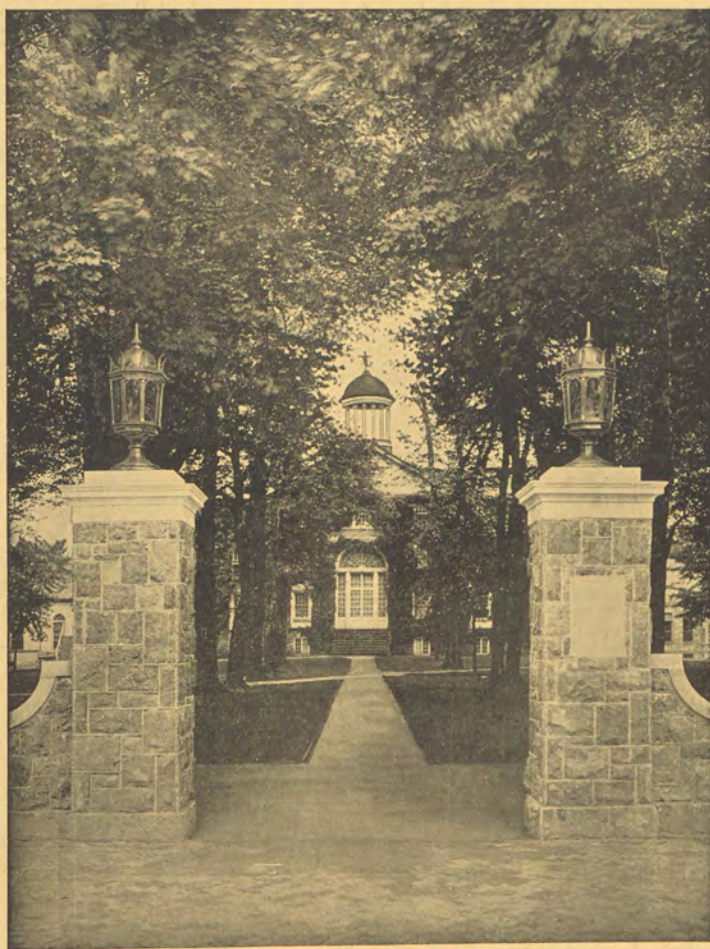


# DICKINSON ALUMNUS



Vol. 8, No. 3

April, 1931

# The Dickinson Alumnus

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and the Dickinson School of Law

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# THE DICKINSON ALUMNUS

April, 1931

## President Mervin Grant Filler Dies at 57

**A** COMPLICATION of diseases which followed a virulent attack of influenza contracted last January culminated in chronic nephritis and caused the death of Mervin Grant Filler, Litt.D., LL.D., eighteenth president of Dickinson College; at 3:40 o'clock on the morning of March 28th, in the University of Pennsylvania Hospital, Philadelphia. He was 57 years old.

While attending a convention of the Association of American College Presidents in Indianapolis in January, President Filler contracted influenza. Realizing that he was becoming ill, he left the convention the day before its conclusion and managed to reach his home in Carlisle before he was fully stricken by the malady. He immediately went to bed and was a patient in his home for about three weeks, under the care of his family physician, Dr. C. R. Rickenbaugh of Carlisle.

He made his last public appearance when on February 20th he had recovered sufficiently to attend the annual "A" dinner in the Molly Pitcher Hotel, when he presented the speaker of the evening Professor W. B. McDaniel, his former teacher at the University of Pennsylvania. Everyone who saw him on that occasion was struck by his appearance, and realized that Dr. Filler was a very sick man.

