VI

The Cornell University: Opened, 1868

I hope we have laid the foundation of an institution which shall combine practical with liberal education, which shall fit the youth of our country for the professions, the farms, the mines, the manufactories, for the investigations of science, and for mastering all the practical questions of life with success and honor.

Ezra Cornell

In 1865 the Town of Ithaca had a population of something more than seven thousand inhabitants, the Village of Ithaca considerably less than that. Except for some scattered dwellings on South Hill, on upper Seneca and Buffalo Streets, and a small settlement clustered around the mills at the Ithaca Falls, the Village was chiefly confined to the region bounded by the Inlet and by Green, Aurora, and Mill (now Court) Streets. It was served by one railroad, the Ithaca and Owego, and a line of steamboats running on daily schedule between Ithaca and Cayuga Bridge at the northern end of Cayuga Lake. It could boast of various industries—plaster and flour mills, tanneries, a carriage manufactory. It could boast of two newspapers, the Journal and the Democrat; and of two hotels, of which the Ithaca House was the more ancient and the Clinton House the more splendid, being then regarded by many as one of the finest, both for service and for architecture, in the state. The most conspicuous building in the Village (and by some no doubt regarded as the most beautiful, since there is no accounting for tastes) was the Cornell Library at the corner of Seneca and Tioga Streets. The most distinguished citizen was Ezra Cornell, whose farm, purchased in 1857, and recently donated as the site of the new university, extended eastward from the cemetery between the
Cornell University: Founders and the Founding

Cascadilla and Fall Creek gorges. The old farmhouse, known as Forest Park, and still standing at the Stewart Avenue entrance to the campus, was occupied by Mr. Cornell. Since there were no bridges over either of the gorges, it could be reached only by a road branching off from what is now University Avenue and skirting the north side of the cemetery. This road did not extend beyond the farmhouse; but there was a road running from the farmhouse along what is now Stewart Avenue to what is now University Avenue but was then merely a country highway from Ithaca to Free Hollow (Forest Home), Dryden, Cortland, and Syracuse.¹

For the inhabitants of Ithaca the fifth of September, 1865, was a day out of the ordinary, a day to take note of and make preparations for, since there were on that day and the following, lodged at Mr. Cornell’s home at Forest Park and at the Clinton House and meeting for conference at the Cornell Library, more distinguished strangers than the village had ever before had occasion to welcome. There was His Excellency, Reuben E. Fenton, the Governor of the State, His Honor, Thomas G. Alvord, Lieutenant Governor of the State, the Honorables Andrew D. White and William Kelly, Senators, and Abram B. Weaver, Assemblyman, and Messrs. Erastus Brooks, editor of the New York Express, and Edwin B. and Edwin D. Morgan. None of these men had ever been in Ithaca before. Not that the village was, for that time, inaccessible. Mr. Erastus Brooks, for example, could leave New York early in the morning and arrive safely at Ithaca some twelve hours later by either of two recommended routes—either by the Erie Railroad to Owego, changing there to the Ithaca and Owego, and leaving the train at the station at the head of the Inlet; or by taking the New York Central through Albany and Syracuse (where he might have been on the present occasion joined by the Honorable Andrew D. White) to Cayuga Bridge, and thence by steamer to the landing on the Inlet (near the present Johnson boathouse), where he could take a bus, or, for a consideration, a more luxurious vehicle, along
Willow Avenue to the Clinton House. The Village of Ithaca was not inaccessible, but it was after all a small place, and not being on either of the main routes of travel east and west, the Erie and the New York Central, was but little known to the people from other parts of the state, and little visited by them in the way of business or pleasure. The distinguished men who arrived there on the fifth of September, 1865, were not there in the way of pleasure, or in the ordinary way of business either, but in the way of business quite unusual, and regarded by them all as unusually important. They had come to Ithaca to attend the first meeting of the full Board of Trustees of the Cornell University.

The distinguished visitors were well received—a “serenade one evening, followed by a grand reception the next attended by large numbers of the best people.” They were of course taken up the hill, and were of course, as they were expected to be, properly impressed by the magnificent view. There was indeed nothing else there to be impressed with, unless it might be Mr. Cornell’s prize bulls, contentedly browsing on the hillside, or lumbering heavily down the ravine (where Mr. Cornell’s statue now stands) to drink at the spring. What must have impressed them most, I should think, was the absence of all they were required, within two years, to assemble on that rough hillside—adequate buildings and apparatus for teaching agriculture and the mechanic arts, and a competent faculty for teaching them. As yet, not a spade sunk for any foundation—not even the site for any building as yet chosen. With so much to do and so little time to do it in, there was, nevertheless, not much that the trustees could do at this meeting on the fifth of September. Permanent officers were elected—Ezra Cornell, President; Francis M. Finch, Secretary; George W. Schuyler, Treasurer. The necessary committees were appointed—an Executive Committee, a Committee on Buildings, a Finance Committee, and a one-man committee, consisting of Andrew D. White, to draft bylaws. But the chief thing done was the acceptance of Mr. Cornell’s proposal to give his bond to the trustees for $500,000, at seven per cent inter-
Cornell University: Founders and the Founding

est, to be secured by Western Union Telegraph stock to the amount of $700,000 par value, and the appointment of a committee to lay this proposal before the Comptroller of the State for his approval.⁴

This was little enough, but more was being accomplished than the formal record indicated. Mr. Cornell had already hit upon a grand idea which, after infinite effort and repeated discouragements, was to provide the university with an endowment far in excess of his original gift of five hundred thousand dollars. As early as March 27, 1865, he had written to Mr. W. A. Woodward: "What I desire . . . is . . . for the Treasurer of the University to take the funds I shall give the institution and buy the scrip of the Comptroller at 50 cents per acre, and enter the lands in the name and for the interest of the university."⁵ By holding the lands until they were worth, say, two dollars per acre, the university would have ultimately, in addition to its present annual income of approximately forty thousand dollars, an endowment of about two million dollars. This was Mr. Cornell's grand idea, and he desired Mr. Woodward, as a man with seventeen years of experience in locating and selling western lands, to say whether the idea was a practicable one.

