance. He made some progress. "I was gradually gaining," explains Benson, "and had built up in two years about $35,000 above operating expenses" (1).

He then began looking outside the brotherhood to see what could be done.

Davidson introduced Benson to Donaldson Brown, an industrialist in Wilmington, Delaware. He agreed to put the college in his will for $25,000.
George Benson thought twice and decided to persuade Donaldson Brown that an immediate gift would be more meaningful, to both the college and the donor. The gift was made immediately (1).

In 1926, while still in China, George Benson had made a very important contact with George Pepperdine, of California, founder of Western Auto Stores. Pepperdine was very interested in Christian education and missionary work. He had plans to endow a Christian college in Los Angeles.

In the fall of 1936, after his appointment to the presidency of Harding, Benson had an appointment to talk with Pepperdine in Los Angeles. He tells of this event:

There was a young fellow in his office trying to tell him that he should not start a Christian college and spend his money that way -- he was misrepresenting the statistics to Pepperdine. When it came his time to leave and I was to come in, Pepperdine asked him to stay. When I came in he introduced the fellow to me and told me what he had been saying and asked me if this were true. I told him this was not correct and had been misrepresented. He then told the other fellow that that was all he wanted and he could go. We talked the rest of the afternoon and most of the conversation was directed toward the college he wanted to establish. This was not what I wanted to talk about. I wanted Pepperdine to give some financial aid to Harding. Instead he asked my advice on many matters pertaining to Christian education and missionary work. I did not get any money then (1).

In 1939 the Pepperdines were planning a trip to the East coast, and were invited to stop and visit Harding. This they did, visiting the Armstrongs as well as the Bensons (48, p. 261).
While the Pepperdines were on the campus, George Benson invited him to come to his office for a conference. During the conversation that followed Benson secured a promise of $25,000 from Pepperdine (48). With this promise and the other money already raised, the institution had acquired almost enough money to pay the debt.

Not all of Benson's time and energy was spent in the area of finance. He was very active in the administration of the school. By the end of the first year he had consolidated all operation under his direct supervision so that he could at all times be aware of the effectiveness and achievements of each department. He centralized the responsibility for all collections and disbursements in the business office. He acquainted himself with the operation of the college farm and the college bookstore. He gave very close attention to every minor detail to make the total operation function effectively. He very quickly saw a need to establish a salary schedule for the faculty. He explains:

I found that in past years some teachers had been on a guaranteed basis and received full salary; others had received maybe half of what they had been promised, and some had received very little. I adopted a faculty schedule that I thought I could meet. It was on the basis of $85 per month for a Ph.D., $75 for a M.A., and $65 for a B.A. Then I actually paid them each month. This was a definite surprise to most of the teachers who thought it couldn't be done (I).

At the close of the first school year, June 3, 1937, there were thirty-three in the graduating class.
Both the fine spirit that had prevailed during the year and the consistency of George Benson's belief in the rightness of his money-raising causes, are manifest in the President's Message in the college year book, the *Petit Jean.* Benson expressed his appreciation to the students for their "keen sacrifice in pledging eight thousand dollars (of their own money) toward lifting the mortgage" (45, p. 2).

The work of the school continued and each month brought the institution closer to paying off the mortgage. To the astonishment of many people, by the summer of 1938, only $50,000 remained unpaid.

This fact kindled the Benson determination. In a board meeting on November 28, 1938, he expressed his belief that "the indebtedness on the institution will be retired on the time schedule" he had suggested, years before the last payment was due (24). The target date was Thanksgiving Day, 1939.

The students expressed their appreciation to their new president in a feature story in the school newspaper, *The Bison.* The article proclaimed him the "Little Giant of Harding College." It said his boundless energy, long hours, determination, zeal, decisive and direct action were his distinguishing characteristics (2, p. 1).

The faculty and student body began to catch some of their president's enthusiasm and optimism. The signs can be found in some of the 1939 spring and fall issues of *The Bison.* They reflect the stepped-up emphasis in the
financial campaign, the goal of which was "to burn the mortgage!" The Bison noted that Benson was gone from the campus almost every night and weekend, raising money (3, 4, 5).

When school opened in the fall of 1939, the goal seemed still to be a long way off; but in his welcome to the student body Benson retained his optimism:

We have made definite progress on our financial campaign and are still looking forward to complete liquidation of our indebtedness this calendar year. In fact, we are still hopeful that the mortgage can be destroyed on Thanksgiving Day (6, p. 1).

The long-awaited announcement was appropriately saved for Thanksgiving Day, November 30, 1939. In the final week the businessmen of Searcy had contributed $2,900 to finish the long and intensive struggle.

The mortgage was paid. As this announcement was made, a very noticeable silence ran through the audience of students, faculty and friends of the school. Benson took the paper from his brief case and presented it to J. N. Armstrong. The excitement of the moment brought visible tears to many eyes (7). Harding College was debt-free for the first time in its existence. Sears records what followed next:

The meeting adjourned immediately to the campus, President Benson lighted a bonfire, and Armstrong placed the mortgage on the flames as spectators broke into strains of the "Alma Mater" (48, p. 262).

The day was a cloudy, rainy day, but to the people present it was one of the brightest days in the history of Harding.
It was characteristic of George Benson to share the honors of the day with Armstrong. Sears writes:

He expressed gratitude to Armstrong and the faculty who had preserved the school through the depression and in appreciation he presented the cancelled mortgage to Armstrong (48, p. 262).

Benson also recalls the event:

I gave Brother Armstrong the mortgage and asked him to put it on the fire -- and that created a very stirring moment, because he had labored so long with the college and was loved by so many people but had not been able to finance the college (1).

During the thirty-nine month struggle to clear the institution of debt, the other phases of the college had not been overlooked. Benson comments:

In the meantime we had kept up the enrollment of the college and it had grown a little each year. We had also managed to improve our faculty little by little each year even on our skimpy salaries (1).

With the mortgage paid, Benson began to make plans for expanding and upgrading the academic establishment and increasing teacher salaries, for extending of the campus and the financing and construction of many new buildings. His first priority was to raise salaries. By March of 1940 he had accomplished this task. He had secured an anonymous gift of $30,000 to be used to increase salaries of the faculty (1). The practical and sound program he had initiated for the institution had begun to show dramatic results in all areas of operation. A truly new Harding College was taking shape.
But just ahead, a mountain loomed to challenge and drastically slow the climbing ability of George Benson and his ambitious institution. World War II, with its paralyzing effects on every normal activity in the land, already had begun, with Hitler's blitzkrieg into Poland. For more than a year America seemed capable of escaping involvement in the actual war; then Japan, in one bold stroke from the air, seriously damaged the Pacific naval might of the United States -- in what President Roosevelt was to brand a colossal "act of infamy." The nation overnight was at war.

A year ahead of the devastating Japanese blow and the Roosevelt and Congressional commitment of the nation to war, Benson had announced in a chapel speech that his next major objective for Harding would be the preparation of the college to warrant accreditation by the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools. This was a "must" if the college was to fulfill the destiny envisioned by Benson, her founders and her widening family of patrons.

It proved to be a much bigger challenge than paying off the mortgage. He was to work for fourteen years, most of the time in frustrating desperation against a towering array of opposition, before he won for Harding College one of its many historic victories and certainly one of its most important ones. The fight he had to make for NCA endorsement seemed to generate in George Benson all the capabilities of generalship that a Supreme Commander must possess to win the decisive battles in a war.
He did not anticipate a "fight" for accreditation when he first began to prepare Harding for admission. He felt that by making obvious reforms and improvements in a number of educational practices, bringing the faculty up to higher general standards, improving the finances, raising salaries and establishing a more solid security, the school would be ready for accreditation. He set out to accomplish these achievements. He brought the entire faculty and business staff into the drive toward these improvements. But progress was slow. He had hoped to prepare the college so that a North Central Association application could be made in about five years (1).

Then the Japanese struck Pearl Harbor and, with the American fleet all but destroyed, began to take over the islands of the Pacific and, with her Axis partners, Germany and Italy, to threaten to take over the world.

The United States was plunged into a mammoth overseas war, almost entirely unprepared, with her mightiest naval weapons spiked, with inadequate military manpower, and with the country's productive capacity badly weakened by a decade of stagnating economic depression.

Before this happened, however, George Benson advanced the fortunes of Harding College in a number of ways, but most dramatically with the image he created for himself and the college when he appeared as a witness before the House Ways and Means Committee in Washington, as reported in the preceding chapter.
In the annual spring meeting of the Harding Board, May 27, 1941, six months before the Japanese strike, George Benson was elected for a new five-year term as president. The motion carried unanimously. A second motion made by L. C. Sears and seconded by J. D. Allen, that the board "reaffirm its support of the policy of free and open discussion upon all matters," also carried unanimously. The board then officially authorized Benson to "continue his campaign for national economy and good government, and to carry out any plans calculated to further that end." As a matter of fact, at this date George Benson had so well demonstrated his extraordinary capabilities that the board, in a sense, gave him a "blank check" in freedom to operate (25).

Great Britain was already in the war; France had been overrun; Hitler had unleashed his bombs on London; and President Roosevelt already had involved the United States as supplier of arms to the British. Hitler's roving packs of submarines had sent scores of American ships, carrying war supplies to England, to the bottom of the Atlantic.

George Benson, at the little Arkansas college, foresaw the immediate future as somewhat bleak; he felt that the United States would be at war, and, in fact, began a war retrenchment program at Harding. At the board meeting in mid-1941 he reported a slump in college enrollment, due entirely to wartime restrictions, mammoth recruitment into the armed services, a feeling of fearful uncertainty in the homes and families of the nation. He
asked for and was given approval to reduce the size of the faculty during the period of the war, which he expected momentarily and which would involve this nation. In the school year 1940-41 there had been a loss of fifty students, and this had cost the college approximately $7,500 in income. So he retrenched, with as little dislocation among the faculty and staff as he could manage (26).

At the close of the 1941-42 school year, because of his austere program at the college and his persevering fund-raising, there was a surplus of $25,000 above operating expenses. Upon a motion adopted unanimously by the board, it was decided that "President Benson be authorized to invest the $25,000 now on hand, for endowment as seems wise in his judgment" (28).

The drop in enrollment continued to make itself felt. "In the fall of 1942," reports George Benson, "it became necessary to further reduce our operational budget to offset the financial strain caused by decreasing enrollment" (1). The reduction brought limitations to the institutional program: Course offerings were consolidated and in some cases eliminated, and the number of faculty members was reduced.

During this period of great difficulty it was almost impossible to get materials for construction of new buildings. However, with a dwindling student body, new buildings became less important for the time being. Benson was able to plan for the future of the institution with more deliberation than would otherwise have been possible. He worked constantly, with
the North Central accreditation project in the back of his mind. And he intensified his solicitation for endowment funds.

The essential work of the school went on. Benson was able to build upon his and Harding’s reputation and to enrich the quality of Harding’s educational product. He was vitally interested in faculty improvement. In cutting the size of the faculty to meet his rigid economy program, he tried not to create hardship cases; but he was determined to use the extraordinary circumstances to raise the quality. He arranged leaves of absence for the most promising faculty members who wanted to improve their education and seek the master’s or doctor’s degree. Two members added to the faculty in 1942 stand out as examples of this upgrading program — based on the necessity for retrenchment and the desire to develop an outstanding academic program: Joe Pryor and F. W. Mattox. Pryor, an unusually capable man in the field of science, went on to secure his Ph. D. degree; and Billy Mattox, with outstanding administrative abilities, returned to the campus after earning his doctorate. As Benson had planned, Pryor was to become, in 1960, the Dean of Harding College; and Mattox, with the help of George Benson, was to establish and become president of a new Christian college in Lubbock, Texas — Lubbock Christian College (27).

In March, 1942, George Benson began to write his column "Looking Ahead" and the Western Newspaper Union began to syndicate it to weeklies and dailies. He was by then speaking at some of the outstanding conventions
across the country, and making influential friends. Within two years the Benson column grew in popularity until it was being sent, on request, to 2,700 newspapers in North America (1).

As Benson's national stature grew, so did Harding's. One reporter in 1942 wrote:

Dr. Benson is president of Harding College, Searcy, Arkansas, and the boast of this school is that it has no unemployed graduates. The teaching staff is littered with men holding the doctor of philosophy degree, most of whom have refused positions at richer schools for several times their salary (11).

When asked how he maintained such a high quality of faculty on such low salaries, Benson replied:

All anybody is going to get out of life is living and the satisfaction of performing a service to mankind and his God, I guess that was our best drawing card. Our teachers at Harding felt like they were doing something worthwhile. I was of the opinion, however, that a Christian college probably should not be paying quite the running wage, because there should be some means of screening out those who lacked dedication, those who were really just teaching for the money. We wanted people who were interested in building genuine, sterling Christian character (1).

Operating on this philosophy, Benson attracted many well qualified and dedicated men; however, as one faculty member who has taught at Harding for almost 30 years pointed out, "President Benson did not always realize that everyone didn't share to the full extent, his enthusiasm and dedication" (18).
Benson explained further his selection of faculty members:

First of course, we looked for academic fitness. A man needed to be qualified to teach what we were employing him to teach. Then, we wanted a man who was a dedicated Christian and who would help develop dedicated Christian character; a man who understood the ideals of Harding College and believed that he could whole-heartedly support them (1).

George Benson had a great loyalty to Harding College, and he expected or demanded it from those who chose to work for him. The more he expanded the campus, the physical plant, the academic program and the student body, the more the institution became a part of the man, his mind and heart and spiritual being. "I was fully employed by Harding," emphasized the seventy-two-year-old Benson (in 1971). "Harding's stability and progress was my business and I worked at it about eighteen hours a day for most of those twenty-nine years" (1). It was, in fact, virtually the whole of his life. This was the loyalty pattern he set for his faculty during those twenty-nine years.

He was away from the campus much of the time and came back to the office almost every night when he was in town. During the day he was in conferences and would use the night time to catch up on his paper work and correspondence.

During the war the faculty was strengthened despite the low salaries. "This was possible," comments Benson, "only because of the dedication to Christian education" (1).
In 1944 a faculty retirement program was made operational, which required retirement at age seventy or optional retirement after sixty-five, and provided substantial retirement benefits. At the annual board meeting in June, 1944, George Benson asked the board to approve a ten-to fifteen-per cent salary increase. The motion was passed to be effective in September, 1944.

The war was at its peak in September, 1944. The enrollment for the fall semester was 285, a small increase over the previous year. The administration continued optimistically to plan for expansion. At the board meeting in May, 1945, Benson presented the new campus development plan as prepared by Lamb and Herman Associates, 11 East 44th Street, New York City, with whom he had worked for some time. The plan was adopted as presented. He suggested that two of the proposed buildings, a Student Center and an addition to Patti Cobb Hall, would be needed for the opening of the fall term. He had raised his first quarter million dollars for a building project, in a tight wartime economy.

The funds available for the purpose of expansion were in the amount of $285,249. The estimated cost of the proposed expansions would be $450,000. Benson told the board, "The necessary funds will be available" by the time extensive building operations could be successfully carried out (29).

At the beginning and throughout the remainder of his tenure as President of Harding College, George Benson cast himself in the role of a
general building contractor (47). He got the best architect he could find in Little Rock who would be willing, under George Benson's powerful persuasion, to do two things: Draft plans for utilitarian buildings, attractive on the outside and most useful on the inside, with no frills or costly decoration; and do this for about half what the run-of-the-mill architect would charge (1). He had been developing through the early years a construction team of people on the campus, and he bought or rented the necessary heavy construction equipment required. The man he brought on campus as a journeyman carpenter grew in construction know-how and stature, while maintaining and remodeling some of the old Galloway structures, to a full-fledged construction boss. In Harding's first building program, he became the construction superintendent working under the direction of George Benson (1). Harding's building program became a do-it-yourself undertaking. It saved the college several million dollars, in all, and in addition provided the richest source for student employment. At some stages of the building program, work was provided for more than 100 male students (29). The man whom Benson had brought to the campus as a tender of the water and heating plants revealed himself to be one of the best electrical and plumbing engineers in the country. He drew up blueprints for "home-made" electrical systems and air-conditioning schemes that won the praise of the architect and state government inspectors (1).
When George Benson was on the campus, from 1944 to 1965, if he couldn't be found in his office, he certainly could be found wherever the building noise could be heard -- checking on progress, conferring with his superintendents, looking over blueprints, going over cost sheets with his business manager, examining the steel, or cement, or bricks, or lumber that had come on the job from a supplier. On many of the building projects he was able, again with his powerful persuasive approach, to obtain contributions of plumbing fixtures, pipe, air conditioning generators, and so forth, from manufacturers whom he had met in his nationwide travels and who had, in some form or other, praised his educational work in behalf of the American system.

