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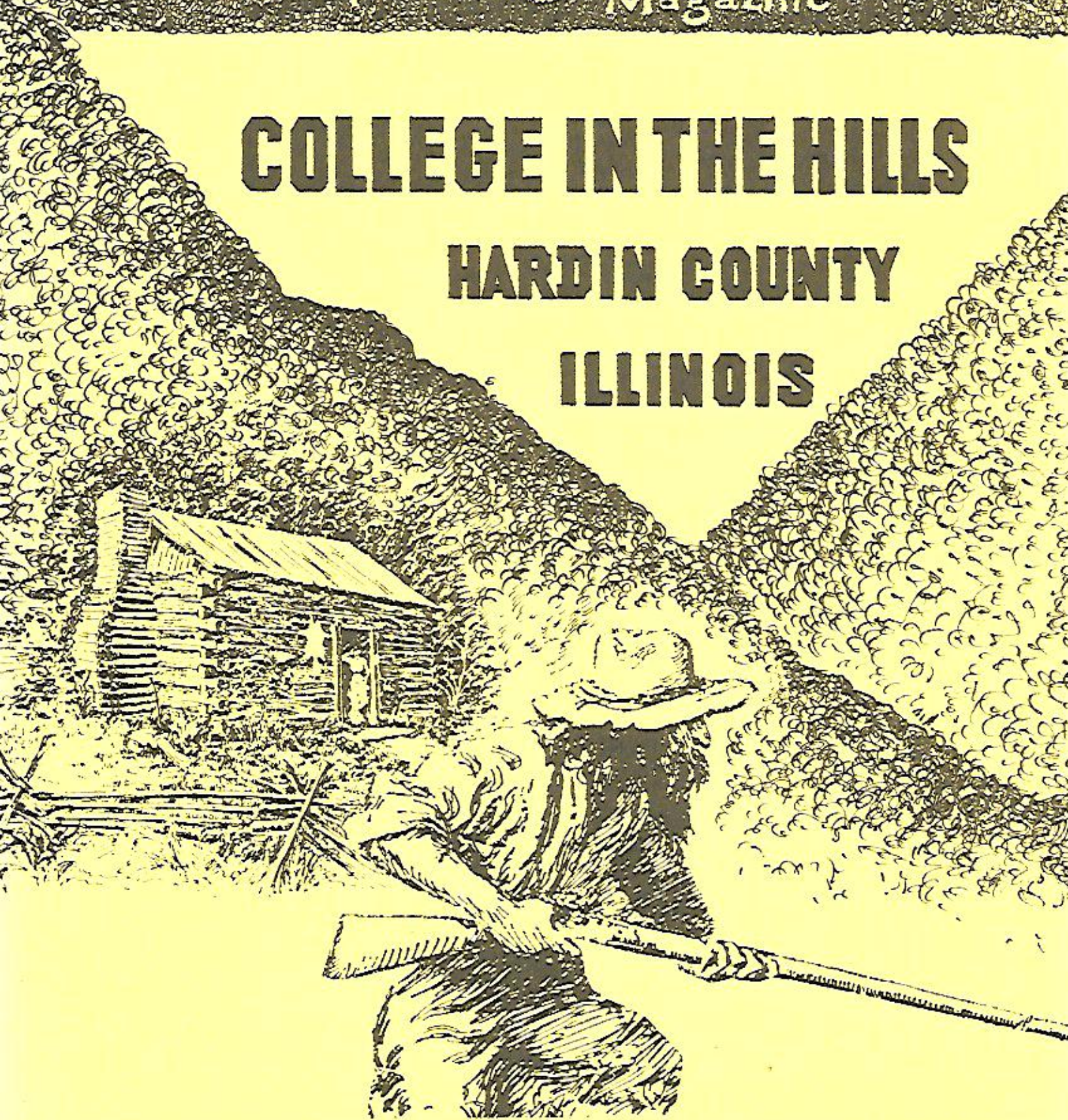
# Springhouse