Mr. Woodward replied that the idea was entirely practicable, provided some experienced person—he meant himself—were employed to manage the business. Meantime, Mr. Cornell, finding the trustees not disposed to buy the scrip and locate the lands for the university, had decided to do it himself. On his invitation Mr. Woodward came to Ithaca, late in November, to discuss the matter, and on that occasion, as he remembered some years later, was introduced to some of the trustees—Messrs. Finch, McGraw, Andrus, Williams, and Schuyler—in order to get them interested in the project. But Mr. Woodward found them unwilling even to listen to him. "They were devoting their talk to something else all the time. . . . After . . . about twenty minutes one said: "It's tea time.' Another said: 'I must go, I never keep my wife waiting.'” Mr. Cornell, fortunately, was less interested in his tea than in his
The Cornell University: Opened, 1868

grand idea. He gave Mr. Woodward an estimate of his wealth, and asked him whether with that amount he could "carry the matter through." Mr. Woodward assured him that there would not be "any difficulty about that"—always provided, of course, that he would employ Mr. Woodward to manage the business for him.6

The upshot of these preliminaries was that Mr. Cornell made an agreement with the Comptroller to buy the scrip and locate and dispose of the lands for the benefit of the university, and for the next six years employed Mr. Woodward as his agent for selecting and entering, with the scrip which Mr. Cornell turned over to him from time to time, valuable pine timber lands in Wisconsin. Mr. Cornell's agreement with the Comptroller was precise and businesslike; his agreement with Mr. Woodward, unfortunately, was not.

Mr. Cornell's arrangement with the Comptroller was made legal by an act of the state legislature, April 10, 1866, which authorized the Comptroller to sell the scrip for not less than thirty cents per acre to the Trustees of Cornell University, or, in case they declined to purchase, to any one who would comply with the condition laid down. Since the trustees declined to purchase, Mr. Cornell signed a contract with the Commissioners of the Land Office, August 4, 1866, which provided: (1) that Mr. Cornell should purchase the unsold scrip (813,920 acres) at thirty cents per acre; (2) that, since thirty cents per acre was one half of the market price of the scrip at that time, Mr. Cornell should, as the lands were sold from time to time, pay into the state treasury an additional thirty cents per acre; (3) that these two sums, totalling sixty cents per acre, should be regarded as the price received by the state for the scrip, and should be kept in a separate fund known as the College Land Scrip Fund, the income of which should be paid to the university and used by it according to the terms of the Morrill Act; (4) that the net profits received by Mr. Cornell from the sale of the lands—that is, the price received minus the sixty cents per acre paid for the scrip, and minus the cost of taxes, management, and the like
Cornell University: Founders and the Founding

—should be paid into the state treasury and kept as a separate fund to be known as the Cornell Endowment Fund, to be used (as the court decided later) for any of the purposes defined in the charter of the university.

By this arrangement the College Land Scrip Fund would be what the state received for the sale of the scrip—$594,000, which was approximately what it had commonly been supposed the state might realize from the scrip. But the Cornell Endowment Fund would be whatever Mr. Cornell could make for the university by locating the land and holding it for a higher price as a private business enterprise. In a letter to the Comptroller, June 9, 1866, Mr. Cornell estimated that this fund would ultimately amount to $1,600,000, which would give the university a total endowment of $2,944,000. The estimate was conservative, being some two million dollars less than the university ultimately realized from the sale of the scrip and the lands alone.?

For the present, however, and for some twenty years to come, these advantages existed only on paper, and even on paper they were not regarded as impressive by any one except Mr. Cornell. If Mr. Cornell’s estimate of the ultimate value of the lands was too conservative, his estimate of the immediate difficulties of carrying the enterprise was, characteristically, far too optimistic. He was misled in part by Mr. Woodward, who professed a great interest in Mr. Cornell’s noble educational plans, but whose real interest was only, with Mr. Cornell’s aid, to make a fortune for himself. But he was also misled by an excessive confidence in his own judgment, and by the essential honesty which disposed him to be extremely casual in his business methods. The enterprise in which he employed Mr. Woodward as his agent was a difficult and complicated one, involving the handling, it was estimated, of some two million dollars; and yet we look in vain for a formal contract defining what either principal or agent should render or receive. The two men appear to have drifted into an ill-defined gentleman’s agreement, in which there was no intention on either side to de-
The Cornell University: Opened, 1868

cceive, but only every opportunity to do so, nor any wish for misunderstanding, but only the remotest chance that it would not occur. When it did occur it was so complete and baffling that thirteen hundred and eighty-eight pages of testimony were required to determine whether, and in respect to what matters, there had ever been a meeting of minds between principal and agent. In the end it was decided that that there had been, and that Mr. Cornell owed his agent a good many thousand dollars more than he thought he did.