By the spring of 1945 the war with Germany was near its end. The allies, on May 7, at Reims, France, accepted Germany's "unconditional surrender," and V-E Day was celebrated by a grateful world. This development found Harding College in splendid condition in all areas. The May, 1945, meeting of the Board of Trustees was almost a gala affair. Thanksgiving was the order of the day.

The faculty turnover for the school year 1944-45 was minimal. Only one position was vacated, and it was in the elementary school. Benson announced that Jack W. Sears, son of L. C. Sears, would return to head the college department of Biology. He returned with a doctorate (30).
Before the opening of the 1945-46 school year the Japanese had surrendered and the long struggle was ended. Harding's enrollment soared to a record number. And with the end of the war and the promise of things returning to normal, Benson was very anxious to carry out his expansion of the physical plant and to improve the college for North Central admission.

The rapidly expanding student body made building almost a necessity, but as Benson stated to the board: "We must proceed with caution at this point. To overbuild or underbuild would not be healthy for the growth of the institution" (30).

The problem was taken to the faculty. A committee was selected to examine the needs, project the near-future needs and make recommendations to George Benson (1).

It was during this period, on the threshold of great potential growth, that another situation arose to postpone any major construction. A group of businessmen in Memphis, Tennessee, who had watched George Benson's career, decided to persuade the board to move the college to Memphis. They met with the Board of Trustees in November, 1945, to present the advantages of moving the college to Memphis.

Recorded in the minutes of the Board of Trustees is the following account:

Present was a committee from Memphis, including J. W. Ray, R. T. Bolen, J. C. Moore, and G. C. Brewer. Speaking for the committee, J. C. Moore extended an invitation to move the institution to Memphis (30).
It was pointed out that there would be many advantages for the school in Memphis. Some of these were, Memphis was a metropolitan population of 400,000, with twelve large Churches of Christ. It was a manufacturing center, the largest trade and banking center in the mid-south. There was a large medical center; water, gas, and electricity rates were low; Memphis was the chief transportation center in the South, with daily buses, and passenger planes and nine national highways that crossed the city.

The city of Memphis agreed to give the institution any site the board chose and to raise $500,000 or whatever sum the board deemed necessary to justify the move.

George Benson and the board felt that the offer was attractive. This seemed to be a great opportunity for the small institution. But Benson needed time to look into all the ramifications. He was inclined to believe that, if they could secure all the things the committee had promised, the move certainly would be good for the growth of the college.

"E. W. MacMillen," explains Benson, "had already secured about $15,000 a year for the endowment of a graduate school in Bible, and also the gift of an old estate and business valued at $300,000, which before the war had earned an income of $50,000 annually" (1).

The board, at Benson's suggestion, set up a committee to study the proposed move to Memphis. The committee members were C. L. Ganus, Chairman of the Board, George Benson, and L. C. Sears (30).
At a special board meeting January 19, 1946, called to discuss the move to Memphis, several groups came to make pleas for or against the move. The meeting lasted most of the day. When the last group had been heard, Benson made a plea for impartial consideration of facts and problems involved. He pointed out that the proposals did not involve giving up the present site, which might be turned into a Christian high school made self-supporting by tuition and fees. He stated he did not wish to take sides in the controversy that the proposed move had created (31).

There was then a general discussion of the issues involved, with each board member giving his own opinion on the matter.

The following motion was made: Be it Resolved that:

The Board of Trustees of Harding College, realizing their responsibility for guiding the future of the institution, in order that it may expand its field of service and make the greatest possible contribution to Christian education as a whole, take the following two steps:

1. Accept the invitation of the committee from Memphis to move the college there on the following conditions:
   A. That the city provide a location acceptable to the college.
   B. That Memphis provide $500,000 to be raised in cash acceptable pledges by June 1, 1946.
2. Retain a high school and grade school of high quality in Searcy to serve not only this section of Arkansas but boarding students as well, the organization of which shall be worked out prior to the time the college shall be moved to Memphis.

The motion carried, eight members voting 'yes' and three voting 'no' (31).
George Benson and two board members, C. L. Ganus and L. M. Graves were appointed as a committee to further study the terms under which the move had been authorized.

They met several times with the people from Memphis. The terms for the move seemed to be working out to the agreement of both parties.

There were several groups in Memphis and Searcy who were opposed to the move and worked against it at every turn. The leadership of the city of Searcy pledged every resource to keep Harding. There were other private colleges in the city of Memphis that did not want to see Harding move into their territory.

The public announcement was made that a decision had been reached to move Harding College to Memphis (8). This came in late January of 1946. Benson reconstructs the situation:

I had made plans to go to Europe to study the situation there. I thought this would be very beneficial to our work in the National Adult Education Program as it was known then. We were to meet in the early summer and sign all the papers and work out the whole Memphis deal. I already had my passage booked to sail for Europe and thus would not be present for the final paper signing. Some phases of the deal did not materialize in the final showdown. By the time I got back the people who were opposed to the move had gathered their forces. When I returned from Europe we tried to reach an agreement, but we never could, so we didn’t move. I suspect we are not any worse for it today. The people of Searcy have been very good to the school and we in turn have been good for them (1).
The announcement was made that the school would not be moved to Memphis (34). The road was now open to build and expand the present campus.

A rich new asset for the college was added in May of 1946. Benson, always searching for ways to increase Harding's income, found what looked to him like a great investment. He requested a special board meeting and it was convened April 29, 1946. For two or three months Benson had been investigating the possibility of the college purchasing a radio station in Memphis, WHBQ. The following action was taken at the board meeting:

President Benson discussed the possibilities of future development of the station, pointing out the balance sheet for the station last year showed a handsome net profit. He gave a complete background of how the college became interested in the station. The station could be purchased for $300,000. The motion was passed unanimously giving President Benson authority to purchase the station and arrange for financing the purchase (32).

This added substantially to the financial stability of Harding. Its annual net receipts averaged about $60,000, equal to the interest on a $2,000,000 endowment. In a sense George Benson became the absentee owner-manager of a Memphis radio station. And he was to turn it into one of the college's richest assets, by using it to obtain a TV franchise.

The 1945-46 school year could be counted a most successful year. The enrollment had reached the largest in the history of the school, and the prospects for the next year indicated that the college might have a demand that would be difficult to accommodate, although dormitory expansions had
been made. The increased enrollment of the returning servicemen (GI's) helped to create this situation. Almost one-third of them were ministerial students (29). The crowded situation had been eased somewhat by the Lanham Act, which provided some housing for ex-GI's. The college had been able to acquire enough money under this act to accommodate about twenty families.

The enrollment of the college had climbed gradually for the last four years, with the following figures: 1943 - 256, 1944 - 292, 1945 - 338, 1946 - 636.

The President's Report to the Board in mid-November of 1946 carried a note of urgency about the increased enrollment. It was time to build. But supplies were still scarce, though the war had been over for some fifteen months.

The finances of the college had continued to improve, and Benson could report to the board a total of $480,584.97 in cash or investments that could be used for building. The purchase of the radio station is very typical of what happened to many of the Benson bargains. His report to the board was as follows:

As directed by the Board, Station WHBQ was purchased for $300,000. I raised approximately $186,000 in cash specifically to apply on the purchase of the radio station. Then we borrowed $100,000 from the Union Planters National Bank of Memphis at 3% interest. This left $14,000 to be advanced from the funds we had on hand. The station is earning at a rate of $100,000 per year so during November and December we should make enough to repay the $14,000 advanced. During the calendar year of 1947 the station should repay the loan at the Union Planters National Bank (34).
WHBQ was to prove to be a far richer asset than that.

The two big projects that now occupied George Benson were accreditation and building. These two priorities gave way only to fund raising, which was important to the realization of both goals. The college moved into a period of rapid growth that would see the erection of a new structure almost every year.

Housing and the classroom shortage were pressing problems. In the small auditorium of old Godden Hall (Galloway vintage) it was necessary to hold chapel service twice daily.

Seventeen new faculty members were employed. This gave the college the largest and strongest faculty in its history. Benson reported to the board at the end of 1947:

It has been necessary during the year to continue to add living facilities by contracting two frame dormitories for the housing of about 150 boys at a cost of about $40,000 (35).

He reported that the radio station WHBQ had a net earning of $52,000 for the last six months of the year and that the $100,000 note at Union Planters had been paid. Harding's radio station in Memphis was free of debt.

Benson impressed upon the board the importance of determining the size of the student body for future years. Such a projection would affect planning of the building program and also determine faculty size. The faculty had given considerable thought to this problem and had recommended that the student body be limited to 700. The board accepted this recommendation by
the faculty and momentarily the future planning was based on this. But the success of the fund-raising in the next twenty-four months inspired Benson to lift Harding's growth horizon tremendously.

It was reported by Benson that there was now approximately $500,000 in the building fund, and the faculty building committee had suggested the following order for building needs: library, student center, gymnasium, and auditorium. This suggestion was accepted by the board.

The first big nationwide campaign for building funds was begun in the fall of 1948 and was to be in two parts, ending in 1950. The professional services of the John Price Jones Corporation of New York City had been secured to help in preparing for a multi-million-dollar fund-raising campaign.

In the next five years twelve new major buildings were constructed on the Harding campus. Old Godden Hall was razed and the campus began to bring to life the dream of Harding's founders and the blueprint in the back of the mind of her president. In his November, 1953, report to the board, George Benson described these structures:

1. Training School Building, housing the academy and grammar school division, important to our teacher training program.
2. Rhodes Memorial Field House providing for an adequate physical education program.
3. Armstrong Hall, a fireproof hall housing 225 men.
4. A Library Building, capable of seating one-third of the entire student body at one time, and fully air-conditioned.
5. Cathcart Hall, a fireproof hall for 200 girls.
6. Ganus Student Center, providing space for much of the social life of the institution, offices for student organization, and for the college post office. This entire building is air-conditioned.
7. The Administration Building, providing space for administrative offices, a small auditorium, the recording studio, and a limited number of classrooms—all air-conditioned.

8. The Auditorium, with large, well-equipped stage, has 1300 upholstered opera seats, and room on the stage for folding chairs when needed. The small auditorium, which has 200 upholstered chairs, can be connected with the large auditorium through a public address system. The building is air-conditioned.

9. The Music Building, with offices, studios, practice rooms and band room for all work in the music department.

10. Sewell Hall, a residence for faculty and staff members, with seven furnished apartments.

11. American Studies Building, with seven class rooms and five seminar rooms, and nineteen offices, is entirely air-conditioned.

12. A four-bedroom, Home Economics Practice Cottage. This building is modern in style and furnishings and is air-conditioned (47).

This rather imposing array of new well-equipped buildings gave the institution a plant quite adequate for its present purposes. "In fact many people think," remarked Benson to the board, "that Harding College has the best college plant in the state in comparison to the size of her student body" (47).

Without an increase in the student body the institution was able to make a twenty per cent increase in the number of full-time faculty members. "We have spared no pains," Benson informed the board, "in seeking highly qualified people" (10). This was another step in the direction of one of Benson's priorities, North Central Association accreditation.

The administration for the moment at least was somewhat freed from the great financial concern and stress of building. But Benson's blueprint
stretched on and on. "Harding College," said her president, "is entering upon a new stage of development." This forecast proved to be accurate (47).

Although the period 1948-53 was characterized by what seemed to many a miraculous transformation of the campus, with the sprawling building projects dominating the scene, disrupting at times most of the student body, the students and faculty seemed as enthusiastic and happy as did their president. The loyalty of the students was dramatically manifested in their behavior, their constantly expressed gratitude for the new campus, and their own personal contributions to the financial drives.

In the school-opening ceremonies in chapel in September of 1953, Benson commended the students for their attitude about rules and policies and particularly their happy adjustment to the inconveniences of a campus turned upside down by construction projects.

I commend you for your loyalty to this institution. We who are in the administration and on the faculty must never forget that you are the reason for Harding's existence. We could not operate an institution such as this (especially with all the growing dislocations) without your cooperation. We, as faculty members, could not make you obey the rules unless the majority of you cooperated (47).

Only a few people were aware at the time (or are aware today) of the magnitude and ramifications of the battle waged by George Benson for accreditation of Harding College by the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools.
At the beginning of his preparations at Harding for application to NCACSS, Benson was told confidentially by a trusted friend and fellow college president in the Midwest that, "the powers-that-be in North Central were determined that Harding would never be acceptable." The "word" was that the Executive Director and a majority of the college presidents serving on the Board of Review opposed George Benson for the following reasons: his freely announced belief that a basic responsibility of education was to "teach" and "indoctrinate" students with proven, documented facts; his opposition to the appropriation of Federal funds for teacher's salaries; his outspoken support of the profit motive, the competitive market, and the principle of private ownership of property; his popularity with the top leadership of American business and industrial enterprises; and his criticism of those institutions of education which failed to include American history and comparative economics as compulsory courses -- in both high school and college curricula (1).

What he found out concerning this situation in 1946 made it all the more necessary, in George Benson's mind, that Harding College achieve North Central accreditation and thus be more influential within the institution of education. He studied the history of the North Central Association and talked with scores of persons who had at one time served on the Review Board. He became acquainted with some of these. Some of these men were college presidents; others were in retirement from their college posts.
When he felt that Harding was nearing the stage in her academic and economic improvement that put her ahead of many small colleges which had obtained NCACSS accreditation, he made his first move -- at the close of the 1946-47 school year. He engaged H. M. Gage as a consultant to come to Harding and spend as much time as necessary checking out every phase of the college so that he could recommend what would be necessary to meet NCACSS requirements. Gage was President-Emeritus of Coe College, Cedar Rapids. The four factors which led to the employment of Gage were, in Benson's listing:

He was an extremely competent and widely experienced college administrator; he was genuinely friendly to me and my philosophy as an educator and citizen; and he had served as President of the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools longer than any other person; he "knew the ropes;" and he was no longer associated with North Central (1).

The administrators and faculty worked conscientiously on recommendations made by Gage. By the end of the school year 1947-48 everyone felt that an application to North Central should be made and almost everyone was confident that Harding was "ready," although the college was still in the process of improvement and growth. Benson, the strategist, felt it worthwhile "to see how the land lay." The application was submitted by Benson, and during the two days, January 20-21, North Central examiners, H. C. Coffman, Melvin W. Hyde and M. G. Neale, were on the campus seeking out the vital facts about the college (19).

The subsequent report submitted to NCA listed nine "elements of strength" and thirteen "points of weakness." The report said:
The six critical areas of weakness in Harding College lie in the fields of faculty competence, advanced education, library, student housing, finance, and physical plant (41).

The report sharply condemned what it considered the 'in-breeding' within the faculty -- too many faculty members were blood relatives of other faculty members, and of the forty-nine persons on the faculty, fifty per cent received their undergraduate training at Harding. The only mention of the National Education Program was that 'it is a non-collegiate program of general citizen education.'

The examiners complimented the "constructive" work of reform done at the suggestion of Gage (41).

Robert Burns, Executive Secretary of the Board, made a copy of the report available to George Benson and requested that comments by the college be drafted for submission to the Board of Review. Such informal comments were filed with Burns, defending some points made in the 'points of weakness' and promising whatever remedies were required (1).

Accreditation was denied by the Board of Review. This was in 1949.

By the end of the 1949-50 year, Benson was ready again. He had tried to establish an acquaintanceship with as many of the Board of Review as he could.

An incident which occurred when George was three years old seems to suggest an inherent courage which refused to weaken in the face of opposition.
The child had seen his father set traps for the mice in the barn, and had watched as the traps were revisited. Stuart Benson would hold up the dead mouse with its neck broken, under the trap's heavy wire bar. Three-year-old George Benson knew that the mice were eating the hogs' corn and the chickens' grain, and tearing holes in the big sacks of cotton seed meal which held food for the cattle.

He was motivated strictly by impulse when one day while in the barn alone he saw a chubby mouse run into a hole in a plank near the floor where the sacked feed was kept. He ran over and reached into the hole and grabbed it, and the mouse grabbed the hand. The child apparently knew that the neck was the vital part and was trying to reach it with his thumb and fingers. He screamed and danced around the barn floor as the mouse repeatedly bit into the hand that held it. He ran for the house. His mother rushed into the yard to meet him.

When she reached him his hand had been bitten several times, but it still held the mouse, which was dead. The child, through all the biting, had worked his fingers up to the neck and had choked the mouse to death.

Emma Benson often recalled this incident, which she told with a mother's pride as George, the school boy, then the man and finally the college president overcame opposition and adversity to achieve his successes (1).
After the initial North Central rejection, George Benson told everyone he could reach in the North Central Association, "You just tell us what we must do, and we'll do it." He got a few suggestions from this round-robin inquiry, and sought immediately to make the improvements recommended. Work was done on the "Thirteen Points of Weakness" as listed by the first NCA examiners (1).