Magazine

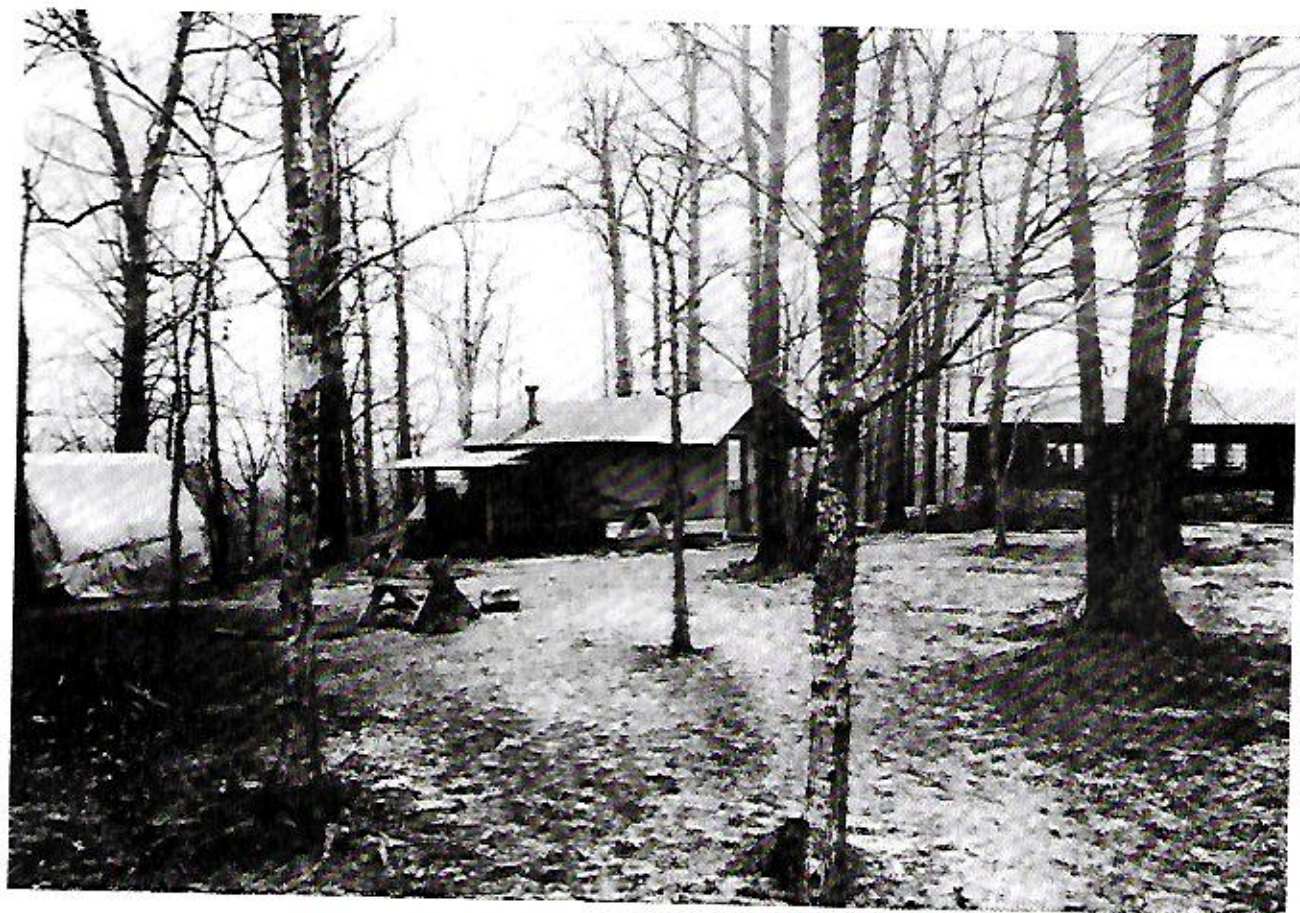
## COLLEGE IN THE HILLS

### HARDIN COUNTY

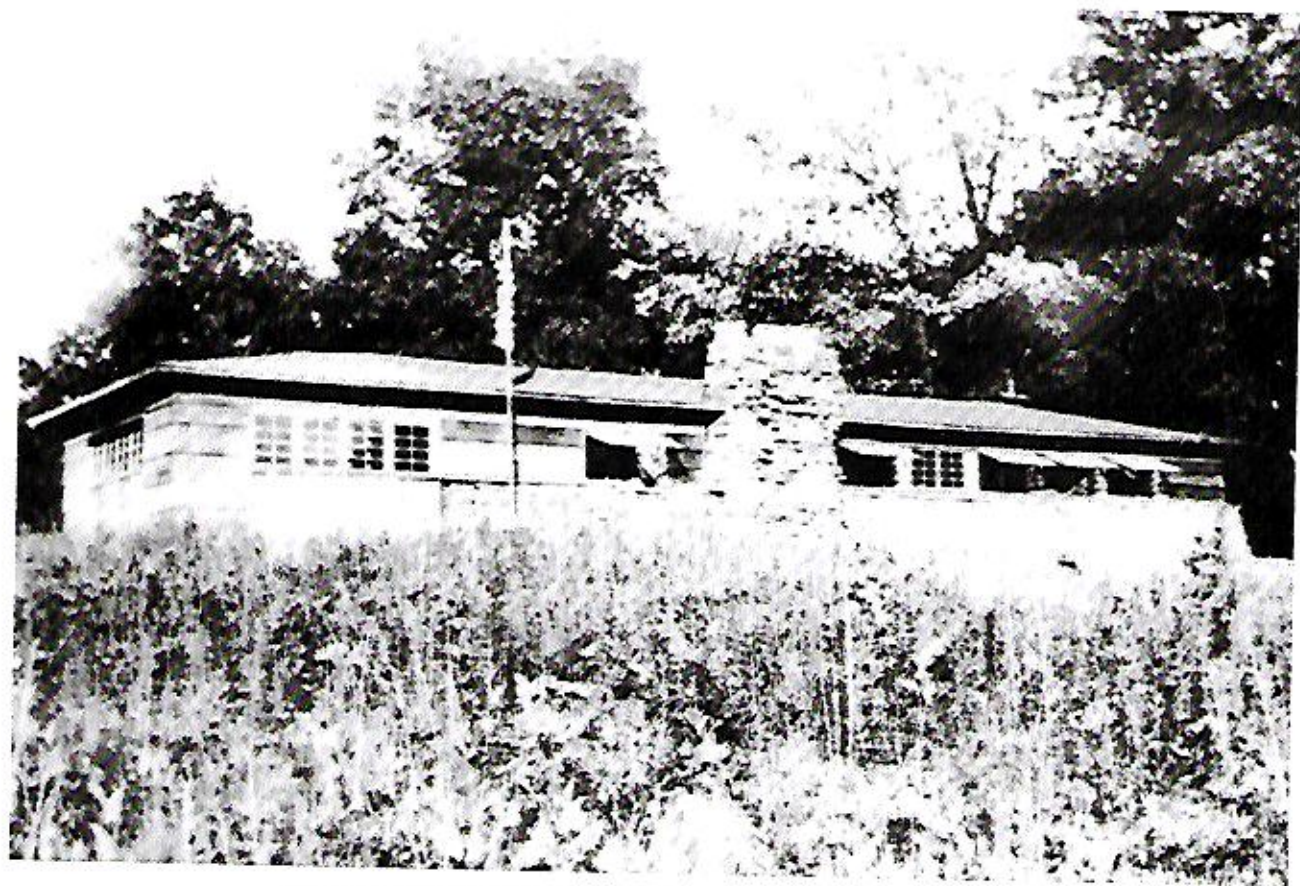
### ILLINOIS







*Primitive conditions prevailed in the College in the Hills.*



*Main building, College in the Hills, near Herod, Illinois, 1935.*



*This monograph was written in 1980, the year its author, Fred J. Armistead, died. Since then, Armistead's work has achieved a certain underground status in southeastern Illinois, often being described as a suppressed book. Not a book by any measure, it is an achievement worthy of publication, and Springhouse is pleased to publish it now.*