What Mr. Cornell really owed Mr. Woodward for his services no one will ever know. But the melancholy fact is that with more careful inquiry at the beginning he could have dispensed with the services of Mr. Woodward altogether. The real work of selecting and locating the lands was done by Mr. Herbert C. Putnam, a clerk in the land office at Chippewa Falls, and after a few years Mr. Cornell learned this fact and thereafter dealt directly with Mr. Putnam. But apart from the money wasted on Mr. Woodward, the necessary expense of carrying the enterprise, even with the most prudent management, was far more than Mr. Cornell had realized or could afford; so that in 1867, having purchased and located 511,068 scrip acres, he found it impossible to purchase any more. At that time virtually nothing had been realized by the sale of the lands; and when the university opened in 1868 no one but Mr. Cornell, unless it might be John McGraw and Henry W. Sage, had much interest or any real faith in the grand idea. Certainly President Andrew D. White, a majority of the trustees, and so far as is known all of the faculty would have been glad to sell the lands for whatever they might bring and so get rid of a bad business. Nevertheless Mr. Cornell, encumbered by commitments too casually undertaken, but inspired by an indomitable faith in his grand idea, insisted with admirable if sometimes irritating stubbornness, and with a good measure of success, on holding the lands for a better price. To Mr. Cornell, therefore, must go the initial credit of providing Cornell University, in spite of
Cornell University: Founders and the Founding

the best efforts of its trustees, its president, and its faculty, with an endowment far larger than any one had originally dreamed of.9

Since Mr. Cornell and Mr. White had taken the leading part in getting the university incorporated, it was taken for granted by the board of trustees that they should take a leading part in organizing it; and as Mr. Cornell was commonly deferred to in matters of business and finance, Mr. White was commonly deferred to in matters of educational policy. Mr. White was accordingly made chairman of the Committee on Plan of Organization; and on November 21, 1866, he presented to the Board a report of forty-eight pages, which was adopted, and finally put into effect with such slight modifications as may be noted in the first General Announcement issued in 1868.10

The report was based on three general ideas: first, that agriculture and the mechanic arts should be regarded as "the peers of any other" subject; second, that the conventional liberal-arts course should be extended to include history, political science, and modern literature; and, third, that students should be given, in respect to choice of studies and in respect to conduct and discipline, a greater degree of freedom than was then customary in most colleges.

In accord with these principles, the subjects of study were organized in two divisions—"The Division of Special Sciences and Arts" and "The Division of Science, Literature and the Arts." The first division comprised nine "departments"—Agriculture; Mechanic Arts; Civil Engineering; Commerce and Trade; Mining; Medicine; Law; Jurisprudence, Political Science, and History; and Education. These departments were, so to speak, in the nature of potential professional schools, designed to fit students for the particular profession indicated, although the department of Jurisprudence was especially recommended for training political leaders in the state and nation, who had hitherto been lacking, the report said, in "the commonest rudiments of knowledge." The second division was intended to replace the traditional
college course. Instead of the single required classical course, there were to be three "general" courses, a "science" course, and an "optional" course. The three general courses were variations of the conventional classical course, permitting the substitution of German and French for Greek and Latin, and including a good deal more of history, political science, and modern literature. The science course was designed as preliminary training for those who expected to become proficient in science, engineering, or agriculture. The optional course was a concession to those who were not sure what they wanted, and accordingly permitted them, as one may say, to close their eyes and choose three "subjects of study from all those pursued in the university."

The courses of instruction thus offered called ultimately for forty-six professors—twenty-four in the first division, twenty-two in the second; but for a beginning it was thought that twenty-six would be sufficient. These should naturally be the best obtainable, since the quality of a university depended fundamentally on the quality of its faculty. Unfortunately, the best were not to be had on permanent tenure at any price. "To take Agassiz permanently from Cambridge," the report said, "we must outbid the Emperor of the French, who has recently offered the most tempting prizes in vain." This being the case, Mr. White's happy idea was to secure as permanent, or "resident," professors the most promising young men to be had—at salaries ranging from $1,000 to $2,500—and trust them to achieve distinction; but also to invite men who were already distinguished, such as Agassiz or James Russell Lowell, to give courses of lectures for a term or a year as temporary or "non-resident" professors. This would enable students, faculty, and the citizens of Ithaca to hear many of the most famous scholars in the country, to their own great advantage and to the enhanced prestige of the university. To begin with, the report suggested sixteen resident and ten non-resident professors.

The report discussed at length a great variety of other matters. It touched upon the desirability of providing remunerative manual
Cornell University: Founders and the Founding

labor for students; fixed the student's fees at $25 per year; opposed the dormitory system; suggested that if the citizens of Ithaca charged too much for board the university might build a dining hall and lease it to the students; emphasized the importance of obtaining, for the faculty, men of "general culture" and good manners, although a few eccentrics might be tolerated on account of special distinction in scholarship; declared roundly that "the university will not tolerate feuds in the faculty"; made much of establishing close personal and social relations between members of the faculty and students; and made even more of the library as an indispensable part of any great university. The report closed by laying down, as a general test and touchstone of success in all their efforts, the principle enunciated by Wilhelm von Humboldt and elaborated by John Stuart Mill: "The great and leading principle is the absolute and essential importance of human development in its richest diversity."