NCA examiners came to Harding for the second time on January 25, 1951, to gather information and report to the NCA on the college's second application for accreditation. The examiners were Robert M. Strozier and C. F. Richards. They found a much-improved institution in many of the areas of "weakness" and said so in their subsequent report. But they found fault almost everywhere: the score this time was four "elements of strength" and eight "elements of weakness." Harding was permitted, as was customary, the opportunity to rebut those conclusions of the examiners with which the college took issue (42).

But the NCA verdict again was rejection of the Harding College application for accreditation. The accrediting association was obliged to admit substantial improvement in the "six critical areas of weakness" listed in the first examination. A new library had been built, the per capita expenditure for books was near a record, and the qualifications of Librarian were adequate. The physical plant generally scored high -- with new mens' and.
womens' dormitories, a student center, library, gymnasium, etc. The following was stated:

The President had received $1,500,000 for this purpose in the last two years and is getting excellent value for the money invested in new library, gymnasium, mens' dormitory and womens' dormitory -- and the excavation has been made for a new auditorium (42).

But the examiners were very explicit on what they described as continued "inbreeding" in the faculty.

Of the forty-three teachers of college classes, twenty-two are Harding College graduates and seven of the twelve heads of departments are Harding graduates. This intellectual and cultural inbreeding is unfortunate... There is little justification for the employment of two sons of the college Dean (Dean Sears) as members of the faculty. In the opinion of the Examiners, this arrangement should be terminated. The employment as a teacher of a son of the Chairman of the Board of Trustees (Clifton L. Ganus, Jr., now president of Harding) may be justified but is questionable. Other father-son and husband-wife combinations should be discontinued (42).

The previous examiners had been not quite so specific.

These 1951 examiners spent considerable time probing into the activities of the National Education Program, which, their report said:

Is established as a separate enterprise and not located on the campus. The finances of this enterprise are entirely apart from the finances of the school, although profits from the National Education Program are turned over to the Harding College operating budget. The National Education Program has been self-sustaining and it has brought some national attention to Harding College. Along with the national attention have, of course, come many contributions, not only to the operating budget of the school but also to further the National Education Program (42).
George Benson and L. C. Sears were permitted to be heard by the Review Board prior to its decision to reject the college's application for accreditation. Benson found, as he had suspected, much opposition in the minds of Executive Secretary Burns and some of the board toward his work in the National Education Program; he found it difficult to win an argument with them. Both Benson and Sears assured the board that the "inbreeding" of faculty was being substantially dissipated. Sears said his younger son on the faculty had already accepted a professorship in another institution and that efforts were underway to further diminish the "family" character of the faculty. Benson reviewed for the board some of the "outside" well-known educators whom he was trying to attract to the Harding College faculty. The final result was rejection of Harding by the NCA.

In preparation for his next application, George Benson made still further trips into the "home-grounds" of the Review Board members. A former member of the board gave Benson additional information on the nature and identification of the opposition toward Harding. This person told him that the "key" man in the opposition had said to him: "I'd rather see George Benson burned in oil than to see Harding College get into North Central." The "key" man also had said, at another time, according to Benson's informant, "If Harding College gets in North Central, it will do it over my dead body" (1)

This attitude, of which he had been clearly aware throughout his work toward North Central accreditation, made George Benson all the more
determined to win. He began to visit with members of the current Review Board, and assured each of his intention to do whatever was necessary to make Harding acceptable to them. His strategy was to win over sufficient numbers of the Board of Review to override the adamant stand of the "key" opponents. In almost every instance, he was told that his personal speeches all over America, in which he stood on principles which found sharp conflict in many educational circles, and the continuation of the National Education Program were the two chief points of contention. It was suggested to him that, "If I would abolish the National Education Program and 'be careful' of my public utterances, Harding would, in time, win accreditation" (1).

In the next three years he employed two retired former members of the NCA Board of Review, Edward Potthoff, of the University of Illinois, and Russell Cooper, of the University of Minnesota, to work with him and the faculty in correcting the weaknesses at Harding. The examiners came again, and they were obliged by now to recognize the formulation of a top-quality faculty with a sprinkling of nationally-recognized "outsiders," a physical plant which satisfied all requirements, one of the most stable financial situations among small colleges in America, and a graduate product that had begun to be recognized for its high quality. But again the Board of Review said, no (43)!
There was considerable talk on the campus about the advisability of giving up the quest. After all, the college could do its work without NCA's certification. Wherever George Benson encountered such talk, he firmly spoke against it (1).

He intensified his study of the Board of Review, concentrating on what their philosophy was concerning not only the institution of education but also the ideology of nations. Late in 1953, after a fourth rejection at the Chicago offices of North Central's Executive Secretary, Benson's interest and personal contacts developed the intelligence that Harding would win a majority of the Review Board if the small militant opposition could be neutralized by one action on the part of George Benson: abolition of the National Education Program (1). This, to him, meant surrender, an appeasement detrimental to his hopes for the college and his work for the nation. But since the National Education Program at this time was a part of the college, he made a concession to the need of those on the board who wanted to see Harding accepted: he announced the dissolution of the National Education Program as a part of Harding College, the formation of a separate Board of Directors for the National Education Program, and the incorporation of the program as a private, self-governing educational institution for the purpose of bringing about a better understanding of the American way of life. This had been the purpose of the program from the
beginning. George Benson was elected President of the National Education Program (1).

This was a decisive action. On March 14, 1954, the Board of Review of the Commission on Colleges and Universities, North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, announced in Chicago that Harding College of Searcy, Arkansas, had been accepted for accreditation (9).

That day will always be memorable at Harding College.

To George Benson the accreditation was a formality, but a very necessary one.

Success finally in the long-sought goal of accreditation ushered in a new era in the development of the college. It opened up new possibilities for the once struggling school. The college's prestige nationally was instantly enhanced, and for the first time, Harding students could be assured that their credits would be honored by other institutions. Benson's utter refusal to accept defeat was the major factor. A faculty member gives testimony to this:

Dr. Benson was always optimistic and had great faith. He would never become discouraged when most of us on the faculty were very discouraged. He knew that we would eventually get accreditation from North Central Association (17).

The ultimate concern of NCA and others, that Benson through the National Education Program had prostituted Harding College to large industry, is refuted by Clifton L. Ganus, President of Harding College:
I don't think that Harding prostituted itself at all. Neither did Dr. Benson develop a program designed to attract business support per se. I think that what really happened is that Dr. Benson firmly believed in these principles in the 1930's when he came back to the United States and he saw what had happened in America during the period that he had been gone for eleven years and near the close of the depression. He began immediately when he returned, speaking everywhere he could. It is true that businessmen liked what they heard. Some of them didn't, I am sure, but basically they did. And as a result, they were willing to help him in the program that he had developed and this program has grown and developed over the years and support has come in through the 40's, the 50's, the 60's even until today. So it is not a case of Dr. Benson developing a program that he didn't believe in just to get the money from business. To the contrary, he developed a program in which he believed and still believes with all of his heart. He wouldn't be doing what he is doing today if this were not so. As far as going out and prostituting one's self, to get money from big business, this just didn't happen that way. Harding still remained true and faithful to its basic principles and reasons for its existence all through these years and the program that has been developed has been developed because we believe these principles and not because we did it just because of the money at all (16).

Clifton L. Ganus, Jr. worked very closely with George Benson during the period of the large campaigns. Some have thought that Benson was able to secure large individual gifts from industry. Ganus adds more information concerning this:

In so far as the big money is concerned, some people may think that we have individual gifts of millions of dollars or more, but most of our gifts, and our records would bear this out, were a few hundred dollars a year, a thousand dollars a year, five thousand dollars a year, something of this nature (16).

In the spring of 1970 NCA sent a review team to Harding for the purpose of examining the college. The team consisted of Miller Upton, President,
Beloit College (Chairman); Joe E. Elmore, Vice-President for Academic Affairs and Dean of the College, Earlham College; Russell Sutton, Associate Professor of Chemistry, Knox College; Leanon D. Epstein, Professor of Political Science, University of Wisconsin.

The team spent three days on campus and the following statement in their report is worthy of mention:

In terms of being faithful to providing an educational program of high standards consistent with its stated purpose which involves a strong religious commitment, Harding College measures up extremely well. For the most part there is homogeneity of purpose and composition within the community that is rare. As the subsequent detailed analysis will support, the general educational resources of the institution, while in no way extravagant, are in ample supply for carrying out the college's stated task. All-in-all Harding College is thoroughly faithful to its operational purpose in terms of what it proclaims to be to outsiders and what it attempts to be to its own members (44).

In the 1954-55 school year George Benson was able to concentrate again on the academic development of the school. With accreditation came increased enrollment and the requirement for a larger faculty, and in a short time the whole institution cried out for further expansion. This meant more building, which in turn called for another financial campaign for $1,462,500 to build a men's dormitory, a classroom building, a Bible and religious building, and a graduate wing on the library. And at the moment of announcement, he sprang a surprise. He had already secured $800,000 of the $1.5 million sought. The announcement was made in chapel, and the student body sent up a great cheer. This sum included operational expenses for the new buildings for a
period of five years. "The expansion program," stated Benson, "is calculated to provide services of a higher quality in keeping with the growing demands in a growing nation" (1).

Later in 1955 Benson was able to announce that the late W. R. Coe had left a bequest of approximately $20,000 a year, which was used to strengthen all aspects of the school's citizenship program (36).

By February, 1956, students could begin to see one of the structures take shape. It was the new boys' dormitory, and it was completed just in time for the 1956-57 school year. It had been necessary in years past for many men and women students to seek off-campus housing. The new boys' dormitory allowed all of the male students to be housed on the campus.

The student body continued to grow as the school's facilities and reputation grew. The limit of 700 students had been abandoned, and more students were allowed to come each year. The standards, however, were not lowered. The student body grew to 782 in 1956 (38).

Harding College lost one of its most enthusiastic supporters in 1956 with the death of her President of the Board of Trustees, Clifton L. Ganus, Sr. He had been a strong supporter of Harding College and had served as President of the Board for fifteen years.

The period of 1955-65 was a period of continuous building and financial drives. Board meeting minutes reflect an unbroken record of success in financial drives, and a constant expansion of the physical plant. The invested
value of the buildings rose from $5 million in 1955 to double that in 1965 and the true value of the physical plant was -- because of Benson's economics in construction -- nearly twice the invested total of money. A new home economics annex was built, and a nursery school added for the convenience of the Home Economics Department. A modern dairy farm was established and a new house for the farm was built. A new Graduate Dormitory for the men came next. The main dining hall was completely refurnished, and the most modern stainless steel kitchen equipment was installed. The college laundry was completely modernized and the student center enlarged; a new faculty housing area was opened east of the campus, and an attractive park was developed. A number of parking areas which were formerly gravel were blacktopped, and many such improvements greatly enhanced the usefulness and value of the property and the institution (37).

In spite of a shortage of teachers in 1957, George Benson worked hard to maintain the strength of the faculty. The academic qualifications of Harding faculty members was partially indicated by the fact that 32.4 per cent of the members of the faculty had doctors' degrees, 52.9 per cent had master's degrees, and 13.2 per cent had the bachelor's degree. Several members of the faculty were to be awarded doctoral degrees shortly, and others were away on leaves of absence to complete their doctoral work in a two-year period. The college had been able to grant an increased number of special leaves with pay to members of the faculty who wished to pursue
advanced work or carry out research projects. This had been an early
suggestion and goal of George Benson, and he instigated the program the
minute funds could be spared (39).

During the 1956-57 school year, Benson made the suggestion to the
board and the faculty that a Graduate School of Bible and Religion be estab-
lished. He felt that it would be an asset for the Harding campus. But this
proved to be one of the few times in his twenty-nine years as head of Harding
that he encountered outspoken opposition to an idea. Many faculty members
and some who were not faculty members but were patrons of the college
voiced opposition to the Graduate School for the Harding campus. The basis
for some of the opposition was a reluctance to have "experts" in Bible and
religion. Benson was not adamant, and besides he had begun earlier to look
at Memphis as a big metropolitan area which would be more helpful and more
fertile for church work. He was, in fact, already planning to establish a
grade school and high school academy in Memphis, and the Graduate School of
Bible and Religion would be a great asset, he felt, in Memphis, one of the
great trade and cultural centers of the Mid-South (1).

In the 1957-58 school year, the King Estate in Memphis was acquired.
With money largely raised in Memphis, Benson established his dreamed-of
academy in Memphis on the King Estate site. Within another year he
launched a fund-raising campaign for the Graduate School of Bible. It was
successful. The new establishment was built -- with a capacity for an
enrollment of 500 — and began operating in 1958. The following degrees were offered: Master of Arts, for one year of graduate work; Master of Religious Education, for two years of graduate work; and Master of Tehology, for three years of satisfactory graduate work (39).

As if to emphasize his views on the need for constantly improving an educational institution's service to its students, Benson, in his annual report to the Harding Board said:

Curriculum must invariably change as needs of the students change and as more effective teaching methods are employed. Constant study by faculty members is encouraged to find ways of improving courses in the departments. Special attention is being given to better serve the gifted student. The over-all aim of all curriculum change is to better prepare the student to meet the needs of our complex society (39).

In 1963, two years before his retirement, George Benson summed up a decade and a half of growth. He said in his report to the board:

Harding College has had a constant growth for the last fifteen years. During that time many new buildings have been constructed. The campus has been much expanded and much beautified. The present value of the campus, buildings and equipment is approximately $10.5 million. (This was the investment figure; to have built the physical plant with outside lowest-bidder contractors, would have cost an estimated $20 million.)

Two new buildings have been constructed during the past two years. These are the Bible Building (on the Harding campus) and a new girls' dormitory, Kendall Hall. Another new building already started will be known as the American Heritage Center Alumni Building. It will, when completed, be the largest building yet constructed on the Harding campus. It will also serve as a continuing education center, for housing Freedom Forums, various seminars, and for housing the alumni and other friends at annual homecomings (40).
In 1963, Harding College had an unusually sound financial foundation and was in a healthy position for continuing growth. The faculty was strong with thirty-three per cent of the total teaching faculty holding the earned doctorate degree as a result of work in some of the nation's greatest universities. This was a higher percentage than was normally found in institutions the size of Harding. The faculty morale was high and the spirit of cooperation, according to the President's report to the Board, was excellent (40). Benson reported further:

The student body is of high quality and has been quite carefully screened. Five students, however, have been asked to withdraw from the college since the beginning of the school year because of unsatisfactory conduct. It is our intention to maintain high ideals and standards and to screen out as quickly as possible the students whom we are convinced will not fit into the environment and who will not share our ideas (40).

This was his year for retirement, at age sixty-five. A year earlier, in 1962, George Benson had announced that he would retire at the end of the 1963 spring semester. The board, with his full approval, had set sixty-five as the mandatory age for administrators to retire. However, before the date arrived, the Board of Trustees asked Benson to remain through two additional years in order to carry out the building program that he already had under way. He agreed to stay, mainly because he had wanted to give his personal supervision to the building of the American Heritage Center, and to complete the collection of the major gifts pledged to this building and the others under way (1, 40).
His tentative plan, if he had retired in 1963, was to go immediately to Hong Kong and help build a Church of Christ college in that city, known as the 'crossroads' of the world. He had visited Hong Kong in 1960 and had laid the groundwork for a college there; and the patrons he had recruited to assist in raising the funds and building the school had insisted that George Benson be the president of the Hong Kong Bible College, as a fitting climax to his career in Christian education and missionary work. Establishment of the college had a great and special appeal to him. He still had a love for the Orient and wished to continue to expand the reach of the church in a land of so many people and so many undeveloped opportunities. A college in Hong Kong, he felt, would be something of great and lasting value to the Orient's nearly one billion people. When his retirement came in 1965, the Trustees of Oklahoma Christian College were arguing their case against his Hong Kong dream. It wasn't any feeling of age that decided the issue for him; Benson finally had to admit that he had helped to start something with great potential in Oklahoma and he was needed there, for a while, to help finish the job. He went to Oklahoma in 1965. The challenge from afar would rise again -- it rose six years later -- to take him on a mission to Africa. But he had two more years in which to build Harding, and he put those years to good use for the institution which will always be his first love (1).

In 1965, the new American Heritage Center was finished; the new Science Building was financed and the blueprints approved; another new boys' dormitory
was underway, and George Benson could sit down in his modern office suite in the Heritage Center and gaze out across the Harding campus at the handiwork he had wrought during his extraordinary tenure as the President of Harding. There before his gaze sprawled a new college, with a physical plant worth many millions more than the $12 million invested, and with an endowment of approximately $13 million in securities.

In his administration of the affairs of Harding College, as in every activity of his adult life, George Benson evidenced a hard-to-restrain impatience with incompetency, and an immediate visible admiration for competency and especially for personal industry. On one of the big bronze plaques in his office, a testament of appreciation for a service rendered, is the following admonition spoken by President Theodore Roosevelt: "When you play, play hard, when you work, don't play at all!" A note under it says that it is a favorite Benson quotation.