*Several years ago, Springhouse presented Mildred McCormick's two-part article about the College in the Hills. These, plus Armistead's monograph printed here, constitute the most extensive study of the curious and controversial school to appear in print. Even so, we have barely scratched the surface.*

*Again, the reader is urged to keep in mind the "present" of Fred J. Armistead's "The College in the Hills," is 1980, not 2001.*

*Springhouse thanks Mildred McCormick, Billy Beal, Bill Carr, James Carr, Brian DeNeal, Robert DeNeal, Carolyn Feazel, Andrew and Judy Hamp, Noel E. Hurford, David Koch, Herb J. Meyer, and Debra Tayes.*



## COLLEGE IN THE HILLS

# A Phenomenon of the Great Economic Depression

Fred J. Armistead

Fred J. Armistead is Emeritus Professor at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale. A native of Harrisburg, he has had a lifetime interest in southern Illinois history, the area's peoples, and their problems. He earned his A.M. at the University of Illinois-Urbana and his Ph.D. at the University of California-Berkeley where he wrote a historical study on the development of the Illinois junior high school for his dissertation. He is a member of the Saline County and Illinois State Historical Societies. This monograph was initially funded in part by SIUC.

DEDICATED to my wife, Marie, for she, too, has had a lifetime interest in the hill people of Hardin County and their struggles.

Penny Cent stood in the doorway of the College in the Hill's single large building and gazed at Hardin County's Ozark landscape. It was an area of natural beauty for "there are more kinds of trees in southern Illinois than in all of Europe."<sup>1</sup> Springtime, too, must have had its special attractions for him. "While there are as yet in this part (Shawnee National Forest) no azaleas or rhododendrons to festoon the hillside, the dogwood, redbuds and many of the pretty wildflowers will soon be blooming profusely all along the roadside."<sup>2</sup> It was in the middle 1930s and as an artist, Penny Cent could not fail to have noticed during the summer the vivid sunsets made more brilliant by the loess blown from the Great Plains' Dust Bowl hundreds of miles to the west.

Who was this urbane man with the strange name—obviously not his real one—and what caused him to be liv-

ing at this time in one of [the] most rural counties of Illinois? Or, in a broader context what were the historical events leading to the inception, brief existence, and demise of the College in the Hills?

### Targets of This Inquiry

Few places in Illinois would hold less promise of future development, even survival, for an institution of higher learning than the site selected for the College in the Hills. Lack of adequate financial support, paucity of a wide cultural environment, declining population in the area—all were bad omens. Yet, there must have been some assets beyond the apparent opportunities for sacrifice and service. Nevertheless, it was evident very soon that the human elements overshadowed the natural resources.

- ◆ What individuals thought of a college to be built in southern Illinois and what social forces motivated them?
- ◆ In general what kind of college did the founders envision and did they formulate any specific objectives for it?
- ◆ From what geographical areas did the college seek students and what type did it hope to attract?
- ◆ What were the financial organization of the college and its provisions for land, buildings, salaries, maintenance and expansion?
- ◆ Who were the faculty and outside advisers and their backgrounds?



- ◆ What proposed courses of study, including extra-curricular activities and community offerings, finally became operational?
- ◆ How did the southern Illinois community react to The College in the Hills?
- ◆ In retrospect what were the college's successes and failures?

### Constrictions of Date and Setting

Few tasks are harder for historian and reader alike than the one of delimitation. There is a great temptation to describe and interpret the College in the Hills as if it began and continued in existence today. This monograph can suggest only a few economic, social and physical restrictions in the southern Illinois of forty-odd years ago and leave them to the reader to fill the gaps for a more nearly complete history. For example, the Great Economic Depression was not confined to southern Illinois, but its effects seemed intensified there in lower prices, lower wages, lower standards of living. Transportation for the college was at a premium: the closest railroad was at Harrisburg and the only other connection link with the outside world was State Highway 34, known locally as "the hard road."

Surrounding land prices were unbelievably low. Officials of the College in the Hills contracted with W. C. Kane, an astute lawyer, bank director and business man of Harrisburg in 1934 to buy 38 acres for \$1000 or less than \$27 per acre for its campus. This price was not consonant [consistent?] with that paid by the federal government for acreage used in the Shawnee National Forest, which bracketed the College in the Hills geographically and chronologically. "...The Shawnee Purchase Unit was established October 1, 1933. The Shawnee National Forest was proclaimed September 6, 1939. The price of land during the 30's was one to three dollars per acre..."<sup>3</sup> Part of the higher price paid by the college may be explained by the fact that it was in a choice location of the county, a short distance east of State Highway 34 and on a secondary road west of the Karber's Ridge village. In contrast, the national forest land had undesirable tracts mixed with the better positions.

In such a rural setting Hardin County could not offer the stimulation or indirect support large towns or cities are assumed to give educational institutions. There was no town of 3000 population or over. Still there was no competing college nearby inside the state. Southern Illinois State Normal University (now Southern Illinois University) at Carbondale was 57 miles away, a distance magnified by the poor transportation of the area.

Table 1  
Early Staff and Backgrounds (1934)

Name	College or University Attended	Position or Teaching Areas At College in the Hills
Donald P. Brown	Northwestern (BA)*	President
Donald Monson	Northwestern	Business Manager and Architect
Astrid Aronson	Northwestern (BA)	College Secretary and Social Research
George Guemsey	Northwestern (BS)	Humanities
Mildred George	Ball State (BS), Northwestern * and Butler*	Speech
Harold Monson	St. Olaf College (BS) and Luther Seminary *	Speech
Penny Cent (or Penrod Centurion?)	Friedrich Wilhelm University, Berlin	Art
Thomas E. Garrison	Northwestern (BA)	Political Science
Nadia Naumann	Northwestern (BA)	Psychology, German
Richard F. Peterson	University of Illinois (BA) and Northwestern*	Psychology, Biology
* = Graduate Work		
Sources: College in the Hills, Summer Bulletin 1934 Hardin County Independent, June 14, 1934, p. 1 Evansville Press, September 29, 1935 Ibid., August 14, 1938, p. 10-C Letter to author, Astrid Aronson Monson, January 28, 1980		

