

**WILLIAM EDGAR PARK**  
**THIRD PRESIDENT OF SIMMONS COLLEGE**  
**1955-1970**

William Edgar Park was born in West Newton, Massachusetts in 1909 to Dr. J. Edgar and Grace (Burt) Park. Park graduated from Williams College (A.B. 1930) and received the B.D. from Union Theological Seminary in 1933. From 1933 to 1934, he studied English Literature at the Harvard Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. In 1934, Park assumed the first of three pastorates, beginning with the North Congregational Church in North Abington, Massachusetts. The other pastorates were in Orient, Long Island and the North Presbyterian Church in Buffalo, New York.

In 1940, Park became President of Northfield Schools, guiding both the Northfield School for Girls and the Mount Hermon School for Boys. During this time, Park also supervised the Northfield Summer Conference, the Northfield Hotel, and the East Northfield Water Company. In 1945, Park published the first of two books of religious writings entitled *Narrow is the Way*. The second book, *The Quest for Inner Peace*, was published two years later in 1947.

In 1955, Park left the Northfield Schools to become the third President of Simmons College. During Park's tenure at Simmons, three dormitories were constructed, facilitating the change from a predominantly commuter campus to a more residential campus. Beatley Library and Lefavour Hall were also completed during Park's presidency.

By far the most important event to occur at Simmons College during this period was the Self Study, conducted from 1963 to 1965, which resulted in the reorganization of the College from nine schools into nineteen departments; the granting of a Bachelor of Arts degree in addition to a Bachelor of Science degree; a cooperative agreement between Simmons College and Emmanuel College libraries; and an agreement between Simmons, Emmanuel, Wheelock, and the New England Conservatory of Music to share services and curriculum.

Park retired from Simmons College in 1970. He died December 10, 1987.

Park received honorary degrees from Simmons, Middlebury, Williams, Lesley, and Emerson Colleges. He also served as a trustee of Vassar College (1945-1954), the International College (Lebanon), Andover-Newton Theological School, Garland Junior College, and Williams College (1959-1964). Park also served as Chairman of the Massachusetts Board of Education, a member of the Board of Collegiate Authority, and a trustee of the WGBH Educational Foundation.

Compiled by Peter Carini, The Simmons College Archives, 1994.

### **Developments in the Administration of President William E. Park, 1955-1970**

William E. Park came from a family of educators. His father, J. Edgar Park, was President of Wheaton College, and his sister, Rosemary, was President of Barnard College in New York, later President of Connecticut College in New London, and still later Vice Chancellor of the University of California in Los Angeles. Both his father and his sister attended his inauguration.

In his address, Park commented that women feel inferior since they are not men, and that society has not offered women the opportunity for work in which they could fulfill themselves as individuals:

Simmons was among the first of the women's colleges to try to overcome this inferior feeling by recognizing the diversities of gifts of women, and by devising an educational program to give them adequate training for future occupations.... It was also agreed that there would be a unifying concept which is found in the spirit of general education and which results in a curriculum of collegiate character.... Simmons has always remained true to the original idea of training the diversities of women with the same spirit of the liberal arts college.(1)

On the 60th anniversary of the founding of Simmons College in 1962, *The Simmons Review* published a group of essays on the future of the College.(2) Among the themes were:

- \* Nursing education would move towards educating all nurses in institutions of higher learning.
- \* Home economics was moving boldly ahead in the fields of Foods and Nutrition. Also in the thinking-out stage was a course on Foods and People, which could be a non-laboratory course, combining Foods and Nutrition subject matter.
- \* The School of Library Science was already working toward the automation of the library.
- \* The Science School was offering seven programs for prospective scientists: Biology, Chemistry, and Mathematics were the most popular majors, with the new mathematics growing by leaps and bounds; and Physics, Medical Technology, Physical Therapy, and Orthoptics.
- \* The School of Communications (unique among women's colleges) offered broadened liberal arts courses, since journalism was swinging from straight news and fact reporting to interpretive techniques.

In the same period, the Simmons College Faculty Committee on Educational Policy conducted the Self-Study. Its objectives were three:

- (1) The general reason that, though women's colleges cover a period of 100 years, there is still little agreement on what type of higher education should be most suitable for women.
- (2) The second reason was a practical one of planning the needs of the College over the next 10 years so that support could be found for these programs or that joint programs could be worked out with other institutions.

(3) As a related effort in the overall survey, the College was to review all the great changes of recent years in the light of the many individual needs in what areas, as opposed to an all-inclusive plan for the future.

The specific individual changes accomplished by the Self-Study are listed under President Park's biographical sketch. The overall report of the Study proposed four educational goals:

(1) Simmons graduates should have both a broad education in arts and sciences, and a specialization in at least one field related to their career objectives.

(2) Simmons is to remain a college focused upon career preparation for women.

(3) The Simmons bachelor's degree should imply that the student is prepared to work in the field of her choice or to continue her career preparation through graduate studies.

(4) The Simmons undergraduate program should make increasingly rigorous demands upon students by developing courses with high intellectual standards. The College must also offer opportunities for students to develop creativity and imagination through individual study, field work, and interdisciplinary seminars.

**Six Career Areas:** In 1965, Simmons established career objectives in: Administration and Communications, Social Sciences, Humanities, Education, Science, and Health Services. The faculty also approved twenty courses offered by the departments to fulfill the distribution and depth requirements in these fields. In planning their programs, students were to choose a field of concentration within one of the career areas, with stipulations for the hours to be spent in their individual fields, and for a balanced program in both arts and sciences.

**The Seven-Year Plan for the Development of the Sciences (1966-1974):** The plan had two objectives: to make science more realistic and attractive for women; and to enlarge and improve the laboratory and classroom facilities to attract good students and qualified faculty to the science departments. To achieve both objectives, research orientation would be the integrative factor throughout the sciences at Simmons. The entire plan was centered upon the processes and problems of scientific research. By implication, the plan called for a shift from the faculty-student relationship to a colleague-apprenticeship.

Compiled by Richard Carroll, The College Archives, 1996

Notes:

1. *The Simmons Review*, Vol.38, No.2 (Fall 1955). pp. 6-7.
2. *The Simmons Review*, Vol. 44, No.3 (Spring 1962), pp. 6-15, 37.
3. President's Annual Reports 1955-1970, Office of the President, RG 4, The College Archives, Simmons College, Boston, Massachusetts.