Nothing was said in the report about the admission of women. Both Mr. Cornell and Mr. White approved of it in principle, but many of the trustees did not, and in any case it was thought to be out of the question until proper buildings could be provided for them. For a fleeting moment there seemed to be a bare chance that this might be done at once. On April 9, 1866, Mr. Henry Wells wrote to Ezra Cornell asking where he could get a good quality of brick for a building in which, as he said, "I intend to educate wives for your boys, allowing they bring good recommendations." Four days later Mr. Cornell replied—very specifically about the brick; but then took the liberty, as an old friend, to make a suggestion; which was that, since there were already too many small colleges, it would be better all round if Mr. Wells, "instead of building one more college at Aurora," should "build at Ithaca the female department of Cornell University." The hope that this might come to pass—it must have been pretty thin at best—was extinguished on May 22, when Mr. Wells gave his reasons for preferring to build a female seminary at Aurora.11

120
The Cornell University: Opened, 1868

In his report on Plan of Organization Mr. White raised the question of whether the ideal American university needed to have a president, decided, for good or ill, that it did, and recommended that the Board of Trustees should proceed, at an early day, to choose one. But it seems that without Mr. White's knowledge the question had already been decided; for almost immediately after Mr. White's report had been accepted, the board voted unanimously that "the Hon. Andrew D. White of Syracuse" should be the president of the university.

This action, Mr. White says in his Autobiography, came to him as a complete surprise. If it seems to us a little incredible that the action should have surprised any one, no doubt the reason is that, looking back on the history of the institution, we find it difficult to suppose that any one else could have been thought of, much less seriously considered, as first president of Cornell University. But in human affairs nothing is predetermined until it has occurred; and in 1866 it was not a foregone conclusion that Mr. White should be chosen. Several other men were in fact thought of in that connection. There is some reason to believe that the Rev. Amos Brown, President of the People's College, thought of himself. Mr. White had various men in mind. He had heard a prominent Massachusetts judge mentioned for the position, and would, he confessed, prefer him "to a clergyman," but thought rather better of Governor Andrews, who had recently declined the presidency of Antioch College. But the man he preferred to all others was Martin Anderson, President of Rochester University, whom he recommended strongly to Mr. Cornell. To all of Mr. White's suggestions in the matter Mr. Cornell listened, but no doubt said little. On one occasion, however, he did go so far as to say that he had a candidate of his own, but preferred not to say who it was until the next meeting of the Board of Trustees; and at the next meeting he presented the name of Andrew D. White in "a very earnest speech."

I think it unlikely, therefore, that Mr. White could have been
altogether unprepared for the action of the Board in electing him president of the university. Whether surprised or not, it seems that he nevertheless protested against it, and finally accepted the position, as he says, with “the distinct statement that I should be regarded simply as a locum tenens . . . until some man more fit for it could be secured.” Reasons for this attitude he had in plenty: he was too young and had not the necessary experience; he was already overburdened with affairs—was at the time a professor in the University of Michigan, State Senator, president of a Syracuse bank and director in two other banks, a director in the New York Central and Lake Shore Railroads and in the Albemarle and Chesapeake Canal, and the executor of two large estates. Besides, so he said, whatever ambitions he had (and in this he was supported by his wife) were “in the direction of accepting a professorship which had been tendered me at Yale.”

So he said. And throughout his life he said repeatedly that he was a scholar, and that his greatest desire was to be relieved of business and public affairs, and retire to the peace and seclusion of his study where he could do his proper work. I have no doubt that Mr. White believed, in connection with all this, what he said when he said it. But I am under no such compulsion; and I note that he never declined an offer of any prominent official position, unless it might be a tentative offer—which was in fact not pressed—to be a candidate for Governor of New York, and even this he did not absolutely decline. Mr. White said himself that his chief ambition in life was to aid in founding a great American university; and I cannot think that anything ever pleased him more than to be chosen the first president of Cornell, or ever gave him more satisfaction in later life than to feel that he, no less than Mr. Cornell, or even more than Mr. Cornell, was the effective creator of Cornell University—nothing, that is, unless it might be his appointment as Minister to Germany, where he remained three years hobnobbing with Bismarck and receiving the applause of German universities, in spite of repeated requests from Ithaca
that he should by all means return and take up his duties as
president, because the university was in a fair way to be ruined
by constant and resounding clashes between the rigid conscience
of Vice-President Russel and the impervious mind of Henry W.
Sage.

Andrew D. White was not, in the modern sense, a scholar, but
what used to be called "a gentleman and a scholar"—a very fine
gentleman indeed, and in the sense intended a very fine scholar.
But scholarship was not his profession. He was essentially a cru-
sader, by profession a promoter of good causes, primarily inter-
ested in changing the world rather than in understanding it. If
he had been taken at his word, and left severely alone to the
peace and seclusion of his study, he would inevitably, in no long
time, have been bored by it; the strain occasioned by the silence
and lack of bustle would have aggravated his dyspepsia and his
sleeplessness, so that he would of necessity have welcomed, for
its sedative effect, the first offer to serve on the busy board of no
matter what railroad or canal company, or, all else failing, would
have found relief in rushing out to organize something—perhaps
a society for the promotion of activities and preservation of ex-
citements. Ambitious as he was to aid in founding a great Ameri-
can university, and being neither unintelligent nor shrinkingly
modest, I cannot think that he did not know, down in his bones,
that he was destined by circumstances and his own interests and
abilities to be the first president of Cornell University.