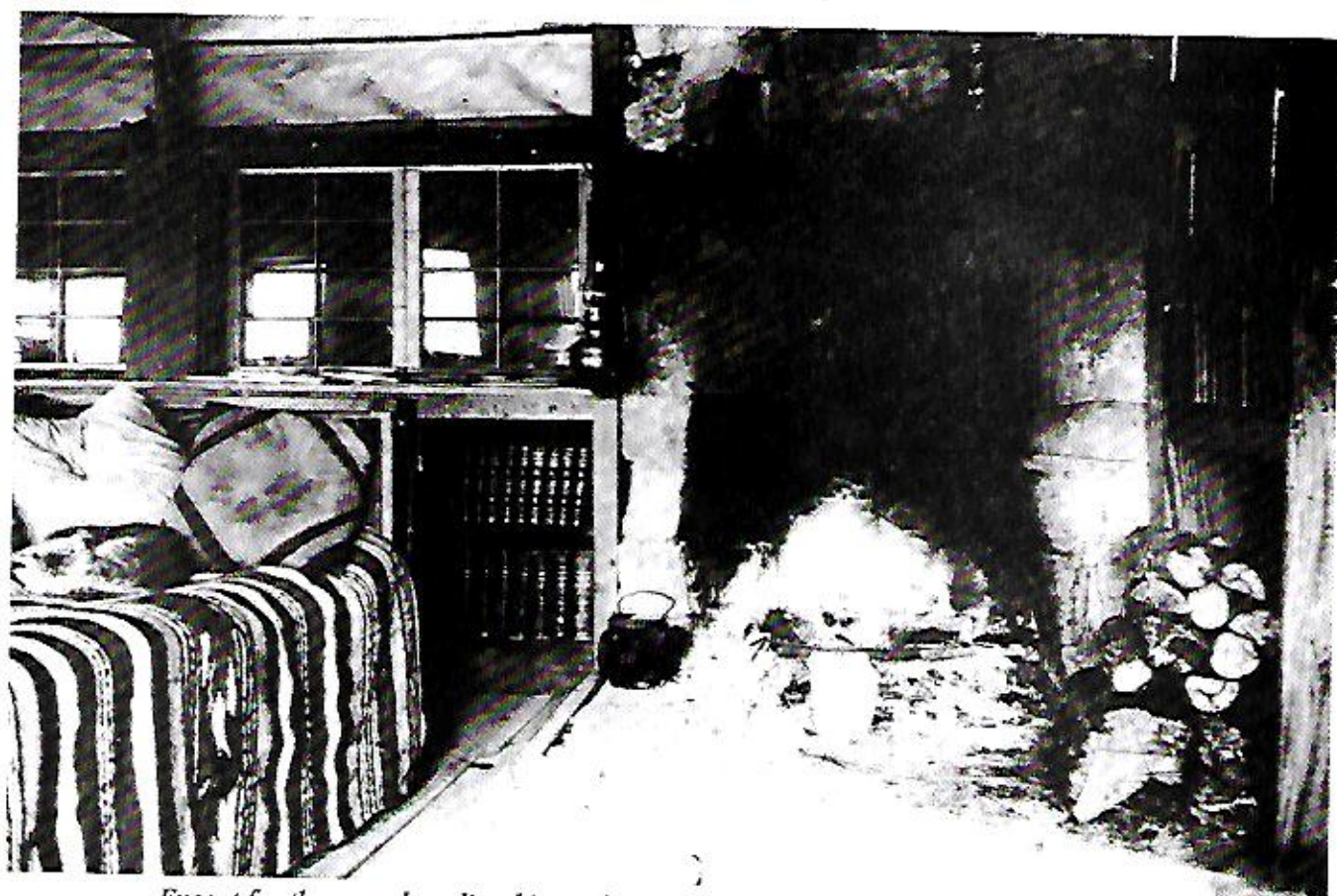
The same sources listed later faculty which included Earl Edgar, De Pauw, (Philosophy), who subsequently became a university vice-president; Ethyl Potter Rolfe,

Northwestern, (College Chaperone, Geology and Geography) and Eunice Bonniwell, Northwestern and Iowa State, (Philosophy). Other staff names on a later college





*The Faculty. The only one we can name with certainty is Penny Cent, second from the right. Springhouse expects to have the identification of the others by the next issue.*



*Except for the encyclopedia, this might have been an interior shot of a nearby home.*



community list were Dorothy Hilbert, Harvey Renfro, Leon Caraker, Thelma Edwards, Charles Kuhn, Alvin Lee, Beulah McFarland, Robert Zerlin and Frank Quaife.

There is a deficiency of documentary evidence on the faculty and its backgrounds. Most persons had met in the Chicago area, especially as Northwestern University students. Youth was on their side. Faculty ages ranged from 21-20, as Business Manager Monson said, "Older people could not have afforded to take the risks involved." There is no indication of racism or sexism, although all were of the white race with a good balance between men and women. Academic achievement was above average. One faculty person (Aronson) earned a Phi Beta Kappa key and another (Penny Cent) won several Guggenheim Awards. It is difficult to assess teaching impact on the students. One, Robert L. Hunsinger, however, remembered this phase as follows:

**Question:** It has been now over forty years since you were a student at the College in the Hills. Would you care to comment on the value of this experience?