With his schedule so full of demands upon his time, Benson cataloged his activities on a priority basis: keeping Harding College financially healthy and growing -- and this meant a constant securing of funds; expanding the mission forces of the church; expanding the church; expanding Christian education; raising the quality of Harding's educational product; bringing about a better public understanding of the American way of life, the heritage of freedom which, he contended, permitted the existence of institutions such
as Harding College; and helping Harding students, particularly those who
evidenced attributes of leadership and dedication (1).

With such a schedule, the lower priorities received less attention, of
course. And the most common image of the Harding President which was
tucked away in the minds of the masses of students was of a man always in a
hurry, a fast walking man in a hurry to get from his campus residence to his
office, or from his office to the noisiest construction job on campus, his
mind occupied with the problems with which he was at the moment wrestling.
He was a man in a hurry to get to the next "whatever-it-was," impatient
with the momentary lapse between challenges. Students and faculty and
visitors to the campus who took enough interest to look twice at the man were
conscious of this sense of motion about him. He was moving fast physically
and mentally, never loafing in body or mind, always checking in and checking
out.

His days and nights on campus became more cramped for time with the
inauguration of the first big fund-raising campaign in 1948. Only because he
was gifted with an extraordinarily sharp and disciplined mind, and had
developed a personal staff of loyal and competent associates, was he able to
distribute his indefatigable energy over such a massive work load as he
invariably programmed for himself. Though his office light was the last to
go out at night and his office door the first to open in the morning, and
though he organized his work to get the most production out of every minute,
he found himself unable to have the number of leisure hours for contemplation and social visiting that he would have liked. His personal secretary for most of those years adds this:

As a result, some campus people who, for a variety of reasons, were obliged to have appointments with the President were sometimes miffed with what they felt was George Benson's 'lack of appreciation' for their problems, their ideas and suggestions; when, as a matter of fact, in many cases he had -- on a plane or train or in a hotel room after midnight -- studied a brief dossier of the problem, suggestion or idea (prepared by his staff) and only waited to hear and size up the person himself to make a decision on any action to be taken (20).

This situation created a few complaints, some of them lasting, and from time to time the complainers generated small pockets of criticism among the student body against almost everything George Benson undertook to do. To a far less degree, there was some of this manifested also among the faculty, especially the few who wanted to see the church and its allied institutions, such as Harding, adopt a more "liberal" interpretation of the scriptures and a more liberal policy of college discipline.

A Benson friend on the campus recalled a statement by George Benson, made in private conversation, which seemed to put his attitude and his drive toward his multiple goals in proper perspective:

You may not be able to win a popularity contest among all people you are trying to help, but if your goals are worthy and your efforts are crowned with success, that's reward enough; and you can live with the gripes (12).
Clifton Ganus, Jr., who was very close to Benson as a student, professor, vice-president and heir apparent to the presidency over a twenty-five year period looks back over the years and says:

Dr. Benson is a very hard-driving, tireless, dedicated man. His capacity for work is extraordinary, even at age 72. His expression, 'This life is for working and the next one is for resting,' pretty well describes his idea concerning work. On the other hand, he is an outdoorsman, loves horses, hunting, trampling through the woods. Camp Tahkodah was a pride and joy of his life while he was operating it.

He is strong-willed and somewhat authoritarian and when he believes in something he is wholeheartedly for it. I know of no one who can be more thoroughly dedicated to a cause and work harder for it than he does. His position and responsibilities probably tended to make him a man of moods. There were times when he could be extremely friendly; there were times when he was very much aloof. He could be charming but he could be curt. He could have done a great job in several different fields, but truly dedicated himself to the work of the Lord and Christian Education. I think there were many factors that drove Dr. Benson to great accomplishment: One, his strong belief in God and his desire to accomplish His purpose on earth. A second, is his desire to achieve. A third, is the fact that he was reared on hard work in an Oklahoma rural community. I am sure he appreciates the plaudits of men, but he has never really sought their acclaim. I think he would rather please God than man (16).

There was a small turnover in faculty, but the employing of one faculty member is quite significant. Clifton L. Ganus, Jr., son of the Board Chairman, was employed for the 1946-47 school year to teach in the History Department. George Benson had observed this 'extraordinary young man's talents and capabilities while he was an undergraduate. He received his degree from Harding in 1943. He received his M.A. Degree at Tulane University in 1946. (He later received his Ph.D. from Tulane.) When he came on the
faculty, he became Benson's protege, and heir-apparent to the presidency. As he moved up toward the presidency, he served as Chairman of the History Department, Dean of American Studies, and Vice-President. Upon the retirement of George Benson in 1965, Clifton L. Ganus, Jr. became president.

In the last ten or twelve years of his presidential regime at Harding, George Benson turned down offers of executive positions in a number of firms, at salaries many times larger than he drew at Harding. When President Eisenhower took office in Washington in 1953, one of the jobs in the Federal Government in which he had a special interest was the Indian Bureau. He felt that nothing really had been done to free the Indians from the stagnating "reservation" type of life, and he wanted to find a man who agreed and who had the imagination and ability to bring the Indian citizens into the mainstream of American life and abolish the whole structure of paternalism. He asked his staff, during the first months of his administration, to scout out a number of possibilities for the job. At the top of the list when it had been completed was the name of George Benson, President of Harding College. President Eisenhower, through his interest and activities in Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge, had learned of Benson's work at Harding. He had his chief of staff contact Benson confidentially to see if he would accept an appointment to the office of Director of the Indian Bureau in the Department of Interior. It was a
challenging offer. But George Benson finally decided that he could not accept its challenge, with all the concentration of attention that it would require, and at the same time carry on his life mission at Harding. He turned down the appointment. A few months later, the White House called again. Would he accept an appointment, which wouldn't require too much of his time, to the Board of Directors of the Coast Guard Academy. His answer, a week later, was, "yes," he would accept that appointment; and during the Eisenhower years George Benson was able to make some contributions to the education of several thousand naval personnel who had chosen the Coast Guard for their career (15).

J. D. Bales who, came out of the student body during Benson's early years as president, to become the most prolific writer on the Harding faculty, says:

Dr. Benson is one of the most outstanding and effective Christians and Americans of our time. When he had the time, and sometimes when he didn't, I always found him willing to talk to me. I often went to see him at night when I knew he did not have a schedule of appointments as he did in the day time. A president or the leader in any organization must have the capacity to make rapid decisions. Dr. Benson had this capacity. Whenever I felt he had made a wrong decision, I would go in and talk with him about it, at least in most cases. I learned, with hardly an exception, that he knew some things that I did not know; and which, if I had known, would have led me to make the same decision he made. Harding, in a sense, became a reflection of its extraordinary president; and this was not an unusual development. The school had been run in the main up to 1936 by Brother Armstrong and the school reflected his character and capabilities; most of the decisions automatically fell on Brother Armstrong's shoulders. When Dr. Benson took over, responsibilities shifted, the decision-
making shifted. It seems to me that most colleges are started or built around the leadership and personality of one man (18).

In order to get a clear picture of the attitude of students, faculty and board toward George Benson, a letter was sent to every student body president, Bison editor, and Petit Jean editor during Benson's regime, to teachers and to Christian college presidents and board members. The response was almost 100 per cent. And since the privilege of anonymity had been extended to all, the statements received were frank and critical statements as well as affectionate, praising comment. Here are typical comments from student body presidents:

I respected Dr. Benson as a man, admired him for his goals for the school, and feel he thought he was justified in his actions. I doubt many men would have done as much for the college in promoting finances, level of education, and traditions for the school. At times, I felt Dr. Benson was more concerned with the dollar, the Americanism program, and keeping his image than with the students as individuals and meeting the needs of the students. Although I didn't resent rules and regulations at Harding, I saw times where some change to 'modernize' would have helped morale...

I have never had any doubt as to Dr. Benson's deep concern for Christian education and his willingness to work and give almost superhumanly... He is certainly no ordinary man and I therefore classify him as 'great'. But he is a man of the nineteenth century who, despite his identification with the 'American way,' i.e., democracy and personal freedom, really trusts neither. He is paternalistic toward those he seeks to help (whether students, black Africans, or whatever), always knowing better what they need than they themselves know, never really seeking to know how they feel. He understands the politics of power and intrigue much better than the politics of participatory democracy... While his goals have always been, in his own mind at least, for others' good, he has...
always crushed people who stand in the way or refuse to go
along with him seemingly with no qualms at all (50).

Benson's lack of contact with students other than chapel talks hurt his
image with some of the students. He did not have, nor do many college
presidents, the real close contact that would give the majority of students
a clear understanding of the man.

A man who had been in a similar situation as a college president made
these remarks:

Some have said that they wished that they had known me
better before now. They didn't realize that I was as easy to
know. The fact is I am still the same person but the pressure
has been lifted and my own personality has been allowed to come
to the surface (13).

Other students offered different viewpoints:

As a student (four years noted), I felt only one
criticism of Benson -- his too frequent emphasis on 'The
American way.' I agreed with the emphasis but felt it
overshadowed Harding's identity as a Christian college. I
still feel that the NEP and Harding's rightist political
ideology are more noticeable than desirable.

Due to more maturity on my part, I admire Dr. Benson's
efforts more since college than during the years at Harding.
I feel he is a truly great educator and has contributed greatly
to the promoting of Christian education.

Dr. Benson came to Harding at the beginning of my
junior year. After eleven years as a missionary to China,
none of us expected he would be a 'businessman', but the
speed with which he raised money (during the depression,
mind you) was truly amazing. I remember him as a truly
dedicated man, energetic, forthright, perceptive and
possessing good judgment. He was friendly enough but not
the warm, personable being one might expect, and he verged
on being impatient -- qualities which did not endear him to some people (people who usually tended to drag their feet and say, 'It can't be done!').

The student body respected President Benson and considered him a good college president, fair in his decisions that concerned students. I would classify him as a great man. Soon after I graduated from Harding I went to (place named) to help establish a congregation there. Brother Benson came to preach in a tent meeting. During the time he was there, he received a telephone call from a group of businessmen in Tulsa. They wanted him to speak that week, at noon, in Tulsa, and assured him it would mean several thousand dollars for Harding College (it seems to me it was around $15,000 to $20,000). Brother Benson found out that he could not get to Tulsa and back in time for the tent meeting at night, so he told them he was sorry, but that he would not be able to accept the invitation. As a student editor of the Bison, I appreciated the fact that Benson, when he disagreed with me, never tried to change or dictate the policy of the paper.

Dr. Benson is a great man. During my student days at Harding, he was considered a good President and was credited with making a major contribution to Christian education. Dr. Benson was strict and the rules of the college were more strict than they are now. However, I had been reared in a home with strict rules, so the college rules did not bother me. As an example of how strict -- my Mother wrote Dr. Benson a letter advising him that I had permission to date a boy who was coming to Searcy to see me. She explained that she had known him and his family all his life. We had been in school together in grades one through twelve. Dr. Benson called me to his office and explained that although I had my Mother's permission, I did not have his. It was final. When he made a decision, he would not change it; however, he seemed to always give a great deal of consideration to every problem before making a decision. I had as much respect for Dr. Benson then as I do now.

I feel that Dr. Benson was and is a great man because he was consistent in preaching and teaching and practicing his philosophy of life as related to the church, Harding, and the public. He had the distinct and in my opinion 'rare' ability to make decisions as related to important issues. I feel that he was a strong and dominant leader and largely responsible for
the significant progress made in relatively short period of time by Harding College. I believe that his contribution to Harding and to the church has been great and would really be impossible to measure in quantitative terms.

When I served as president of the student body, periodically, I would go to Dr. Benson's office to discuss student affairs matters and always found him extremely interested in what the SA (Student Association) was doing and how he could personally be of assistance to the SA in taking care of the matter under consideration at the time. Naturally, I was very much aware of the importance of his time and consequently I would try to be brief and to the point. There were times of course that he was pressed for time and the matters would be handled very quickly but a majority of the times after we had discussed something in his office I would rise to excuse myself only to be greeted with the following statement: 'Sit down, (name), I want to tell you about such and such that happened in Oklahoma or China in the early days of Harding.' On one occasion, I had come in to see Dr. Benson concerning SA business and we were discussing the problem when the telephone rang; he asked to be excused and began the conversation which obviously dealt with the coming Commencement Exercises and Dr. Benson's plans to have General MacArthur to be the speaker. He discussed several aspects of this and then hung up the telephone. He turned to me with an apology for keeping me waiting, with this remark: 'I'm sorry, but when a fellow like H. L. Hunt calls me on the telephone I'm reluctant to keep him waiting.'

He was a busy man, so he wasted little time on small conversation. If there was something to discuss, he came right to the point. However, I did not feel fortunate to know him on a more informal basis while a student. During (years given) there was a group of us college students interested in forming a horseback riding club. When we asked Dr. Benson about this he was most cooperative. Several horses were brought in from Camp Tahkodah, a barn was repaired near the campus at the college farm, and some bridges were even repaired so we could ride in a protected area away from traffic. For a fee of five dollars a month, those of us who were members of the group could ride as often as we liked, provided we teamed up on care and feeding of the horses. This arrangement lasted through the school year and we occasionally met with Dr. Benson.
to agree on rules for the group and just talk horses. . . When I returned for an interview for the position as (position noted) in (date given), the first question Dr. Benson asked me was: 'Do you attend church regularly?' and 'at what congregation?' I appreciated his emphasis and realized this was uppermost in his mind.

Dr. Benson was a very busy man when I served as president of the Harding student body. He and I generally did our talking about ten p.m. When we finished discussing school business, he took time to talk to me personally. He always had a stack of papers on his desk a foot high but he showed a personal interest in me. . .

One Saturday night, the (name) Club decided on a program, but we knew we would have to have Dr. Benson's approval. So I went to his house. He answered the door, invited me into the house. We sat down in the living room and he listened patiently and attentively to what I had to say. Then he took the time to tell me why he thought a 'Mock Wedding,' advertised as a real wedding might not be the best idea even though he saw no harm in it personally. I have never forgotten his taking his time, as busy as he was to listen and to instruct me. Every time I have been back on the campus and have seen Dr. Benson, he has recognized me and called me by name (49).

Following are excerpts from former Harding students, later faculty members:

Dr. Benson assumed not only the responsibility of directing the program of a rapidly failing institution but also assumed these responsibilities during a very depressed financial period in this country. His zeal for the Lord and I know his continual moments of prayer to the Lord were factors that cannot be over emphasized as far as the roll they played in making him the great man he is. Because he felt like he did not have to apologize for Christian education and its contribution to education in general, he was able to convince many outstanding contributors that Harding had something to offer. Men of any less calibre might have compromised principle in order to gain recognition and thus be better able to contract money for the school. I feel his unwillingness to do just that impressed administrators
and executives across the country that there was something worthwhile and important coming out of the tiring, back-breaking work here and assume responsibilities in an administrative office, government, and industry or any one of several of this country's major universities. He chose rather to serve the students whom he felt would make an impact on the world for Christ. To me, this is the epitome of unselfishness as far as human kind is concerned.

Dr. George S. Benson has made a significant contribution to Christian education. His ability to develop a school in the middle of Arkansas to national stature is ample evidence. However, I think equally significant is that during this time he was instrumental in aiding in the development of a number of other Christian colleges around the United States. I believe that historically he will find his place as perhaps the leading figure in Christian education during the decade of the 1950's and perhaps into the early 1960's. . . My tenure as a teacher at Harding began at the time that Dr. Benson was preparing for retirement. I think that perhaps the most significant event at this time was the fact that he chose a number of young men from his faculty and from former students to take roles in key administration positions ensuring the ongoing of Harding following his retirement. This perhaps is one of the finest tributes that can be paid to an administrator. . .

Dr. Benson provided the leadership that enabled Harding College to develop into an academically strong institution that retains still its original deep commitment to New Testament Christianity. He took the leadership in building a faculty of highly competent people who had the same dedication to the objectives of the institution as its founders and early leaders. . . Although the college always needed more and more funds than it had, he would never accept funds with strings attached even though he was accused of this by some who opposed him. . . Some of the more influential preachers (around the country) were very outspoken in their opposition to premillennialism and were very critical of Harding because J. N. Armstrong and others would not oppose premillennialism in the manner desired. These men tried to take advantage of the need of the college to impose their 'manner of opposition to these prophetic views' and even suggested that the college demonstrate its good faith by taking all copies of 'Great Songs of the Church' out and having a big bonfire since the compiler was premillennial in his
views. Dr. Benson unhesitatingly refused, stating this would exhibit a sectarian spirit and would be opposed to New Testament Christianity and the restoration plea.