After his election, at all events, we hear nothing more from
him about the *locum tenens* business or the Yale professorship,
or about anything at all except the pre-eminently important busi-
ness of organizing the new university, of which no aspect, human
or otherwise, was to him indifferent. We find him writing innu-
merable letters, sending any number of telegrams, and interview-
ing all sorts of people in the effort to further that business. We
find that he has a finger in every pie, and definite and passionate
convictions about every matter, whether it be the best type of
Cornell University: Founders and the Founding

mind for teaching English literature, or the best type of lens for the great telescope, or the high importance of at once securing the Anthon classical collection, or the proper level for the water tables of the main buildings. We find him suffering from sleeplessness and often on the verge of a complete nervous breakdown—but never more than just on the verge. And so I think we may conclude that he cared for nothing so much as for Cornell University, that he delighted in nothing so much as in being its first president and in working day and night to make it fair and fine. And for my part I also conclude that, for all his frail body and fits of nervous irritability, he must in fact have had a constitution with the flexible toughness of whang leather, besides vitality enough for three ordinary men.

Nothing engaged Mr. White more in these days, or was thought by him to be of so much importance, as the selection of the first faculty. "Better a splendid and complete faculty in a barn," he maintained, "than an insufficient faculty in a palace." 16 Not content with letters of recommendation, he went to New York, New Haven, and Cambridge to consult personally and confidentially with the leading professors about the most promising young men in the various fields of study. While at Cambridge he visited Agassiz at his cottage at Nahant, and had with him long and fruitful conversations "regarding the merits of different candidates." Information obtained in this way, he said, was worth more than "cartloads of credentials"; and to make still more sure he always insisted, if it was at all possible, on having a personal interview with the candidate before making an appointment.18

The first promising young men to be nosed out in this fashion—or at least the first to be formally appointed, February 13, 1867—were Evan W. Evans, in mathematics, and William C. Russel, in modern languages. September 25, of the same year, four additional appointments were made—Burt G. Wilder in natural history; Eli W. Blake in physics; G. C. Caldwell in agricultural chemistry; and James M. Crafts in general chemistry.17 Young
Mr. Wilder, a favorite pupil of Agassiz, apparently took a greater interest in Cornell affairs than the others. In accepting his appointment, he let Mr. White know, in a formal and somewhat elegant English style, that all he had heard of the Cornell University, and of Mr. White himself, "assures me that with the position thus offered is given an opportunity to work in science more than ordinarily advantageous." In November following his appointment he came to Ithaca, was taken by Mr. Cornell for a ride in his dilapidated buggy, and expressed himself delighted with the place and the people, especially with Mr. Cornell, of whom he could not "say enough in admiration." He felt sure, notwithstanding "the smallness of the salary" (which required him to ask for an advance the first year) that a man who could not do good work under such conditions could not do it at all. But one small thing gave him some concern—what type of seats had they planned for the class rooms? He was convinced that "the easier and more comfortable the seats, the closer is the attention and the more rapid the progress of the pupil." He therefore took the liberty of making a rough sketch, in a letter to Mr. White, of the proper type of seat, which had a cushion in the back of it pliable to the natural curve of the spine, and of the improper type of seat, which had only a rigid, unaccommodating bend in it.¹⁸

From Professor Caldwell, after his appointment, Mr. White obtained information about three other promising young men—Messrs. Miles, Prentiss, and Rothrick. Professor Caldwell thought Mr. Miles the ablest of the three, although he perhaps depended "too much upon a text book"; but he thought Mr. Prentiss a first-class man too, and "more agreeable and elegant than Mr. Rothrick." It seems that Mr. Miles, though tempted, declined an offer, so that the "agreeable and elegant" Prentiss was in fact appointed. From Cambridge Mr. Cornell and Mr. White heard good things of a certain James Oliver, who "for character and purity of life is unsurpassed," and sure to have a great influence on the young, being himself most agreeable and always ready

¹⁸
Cornell University: Founders and the Founding

to do good." 19 Young Mr. Oliver was not appointed at this time, but the mistake was remedied later, and for many years James Oliver was the delight of his colleagues, and always ready to do them good, one favorite way being to provide them with the most engaging examples of professorial absent-mindedness ever recorded on any campus. Another unsuccessful candidate, recommended by Moses Coit Tyler, was Hiram Corson, who much desired to come to Cornell because of the prospect that the English language and literature would there "be given the prominence which its transcendent importance demands." 20 Mr. Corson also was appointed later, and also became a center for the collection of myths.

And so with infinite care, but with some mistakes, the first faculty was selected. Yet with every effort to hasten matters it was found that the time allowed for organizing the university was too short, so that it was necessary to get, by legislative act, permission to postpone the opening for one year—to October, 1868. 21 Even so, as late as February 13, 1868, only ten resident professors had been appointed. Meantime Mr. White had been exerting his persuasive charm to induce the settled and the distinguished to accept temporary appointments. At the close of a letter to Mr. Cornell he announces some good news — "P.S. I have secured James Russell Lowell, the foremost literary man in the United States, as one of our non-resident professors." 22 Five other men were likewise beguiled—Louis Agassiz in natural history; Fred Holbrook in agriculture; James Hall in geology; George W. Curtis in recent literature; and Theodore W. Dwight in constitutional law. All six were appointed by the board on February 13, 1868. It was voted by the board that the term of office, unless otherwise determined, should be two years; but Mr. White, allowing always for human frailty even among the distinguished, got a rider inserted to the effect that the agreement might be terminated at any time "for delinquencies." 23