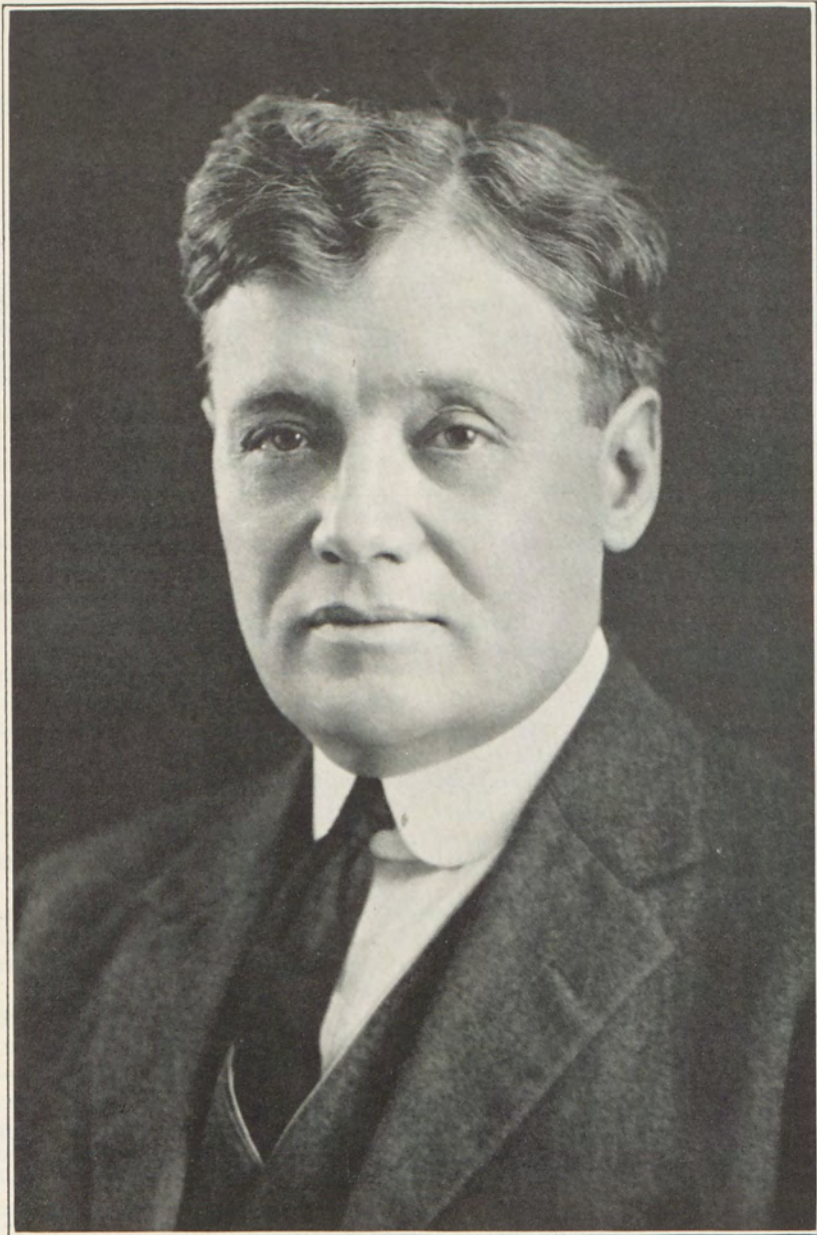
Immediately following the dinner he suffered a relapse, but recovered sufficiently the following week to leave Carlisle with Mrs. Filler for Atlantic City, where he expected to recuperate and regain his strength. He remained at the shore but a single night, and the next day Mrs. Filler urged him to return to the University Hospital, Philadelphia, where he became a patient of Dr. Alfred Stengel, noted physician, who had

prescribed a course of treatment for him some years previously.

After a week in the hospital, benefiting from the rest, Dr. Filler looked better than he had done at any time in many months and he began to look forward to an early return to the College and his work. While it was apparent that he was seriously ill, from that time until a week before his death, he seemed to be making progress against the maladies which afflicted him.

An attack of hiccoughs seized him in the last week of his illness, and so weakened him that hope for his recovery was abandoned three days before his death. On that same day he was threatened with pneumonia, but fortunately that disease did not develop.

About five years ago Dr. Filler learned from his family physician that he would probably develop Bright's Disease, if he did not take unusual care of his health. For several years he had had an unusually high blood pressure, and he sought the advice of physicians to relieve that, as well as to remedy his kidney ailment. Throughout his life he never complained of feeling ill, and he often said that he never felt any pain or discomfort. For that reason it was very hard for him to realize that he was really a sick man, and it made it difficult for him to accept the dictation of his physicians. He repeatedly said that just as soon as would get caught up with his work, he would take a little period of rest, during which he expected to fully regain his strength. He left Carlisle shortly after Commencement last year, and spent some time in Maine, returning to his desk about the middle of August. His associates noticed that he very quickly lost all he had gained in strength during that vacation, and those closest to him



MERVIN GRANT FILLER, LITT.D., LL.D.  
Eighteenth President of Dickinson College  
1928-1931

now realize that he had a gradual decline over a period of some years.