**Answer:** Well, it's hard for me to evaluate or put my finger on what was really done there, but I don't think I was ever exposed (elsewhere) to the type of instruction that I got there. These people really presented a picture of possibilities that I never [knew] really existed. It gave me inspiration far beyond what you can see of the College in the Hills.<sup>4</sup>

Few of the instructors involved in the planning and founding stages were still connected with the college when it folded. Moreover, none of the faculty came from the area selected for the campus, and doubtless, this led to a lack of understanding of the local mores. James Hicks, rural teacher, father of one of the students and brother to a near-by farmer who lent his machinery to the college to level its land, made an interesting observation on this point:

The faculty always referred to the local citizens as "natives" (interpreted by said residents as a derogatory term) and one instructor made the comment that not one-half of one per cent had running water nor a bathroom in their homes.<sup>5</sup>

Penny Cent was the mystery man of the faculty. No one seemed to be certain of his true name. After the college went out of existence, two of the faculty (D. Monson and Aronson) were married and spent many years working overseas in South America and Africa. Presently, they live in a beautiful home in Hawaii and it was the author's privilege to visit them there. During a conversation he mentioned that the local postmaster at Herod, Illinois, (which post office had served the college) stated he thought Penny Cent's legal name was Friedrich Wilhelm Schmidt. The Monsons said they didn't know actually but "it was as good as any."<sup>6</sup>

### Varied College Objectives

Commencement was approaching at Northwestern University in 1934 and job opportunities appeared bleak. Instilled by youthful enthusiasm to do a socially desirable task, a small group of students set about looking for a locale, which met their requirements. A few Chicago area professors and clergy gave the group some guidance, inspiration, and a little finance.

This advisory board was not formally organized during the early days of the college, but evolved later, and thus helped set its objectives only indirectly. Since the institution was a private venture, there were fewer legal restrictions than would have been placed on a public college. Advice and financial help came on a one-to-one or small group basis. The records are not clear as to frequency or the nature of all the board's official transactions. It does seem, however, that the advisory board did not assume powers of a more formal board of regents.



Table 2  
Advisory board of the College

Name	Position	Location
Dr. Paul H. Douglas	Professor of Economics	University of Chicago
Dr. Benjamin Van Riper	State Supervisor of Education	Illinois Emergency Relief Commission
Dr. Ernest Fremont Tittle	Bishop	First Methodist Church, Evanston, Illinois
Dr. Arthur James Todd	Head of Sociology Department	Northwestern University
Dr. Charles H. Behre, Jr.	Head of Geology Department	Northwestern University
Baker Brownell	Professor of Journalism	Northwestern University



All fiscal and corporate affairs are decided by the faculty in residence, acting in lieu of a board of trustees. Matters dealing with student life are decided by the college as a whole, meeting as a body.<sup>7</sup>

As the university students, soon to become college instructors and administrators discussed their future, what objectives were proposed and which ones finally crystallized? Categorization of the college's type or kind depends on at least two variables: the date on which the classification was made and the purpose as the evaluator saw it. What was the main educational thrust of the College in the Hills? An early press release quoted President Brown as announcing "final plans for a new labor college."<sup>8</sup> Evidently, Brown saw feasible opportunities for this objective in the chosen site: "The location, in the Ozark uplift, was selected because of its possibilities in labor education among the miners and workers nearby."<sup>9</sup> Brown had been an instructor at the University of Illinois in mathematics, but his graduate studies were in political science and sociology. Perhaps from his work in these fields, he saw another angle or definition to "labor college," one in which student self-support had educational value.

...the theory that a desirable training for life can be made available to a group of students who prove themselves willing to live and work together on a co-operative basis.<sup>10</sup>

Later, the hard conditions of the Great Economic Depression were to implement Brown's theory. Beyond the potential for organizing the labor forces and training their leaders, the president proposed a broader initial base of learning: "The college," according to Brown, "will attempt to give a social and economic interpretation of present-day living."<sup>11</sup> Possibly he viewed this part of the curriculum as one of survey courses with more complex subject-matter and/or presentations reserved for upper classmen: "Special seminary courses in labor problems and mining conditions will be offered to the more advanced students."<sup>12</sup>

So many charges of radical political-social positions would come later in the college's life to hamper and cloud its work, it is well to document some early statements by its founders. In the formative period of the school's existence, there appeared to be an attempt to preserve the labels of a traditional organization, yet to bend its emphasis towards left of center. Just eleven days before the first session opened this point of view was expressed in a letter from the president to a prospective student.

The degree of "leftness" of the College in the Hills is somewhat difficult to determine definitely. The

school has purposely been planned as a liberal arts college rather than simply a training course for labor organizers. At the same time, we have stated definitely in our catalogue that we are trying to be instrumental in the bringing of a new social order, as well as fitting our students to be citizens of that order. Of the faculty, a few are members of the Socialist Party, others are non-party socialists, and I believe that it is safe to say that there is not one of us who is not well to the left of center. There is no political party or group backing us. We have purposely kept ourselves free from any alliance, which might attempt to dictate our policies.<sup>13</sup>

Prospective students continued to inquire about an inexpensive education not bound by political conservatism.

I have heard of experiments for making it possible for young people to get a liberal arts education at low cost. I understand that the College in the Hills with which Socialists are experimenting is in Illinois.<sup>14</sup>

Verdun's letter was not answered by President Brown, but by Acting Director Donald Monson, who negated in part the definite Socialist Party label. "...The college is not an official Socialist Party venture. The only connection is that some members of the staff are also members of the party and the school is strongest in the social sciences."<sup>15</sup>

Other faculty members tried to interest future students unable to afford an education at a large institution or not attracted by the usual collegiate offerings and setting. The head of the Social Sciences who was also the college secretary stated this position succinctly in a "sausage comparison."

I can perhaps tell you a few things about the College that will make you like the idea. It was originally started by a group of young college graduates, mostly from the Middle West, who felt that there were large numbers of intelligent young people who could not afford to attend the usual large university, and that, perhaps the type of education offered in the average university or college was not always what a student was looking for. Classes of fifty or seventy-five, routine lectures, examinations, and the more or less regimentation of such a college have often been condemned by modern educators as turning out college graduates in much the same way as a machine grinds out sausages.<sup>16</sup>

In lieu of the usual formalized higher education, Aronson proposed an informal program tailored to the individual through close contacts with the "advisors," as the professors were to be called. "We believe the extremely close personal contact between students and advisors





*Part of the library. Had members of the faculty bothered to look up the word "prejudice" in the large dictionary atop the shelf, they might have been less idealistic, more practical. At the very least, they would have refrained from calling the local people "natives." The hill folk suffered in many ways; they rarely suffered a shortage of pride.*



which we develop here leads to a much more individualized and personalized education...Whatever else students who have been here say, they always agree that they have learned many things not to be found in textbooks!"<sup>17</sup>

### **An Inexpensive Social Life**

Lest the student applicant become frightened at the austere study-work ethic alone, the college tried a program of recreation within the constraints of limited institutional and personal budgets.