Mr. White was one of those fortunate if sometimes irritating
The Cornell University: Opened, 1868

persons who are predisposed to think that men or things chosen by themselves must be of the best—any doubt on that score being a bar to their going ahead and being right with undiminished confidence. He was therefore well pleased with the men he had chosen for his faculty. He did not, however, go so far as to suppose that these excellent young men, housed in Mr. Cornell’s barn, even with the prize bulls removed, would make a “complete university.” Additional buildings were necessary; and in the matter of buildings Mr. Cornell was also concerned. Mr. Cornell had been interested in the construction of Cascadilla Place, originally designed as a water cure; and now, as the principal stockholder, he was instrumental in acquiring the gray, massive, prison-like structure as a university dormitory for housing faculty and students. But the main buildings were to be located between the two gorges. As a site for the buildings, Mr. White rather preferred the lower level (no doubt because better adapted for a quadrangle) where the Baker Dormitories now are; but in deference to Mr. Cornell the present site, in spite of its uneven surface and very likely because of the more “magnificent view” afforded, was chosen. For the general plan of the buildings Mr. White was responsible. His idea was a quadrangle, with the main buildings around it, and other buildings to come later located in attractive disarray elsewhere. The architect, Frederick Law Olmsted, who was consulted, protested strongly against this plan, on the ground that it was too conventional and did not sufficiently allow for future expansion.24 His idea was something less obvious—a plan that would aim at “unity in variety.” But Mr. White had too long dreamed of “quadrangles as beautiful as those of Jesus and St. John” to abandon his idea; and so he had his way, and we have the quadrangle—which is well enough. If in the arrangement of the other buildings no great unity is discernible, the buildings themselves at least cannot be said to lack variety.

The plan called for the immediate erection of two buildings on the west side of what would ultimately be the quadrangle—the
Cornell University: Founders and the Founding

present Morrill and White (then called the South and North University) Halls, with a more imposing structure between them to be erected later. Mr. Cornell's role was to scrutinize the estimates for construction, which he commonly found too high (and maybe the result of collusion), and to supervise the work in progress, which he commonly thought was slower than it need be. His chief aim was always to keep expenses down; so much so that he thought it hardly worth while to fill in the ravine sufficiently to bring White Hall on a level with Morrill—a decision that outraged Mr. White's sense of architectural fitness, and would, moreover, have given to the quadrangle something of the aspect of a shoot-the-chutes. "Now I beg of you," Mr. White writes in great distress, "asking it as a favor, that the water tables be put absolutely on the same line... We are building for centuries and should not subject ourselves to the charge of stupidity from those who come after... You had your way about the site—yield to the majority in regard to this slight matter of the level." Mr. Cornell must have yielded—a good deal at least; for although the water tables of Morrill and White are not, judging by the naked eye, absolutely on the same line, the "stupidity," that is the difference, is not glaring. So the work was pushed on; but as late as February, 1868, although Morrill was virtually finished, White Hall had as yet been raised only to the first storey.

With the buildings unfinished and the faculty still far from complete, Mr. White was preparing, late in 1867, to spend three months in Europe for the purchase of books and apparatus, when suddenly, to his excited imagination, disaster loomed on the horizon. A constitutional convention was then sitting at Albany, and an amendment to the report of the educational committee had been moved, to the effect that the revenues of the College Land Scrip Fund should be given to Cornell University each year only if specifically appropriated by the legislature—the implication of the amendment and the intention of its movers being that the legislature might, at any annual session, for good reason, refuse...
to appropriate it to the university. The amendment was supported by the friends of the People’s and Genesee colleges and of Rochester University, the leader being Mr. Angus McDonald, former attorney for Genesee College. In the debates the history of the struggle for the Cornell charter in 1865 was reviewed, and the Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser, and other newspapers hostile to Cornell University, made this the occasion to exhibit Mr. Cornell once more as an unscrupulous land-grabber whose chief aim was to rob the state for the enrichment of the Cornell family. Mr. White, much alarmed, sent telegrams and wrote letters to many people, and interviewed many more, convincing some but finding others “shaky,” or entirely “ignorant of the issues involved.” The “malignant,” as he said, was McDonald, whom “no argument could reach for the reason that he kept raising new questions and befogging the whole matter.” Fortunately, the cause of the university was ably defended in the convention, especially by Judge Folger, who offered a substitute to the amendment to the effect that the revenues of the College Land Scrip Fund should be appropriated to Cornell University “so long as said university shall fully . . . perform the conditions of the act of the legislature establishing said institution.” The substitute amendment was adopted, the storm subsided, and in April, 1868, Mr. White left for Europe.

In Europe Mr. White had—there is no other word for it—the time of his life. His long and frequent letters to Mr. Cornell, written in such a rush as to be scarcely legible and barely literate, have something of the quality of breathless lyrics. “Have tried,” he writes, “to shake off thoughts of the university, but ‘distance lends enchantment to the view,’ and I can think of nothing else.” He was hardly settled in Paris before reporting: “Have begun my book purchases, and am postponing as to apparatus”; expect soon to investigate agricultural and technical schools; “will have an interview with the Minister of Public Instruction and some of the professors here”; have written to Professor Russel and Mr.
Cornell University: Founders and the Founding

Fiske for a meeting; also to arrange for an interview with young Sibley, and "if he is at all the man for any of our professorships I shall 'gobble him up’"; have decided to "go personally and make the purchases of apparatus and chemicals at Heidelberg, Darmstadt, Erfurt, and Berlin." All in one letter. And so with every letter—a dozen things done or to be done. And he does it all, and from time to time sends home great packing cases filled with books or apparatus (for which there is, of course, not enough money, more of which, of course, he accordingly asks for and obtains from Mr. Cornell). Not the least of his triumphs was that, in England, he managed to "gobble up" Professor Goldwin Smith, and Dr. James Law, a highly recommended young man in veterinary science. And so he returns, flushed with success, and pleased more than a little when it was jocosely said that he had brought back, as part of his European spoils, "an Oxford professor and a Scotch horse doctor."