Throughout the time Dr. Filler was a patient in the hospital, his wife was at his bedside daily, arriving early in the morning and staying until the hospital closed at nine o'clock at night. Mrs. Filler missed only one or two days, when she herself was suffering from a severe cold. It had been expected that Dr. Filler's blood pressure would drop perceptibly as a warning signal some time before his death, but this did not happen. He passed away with lightning-like suddenness at 3:40 in the morning, and no member of the family was at his bedside at the time.

Professors C. W. Prettyman and W. W. Landis were the last members of the College Faculty to see Dr. Filler alive. They called on him the day before his death, and he recognized them both.

### SUSPEND COLLEGE CLASSES

News of the death of President Filler reached Dean M. P. Sellers shortly before eight o'clock on the morning of March 28th. He immediately issued an order suspending all college classes.

The annual spring recess was scheduled to start at 10:15 o'clock the same morning, but all work was suspended as soon as the news arrived. Vacation continued until Easter Monday, April 6th, at 1:30.

The Law School, which has no spring recess, suspended classes by the order of Dean W. H. Hitchler on the afternoon of the funeral.

## Doctor Morgan Called to Serve as President

**C**ARRYING out the suggestions made by Dr. Mervin G. Filler, a few days before his death, the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees met on the afternoon of March 28th, and asked Dr. J. H. Morgan to serve as President of the College temporarily. Dr. Morgan accepted and is now serving.

When Dr. Filler learned some days before his death from his physician that he would be unable to return to his desk before September, he suggested that a meeting of the executive committee be held to name Dr. Morgan as President, until he would be able to return to his duties. Acting upon this suggestion, Judge E. W. Biddle, President of the Board of Trustees, issued the call for the meeting and it was held on the afternoon of the day of Dr. Filler's death by a tragic coincidence.

The members of the Executive Committee and Dr. Morgan who was called into the meeting were visibly affected by

the situation and carried on their deliberations under a very great strain.

Dr. Morgan who retired as President of the College in 1928 when Dr. Filler succeeded him, is the first president to be called back to office.

Since his retirement, Dr. Morgan has been residing at his old home, 243 West Louthier Street, except for a winter he spent in travel abroad. The few years of rest which he has enjoyed have been of great benefit to him and he is probably in better physical condition today than he was in 1928. He has entered upon his duties with all the vigor he showed during the fourteen years he served as President.

Members of the Executive Committee who attended the meeting were Judge E. W. Biddle, and John M. Rhey, Secretary, of Carlisle, Boyd Lee Spahr, Philadelphia, L. T. Appold, and J. Henry Baher, of Baltimore, Robert F. Rich, Woolrich, Pa. and Rev. Dr. John R. Edwards, New York City.

## EDITORIAL

### PRESIDENT FILLER

**S**UBSTANTIAL as its loss of an executive, Dickinson loses something more in the death of President Mervin Grant Filler, March 25, 1931. There has been taken from the ranks of Dickinsonians one whose whole self was submerged in promoting the welfare of his alma mater.

Save a year or two of absence for graduate work and the period of the war emergency, Dr. Filler was associated every hour with Dickinson from those days of the late '80s when he entered as a student to follow in order his years as instructor in old "Prep," instructor and professor in college, dean of the faculty and from three years ago its President.

So devoted was he to the institution with which he pledged his life, his fortune and his sacred honor that he had but slight acquaintance with the experience of a vacation. This was particularly true when he filled the office of dean and even more so during his presidency. In fact it was only upon the commanding insistence of his most intimate friends that during last summer he spent a few brief weeks on the New England Coast.

This unceasing attention to his positions was his conception of loyalty to a task, a demonstration of his dedication to a trust. He was conscientious as few men are in such matters. Self to him mattered little; service meant everything. And in that service he spent himself even to breaking his health and heroically concealing it as long as he could. Like great warriors he had to be carried from the field of action. Grimly he bore his physical anguish until Death could claim him as a martyr to duty.

Eulogists at his funeral services singled from his many admirable attributes and talents his greatness as a teacher. Latin happened to be his subject but none doubts that in any other subject he would have been an outstanding teacher. He had the patience, the perseverance, the skill, the scholastic capacity and the sense of justice without which no teacher can be great.

The older graduates of the college recall him as the teacher of Latin. They readily accord him a high place. They do not know as later generations know that he was also a distinguished dean of the faculty, a strict disciplinarian in that office but just, rigid in his rulings but fair, not without mercy or consideration.