I find that I have not mentioned social life. We have a congenial group here, and generally manage to keep ourselves amused. About once a week, several arrange to drive in to Harrisburg, sixteen miles away or to Rosiclare, eighteen miles away, for a dance or a movie. In time, we hope to establish the college as a community house for the neighborhood, and if you are at all interested in children and young people, you will find this a rich field for any work in music, dramatics, games, folk-dancing or other talents you may have.<sup>18</sup>

### **Accessibility of Churches**

One student applicant inquired as to the nearness of places of worship and the secretary informed him

Since we are so far out in the country, it is difficult for students to attend the denomination of their choice if they happen to belong to a church whose nearest house of worship is in town, which is sixteen miles away. We have, within a few miles of us, a Catholic church, and several country churches of the evangelistic type...<sup>19</sup>

### **Private, Not a Public Institution**

In regard to the government educational hierarchy, all evidence points to the fact that the College in the Hills was a private institution, not a part of the State of Illinois' public education system. In a unique sense the college was not built by an outside agency and handed over to an instructional staff later. The faculty planned, and with student help, constructed it. To quote the College Secretary, "We have the absolute essentials—over two thousand books, a group of teachers, who, themselves created and built the school..."<sup>20</sup>

### **Accreditation and Transfer of Earned Credits**

Naturally, prospective students who earned credits wanted to know if these academic hours could be transferred to other colleges and universities.

The University of Illinois will give credit upon examination for any course which we give for which there is an equivalent course at the University. At the University of Chicago, all transfer students are expected to be able to pass their comprehensive examinations before being admitted to the upper college. At Carbondale State Teachers' College, (sic) credit will be given upon examination. This is the regular procedure followed in regard to unaccredited schools.<sup>21</sup>

### **Large Obstacles**

The faculty sensed early with cold realism there were large built-in obstructions in the segments of society with which it was to deal. The stark situation was well stated in a letter seeking help outside the immediate campus area.

...I write to you concerning the College in the Hills, an educational and community center which was started this summer in southern Illinois. This area is composed, roughly speaking, of three different population groups. First, the people employed in the coal industry in the southern Illinois coal field. Second, those connected with the fluorspar industry, the center of which is Rosiclare, located sixteen miles from the College. And, third, the subsistence farmers in the rural areas surrounding the College. The situation, is, perhaps better understood when it is remembered that up to forty per cent of the population are on the relief rolls in the counties of the southern part of the state, and that as many as seventy-five per cent, and in a few towns, one hundred per cent of the people are unemployed.<sup>22</sup>

The general tone of need continued to be reflected a few months later as the State Supervisor of Adult Education in the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, State of Illinois, appealed to The Carnegie Foundation in New York City on behalf of the college.

[Note: *Herod is in Pope County, G.D.*]

A note from "The College in the Hills," located at Herod, Hardin County, Illinois, informs me that they have applied to you for aid. Although they have not explicitly asked me to do so, I want to take this opportunity to say something to you in their favor. The region in which they are located is, perhaps, the most primitive in the State of Illinois. It is culturally a colony of the hill region of Kentucky and Tennessee. There is no general locality in the state more in need of the kind of educational work the college can do; at the same time—as is but natural—there is no region less aware of its educational needs...They were well aware of the resistance they would have to face from local fanatic provincialism; and so were we...I have the utmost confidence in the ability and





devotion of the little group now at the college. I can assure you that any help you can give them will be an investment in the future enlightenment of one of the darkest regions in this troubled state.<sup>23</sup>

### Tents, Sheds and a Permanent Building

Unsatisfactory housing is one of the crosses higher education usually bears, and the College in the Hills was no exception. On the theoretical side, construction was to be delayed until faculty and students arrived for a co-operative educational effort. Actually no building could be planned and executed beforehand from a practical viewpoint inasmuch there were not enough funds. Therefore, the 1934 Summer Session began in floored tents and sheds. Speculation is not historical research, still it is interesting to surmise how many prospective students were discouraged from the beginning by poor housing as was Vivien Hunter, Logansport, Indiana, who requested her five dollars initial deposit be refunded, June 25, 1934, and bluntly wrote, "Sunday with my parents I visited the College in the Hills, and they decided it was hardly a satisfactory place for them to leave me."

During the first few months, Donald Monson, school architect, decided on a construction pattern for the campus. "The buildings will be in the 'modern' or 'international' style, much after the fashion of Frank Lloyd Wright's adaptation of the Japanese."<sup>24</sup> Then Monson designed a very comfortable building using fieldstone from the school quarry and other indigenous material. An outstanding feature was its large fireplace. By early 1935, Monson had become acting director or president upon the resignation of Donald Brown who took a position of casework supervisor in the Herrin district of Williamson County and described the main all-purpose structure and temporary housing as follows:

...At the moment the college has one building fifty by sixty feet now being completed which houses the kitchen, library-living room, and the women's dormitory. The men sleep in a summer cottage, which is being insulated. With both buildings completed we can house not over six more men without excessive crowding and two or three more women...The staff wishes to limit the student body for the present not over fifty and feel that thirty to forty students will probably be a desirable number.<sup>25</sup>

### Getting Started

Press releases in early 1934 describing the college and its proposed offerings went to out-of-state newspapers in the St. Louis and Evansville areas as well as to concentrations in northern and southern Illinois. Many personal

letters (postage three cents) were mailed, and even the popular "penny" postal card of that era was pressed into service to tell the story of the College in the Hills, but the telephone seems to have been used sparingly probably because of its expense and scarcity in the area. Contacts were made with southern Illinois public high school principals and librarians. Sometimes these school officials returned a list of seniors, indicating likely prospects. Next, the college made follow-up interviews, and records still exist as hand-written notes, e. g.,