When Mr. White returned from Europe there were less than three months to run before the great event for which three years of unremitting effort had been a preparation—the opening of the university in October, 1868. It was a time of belated reminders of last things to be done, of last-minute activities, conveying an impression of every one so rushing about that nothing seemed to be accomplished. When the students began to arrive, at all events, it could not be said that anything was really ready. White Hall had been raised only to the second storey; the shops and laboratory, although usable, were not finished; and even Morrill Hall still lacked doors to some of the rooms, and such like convenient accessories. Of the twenty-six professors, a number were not officially appointed until the day before the opening, and accordingly were not in Ithaca. Those who were on the ground were busy unpacking the cases of books and apparatus that had arrived, and wondering where others that should have arrived had got to. But more than anything else they were wondering what
they could do with the quite unexpected number of students that had suddenly descended upon them.\textsuperscript{30}

They had wanted students, of course, and had taken care to make known the advantages of the new university. Mr. Cornell had sent the first General Announcement to some three hundred prominent persons, and to more than a thousand newspapers; had also, much to Mr. White's dismay, published an article in the New York \textit{Tribune} stating that students desiring to pay for their education while getting it could do so by giving half of their time to manual labor for the university.\textsuperscript{31} But what no one quite realized was that the university had been advertised in other and more effective ways than these. For three years it had been heralded or denounced throughout the country as a novel and somewhat questionable "experiment," as "the Cornell idea"—an institution in which any person could find instruction in any subject, and in which professors would be appointed and students welcomed whatever religion they might profess, or even if they professed no religion at all. The university had become well known for the friends, and still better known for the enemies it had made; had become, in short, famous or infamous as the case might be for its "radicalism"—its frank and publicly announced departure from conventional academic and religious ideas.

For these reasons the professors on the ground found themselves, at the end of September, saddled with the largest entering class ever admitted to any American college up to that time—\textit{412} students: more than twice as many as could be provided with lodgings, together with the professors themselves, in the dormitory known as Cascadilla Place; and more than three times as many as could be conveniently taught in the class rooms available. Nevertheless, the professors on the ground, all sold on the "Cornell idea," got down to it with good will and determination. Entrance examinations were held in the dimly lighted basement of the Cornell Library. One professor made a brave show of teach-
Cornell University: Founders and the Founding

ing the French language to a class of two hundred; the department of geology was confined to a single room adjoining one of the coal cellars; and demonstrations in natural history were conducted in the vacant space next to a furnace. The library, in Morrill Hall, could not be used as a library, being in constant demand for holding recitations; and in any case, whatever it might be used for, it suffered the disadvantage of being always permeated with the variegated odors that seeped up from the basement, where the chemists prepared their instructive stenchers.32

Whether, for the students, the promise of the “Cornell idea” was sufficiently attractive to outweigh its present inconveniences, I cannot say. One student at least—Mr. J. Y. Davis from Auburn—liked it well enough. He liked his room, nine by twelve feet, in Cascadilla Place, because it gave him a magnificent view, because it was exactly opposite the lift where he got his coal, and nearly opposite the elegant dining room where excellent meals were served—four kinds of meat with fish, and pie for dessert; he liked marching in military order to and from the campus; liked the chimes, the largest bell reminding him of the one on the big factory at Auburn; he liked the reception given on inauguration day in the Cornell Library, where the ladies appeared “in full dress costume with the Grecian bend”—it was “like the Bazaar except for the booths.” Mr. Davis liked it all very much, but admitted that “as yet everything is in an uproar and confusion.” 33 Maybe he liked it for that reason. Maybe students like uproar and confusion when there is a chance that something new and interesting may come out of it.

The uproar and confusion probably died down a little on Wednesday, October 7—the day set for the inaugural ceremonies, for which elaborate preparations had been made by the faculty and the citizens of Ithaca. The citizens, for their part and for the evening, had arranged a “Jubilee” in the streets and a grand reception in the Cornell Library assembly room. The faculty had arranged for the inaugural ceremonies in the assembly room in
The Cornell University: Opened, 1868

the morning, and in the afternoon for the formal presentation of
the chime of bells donated to the university by Miss Jenny Mc-
Graw. The weather, no doubt by some special dispensation of
Providence, was fine, although a high wind was blowing. At
ten in the morning the assembly room, gaily decorated, was filled
with students and faculty, citizens of the town, and distinguished
visitors invited for the occasion. The ceremonies began with an
address by Mr. Cornell—a very brief address, as we might guess;
brief, but still the most pregnant address of the day, since it de-
veloped in simple terms the thesis: "The individual is better, so-
ciety is better, and the state is better, for the culture of its citi-
zens; therefore we desire to extend the means for the culture of all." Following Mr. Cornell's address, the Lieutenant-Governor, Stew-
art L. Woodford, administered the oath of office to Mr. White as
President of the University, and then placed in his hands a casket
of carved oak containing the charter and the seal of the uni-
versity and the keys of the buildings.