His presidency of only three years brought a heavier demand upon his talents and his capacity. He gave all he had of all he had. His term as President was too short to display all his aims and hopes for the college, but long enough to reveal that so far as he was concerned the worthwhile traditions of Dickinson would not perish, its standards for thoroughgoing scholarship would be maintained and it would remain an appealing institution for "those who desire a thorough education in the Liberal Arts in a college of noble traditions and high ideals carried on by a faculty inspired by its brilliant history and whose alumni are increasingly manifesting their loyalty and support.

But apart from Mervin Grant Filler, the instructor, the professor, the dean and the president, there was also Mervin Grant Filler, the man, the student, the school-boy even trudging his way many days five miles to school and back home in the evening. In a truly and wholly personal role, Dr. Filler was a choice spirit, a mild-mannered gentleman, soft-spoken, genial, friendly. His character needed no trumpeting. It stood revealed. There was no doubting a high code of honor in every relation of his life. He was lovable and in his shy modest way companionable.

So it was not strange that his obsequies brought back to the campus students, not distinguished so much by numbers as the distance they covered to offer a tribute to their friend, chum and patron. Dr. Filler deserved it all. He was worthy of the deep-seated sorrow his death brought to town and gown, to student and alumnus, to all who knew even slightly the merit and manner of a man who sacrificed himself that the beloved college which reared him and which he had served so long and brilliantly might not falter in its progress toward even greater days.

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## Spends His Life at the Head of His Class

**T**HAT the attainment of high scholarship in a chosen field brings the reward of place and power with the acclaim of countless numbers is perhaps nowhere better illustrated than in the life of Mervin Grant Filler.

"He was a little tow-headed lively boy, just like the other boys," said a reminiscent old timer, as he stood near Dr. Filler's childhood home in Boiling Springs, "but," he added, "then he went to school and all he did after that was to stand at the head of his class."

"At the head of his class" fittingly tells the story of Dr. Filler's life, as he overcame the obstacles in boyhood and youth, through the grades, preparatory school and college, and then as student, professor, dean, president, churchman, social worker, clubman and man.

He wasn't born with a silver spoon in his mouth when November 9, 1873 brought a lively boy into the Boiling Springs home of Peter Paul and Elizabeth Shue Filler. His father was a painter, employed by the Reading Railroad, and the family enjoyed the quiet life in a comfortable home in the little community near the South Mountain. Then a vigorous boy entered the Boiling Springs grade school and the first year he stood "at the head of his class."

Upon the completion of his schooling in Boiling Springs, Dr. Filler then became a student at the Dickinson Preparatory School and after standing "at the head of his class" during the whole time he was there, he entered the College in the fall of 1888. He led his class throughout his four years in college and

received his A. B. in 1893 with honor as a valedictorian, and having won the coveted key of Phi Beta Kappa. Upon his graduation from the College, he became instructor in Greek and Latin in the Dickinson Preparatory School and held the post until 1899.

During the years when he was a student in the Preparatory School of the College and later as a teacher of the old "prep" he was confronted with the difficulty of commuting to his home in Boiling Springs. Many tales are rampant concerning how he walked back and forth from his home to the College. At that time there were no means of transportation other than a round-about journey over the Reading Railroad between Boiling Springs and Carlisle. It was not until years later that the trolley system was built, which is even now out of existence.

At various times during his "prep" and college days it is true that Dr. Filler trudged back and forth between Boiling Springs and Carlisle, when no other means of transportation was available. In the year of his graduation from the College, he was one of a group which rented a covered spring wagon to provide conveyance to the college halls. Brigadier-General Stanley Dunbar Embick, '97 now commanding officer of Fortress Monroe, Va., Wilbur M. Yeingst, '97, now superintendent of schools in Mount Carmel, Pa., James G. Miller, '97, now registrar of Mercersburg Academy, and Dr. Filler entered into a contract whereby they hired a spring wagon belonging to Abraham Miller, the father of James

G. Miller. The arrangement was not perfectly satisfactory to all of the four men, however, as great difficulty was experienced in picking each of them up at either end of the line to the satisfaction of the others. It meant that very often one or more of them was forced to cover the five miles on foot.

In September, 1899, just a short time before the opening of college for the fall term, an emergency arose when Dr. Henry Clay Whiting withdrew as Professor of Latin. He had held the chair for twenty years and at that time of the year it is very difficult to secure a successor. The suggestion was made to Dr. George Edward Reed, then President of the College, that Dr. Filler was fully qualified to fill the post in the College. Dr. Filler was immediately called to the chair and again he demonstrated that he stood "at the head of his class." He continued as Professor of Latin until his elevation to the presidency in 1928, holding the chair of the A. J. Clarke Professorship of Latin Language and Literature.