Dr. Benson's contribution to Christian education has been tremendous... Many consider his greatest contribution to be in the area of financing and construction. However, I consider his greatest contribution to be in voicing the need of Christian education all over this nation... His contribution has not been limited to Harding College, but he has been very unselfish in helping other Christian colleges as well...

In my opinion, church history will record that Dr. Benson made the greatest contribution to Christian education of any man during the twentieth century. At Harding he resurrected a school that was insolvent and headed for ruin and turned it into a vibrant, excellent academic institution... He retired on his own schedule but at a time when a few opposed him vocally and others worked against him his back. Nevertheless, he retired in as grand a fashion as he had presided and did not meddle thereafter in the affairs of the new administration. In fact, he moved to Oklahoma in order to give the new administration time to get its feet on the ground without people seeking the intervention of Dr. Benson. In my opinion, this man epitomizes that which should be found in a Christian leader. His life has been one of greatness and service in the Kingdom of God. In my opinion he was God's man for Christian education in the twentieth century.

I believe that, as Esther was called to the Kingdom in her time for specific work, George Benson was 'called' to Harding College in a crucial time, to see that it survived. Obviously, Dr. Benson's most tangible worth was providing financial stability to the college. He had the gift of approaching people, presenting a plea in behalf of Christian education, and securing gifts which enabled the school to get out of debt, and to continue its existence. Perhaps not quite so obvious was his leadership, sometimes stubborn and even dictatorial, when religious differences arose among the faculty and the brethren at large. Hand-selecting his faculty and staff was at times difficult. I imagine, because of the dual challenge of securing academically trained, yet spiritually sound and mature individuals in all academic disciplines...

I believe that Dr. Benson has made one of the greatest contributions to Christian education of any living person through
the use of his abounding energy and his clear thinking. Financially, he tapped the American industrial concerns for contributions to education. Thus it became possible to expand the physical facilities of the college. Spiritually he remained a good example of a Christian man in 'big' business furthering the cause of Christ in the world.

It is doubtful if many men ever worked harder or accomplished more in several areas. He was successful in putting Harding in a relatively secure financial position. He led in the development toward strong academic standards. He influenced many in the direction of hard work, dreaming 'big', and emphasizing citizenship. He helped many schools and colleges beside Harding. He had strong convictions and people knew what he believed. He lived the example of sacrifice of time, money, and talent for Harding College.

The most significant event that I remember during my time as a teacher with Dr. Benson was the day we received the news that the school had been accredited by the North Central Association. Of course, this had been the goal for many years and the news was spread throughout the campus by mouth and by telephone and everyone gathered again on the front campus to hear the news and to rejoice in the accomplishment.

President Benson had great confidence in his judgement and this has led him to overlook the judgement of others. This was more evident in his early years as president than later. A person who worked very closely with him for years has said: 'Well, he, I think, values his judgement quite highly, as most anyone who does have good judgement would. That may have made him tend to undervalue judgements of other people' (14).

Following are excerpts from presidents of Church of Christ colleges, and Board of Trustee members:

I admire George Benson very much. However, I think he would be a very hard man to work for or under, since his subordinates would have to be unflinchingly loyal and willing to forego their own judgements in favor of Benson's many times. Certainly Benson is a controversial character, but he has a wide tolerance for those who differ with him on mission methods, and he has many very loyal friends. He is able to command respect from men of very great influence and wealth.
Although I realize that Dr. George Benson has been assailed by many, I believe him to be one of the truly distinguished persons of the twentieth century. His ideas have been time-tested. After all, I believe that nobody has negated his positions. Some have simply inflamed emotions. . . He saved Harding College when it was threatened with bankruptcy and built it into one of the most viable of all Christian colleges. He had been an inspiration and encouragement to all the Christian colleges at one time or another. His optimism, enthusiasm and energy have been infectious. . .

I regard George Benson as the outstanding leader in Christian higher education of this generation. Not only was he a great institution builder for Harding, but he has made major contributions to the development of many other Christian colleges including our own. His outstanding characteristics are true unselfishness; a great mission spirit; incisiveness of mind and action; great energy. . . He was the key person in the move of Oklahoma Christian College from Bartlesville to Oklahoma City and in its becoming a four year college. Our administration building bears his name as a small tribute extended by our Board of Trustees in appreciation for his extraordinary role here. . .

Dr. Benson is completely dedicated to Christian Education, the Lord, and to the American way of life. He has shown the value of Christian education to the church -- the fact that a quality education can be gained in the atmosphere of Christian living and church background. He has never deviated from the above goal he apparently set for himself years ago. A tremendous secondary goal is the preservation of the American way of life as the social and political environment in which the primary goal can best be accomplished. . .

George Benson is a man of keen intellect, enthusiasm, empathy, fluent, a man with a timely message, hard-working, determined, resourceful, courageous, and with a strong Christian character and faith. He has been a recognized leader in Christian higher education, helped raise many millions of dollars for. . . many other colleges. . . he has advanced the spirit of world evangelism and promoted a spirit of unity among Christian colleges. He has spoken at (our) lectureship; delivered Baccalaureate Sermon; delivered special lectures, chapel
talks, and so forth; helped us begin our citizenship program and youth forums; served as consultant in our finance drives; has raised and contributed $50,000 to our Science Center. . . He has been a tremendous help in our building program and to me personally, serving so willingly, unselfishly and sacrificially. . .

After more than thirty years intimate association with George Benson as a member of the Board of Trustees of Harding College, in the administration of Oklahoma Christian College, member of the Board of the National Education Program and association with him in a multitude of church-related activities, my total reaction is admiration and amazement at the energy, foresight and wisdom which has characterized his long career. . .

As a young man I went to Harding without money and met with Brother Benson. I got the impression then that to him any young person was very important; that impression has never changed. He has been among the most unselfish advocates of Christian Education everywhere; yes, in outright contributions and in numerous other ways in influencing others to help. . . he has always responded to our (college) call for help. . .

Brother Benson's primary contribution has been tapping major resources for the building of a strong Harding College. He has engaged in similar efforts for other schools, and particularly (ours). . .

You may be interested in getting the facts about a contribution which George Pepperdine made to the financial stability of Harding College in the first year of George Benson's administration. In the midst of the Depression, he asked Mr. Pepperdine for help and Mr. Pepperdine did come to his aid with a gift of $25,000. . . In 1958 George Benson assisted Pepperdine College in setting up a Freedom Forum to attract the interest of the community. . . He has tremendous drive to accomplish his goals. He is tireless, determined, conscientious and capable. . . I feel that his spiritual contributions have gone unrecognized because of his outstanding ability in financial ways. . .

My judgement is that Dr. Benson has made more contributions to our Christian schools and colleges in general than any other man who has ever lived. He has helped our college on frequent occasions; his help has been invaluable (46).
The seventy-two-year-old Benson stated:

When there are many decisions that have to be made over a period of years, you will make enemies but you also make friends of fair-minded people. I know I have made my share of the enemies. I find I always had the majority of the faculty behind me. I did keep some whom I knew were very critical of me, but they did a good job for the college while I was president. . . (1).

This is the kind of philosophy that has been with George Benson almost all of his life and particularly while he was President of Harding College.

The excerpts from past students, faculty, College presidents and Board members have expressed feelings and attitudes about George Benson that could not have been measured in any other way.

George Benson has aroused among the people he touched mixed emotions, and some still find it difficult to view him neutrally. He was not indifferent to, or unaware of, the impression he made on others. He wanted to please people. One close to him has said:

George Benson had a happy faculty for making others want to please him. He had an incomparable ability to show a deep interest in a wide range of subjects, and he displayed as much interest when he listened as when he spoke (15).

The statement, "I think he would rather please God than man," (16) seems to sum up his life in one short sentence.
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CHAPTER IV

GEORGE BENSON -- CHRISTIAN EDUCATION SALESMAN

George Benson could persuade people to give money and time to any
cause he championed; he seemed to have an insight into human nature and an
eager willingness to learn from the experience of others as well as his own.
This unique capability, in maturity, has become a legend in the field of fund-
raising. And the legend has substance: during his twenty-nine years as
President of Harding College he raised an average of a million dollars a year.

A faculty member who served at Harding under George Benson gives
personal testimony of the man's persuasiveness:

You could go to a meeting, where you knew George Benson
was going to ask for money, with your mind already made up
that you would not give, could not give a cent, and yet his great
persuasive plea would inspire you to give the shirt off your back
and feel bad because that was all you had to give. If George
Benson believed in a thing, he had the dynamic ability to cause
others to believe in it and want to give of their time and their
money (6).

His persuasiveness became legendary in church circles and within the
institution of American education. Few college heads anywhere in America
could have matched his circle of friends among the rich and the powerful in
America. This fact provoked some questions within the educational frater-
nity concerning just what Benson was giving to big industry in America in
return for its financial support of Harding College. As a matter of fact,
he was giving them something they felt they could not buy in just any college
— a devotion to the economic principle of private ownership of property,
inherent loyalty to the private enterprise system, a bed-rock belief in
American capitalism, plus a belief that a vital part of a college's responsi-
bility was to evoke respect for these basic principles in the young people the
college was preparing for citizenship.

George Benson, in all his talks to the monied people of America, made
it clear that he and the college and the National Education Program would
continue to pursue such responsibilities regardless of whether Standard Oil
or General Motors, or Quaker Oats gave one dime toward expanding the
college and its usefulness to America. The men with whom he talked believed
this, and they gave their funds enthusiastically without strings.

"I went with Dr. Benson to many of his luncheon and dinner meetings
sponsored by people who were readily recognizable as from the Who's Who of
American Industry and Business," recalls Glenn Green, who worked with
George Benson in his National Education Program before and after the
National Education Program became a separate entity from the college. "I
was awed in the beginning. I was along to assist Dr. Benson with audio-visual
accompaniment for his fund-raising talk -- flip-charts, slides, films, etc."

Green explains further:

A luncheon in St. Louis might well serve as a typical
element. It was held at an exclusive club whose membership
included, I'm sure, the top-flight bankers, industrialists,
and businessmen of St. Louis. Edgar M. Queeny, Chairman
of Monsanto Chemical Company, was a co-host with John Olin, Chairman of Olin Industries. The forty guests were presidents and chairmen of boards of the businesses, industries and banks of St. Louis, and most of the industries were nationwide.

After lunch, Edgar Queeny rose and in a rather informal way said: 'You know George Benson and the work he is doing at Harding College. What he is doing down there is good for our country. I wish we had more college presidents like him. I've been a contributing patron of his ever since I heard him speak three years ago at our Rotary Club. He's always got a new project. John Olin and I have invited you here to hear about it so if you're not already one of Harding's patrons, you'll want to be in on this new group of buildings that he needs.'

Dr. Benson then made his brief presentation, showing the architect's drawings of the new project, giving a report on his work, and mentioning the total amount in gifts that would be necessary to achieve the new building program.

John Olin got up to close the meeting. 'Dr. Benson will be calling your secretaries during the next few days for an appointment. He won't have to come and see me; I've already told him what we'd do on a three-year basis. Edgar Queeny has, too. So if you and your secretary are going to be busy, you can just stay here long enough after we adjourn to tell Dr. Benson how much you want to give Harding for this new expansion.'

Many stood in line in the next few minutes as Dr. Benson took their pledges down in his notebook. The rest were called upon at their offices. I never stayed behind after these luncheons. But upon his return to the campus, Dr. Benson would always call me. If he'd raised $100,000 in such a meeting, he was elated. But anything less than that left him a little disappointed.

One of his fund-raising techniques was acquired by George Benson from a Harvard professor whose experience had evolved a sales philosophy of offering "something for something." In the early 1940's Benson had a speaking engagement in New York. Present at the meeting was Dean Donham of the Harvard University School of Business Administration. He waited to speak to Benson, and, among other things, said:
I do not have any money to give to Harding College but if you will come out to Harvard University and spend a night at my home, I will tell you what I have been able to learn about fund raising in a lifetime (5).

George Benson expressed his appreciation and quickly accepted the invitation. He went out to spend the night as a guest of Donham, in his home just off Harvard Commons. Donham showed his guest around the campus, through many of the buildings and talked with him all along the way. They talked over dinner and far into the night. The venerable Donham, almost ready for retirement, found the much younger George Benson a splendid listener, and one with many questions. Years later, George Benson tells of this visit:

To sum it all up, Donham's philosophy was this:
"People do not give away money, people purchase things they value. When you sell a man an automobile, it is because you have made him think that the car will render him more service than the money that he must give to buy it. You sell a man a house because you make him believe that the house has more value than the money it will take to buy it. Now this is very simple when you are dealing with material values, but what about your wanting a person to put money into the construction of a building, for paying for a professor, or the operation of a college? What can you sell? You sell him satisfaction. Until you can show the prospective donor that he is going to get more satisfaction from the gift than he would from retaining the money, he is not going to make the gift. So you must sell him satisfaction."

This sales philosophy I found, in practice, to be sound. I have sometimes encouraged a man for several years to make a large gift to Harding. I have emphasized the satisfaction it would bring him to see what this money would do and to realize what it would mean in America's future. I have seen people get a lot of satisfaction from coming to Harding to see their money converted into a building being used by college
students. Then their picture would appear in some of our publications, a story of their philanthropies would appear, and they would feel a life-long satisfaction more cherished than the value of the money they parted with to subconsciously buy the satisfaction. My sales philosophy is: Don't expect a man to ever give you anything; expect him to buy satisfaction. My visit with Donham at Harvard helped me formulate this personal fund-raising philosophy (5).

He had practiced a variation of this philosophy while fund raising in the first few years among Church of Christ people, selling them on the satisfaction they would get from seeing a healthy expansion in Christian education. He brought as many potential donors as possible to the campus, after the building was underway. The church people derived an extra satisfaction out of the knowledge that a substantial percentage of the young people at Harding would be preachers and would thus help expand the church of the Lord in this country and abroad.

But Benson learned the hard way that it took 100 sales attempts to get 100 ten-dollar donations from Church of Christ people, whereas with people of wealth a single sales attempt could raise the $1,000 and perhaps more. He saw the unmistakable evidence early at Harding that he could not build his "dream" institution without cultivating and selling people of wealth. In 1936, the Church of Christ nationwide had a membership of approximately 300,000. Not many of them had achieved any great financial success. Also, George Benson faced among the church brotherhood the controversy over premillennialism, which further limited the potential for fund raising for Harding.
After his spectacular success as a witness before the House Ways and Means Committee, the attendant nationwide publicity, and the flood of speaking invitations that followed, he began to plan what amounted to a Harding College sales campaign among the people of wealth in America. His appeal to Congress and the President for stringent economy in the operation of the Federal government in a warring world impressed the top-flight industrialists -- the businessmen of the country. He saw that they felt drawn to his crusading for the three great principles forming the structure for American freedom and economic progress for all: faith in God, constitutional government, and an economic system comprising private ownership and competitive market.

George Benson found many men of business and industry who were to become patrons of Harding College had sought unsuccessfully to persuade their own alma maters to institute educational programs teaching the principles of citizenship. Thus they were all the more attracted to the work of George Benson.

I found myself preaching the very doctrine that most people in industry actually believe. They were in agreement with me, but they weren't in position to do much about it. Consequently, they believed that it would be to their own best interests to help build a stronger base at Harding College in order that we might have a stronger influence in the very field that was, in their opinion, most vital to America's future. At that time the college had not been accredited. We were in the North Central region, and it was important to the college that accreditation be achieved. Requirements included a better plant with better buildings, a stronger faculty,
and a stronger financial structure. I found that men in industries responded to these needs once they became sold on my sincerity (5).

Benson became friends with several prominent industrialists through his National Education Program, his speeches as Harding president, and his unremitting support of basic American principles. In time he could rely on them for financial help in the National Education Program and for advice on where and how to wage his campaigns for Harding building funds. In 1948 a number of these men assisted him in formulating the first major fund-raising campaign for Harding.

These men -- Charles R. Hook, Chairman of Armco Steel Company, Middletown, Ohip; Lamont Du Pont, of the Du Pont industries in Maryland, Charles M. White, President of Republic Steel Corporation, and others -- agreed readily with George Benson's contention that contributors to the National Education Program should be considered potential contributors to Harding College, since Harding was the base of the National Education Program's nationwide educational crusade.