Mr. White's address, carefully prepared, was a good one, but
inevitably lacked the virtue of brevity. Fortunately, following the
practice of old-fashioned divines, he itemized and italicized his
main points, which were comprised under five heads: Founda-
tion Ideas, Formative Ideas, Governmental Ideas, Permeating and
Crowning Ideas, and Eliminated Ideas. Under these heads he set
forth, with a wealth of illustrative comment, the aims of the uni-
versity—the union of practical and liberal education, special em-
phasis on science, the close relation between the university and the
school system of the state, the promotion of advanced graduate
studies, the establishment of a variety of courses of study, and a
greater freedom for the students, in respect to conduct and choice
of studies, than had been customary hitherto. The Permeating and
Crowning Idea was "to develop the individual man, . . . as a
being intellectual, moral, and religious; and to bring the force
of the individual to bear on society." The ideas to be eliminated
were, first, the idea of the pedants—the gerund-grinders who
Cornell University: Founders and the Founding

“teach young men by text book to parse”; and, second, the idea of the Philistines—the men for whom “Greed is God, and Money-bags his prophet.” The exercises were closed by an address, on behalf of the faculty, by Professor W. C. Russel; and another, on behalf of the Regents, by Chancellor V. L. Pruyn. The audience must have sat there—I have counted the words—for three and a half mortal hours.35

In the afternoon “an immense crowd,” still unappeased, assembled on the hill for the formal presentation of the chime of bells, then housed in a wooden tower erected somewhere near the entrance to the present library.36 To reach this spot one could drive up past the cemetery to Mr. Cornell’s house, and from there climb the steep ascent; or one could drive from the corner of State and Aurora up the Catskill Turnpike, turning left on Eddy Road, to Cascadilla Place, and from there walk across the new wooden bridge over the gorge, climb the sharp rise where the present gymnasium is, clamber down and up the unbridged ravine just north of the present law building, and follow the path along a rail fence, enclosing a cornfield to the right, to the bell tower. From the bell tower one could see Morrill Hall, rising stark and garish on the hillside, and beyond it the half-finished walls of White Hall, and to the right of that the wooden building called the shops. Between these two buildings and Morrill Hall one could see a ravine six or eight feet deep, bridged by two dirt causeways—one leading from Morrill to White, the other from Morrill to the shops. Just beyond the shops were some rickety cow barns. Such was the outward, visible aspect of the Cornell University in October, 1868.37

The bells were formally presented, on behalf of Jenny McGraw, by Francis M. Finch, but the principal address was delivered by George William Curtis. It was what in those days people loved to hear, an oration—what was called a “notable effort,” the requirement in all such displays being that the phrasing should be studied and rehearsed, and that the sentiments
should be edifying. Mr. Curtis met these requirements admirably, especially in his peroration, which was notable for nothing so much as for the brilliance of its imagery, unless it might be the irrelevance of its ideas. "Here is our university, our Cornell, like the man-of-war, all its sails set, its rigging full and complete from stem to stern, its crew embarked, its passengers all ready and aboard; and even as I speak to you, even as the autumn sun sets in the west, it begins to glide over the waves as it goes forth rejoicing, every stitch of canvas spread, all its colors flying, its musical bells ringing, its heartstrings beating with hope and joy."  

Mr. White, listening to this notable effort, looking out over the ragged cornfield and the rough pasture land and noting the unfinished buildings and the piled-up rubbish, experienced a momentary and unaccustomed sense of depression. No words, he felt, could fail more completely to express the reality. The reality had been expressed by Mr. Cornell, in his address in the morning, with blunt brevity. A friend of his, he said, had recently come to Ithaca, had looked over the university, and had reported: "I did not find a single thing finished." But, said Mr. Cornell, "such is not the entertainment we invited you to. We did not expect to have a single thing finished. . . . It is the commencement that we have now in hand."

Not a single thing finished! It was indeed true, if we have in mind only the outward, material properties of the university. The "lofty clock-tower, looking proudly down," the "quadrangles as beautiful as those of Jesus and St. John," any building as satisfactory as Goldwin Smith Hall, even one as formidable impressively and curiously pinnacled as Sage College—all of these, so long dreamed of by Mr. White, were indeed unfinished, were as yet not even begun. Nevertheless, on that seventh of October, 1868, something was finished. The idea of Cornell University was finished, and Mr. Cornell had himself, in his address in the morning, expressed it with admirable precision.
Cornell University: Founders and the Founding

I hope we have laid the foundation of an institution which shall combine practical with liberal education, which shall fit the youth of our country for the professions, the farms, the mines, the manufactories, for the investigations of science, and for mastering all the practical questions of life with success and honor.

This was what was finished on October 7, 1868—this idea of Cornell University. Seventy-five years later there is nothing we could wish to add to it, or anything we could wish to take away. And it is after all the idea that was then, as it is now, the important thing, since it was and is the source of all the rest. In response to this idea the first crude buildings were erected, the first books and apparatus were collected, and the first faculty was assembled. In response to this idea the first students came to be enrolled. And on this seventy-fifth anniversary we shall do well to remember that it is not the buildings however splendid, or the quadrangles however beautiful, but this idea conceived and brought to birth by Ezra Cornell and Andrew Dickson White—the idea of an institution freed from obligation to religious or political or social prejudice, and devoted to the advancement of knowledge in all fruitful fields of inquiry—it was this idea that then gave and still gives to Cornell University whatever high significance and enduring value it may have for learning and for the life of man.