#### Awarded Honorary Degree

In the summers of 1900 and 1901 Dr. Filler attended the University of Chicago. He studied in the University of Pennsylvania in 1906, while continuing his teaching at the college and then put in a year of residence there in 1908. He received the honorary degree of Doctor of Literature from Nebraska Wesleyan University in 1915 and in 1929 Ohio Wesleyan University and Bucknell University both conferred the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws upon him.

From 1904 to 1915 Dr. Filler was dean of the Freshman class of Dickinson college. In 1914 he became dean of the college, succeeding Dr. James H. Morgan who was then elected to the presidency. Dr. Morgan resigned as president in 1928 and Dean Filler was elected to succeed him. He was the first layman to be chosen president of Dickinson College, though the late Dr.

Charles F. Himes, also a layman, served as acting president for some months. Besides his work as an educator, Dr. Filler was well-known for his activities in Y. M. C. A., civic, social, and church work. For the past several years, he had been president of the Pennsylvania State Y. M. C. A. He was an active member of the Rotary Club and served for a year as president of the Carlisle chapter. He was a member of the Allison M. E. Church of Carlisle, and one of the most prominent laymen in the activities of the Church throughout the State.

#### On Leave During War

During the World War Dr. Filler received a leave of absence from the college, and was successful in solving one of the biggest problems which faced the Y. M. C. A. Early in the war that organization was experiencing considerable difficulty in securing passports for its workers to France. At one time there were more than eight hundred Y. M. C. A. workers on the organization payrolls stranded in New York City, unable to sail for Europe because the necessary passports were lacking. The difficulty had arisen between the organization and the War Department and Dr. Filler was appointed to the task of solving the problem. He was called from other Y. M. C. A. work which he had entered at the declaration of war in 1917, and became one of the outstanding officials of that organization. During the war, and until his service closed in January 1919, he had his office in Washington with a board of twenty-five workers and a private telephone line to New York for daily contact with headquarters there. During the first year of the war he continued to teach at the college until the close of the term, making frequent trips between Carlisle and Washington. Later he received his leave of absence until the close of the war.

#### Dean of Summer School

From 1901 to 1912 Dr. Filler was dean of the Pennsylvania Chautauqua,



Summer School for Teachers, one of the three summer schools supported by State funds in the day before college and university summer schools got under way. In 1916 he was teacher of Latin at the University of Pennsylvania Summer School, where he was head of the department.

Dr. Filler was a member of the Phi Beta Kappa and Phi Kappa Sigma fraternities. He was a member of the Masonic fraternity and of the American

Philological Association. He also was a member of the Carlisle Country Club.

On June 12, 1895, Dr. Filler married Mildred E. Beitzel of Boiling Springs. Mrs. Filler and their three children, Donald B. Filler, '17, of Harrisburg and the Misses Mildred Clare, '18 and Mary Elizabeth Filler, '24 of Ardmore, survive. His mother, now residing in Wayne, and three sisters, including Mrs. Ada Filler Kennedy, '07 and Miss A. Grace Filler, '10 also survive.

## Saddened Throng Pays Final Tribute to President Filler

**H**UNDREDS of faculty members, students, relatives, educators, alumni, townspeople and representatives of various organizations, passed by the bier of President Filler as he lay in state in his home for two hours on March 31st, and then crowded Allison M. E. Church, where funeral services were held at two-thirty o'clock.

The church service was preceded by brief rites conducted in the President's home before members of his family, relatives and the honorary pall-bearers by Rev. Dr. Edgar R. Heckman, '97 pastor of Allison M. E. Church. At 2:25 o'clock the body was borne to the church and the casket carried reverently upon the shoulders of six members of the Senior Class.

"What we say is rough and small in comparison to what Dr. Filler's life says to us," Bishop William F. McDowell, of Washington who delivered the funeral oration, declared. "He has abundantly justified the confidence the trustees placed in him when they made him president of the college three years ago."

Bishop McDowell spoke of Dr. Filler's long service to the college and community and his devotion to both. "We cannot help being impressed with the quality of unity of his life. It was of one piece, like a seamless robe. In it was a unity of service, of integrity, of

direction and a tone, a tone that was fit to set the pitch for Dickinson and for Carlisle."