In 1948, with the aid of men of this calibre, he began the first major fund-raising campaign for Harding. He employed the public relations (and fund-raising) firm, John Price Jones Company of New York, to assist in preparation of a brochure. Architectural plans were drawn and included in the booklet, showing a series of needed buildings and their cost. John Price Jones assisted, as did President Benson's friends in business and industry, in scheduling an itinerary taking him to every city in America.
In the brochure was a statement and an appeal from this Harding College National Executive Committee: Hamilton Moses, Chairman, Arkansas Power and Light Company, Little Rock; Thomas H. Barton, Chairman, Lion Oil Company, El Dorado (Arkansas); Joe Crail, President, Coast Federal Savings and Loan Association, Los Angeles; Lamar Fleming, Jr., President, Anderson-Clayton and Company, Houston; Clifton L. Ganus, Sr., Chairman, Harding College Board, New Orleans; E. K. Gaylord, Publisher, Oklahoma City Times, Oklahoma City; Charles R. Hook, Chairman, Armco Steel Corporation, Middletown, Ohio; Morton J. May, President, May Department Stores Company, St. Louis; Louis B. Mayer, Vice-President, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios, Los Angeles; John L. McCaffrey, President International Harvester Company, Chicago; John M. Olin, President, Olin Industries, Inc., East Alton, Illinois; A. B. Paterson, Chairman, New Orleans Public Service, Inc., Edgar M. Queeny, Chairman, Monsanto Chemical Company, St. Louis; Edward L. Ryerson, Chairman, Inland Steel Company, Chicago; William Skelly, Chairman, Skelly Oil Company, Tulsa; R. Douglas Stuart, Vice-Chairman, Quaker Oats Company, Chicago; Charles M. White, President, Republic Steel Corporation, Cleveland; Robert E. Woodruff, Chairman, Erie Railroad, Cleveland; Robert E. Wood, Chairman, Sears Roebuck & Company, Chicago (1).

With men of this calibre participating with George Benson in his efforts, his fund-raising luncheons and dinners in America's major cities were well attended. Contacts made on these occasions became the source of financing for developments at Harding.
George Benson (President Emeritus) is very quick to point out:

The corporations giving to Harding College were also giving to Harvard and Yale and Princeton, the University of Chicago, the University of California, and so forth. The fact of the matter is, their gifts to Harding were always small in comparison to their gifts to some of the other colleges and universities. But I have heard many of the men responsible for these gifts say that they got much more satisfaction from their gift to Harding College than from their gifts to some of the bigger colleges and universities because they felt we were using it in a better way and to more effectively help preserve America's great heritage. The corporations did not make very big gifts to us, but by the time quite a number of corporations were giving, it stacked up pretty fast for a small college like ours (5).

When George Benson retired in 1965, the college had spent about $12 million on the physical plant; and because of his shrewd direction of a construction company "on campus" and his ability to get materials and equipment donations all along the way, the physical plant that he left Harding was estimated to be worth $25 million.

Clifton Ganus (now President of Harding) worked very closely with George Benson in some of the financial campaigns. He affirms Benson's contention (Page 139) that the corporate source of much of the funds raised did not affect in any manner the academic program at Harding. No promises or pledges had to be made by George Benson, and no strings ever were attached to the corporate gifts.

Ganus describes the fund-raising luncheon formats, as he himself participated in them:
In many cities, like New Orleans, Memphis, Little Rock, Houston, Dallas, Chicago, New York, Wilmington (Delaware) and others, Dr. Benson would know some friends — people who believed in what he had been doing over the years and perhaps to some extent had been giving support. He would go to these men, tell them of the needs of Harding College, tell them what we were doing, and what we hoped to do in our building program for the college and the needs of Harding, and ask these men to serve on a national sponsoring committee, and in their own community, as co-hosts for a luncheon.

At the luncheon we might have anywhere from 20 to 100 people, depending on the size of the community. At the luncheon, the man who served as Chairman, who was one of our good friends, would say a few words and introduce Dr. Benson. Then Dr. Benson would speak about the educational system in the United States and some problems we faced at that particular time, and then he would call on me to speak. Occasionally we would have a film, depending on the year it was and whether or not we had a good one. When I finished speaking, the Chairman would take over. He would thank the people for coming and tell the people that he was interested in Harding and hoped that we might have an opportunity to talk to these people in their office. Then the luncheon was over; and we would start setting up appointments. We would always have the prospective donors rated by our friends who lived in the community. This is important, to know how much an individual could give if he were interested. There is no use asking a man for a thousand dollars when he could only give a hundred; and, on the other hand, you would insult some by asking for a mere hundred.

George Benson's ability to help other Christian colleges is revealed in his solving of a variety of problems in some of the institutions which called upon him for help. At one of the junior colleges, for instance, there had been a number of small fund-raising successes for a building program, but the financial management had not been capable of keeping the college going and had dipped into the building fund — until it was depleted.
"The people who had donated the money felt like they had been let down," recounts Benson. "They had been promised a new building financed with their contributions. So there was unhappiness when the money was spent for operations."

He further explains:

I went over and worked with them and initiated a plan that seemed to meet everybody's approval. We got the board behind us. We did get money for a new building and then were able to obtain a government loan for a new dormitory for boys and also a new one for girls. So now they had three new buildings and this is the most new buildings that had ever gone up at once on this junior college campus.

We were able to get some businessmen behind the project who had never before given to the college and so organized the first campaign among the city's businessmen. We got a leader, a banker who had his home in this city but really had been for years head of a bank in Memphis. So with this banker's help and the first campaigning that they'd had in this city, we got things rolling. Now everybody seems to be happy with the institution's progress, its financial management, and its academic achievements (5).

This was a typical "trouble-shooting" operation for George Benson; the problems he helped to solve for the junior and four-year colleges he aided were varied and sometimes most difficult. The common problem, of course, was lack of money; and when that problem arose, with whatever complexities it had, the call went out for George Benson of Harding. He never failed to respond and he was usually successful in helping with the problems.

In response to a questionnaire a number of Church of Christ-related colleges, stated that George Benson had helped their school, and had done it unselfishly (8).
There was some unhappiness at Harding College in the early 1950's over President Benson's delay in integrating Negroes into the student body. His explanation at the time was that Harding was located in Arkansas, and that the educational and social institutions of the state were studying the best manner in which integration could be achieved with the least possible upheaval. The Board of Trustees of Harding felt, as he did, that steps should be taken cautiously and, if possible, in company with the other educational institutions of Arkansas.

He certainly had no animosity toward Negroes. Everything in his life proved that the contrary was true; that he had love for human beings regardless of race. At the time he was being criticized by a handful of Harding students and some faculty members, he was without publicity or fanfare helping Southwest Christian College at Terrell, Texas, an all-black school. He contributed from personal funds, and he arranged some substantial giving by foundations. In fact, years later, in 1971, he was serving as Chairman of a Financial Committee to raise funds for Southwest Christian College at Terrell. His work in Zambia and for Zambia High School in Kalomo continues to be one of the "retirement" projects nearest his heart (4, 5).

In the mid-1950's Norvel Young, newly elected President of Pepperdine College in Los Angeles, made an emergency call to George Benson. Help was needed to establish a solid financial floor under the operation of a college that had run down under previous management and was in danger of expiring.
Benson went to Los Angeles and took some of his staff to help. After long discussions with Young, he suggested that some effort be made to interest the business community in Pepperdine. He first ascertained that Young was a sincere "free enterprise" supporter and intended to work not only in the field of Christian education but also in citizenship education.

Benson called for Glenn Green and Doyle Swain, his two chief assistants in the National Education Program, to come to Los Angeles and help with the planning of a Freedom Forum at Pepperdine. One of the first tasks was to enlist the aid of the top industrialists in Southern California. Benson was instrumental in this, and he furthered the objective by having as the spotlight speaker for the first Pepperdine Freedom Forum, United States Senator John L. McClellan. The Mayor of Los Angeles came to give a welcome to this Forum event. William Pawley, former national Chairman of the Democratic Party, introduced George Benson, who in turn introduced Senator McClellan. The affair was co-sponsored by the Los Angeles Association of Commerce and Industry, and in attendance were 600 of the business and civic leaders of the area. The week-long Forum program brought Pepperdine into intimate contact with people in Southern California who took an immediate interest in Norvel Young's new program in citizenship and were willing to contribute to it. The following year Benson's staff assisted again, and Pepperdine has continued to hold the forums. Its division of business
administration has received handsome gifts, and the total raised in the years
following the "Benson Treatment" was more than $10 million (3, 5).

George Benson tells of other schools which called on him for help:

Alabama Christian College came to me about five years ago with a problem about like that at the institution where the building funds were spent on operations. I was able to be of some help, but less than at any place where I tried to assist. We did manage to get some of the business interests behind the school and enhanced their financial situation a little, not a great lot.

At Lubbock Christian College I helped to get Youth Citizenship Forums started. And we were fortunate enough to get the Mabee interests attracted. They gave the college one building and have made sizable contributions each year since. We also got other business interests involved in helping Lubbock.

Crowley's Ridge Christian Junior College was really in serious trouble about the first of 1970. Creditors were threatening to close down the school.

Benson explains:

I pitched in and helped them work up a plan and then I made twelve appearances for them before twelve different audiences to ask for aid. We began to get some money in. I drafted a plan for operation and for further financial fund-raising; and the Board of the college put the program into operation. It worked. We raised money to make the first payment on a loan which kept the college open; and we got pledges for the next two payments -- and these will clear up the indebtedness. Crowley's Ridge is getting itself in sound shape, and I feel some satisfaction in having had a part in its rejuvenation (5).

In the trophy room of his log cabin on Lake Tahkodah in the Ozarks are displayed some of the awards and tributes that have come to George Benson.

There are plaques and medals; some twenty certificates from Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge, more than the Foundation has awarded to any
other individual; a beautiful silver medallion from the National Tax Founda-
tion; the plaque awarded through a vote of the people of Arkansas, naming
George Benson as "Arkansan of the Year"; and scores of others.

He was persuaded by staff associates to keep in his Heritage Center
reception room a number of plaque testimonials from schools and colleges
that have been beneficiaries of his extraordinary and widely-used talents.

The following inscriptions suffice to gauge the width of gratitude:

HARDING COLLEGE: In appreciation for his skillful
leadership here and elsewhere; for his steadfast devotion to
Christian education and other Christian endeavors; for the
unselfishness which energizes him in helping others; and more
importantly, helping them to help themselves; for the diligence
and tenacity with which he tackles every problem; and for his
unyielding championship of Christian and American ideals and
principles in education, in business, and in all facets of life,
we at Harding College take the occasion of his sixty-first
birthday to honor Dr. George Benson for his many fruitful
years as teacher, administrator, financial acquirer, lecturer,
and friend.

PEPPERDINE COLLEGE: In appreciation of his unusual
ability to lend a helping hand to other Christian colleges, .
specifically for his help to Pepperdine College during a trying
period of transition, we express our thanks to George S. Benson.

LUBBOCK CHRISTIAN COLLEGE: Because of his deep
faith in young people, his unselfish service to the cause of
Christian education, and to us personally, we express our
appreciation and deep gratitude to George S. Benson.

COLUMBIA CHRISTIAN COLLEGE: In testimony of his
untiring efforts in the field of Christian education, his life
and his faith, for his personal counsel and assistance in our
program, we express our deepest gratitude to George S. Benson.
CROWLEY'S RIDGE ACADEMY: In recognition of his devotion to Christian education; of his world-wide interest in the salvation of men; and of his encouragement always to us in our efforts, we express in this way our appreciation for George S. Benson.

OKLAHOMA CHRISTIAN COLLEGE: In grateful acknowledgment for his inspiring leadership in envisioning the college's future in Oklahoma City and, as its Chancellor, for his unselfish and tireless service in the relocation, expansion, and guidance of Oklahoma Christian College into a more vital force for Christian education in his native state of Oklahoma, we honor George S. Benson and join with his many friends in this expression of appreciation on September 25, 1959, at Little Rock, Arkansas.

MAGIC VALLEY CHRISTIAN COLLEGE: He has unselfishly helped others. . . his time, money, and energy have been freely given. He helped to establish our school. His works will live through eternity. We salute George S. Benson.

FREED-HARDEMAN COLLEGE: In testimony of his good works. . . helping others always, giving of his time and energies to the furtherance of Christian education, and for his individual aid to us, we extend our gratitude to George S. Benson.

NORTHEASTERN INSTITUTE FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: In appreciation of his outstanding service as an American citizen, as a Christian minister, and as a champion of Christian Education and in gratitude for his personal aid to our institution we extend gratitude to George S. Benson.

ALABAMA CHRISTIAN COLLEGE: In testimony of his godly life, his great work in the field of Christian education, and his unselfish interest in our personal welfare, we express our sincere gratitude to George S. Benson.

FORT WORTH CHRISTIAN COLLEGE: In appreciation for his untiring and successful efforts to advance the cause of Christian education, for his spirit of helpfulness and unselfishness, and for helping us to successfully begin our work, we extend our gratitude to George S. Benson (2).
The esteem in which George Benson was held by a substantial number of Arkansas leaders was demonstrated in the spring of 1962, when United States Senator J. William Fulbright stood for re-election. A meeting of "prime movers" was held in Little Rock in April. These men had discussed throughout the year a suitable candidate for the United States Senator seat held by Fulbright. Most were business and industrial leaders. Two were former Arkansas governors. After considering a half dozen potential candidates, they chose a man whom they felt had the qualifications for the office and the potential to win it — George Benson.

A telephone call was made to Harding College. Governor Homer Adkins, who had himself run against Fulbright and had been narrowly defeated in 1944, was calling George Benson. He reached him in a far-away city. Would he talk to a group of people about running for the United States Senate against Fulbright? Benson said, Yes, he would talk to them later in the week. He felt that Fulbright, with his soft-on-Communism liberalism, posed a danger to the nation's security. In the following three weeks, George Benson talked to many Arkansas leaders, including long-time Governor Orval Faubus, former Governor Ben Laney, Adkins and other political leaders. He also talked to a number of his closest friends in Washington and elsewhere. Governor Ben Laney would help in the campaign money-raising; Governor Homer Adkins would help plan campaign strategy. Governor Faubus' organization would not support Fulbright. Many prominent Americans, when they
heard that George Benson was considering the race, telephoned him to pledge support.

Many factors in combination served to persuade him not to run. Perhaps the most persuasive, he says in retrospect, was his "unfinished business" at Harding. Also his analysis of his prospects for winning showed that the Faubus organization could be decisive; he was not sure that in the heat of politics it would not be used on behalf of incumbent Democratic Party Senator Fulbright (3, 4, 5).

Perhaps the most dramatic testimonial to his achievements and the measurement of esteem and affection in which he is held by those who know him best was the retirement banquet honoring George S. Benson in May, 1965.

It was a big night in Searcy, Arkansas, the little college town fifty miles north of Little Rock on the highway to St. Louis. It probably was one of the most memorable nights in Searcy's history. "George Stuart Benson," the invitational letters said, "who has done such extraordinary things while serving for twenty-nine years as President of Harding College, is stepping down at age 67."

Come to pay tribute at the gala banquet were the Governor of Arkansas, a number of State Senators and Representatives, the officialdom of virtually every statewide organization and of many top United States corporations, church dignitaries, civic and educational celebrities, the administrative
family and faculty of Harding, and several hundred men and women leaders of his adopted home town, Searcy.

The banquet was served in the new American Heritage Center's spacious, ultramodern Charles M. White Cafeteria. The floor-to-ceiling window-wall behind the speaker's table afforded a dramatic view of the twinkling lights on the campus of an institution whose growth and development undoubtedly constituted one of the most amazing pages in the history of Church of Christ institutions.

As prominent speakers at the banquet filled in the story of George Benson's and Harding's achievements in his twenty-nine years as president, the campus lights formed a background that again and again affirmed the almost unbelievable transformation that had been wrought between 1936 and 1965.

The splendid campus, with twenty new buildings, had been in 1936 only a "dream and a prayer" of a group of dedicated Christian educators. They had brought the college on to Searcy from Morrilton, where it had been established hopefully as a final amalgamation of several smaller schools that had encountered painful problems.

Harding College, as everybody at the banquet knew, could now proudly claim one of the best small-college campuses in America, with one of the highest-rated academic staffs. The American Heritage Center, whose financing and construction had kept George Benson at his presidential post
two years beyond his planned retirement, was a million dollar on-campus motel, plus a quarter-million academic and public service center that ranked with the finest such facilities in America. Crumbling old Godden Hall, largest of the four 1936 campus buildings, was gone; the three other old buildings had been expanded and modernized to blend into the architectural design of the new campus with its utilitarian new facilities. These included a high school, a splendid library, a very adequate school of religion center, a field house, modern air-conditioned classroom buildings, auditoriums for events of almost any size, and dormitories -- a brand new physical plant conservatively valued at from $12,000,000 to $13,000,000 but built, in typical Benson "We-Can-Do-It-Ourselves" fashion, for many millions under that figure. The institution had come from its one-time frightened $70,000 indebtedness, virtual obscurity, meager facilities and poorhouse salaries to

(1) A conservatively estimated overall value of $25,000,000 (half of it in blue-chip, revenue-producing properties, stocks and bonds a rich endowment);

(2) A showplace physical plant;

(3) Full college accreditation by North Central Association of Colleges, gained over seemingly unsurmountable barriers after ten years of aggressive campaigning by Benson in an incredible battle with one of America's most powerful educational entities;

(4) Nearly 2,000 students from thirty states and ten foreign countries;
Top staff salaries and faculty homes in a beautiful residential community.