A random sampling of student inquiries shows a fairly

- \_\_ son of immigrant mother
- \_\_ on relief
- \_\_ president of class
- \_\_ runner-up in State American Legion public speaking contest
- \_\_ was out, but mother interested
- \_\_ will probably hitch-hike to see college
- \_\_ signed up for CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps)
- \_\_ mother enthusiastic about CH, but afraid relief will be cut off and
- \_\_ Mr. \_\_ (principal) "doubts whether democracy and civilization are compatible," but will send list.

wide geographic spread (Chicago, Evanston, Harrisburg and Mendota from Illinois; Arcadia, Noblesville and Atlanta from Indiana). Since these prospective students would be requested to do a certain number of hours work as part of their education, they were asked to state their vocational background. More specifically, information was sought in training or experience in several fields, e. g., typing, bookkeeping, baking, driving a car, rough carpentry, blacksmithing, cooking, ironing plus group, community or social welfare employment. These data were not sought as theoretical bases for discussion only, but were re-enforced by personal letters.

...As you may know, four hours labor a day is the major part of the tuition a student is asked to pay. This is spent on some phase of the college work—quarrying, wood-splitting, hauling rock, gardening, construction, etc. This work is over by ten o'clock and the rest of the day is spent in study and class-work.<sup>26</sup>

One may wonder how the four hours would be finished by ten o'clock in the morning, however the published program of classes and activities gives the solution.





**Table 3**  
**Tentative Daily Schedule**

Time	Activities
(A.M.)	
4:30	"rise and shine": customary chores, such as getting water and firewood
6:00	breakfast
6:30 - 10:00	(boys) construction and garden work (girls) domestic duties
10:00 - 10:30	study
11:30	dinner
(P.M.)	
12:00 - 1:30	recreation
1:30 - 5:00	classes
5:15	supper
5:45 - 8:00	study and recreation
8:00	bedtime
Source: The Evansville Press, Sept. 29, 1935	



Note the term "dinner" for the noon meal and "supper" for the evening one are designations generally used locally. Compared with today's colleges and universities, few students in 1980 would agree to the 4:30 A.M. rising and the 8: P.M. bedtime, but they might like the short study hours on the schedule. Again, the time allotments for physical labor emphasize the cooperative, work-type curriculum aims of the college.

Such a rugged work-type program did not discourage all prospective students, yet after over forty years it is difficult for the American public to realize how desperately some young people wanted higher education but were without money in the Great Depression. The financial schemes for student help were still in the future. As an example of the many appeals in the College in the Hills files, one came from a small Illinois town near East St. Louis on July 5, 1935 whose author for obvious reasons cannot be identified.

Dear Sirs:

I want to sincerely thank you for your kind offer, and wish I were in a condition to accept. But I haven't money, and I stay with my step-father so I haven't anything I can call my own but my clothing. The only thing I can offer in return for an education is labor. I hoped you could accept that but if not I am very sorry because I would like to attend your school. If you can make it possible for me to attend, please let me know soon, if not thank you again and hope your school is a success which I think it will be.

Sincerely \_\_\_\_\_

The college secretary had written this note at the bottom of the letter, "Told to come—sign note payable in 5 to 10 years—no interest—Astrid."

Scholarships were evidently at a premium, but there is a record of at least one offered (value ten dollars) July 16, 1935 for the summer session. The tuition was to be covered by the student's labor. Room rental was not charged because the dormitory facilities were temporary. The ten-dollar scholarship would be payment for the food bill during the eight weeks, according to Mrs. E. P. Rolfe, one of the faculty who signed the letter.

The college's start in 1934 was one of financial and emotional discouragement. One of the faculty graphically described this said state of affairs in a letter from "The Camp" to two of her colleagues.

The Camp  
Herod, Illinois  
June 1934  
Dear Don and Astrid,

If I do not get the student prospect list today, I feel that my being here is rather pointless...I am broke. Feel that the housing, sanitation, food and water are unfair to the people I brought down. Two felt ill this morning. Do not have enough money of my own to send them home...Went to Sunday school at Herod Sunday. Contacted student who may do the plowing for partial payment on tuition. Walked ten miles yesterday hunting tools and students and food.



The people about need us and want us. Newspaper man was up from Rosiclare this morning. Complained about lack of news from us...Am getting milk from the Henry Hicks' for twenty cents a gallon. Butter for fifteen, garden stuff from impoverished family with six children for small sum...

If you do your part and get us some money and get down here quickly the boys I have brought down will stay as students...I am still wondering how long they can live on beans and potatoes. For breakfast, we had toast without butter and oatmeal and coffee. Can't keep that up long...



Mildred George<sup>27</sup>

The college personnel probably did not face actual starvation, but variety and quantity of suitable food was a daily problem. In this respect, the farm families around them with their vegetable gardens, poultry and cows fared better. Because the College in the Hills was not a part of the state school system, its officials were not required to inspect it. Yet Clyde L. Flynn, Sr. (Hardin County Superintendent of Schools, 1935-1951) gave the struggling college any help he could. One day John A. Wieland, Superintendent of Public Instruction for the State of Illinois, came to Hardin County on official business and Flynn invited Wieland to visit the College in the Hills unofficially, for he wanted the State Superintendent to see what "desperate straits" the school was in. They arrived at mealtime and observed the meager fare on the table. Thereupon, Wieland drove his car back to Elizabethtown, filled it with groceries and returned with the gift of food to the school. Flynn sought other means to help the faculty financially, e. g., by using the professors as lecturers at county teachers institutes.<sup>28</sup> Still, student tuition, gifts from Evanston and Chicago friends, and outside work by the faculty in government social agencies could hardly keep the wolf from the door, for there were many days, doubtless, when they heard him howl.

### No Mention of Mathematics

An examination of the original student applications shows two types of curriculum interests. There was the traditional subject-matter, fields ordinarily found in a liberal arts organization: geology, art, beginning psychology, biology, social science, economics, English literature and world history. A surprising fact: no mention of a mathematics inquiry was found, although President Brown had an undergraduate concentration in that field and would be expected to push it.