Rev. Dr. Edgar R. Heckman, pastor of the church, presided and the scriptures were read by Rev. Dr. J. Howard Ake, of Harrisburg, district superintendent of the Methodist Episcopal church. Bishop E. G. Richardson, of Philadelphia, spoke in behalf of the college alumni; Dr. James Henry Morgan, acting president, for the faculty and trustees; and Philo C. Dix, of Harrisburg, secretary of the State Y. M. C. A. for that organization.

Brief commitment services were held in Westminster Cemetery where interment was made, with Rev. Dr. Heckman and Rev. Dr. Ake officiating.

From 12 o'clock noon until a half hour before the church service the body lay in state in the president's mansion and during that time hundreds of individuals passed before the bier. The body reposed in a black cloth covered casket lined with white silk and all about the bier in the spacious room in which it rested were scores of beautiful floral tributes, the final sympathetic gestures of over a hundred individuals and organizations. The visitors were received by members of the faculty who quietly directed the continuous stream as it silently moved past the bier.

Honorary pallbearers included men

prominent in education, law, medicine and the life of Dickinson College. They are: Former Judge E. W. Biddle, president of the board of trustees; Boyd Lee Spahr, president of the General Alumni Association, Dean M. P. Sellers; President Henry W. H. Hanson of Gettysburg College; President H. H. Apple, of Franklin and Marshall College; Dean Howard R. Omwake and Secretary Robert J. Pilgrim, of Franklin and Marshall College; Professor Walton Brooks McDaniels, of the University of Pennsylvania; Dean W. H. Hitchler and Professor Joseph P. McKeehan, of the Dickinson School of Law; Dr. B. O. McIntire, Professor emeritus, Judge E. M. Biddle Jr., President Judge of Cumberland County; John M. Rhey, Carlisle Rotary Club; Francis B. Sellers, Jr., member, Cumberland County Bar; Merkel Landis, president, Carlisle Trust Company; Frysinger Evans, former treasurer of Dickinson College; Gilbert Malcolm, treasurer, Dr. Frederick E. Downes, Philadelphia, and the following professors of the Dickinson College faculty: Dr. C. W. Prettyman, Dr. W. W. Landis, Dr. Leon C. Prince, Dr. Gaylard H. Patterson, Professor F. E. Craver, Dr. Herbert Wing, Jr., Dr. W. H. Norcross, Dr. E. A. Vulleumier, Dr. C. J. Carver, Dr. Lewis G. Rohrbaugh, Dr. M. W. Eddy, Dr. A. V. Bishop and Dr. Paul Doney.

Six members of the senior class of the college served as active pallbearers. They were: Robert L. D. Davidson, Lewis F. Gayner, Samuel F. Heffner, J. Boyd Landis, Robert F. LaVanture, and Howard L. Rubendall.

The floral tributes of which there were a large number, were unusually beautiful and filled the halls and large

front room in the President's home where the body lay in state for two hours. Those who sent flowers included:

The trustees, faculty and student body of Gettysburg College, trustees, faculty and student body of Dickinson College and the School of Law, Dickinson clubs of Northeastern Pennsylvania, Baltimore, Washington, Atlantic City, Harrisburg, Philadelphia, New York City, Pittsburgh and Carlisle Alumnae Clubs of New York and Harrisburg; General Alumni Association; State Y. M. C. A., faculty and student body of Merion Junior High School, the Y. M. and Y. W. C. A., of Dickinson College; the Dickinson Glee clubs, the Ravens Claw senior honorary society, the Skull and Key, junior honorary society; official board and Sunday school of the Allison Methodist church; Christian Endeavor Society of the Plainfield Lutheran church; congregation and Sunday school of the Methodist church of Boiling Springs.

St. John's Lodge, No. 260, F. and A. M., officers and men of the Headquarters Troop 104th Cavalry; Hi-Y club girls; senior class of Dickinson College, class of 1918; men employes of Dickinson College, the men's and women's student senates of Dickinson, Association of College Presidents of Pennsylvania, Carlisle Kiwanis Club, Rotary Club and the following college fraternities.

Zeta Tau Alpha, executive board and active chapter of Phi Beta Kappa, Phi Kappa Sigma, Alpha Chi Rho, Pi Beta Phi, Kappa Sigma, Phi Mu, Chi Omega, Beta Psi, Sigma Chi, Phi Delta Theta, Commons Club, Beta Theta Pi, Phi Beta Pi.



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