A nationwide reputation, for the college and the Benson-founded National Education Program, for aggressive championship of the basic elements of the American way of life as George Benson presented them: faith in God, government within the structure of a representative republic limited in power by a Constitution ratified by the people, private ownership; and an economic system based on a competitive market.

A graduate school of Bible in Memphis;

A high school, with modern physical plant and expanding enrollment, in Memphis;

And, perhaps most remarkable, even an extension service in religion and citizenship, reaching out to points all over the world.

In its heyday as America's most widely circulated weekly magazine, the Saturday Evening Post sent its top staff writer, Philip C. Rose, to Searcy to gather facts for a report to the nation on George Benson's pioneering achievements in private college administration and in citizenship education created to strengthen our free society. The article was entitled "Arkansas Crusader." Mr. Rose ended his comprehensive, well-illustrated feature article with this personal paragraph:

I came away from my visit with Doctor Benson feeling that here is a man who is sound and good to the core. He is a basic American. He draws his inspiration from the founding fathers of the Republic, from the truths of history and from
the Bible. He wants America to rededicate itself to human freedom, to divest itself of all foreign ideologies and resume its march forward. This is his platform. Win, lose or draw, he is in the fight to the end (8).

The article featured the Benson-led crusade to build the best Bible-oriented, truly Christian college in America, from which Church of Christ preachers would carry the teachings of Jesus Christ to all the world, and to provide leadership in all areas of American society. Almost equal space was given to the facilities of the National Education Program, to reach and educate the American people on what he contended was "our priceless heritage of freedom." The Saturday Evening Post article was the first of several giving national and international publicity for the college and its pioneering National Education Program.

In the decade of the 50's, the fame of Harding and the National Education Program spread far beyond the boundaries of the United States and aroused at times formidable attacks by forces challenging George Benson's dedication to the basic American principles and to his goals.

According to one of the speakers reporting on the "Benson Magic" at the retirement banquet in May, 1965, a nationwide study revealed that structured education in American citizenship -- called by some "Americanism" education -- had originated at Harding, had spread to businesses, industries, civic organizations and educational institutions throughout the nation. Educational materials on freedom prepared under George Benson's direction were being used with language translations and foreign soundtracks in more than a dozen
nations around the world. The speaker told of visiting thirteen European and Scandinavian countries and finding more than half of them using the Harding-National Education Program private enterprise educational films, and other materials produced on the Searcy campus (3).

As he retired from the Harding presidency and made preparations to move to Oklahoma City to pursue full-time duties as Chancellor of Oklahoma Christian College, one of the several strong tugs on his heart was Camp Tahkodah. It was a personal achievement that bore the Benson brand as much as did the new buildings on the Harding campus.

Through the years he had invested thousands of dollars in its development from four tiny log cabins into one of the finest mountain camp establishments, capacity 150, in the nation, with its own water and sewer systems, modern kitchen, sports pavilion, ball fields, rifle ranges, riding courses, and stable of horses.

Camp Tahkodah proved to be a splendid investment for George Benson through the years. At the time of his Harding retirement he let it be known that he would sell Tahkodah. He felt that he just could not continue to operate Tahkodah at such remote control.

Offers of purchase came in. As president he had, with the enthusiastic approval of the faculty, often used Tahkodah for faculty meetings and outings. Each school year usually was opened with an orientation and setting-of-goals session at Tahkodah for the faculty and staff. At a session of the
Board before retirement, he told of his plan to sell the camp and of some of the offers he had received. He suggested that as property of Harding College it could become a splendid asset. Before he departed for Oklahoma, Harding College bought Camp Tahkodah -- at a figure lower than the previous lowest bid by an outside institution. The college bought everything at Tahkodah except the Benson log house. The purchase price was sufficient to make it unnecessary for George Benson ever to have to be concerned about money and to live a life of ease -- him and Sallie Benson. But nobody who really knew George Benson expected him, at 67 or at 97, to settle down to a life of ease. There was much to be done at Oklahoma Christian College, in America through the National Education Program, and around the world.

He wanted to move his home out of Searcy for reasons that seemed to him to be entirely obvious:

Of course I wanted to remove myself from any apparent conflict of interest. Since I had been president for twenty-nine years, it would have been a little difficult or embarrassing for the new administrative regime to totally ignore me if I were in Searcy, underfoot. On the other hand, a new administration should have a free hand in developing its own policies and conducting its own affairs. I had worked with Cliff Ganus through the years, and felt he should have a free climate in which to make his decisions and run the college (5).

James Baird and the Board at Oklahoma Christian were delighted. They made available to George and Sallie Benson a modern brick home on campus property. In order to be in constant touch with National Education Program business, he kept an apartment in the American Heritage Center and spent
two or three days a week in his office at the National Education Program, so unobtrusively that scarcely anyone on the Harding campus ever knew of his presence.

The job at Oklahoma Christian was, in one of its phases, much like that which had dominated his attention at Harding -- fund-raising and expansion planning, building national good will and a strong financial base for a growing educational institution. In fact, Oklahoma Christian stands, as does Harding, as a monument to the extraordinary abilities of the man and the unwavering dedication and extraordinary breadth of George Benson's mission in Christian education.

Oklahoma Christian College is the outgrowth of an earlier small junior college operation by Church of Christ people in northeastern Oklahoma, centering in Bartlesville, where the campus was located. When James Baird was elevated to its presidency in Bartlesville in 1955, he made two notable decisions -- to work hard for expansion of the college into a full four-year institution; and to contact George S. Benson immediately, and to enlist his help. He knew George Benson and he began making trips to Searcy; and in time he persuaded him to come to Bartlesville.

Benson looked over the situation and advised James Baird to begin making plans to move the junior college to Oklahoma City. He said its great potential could best be realized if it had the foundations of strength available in Oklahoma City. When approached with the idea, the Board generally was not
favorable to such a move; and the Chairman of the Board was militantly opposed. The job then became one of selling the board on such a move, and it seemed to be a job that only George Benson could get done. Over the opposition of the Board Chairman, he was able to open up the horizon for the Bartlesville school. Both Benson and Baird felt that if they could mobilize some substantial money interest and find a suitable location in the outskirts of Oklahoma City, the Board could be persuaded to approve the move.

There followed a typical Benson operation. One of his best friends was E. K. Gaylord, owner-publisher of the Daily Oklahoman, of television and radio stations, and other properties. Gaylord was much more than that. He was recognized as one of Oklahoma's leading citizens. And he was the "key" to any project which involved raising large sums of money for a project useful to the state of Oklahoma.

George Benson required two sessions with E. K. Gaylord in his Oklahoma Publishing Company office to interest him in the need for a private Christian college in Oklahoma City to serve the entire state. Gaylord held a luncheon, and he invited many prominent people of the state, including several Church of Christ people successful and well-known in the business, professional, and industrial fraternity of Oklahoma. They were favorably impressed by George Benson and James Baird. Bartlesville Board members spoke of the character of the institution that Baird, aided by Benson, could establish.
As a follow-up to this meeting, a quiet survey was made at the potential source of money. The results were so favorable that a search was instituted for a large enough piece of land on the outskirts of the city to provide a college that could expand to meet future needs.

This was in 1955. Early in 1956, two Board members from Bartlesville asked to be heard in an appeal before the Harding Board. They asked the board's permission for George Benson to continue his work on behalf of Oklahoma Christian College, and approval for acceptance of the post of Chancellor. The Harding Board agreed (7).

With this official approval by his board, George Benson arranged to spend considerable time helping with the building of the new college in Oklahoma City. His most ambitious fund-raising campaign for new buildings at Harding had been remarkably successful. During the years 1955 to 1967 perhaps twenty per cent of his time was spent on building the new college in Oklahoma.

Glenn A. Green, who served in the National Education Program as Executive Vice-President since 1949 (with a brief period away, in Washington, D. C. and Little Rock), assisted in some of the promotional work as the Oklahoma Christian College dream began to materialize. He tells of the early activities:

Before any final decisions were made on the Bartlesville School’s move to Oklahoma City, Jim Baird had begun to spend some time with Dr. Benson at Harding. He was extremely interested in the work of the National Education Program.
After I had given him an exposition of our operation, he asked me, "Do you think we ought to have some kind of extension program in citizenship such as this if we move our college to Oklahoma City and expand its size and reach?"

I said, "You certainly should if you genuinely believe that what we're doing here is vital to the future of our nation and its people." He said, "I do believe that, sincerely." I said, "Then I'm sure Dr. Benson will want us to help you in any way we can."

I began to fly over to Oklahoma City frequently. On the first trip I went out with Dr. Benson and Dr. Baird to the beautiful hill-top location, overlooking the skyline of the city from the Northeast outskirts, that was to become the campus site. Later I went with Dr. Benson to visit E. K. Gaylord. By now there were some architectural plans drawn and the two men pored over these a few minutes. The next day we met with the steering committee for the sponsoring group to raise funds. A brochure was being prepared, showing the plans in dramatic watercolors, and setting forth the need and the general outline for what was planned. I made suggestions and assisted in editing the original copy for this brochure.

Oklahoma Christian College came into being out of the vision and determination of George Benson. During his days as Chancellor, I visited the campus at various stages in its construction and later growth, and met with Dr. Baird and his staff. At the request of the Gaylord Advisory Committee and the Administration of the college, our National Education Program conducted a series of annual four-day Freedom Forums in the convention hall of the Skirvin Hotel, jointly sponsored by the National Education Program and Oklahoma Christian College. Later Dr. Benson was to change the format of this project and make it into a one-day citizenship seminar for Oklahoma high school students and teachers. It continues to attract about 2,000 students and teachers each February. During these OCC growth years we advised with the staff on creation of the college's Center for Citizenship Education, as Dr. Baird had planned (3).

Two years after his retirement as Harding President, George Benson came back to Searcy to live. Oklahoma Christian College was thriving, with a sound financial backlog, and it had the respect and support of the state's
leadership. Benson resigned his Chancellorship, but continued as Chairman of the college's Citizenship Education Center Committee.

The Bensons bought a home in the Cloverdale addition several blocks east of the college. The new Harding administration under the leadership of Clifton Ganus had "got its feet on the ground" and George Benson was convinced that his presence now after two years of absence posed no problem at all. In fact, he found that in time his services in the field of fund-raising were urgently needed. When a faculty committee headed by Clifton Ganus came to call on him at his office, he was delighted to be asked to help. He makes frequent trips with Ganus to fund-raising luncheons, and keeps contacts open with the wealthy friends and business leaders who responded so generously to Harding's call through the years. And he was pleased, when plans for the 1971 National Education Program Freedom Forum were being formulated, to have Ganus and the faculty join with the National Education Program in co-sponsoring the Forum, and to have Ganus as one of the feature Forum speakers.

As an outgrowth of his work in the Youth Citizenship Seminar in Oklahoma City, in which the Farm Bureau, civic clubs, business and industrial associations, and the public schools of Oklahoma all cooperated, the youth citizenship education project grew. The publisher and editor of the Tulsa Tribune, along with a group of north Oklahoma leaders, asked Benson
to establish an annual youth seminar in Tulsa patterned after the Oklahoma City one, and he was glad to do so.

Some of the youngsters who attended a session of the Oklahoma City seminar were sent there by the Kansas Farm Bureau Federation. Their attitude and enthusiastic missionary spirit upon their return to their home communities in Kansas stirred up their elders. The next year the Kansas Farm Bureau's Vice-President, Walter C. Pierce, accompanied another Kansas youth delegation to the Oklahoma City seminar. A few weeks later, Benson was called to Wichita and plans were made for the first Kansas seminar. Richard P. Taylor, Information Director of the Kansas Farm Bureau, now serves as Master of Ceremonies in a seminar which each year brings together outstanding juniors and seniors from high schools throughout Kansas (3).

The Texas Farm Bureau sent a delegation to Oklahoma City, and then made plans for a similar youth citizenship seminar movement in Texas. It began at Baylor University -- spreading thence to Sam Houston State College at Huntsville; to Le Tourneau College, Longview; to Dallas, Fort Worth, Amarillo, Waco, and other sites. After his retirement, working out of Oklahoma City and the National Education Program offices in Searcy, Benson spread the youth seminar movement into eleven midwestern states (3). He drafted the programs, produced the unique citizenship education kits for the youngsters and their teachers to take home, obtained the speakers, and
conducted the programs. This kept him busy off and on throughout the three summer months; but beginning in 1970 he was able to delegate much of the programming work onto the local committees.

The national significance of this pioneering youth work received notice in the February, 1969, issue of the nationally-circulated and highly respected magazine, School Activities. The article, using photographs from a half-dozen of the youth seminars, began:

In nine southern, southwestern and midwestern states, the end of the 1968-69 school year in June will be the signal for continuation of an interesting extracurricular activity in citizenship education, attracting a growing number of outstanding high school students. More than 4,000 boys and girls, hand-picked for their leadership qualifications, will attend week-long "Citizenship Seminars" on scholarships provided by service clubs, Farm Bureau groups, businesses, industries, and individuals. Purpose of the seminars is to augment the school program in the preparation of potential young leaders for responsible roles in community, national, and international citizenship activities (5).

George Benson's own personal concern over the insufficiency of such citizenship training in the school system is eloquently expressed in the following statement:

In thirty years of flight away from basic principles, the problems and the dangers involving the survival of the American way of life have expanded and intensified. We are entering a period in American history in which decisions will be made affecting the course of mankind for perhaps a thousand years. This generation of American youth undoubtedly will wield the balance of judgment in these decisions.

Radical and revolutionary youth leaders, boasting that they already command ten per cent of college undergraduates and are expanding their following, are determined to destroy the American system. Their first targets are the minds of
the undecided youth -- decisive millions of them -- in America's high schools.

Despite the military menace of World Communism, this is the crucial need: to educate, stimulate, inspire and mobilize America's splendid young men and women under the banner of individual freedom and responsibility. They will rise to the challenge and turn back the assault of the radicals only when they understand and genuinely appreciate the principles of freedom and self-reliance. So armed, they will provide the intellectual leadership to make the right political, governmental and economic decisions in the days immediately ahead (5).

Since publication of this article, seminars have been established by Benson in two additional states. As he works to expand the reach of this work, he has the satisfying knowledge that every seminar that he has established continues in operation year after year. In 1971, he expanded the National Education Program staff with the employment of a man, a former industrialist in retirement, to work eastward and westward in expanding the youth citizenship seminar movement into additional states (3).

About the time the Bensons were en route back to the United States from their China experience, a group of Church of Christ missionary-minded families, inspired by what George Benson had accomplished in China, went to South Africa. They established themselves in the British protectorate of Northern Rhodesia. They felt that next to China, Africa offered undoubtedly the richest field for missionary work. Taking their cue from Benson's admonition to the church people that educational and English-teaching schools must precede any really effective missionary work in such primitive areas, J. D. Merritt, the leader of the North Rhodesia mission, immediately set
about establishing elementary and grade schools. In the next thirty years, substantial progress was made in establishing Churches of Christ throughout a wide area of Northern Rhodesia. In every case the congregations grew around the missionary work of native Rhodesians who had received their primary school education and their faith in God in the little schools that J. D. Merritt and his associates had founded and directed.

In 1963, Northern Rhodesia was granted "internal self-government" and in January, 1964, a Constitution was drafted and adopted, a Prime Minister was chosen and a Cabinet was set up for self-rule. Kenneth D. Kaunda, an African educated in England, became the first Prime Minister. In October that same year Northern Rhodesia changed its name to Zambia and became an independent Republic. K. D. Kaunda stepped into the Presidency. He began reforms, especially in the school system. No high school ever had existed in the country, and no colleges. Kaunda began establishing high schools, using money from the huge, sprawling copper industry (5).

It was in 1966 that J. D. Merritt called upon George Benson for help. Benson had watched from afar the effective work being done by Merritt and his missionary group in Zambia. When the call came, Benson went to Lusaka, capital of Zambia, where he was met by Merritt and a joyous group of missionary families who accompanied him to one of their missionary communities, Kalomo. The Merritt group, besides its leader, included Ken Elder, Leonard Bailey, and J. C. Shewmaker.
The continuing growth of the missionary work in Zambia appeared to require establishing some high schools, so that the pupils finishing the primary grades in the Church of Christ schools could go on through high school under the same auspices. Otherwise it was felt that in the high schools beginning to come into operation under the Zambia government, the Christian youngsters would not have a good climate in which to further strengthen their Christianity. Kaunda was a member of the Church of England, but it was felt by the Church of Christ people that in the high schools he would either not have any Christian education at all, or would establish the Episcopalian Church as the State Church and teach its doctrines in the schools.

After a week's study of the situation, George Benson agreed that a school should be established. While on the ground there, he sketched in some plans for the first Christian high school in Zambia. A model plant would be built and it would become in time, a pattern for expansion of other primary schools established by the Merritt group. Benson talked to some of the African leaders who twenty years previously had "graduated" from the Merritt primary schools; and he was impressed with their godliness, and their influence in their communities. They, in turn, were enthusiastic about plans for the Church of Christ model school in Kalomo.

George Benson flew home with his new mission, and within two months, he had selected and organized the United States Board of Trustees of the Zambia Christian High School Building Fund. He called the board together
and went over the plans for the physical plant and for the fund-raising campaign in America which would be necessary to transform the blueprint into a reality. He set the first goal: $250,000. It would require this amount, even using the tried-and-true Benson construction formula in Zambia -- self-help and self-construction -- to construct a school plant for 250 students and faculty, put down adequate water wells, install pumps, create a water system, build athletic grounds, etc.

The congregations to whom he spoke had never heard him more impassioned over a project. He told them about the opportunities for the church in Zambia through expanding the schools into secondary education. In 1968 he went back to Zambia to get things started.

"We laid out the ground for the new plant," he reports.

In the meantime the Merritt group already had started school in temporary quarters. We laid out a plant surrounding a quadrangle, with the classroom buildings on all four sides. Then we laid out the place for the boys' dormitories and a place for the girls' dormitories. We actually laid the foundations for these buildings and got the construction underway (5).

Before his 1968 trip to Zambia, Benson had performed one of his minor money-saving miracles. He had found Houston Ezell in Nashville, Tennessee, an experienced builder with a little time on his hands to contribute to any worthwhile Church of Christ project. Benson quickly provided the worthwhile project. He persuaded Ezell to go with him to Zambia. It was Houston Ezell who supervised the pouring of the foundations, with George Benson as his first assistant. Now that the financing was beginning to take shape in
America, Benson recruited additional missionaries to augment the staff of the school.

In 1971, he returned to Zambia. By now he had raised the $250,000 needed to complete the building program. He spent five weeks on this 1971 trip. He preached to many churches which had been established by Africans who had attended one or another of the Merritt grade schools. He met with Africans in a number of cities and towns who, after their early education at the Church of Christ schools, had gone on to become prominent civic and church leaders.

He was quite proud to be able to establish a personal rapport with K. D. Kaunda, President of Zambia. It had been arranged for him to have an audience with Kaunda upon his arrival in the capital city. He found him to be a charming person, apparently deeply religious, and very much interested in the expanding educational program of the Church of Christ. As he was taking his leave of Kaunda's richly appointed office in the capitol building, Kaunda invited him to have lunch with him before his departure.

George Benson recounts the story:

President Kaunda was very much enthused about our program and especially was he interested in our starting a new division which would train young people in farming, particularly with attention to operating and repairing tractors, raising cattle, hogs and chickens and corn. Corn is the staff food in Zambia. I think corn meal mush, called 'ensema,' is a part of every African meal, and corn, of course, is an essential part of the food for hogs and chickens (5).

He didn't eat ensema at the private luncheon in the President's palace. The food, he says, was comparable to the finest served anywhere. But the
main dish was chicken. "It was chicken, all right," he reports, "but it was cooked in the manner developed by Zambians and was a delicious treat." He had not eaten that well at some of the preaching locations or at the schools. But over there the food had been substantial along with the enema.

The most thrilling sight he saw in Zambia, he says, was the 220 young Africans going from their dormitories to classes across the quadrangle. The entire five-year program of the high school was in operation (5). "The faculty is a bit overloaded," he reports, "But we have four new teachers going out in September (1971), and they will relieve that difficulty."

The Zambia mission, its expansion and sound financing, continues to be one of George Benson's major projects as he maps out activities for his second and third five-year-plan in retirement.
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CHAPTER V

A MAN AT HIS ZENITH

Throughout his career as a militant advocate of constitutional govern-
ment, and the private enterprise system as "the best mechanisms" for human
progress, George Benson always has emphasized that neither our governmental
system nor our economic system works perfectly. The basic reason, he says,
is not that the principles are wrong or inadequate but that our society is im-
perfect; man is imperfect. In many of his speeches, he makes his point this
way:

There are no institutions that work perfectly. Let's
look at marriage as an institution of our civilized society.
Does marriage always work perfectly? No. In fact, in the
third quarter of the 20th century the institution seems to
be in a bad way. If all people who marry were perfect, the
institution would work perfectly. Should we discard the
institution of marriage because it doesn't work perfectly?
No, indeed. It is the foundation institution of civilization.

Let's look at the Church. Do you think that your church
works perfectly? It is a divine institution. Yet you and I
know there isn't a church congregation on earth that works
perfectly all the time. Should we throw overboard the insti-
tution of the church because it isn't working perfectly? Of
course not. It is the foundation of man's faith, his solace
and inspiration. We must strive to improve man's steward-
ship of the church (3).

And, he says a fundamental responsibility of United States citizenship
is the improvement of our stewardship of the American governmental and
economic systems.
A basic point George Benson is making with this thrust is that people are imperfect. And this is the point that needs to be emphasized at the beginning of a summation of an examination of his life. Although his achievements call attention to extraordinary capabilities and capacities, George Benson nevertheless had weaknesses as do all men.

It was found in a year of intense investigating, probing, interviewing more than a hundred Benson acquaintances, and an opinion poll conducted among his young and old associates, that only a very few people who have known George Benson have disliked him to a degree that brought condemnation; and, on the other hand, only a very few suggested that he might be a near perfect man. Without exception everyone interviewed or who answered the opinion questionnaires assessed George Benson as an extraordinary person; most said that he had demonstrated the capacity of greatness.

George Benson often provoked momentary anger among those with whom he worked, taught, preached, or with whom he associated because of his single-mindedness of purpose, with his intolerance of incompetency and slow-wittedness, with his sternness in applying institutional discipline, with his severe thriftiness, with the "puritanism" in his moral code and in the student body policies he unremittingly applied at Harding and with his hard-to-shake confidence in the rightness of his decisions. Most of the resentment dissipated, as did that of the young lady student who resented Benson's attitude
on a campus issue only to say, a few years later, that with her maturing judgment she had to admit that he had been right.

He had many problems as he stepped into the Harding presidency, and throughout the full twenty-nine years of his administration. He was a comparatively young man assuming authority over men who traditionally had exercised the highest authority at Harding. Thus among the faculty and students in those early days he had to gain their confidence while those to whom they were accustomed to turning were on the faculty. Nothing in his earlier life had prepared him for the art of finesse; he had achieved his goals the hard way. He was impulsively a straight-from-the-shoulder confronter, but on the other hand he had developed extraordinary personal discipline and this latter quality permitted him to master in time a degree of finesse. He was aware of the problem of "seniority" in the church and in Christian education generally; so he applied himself to the task of building his authority gradually. But when this got in the way of his achieving a vital goal, he pushed forward with whatever vigor was required, hoping to smooth any ruffled feelings the best way he could.

In the premillennialism controversy which greeted him upon inauguration to the Harding presidency, and which thwarted for a long time his plans to raise substantial building funds among Church of Christ congregations, George Benson did the characteristic thing: He went to the New Testament Bible for the answers. To both sides, he read the scripture. Then he
defended the past presidential regime of J. N. Armstrong, who had drawn the full attack on the issue. He called attention to the fact that the Church of Christ had no hierarchy, no superstructure, but was composed of autonomous congregations. In religious matters, he never deviated from the Bible when controversy arose. His attitude finally overcame the premillennialism attacking forces.

He learned very quickly, that once he began to be heard nationally with his crusade for "Americanism" his assessment of the "dangers" in Federal aid to education, and his warnings about Socialism and Communism, that he was to be unpopular with much of the educational fraternity of the nation. He did not resent this, but the conviction that he was right and his critics ignorant of or blind to some vital facts, steeled him to the criticisms and the kind of ostracism which seemed to him to have come to a focal point with the opposition he encountered within the North Central Association of Colleges hierarchy when he sought accreditation for Harding. He fought back -- with what he considered to be irrefutable facts.

He made it a point in his National Education Program presidency to start his defense against an attack from "liberal" or radical sources with the fact that the Communist Daily Worker, published in New York City by the Communist Party United States originated the attack upon the National Education Program. He carefully refrained from calling any and all opposition "Communist," but he overcame some of the weight of the attacks by contending
that they "played into the hands" of world Communism propaganda "line." The Communists -- together with their conscious and unwitting fellow-travelers did some damage to both Harding College and the National Education Program. Socialist Norman Thomas persuaded President John Kennedy to ban use by the Armed Services of the National Education Program film, "Communism on the Map," and the nationwide controversy stirred by this action deterred a number of contributors (1, 2). In this situation, as well as in most of the actions of his lifetime, the one virtue that served George Benson best was his courage. He never ran from a fight. He had no expectations of killing Communism or converting all shades of Socialists to an advocacy of capitalism, but he was unshakably convinced of the rightness of what he was doing, and he felt that what he was doing was the best thing he could do in the eyes of his God.

The majority of the persons contacted, in the preparation of this thesis, were in agreement on some assessments of George Benson. They recognized that he had a bigger than average reservoir of energy, enthusiasm, and determination, and an imagination which helped solve problems and produce projects. They underscored his basic spiritual motivation. They gave him credit for unprecedented achievement in Christian education. They recognized that he had weaknesses but measured them as minor defects. Some felt he was too much of an authoritarian in his dealings with students and faculty and general school policies. That he counted on his own judgment and did not seek the help of others.
George Benson, in his childhood and youth, was prepared to fulfill an important mission. His birth and boyhood, on a farm and in rather primitive surroundings were turned into character-building advantages. He learned early that hard work is noble and satisfying; in fact, he cultivated a love of work. Thus he learned early of the inner regard for accomplishing, creating and producing.

In his early boyhood he developed a keen interest in God, in the Bible teachings, and in the church. The fact that while still in his "teens" he rose to superintendent of his Sunday School foreshadowed both leadership and dedication. As a very young man he came to two conclusions that have dominated his life: the twentieth-century Church of Christ brotherhood carries out the call of Jesus Christ; and education in the liberal arts and vocations must go hand in hand with Christian awakening and training of the intellect as a foremost requirement for expanding the church. Opposition to such emphasis on "secular" education has cropped up from time to time in the Church of Christ brotherhood, but the success of Harding graduates in the church leadership within America and in missionary ventures throughout the world has virtually converted the brotherhood nationwide to this Benson viewpoint.

A conclusion to which George Benson has given unstinted loyalty is that the American governmental, economic and social system, not withstanding its weaknesses and imperfections, is the best social system yet devised. With his firsthand personal experiences with Communism in China and other areas
of Asia (Hong Kong, the Philippines, etc.) he saw clearly, twenty years ahead of most of the American leadership and citizenry, that the disciples of Karl Marx and Nikolai Lenin were forming a movement that meant trouble for the whole world. And acting upon his basic faith in the educational process, he established, in time, the National Education Program "to make our citizens, especially the youth, immune to the propaganda of Communism."

He felt that the foundation for immunity was an understanding by the youth of America of the true facts about our own system and its history, the mechanics of its superstructures, how and why it produced more material well-being and a greater degree of individual freedom than all other systems.

In order to get the youth involved in such "citizenship" education, George Benson felt he had to reach the parent generation as well as people of means who could help him expand his efforts. He did this in his lecture tours, his newspaper column, the films, the monthly letter, the radio series, "Land of the Free," and the Freedom Forums.

He envisioned Harding College as the workshop to prove out his conclusions. It became his pilot plant. The more far-reaching measurement of his vision -- "education equals church expansion" was revealed as he worked, in his second and third decades at Harding, just as zealously to establish and expand other schools and colleges throughout the nation.

In these two decades, during the greatest growth at Harding and the widest expansion of his involvement in developing other Church of Christ
schools and colleges, he reached his zenith in the art of selling. The little unknown college with its indebtedness and its poverty-stricken faculty blossomed. Harding became the inspiration with Benson guidance for approximately twenty establishments around the country. The bronze plaques that grace the Benson office and trophy room in his Tahkodah cottage would indicate that the patrons of those twenty colleges consider the institutions themselves as monuments to the success of the Benson mission. The most imposing building on perhaps the most modern new college campus at Oklahoma Christian College in Oklahoma City, displays its plaque to George Benson in its brick facade. The granite marker says simply: THE GEORGE BENSON BUILDING.

And now, in 1971, in his second "five year plan" in retirement, George Benson is concentrating on the education of American youth and the expansion of the church to Africa. In the three months summer school vacation period of 1971, his Youth Citizenship Seminars in eleven states brought him into intimate contact with more than 7,000 young people chosen to attend the week-long fun-in-education sessions on the basis of their scholastic and leadership records.

At the end of the summer he found himself deeply disturbed on the one hand and highly elated on the other. His concern was not so much the fact that a small percentage of the 7,000 young teen-agers were openly "Anti-establishment," but that these articulate few seemed to intimidate most of the others. "The vast majority of these youngsters," said George Benson,
"were loyal to the American system but in a hazy, ignorant way. They did not really know the story of America. They did not know what free enterprise is. So they were either intimidated by the liberal anti-system few or they just simply did not have the answers about our system and about socialism and communism."

He said that by the end of the week in every one of the seminars, the "loyal" majority had learned enough about the three systems to be able to challenge the anti-establishment militants and give a good account of themselves. "But we were reaching only 7,000 young people in eleven states," he said sadly. "We cannot win the fight for maintaining the basic American principles unless we reach millions with this kind of education." So he is worried.

His elation comes from the act of converting some 6,500 youngsters into outspoken advocates of the proposition: "Let's do our improving and reforming within the system; let's not destroy it." By the end of the summer, his elation was high, as mail from the youngsters piled on his desk; and he announced plans to expand the National Education Program staff with a man who will travel into some thirty states in the year ahead, trying to organize Youth Citizenship seminars in these additional states (3).

And, finally, there is a personal way to dispel the mistaken belief held by a few of George Benson's acquaintances: that he is a man of little emotion, tough heart, and iron self-discipline. He is -- up to a point.
Upon his return from his six week's visit to Kalomo, Zambia, his National Education Program office staff gave him a small, sedate "welcome home" party. He was asked to give a report on his trip.

He has a knack for story-telling and reporting in a manner so vivid one feels almost as if he were there. He told of the completion of the building quadrangle for the Kalomo high school, of the thrill he got seeing 250 young Africans crossing the quadrangle going and coming to classes, of his preaching at a half dozen churches, of his formal dinner as a guest of Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia in the Presidential palace, of his pleasant visit with the veteran missionaries who had founded, thirty years ago, the first of the small elementary schools for African children.

Then he told of visiting in two nearby cities. This was the most meaningful moment of the trip, and one could tell that it had been an emotional experience for him.

"The African men and women I visited in these two cities," he said, "were prominent leaders in their communities. Some were businessmen, some professional men. All were founders and leaders of Churches of Christ. Everyone of them," he said, struggling with his emotions, "were men who thirty years ago had entered one of the little elementary schools conducted by our missionaries in Zambia" (3).
He continued:

The schools had paid off. These prominent leaders in the religious and civic affairs of Zambia were evidence enough. And to add to this evidence, every church I visited in Zambia had been founded and was being led by persons who went to the little schools in their formative years (3).

The Zambia project, to augment the little elementary and grade schools with new plants and staffs offering full high school courses, will be his "pet" mission (he has already raised $250,000) the rest of George Benson's life. Yet, on his desk are a number of letters from old church friends beseeching him to come to some place and help establish a Church of Christ school there. For a good man, it would seem, life begins anew "where the action is,"

George Stuart Benson, from his birth and boyhood and early schooling in Oklahoma, through his extraordinarily productive years at the helm of Harding College, was a gifted person with a mission. His career offers inspiration and, perhaps most important, many priceless lessons for the new generations of preachers, faculty and administrators who must carry on the work of Christian education.

When a man has reached his zenith he usually divests himself of some of his lifelong interests, slows down, lives largely in the past, and leaves the needed pioneering to others.

George Benson has been only partially successful in following this general pattern. He left the presidency at Harding but he continues to be interested in it and to work for it. He has reduced his writing and speaking
but he has increased his youth work in the United States and added to his efforts in Africa. In fact, his interest in these two areas is more likely to expand than to retract. It would be typical of him to maintain all of his interests and to add new ones so long as he lives.
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A letter-questionnaire was sent to all former board of trustees from 1936 to 1965, and the responses are in possession of the author.

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Seven large scrapbooks of newspaper clippings and programs dating from 1936 to 1965.

Five diaries, kept by Mrs. George S. Benson, dating from 1925 to 1964.