Nevertheless, a few prospective students did not fit into the first type. Apparently, they wanted some academic experimentation with requests of "social justice plays with a purpose"; "social psychology, especially the phase of dealing with abnormal children"; "labor problems in the coal fields"; "flying and travelling" and "play production."

### First Classes and Community Involvement

During the first session (summer 1934), ten classes were conducted daily except on Wednesday. The art classes under Penny Cent met every afternoon between the hours of two and four for individual instruction in character sketching and caricature portraying. "The instructor is especially interested in having neighborhood people visit the art class and seeing the work that is being done by the students."<sup>29</sup>

Two more examples of community involvement are given in the same publicity.

The College in the Hills has just started a weekly radio program over Station WEBQ, Harrisburg, a 9 o'clock on Monday evenings. The first program last Monday featured "Minuet" by Louis N. Parker, a one-act dramatic sketch. The play was under the direction of Miss Mildred George, advisor in speech. Harriette Rolfe sang two numbers and Donald Brown, president, spoke of the College in the Hills. Another feature of the new college is the Sunday afternoon sessions of the Modern Civilization course, under the direction of Geo. Guernsey. The meetings are held at 5 o'clock and the public is invited. The subject for next Sunday is "Art in the Modern World." The discussion will be lead by Penny Cent.<sup>30</sup>

Later, the college helped Crossroads, a Hardin County rural school in an exchange program in which the faculty enlarged the library and taught music, art and dramatics to the elementary pupils who in turn helped with public performances at the college.

There were no blacks among the college faculty or student body—in fact few lived in Hardin County—yet the staff helped this minority group with extra activities at the segregated black Lincoln Elementary School in operation at that time in Harrisburg by teaching classes in music and stagecraft and in the presentation of special programs, such as those at Christmas.

Other bids for public acceptance racked up by the college in community offerings were the establishment of the first public library in Hardin County (at Rosiclare) besides the formation of various children's clubs there, plus the sponsorship of a children's theatre at Harrisburg.

### Ridicule, Rumors, Insults

Almost from its inception and throughout its existence, the school was under a cloud of suspicion. It was not approved by southern Illinois. Hunsinger, a former student, pinpointed this "lack of acceptance by the community in which it was located," even over money problems, as the main reason the college had to close its doors.<sup>31</sup> It was not only a case of being ignored, there appears to have



been a drum fire of sarcasm, gossip and abuse heaped upon nearly everyone connected with the institution. Many of the people interviewed in Hardin County had derogatory remarks to say about the school followed by the plea, "Please don't quote me," which made their perceptions, comments and interpretations practically worthless as historical research material. This pathetic fear of being cited was not easily accounted for. The undercurrent of adverse criticism was succinctly recognized by Astrid Aronson, the college secretary, in a feature story released to the press.

I suppose they're all Communists...That's what some people thought. They've also been rumored to be nudists, free-love cultists, Holy Rollers, missionaries and royalists.

The business manager, too, was also aware of the local gossip used to discredit the college.

Other incidents...were a lack of dignity and a violation of social prejudices, such as women smoking and dress too informal, in their opinion, to have sufficient decorum for the position we claimed.<sup>32</sup>

In today's framework of changing cultural values, these idle speculations would be largely disregarded, but in the rigid mores of the college's community of the 1930s, they canceled much of the hoped-for progress.

There is always room for honest differences of opinion in religion and politics, but these diversities brought community censure remembered years afterward, e. g.,

### 1. Morality vs. Religion

One of the (college) teachers came to our church, and he was asked if he were a Christian. He made a talk about being a good man, not about Christianity.<sup>33</sup>

### 2. Red Flag Incident

One unresolved occurrence is connected with flying a red flag. Mrs. Earl T. George (then Mary Hamp) gave this researcher invaluable information and was one of the few Hardin County residents who did not ask to remain anonymous. She was never a student at the College in the Hills, but as a teenager visited the campus often and knew the faculty and students well. She said, "A red flag flew at the school several days and then the community realized it was Communist."<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, Hunsinger, student during the summer of 1934 stated, "I never saw a red or Communist flag there."<sup>35</sup> Even the press at the other end of the state made note of the "red flag" story.



A group of unemployed students went among the hill folk of Hardin County, in southern Illinois, to found a school. The appearance of girls in knickers, the displaying of a danger flag on the tail of their truck while construction was in progress, led to strange rumors about what they were; however, they report Hardin county people generally no longer regard them as nudists or nihilists. The College in the Hills, which is the name they gave their school, now has a building—they built it.<sup>36</sup>

Donald Monson, school architect, recalled the State Highway 34 concrete slab had been poured not long before construction at the college started, but culverts, drainage ditches, and the secondary road leading to the campus were not finished at this time to account for warning flags.<sup>37</sup>

Community disapproval was usually expressed in generalizations rather than in specifics: "These people did not click (Goetzman)."<sup>38</sup> Or "They were a little radical. It was not a fit place (Partain)."<sup>39</sup> Sometimes the community sabotage was more subtle, as when Penny Cent gave the commencement address to the class of 1934 at the Rosiclare high school. Somehow, the principal advised the graduates not to attend the College in the Hills since it was not accredited, and this recommendation, according to one of the class members, "killed any urge to attend the college."<sup>40</sup> Here and there were a few defenders. College personnel often came to a contiguous farm to buy milk and eggs from Mrs. A. F. Hamp who described them in a beautiful phrase as "peace-loving people,"<sup>41</sup> but sadly enough the detractors were louder than the friends.

### Financial Help Always Needed

Few of the college's activities were free from the deadening overtones of poverty. Resourcefulness was demonstrated to a remarkable degree, e. g., tools were borrowed from local mining companies and donations of electrical supplies sought from them, salvage lumber came from razed barns, clay was used when builders had no cement and stone was dug from campus creek-beds before the school's quarry was established. Some building supplies were obtained from community lumber companies, but because of the college's restricted credit rating, most had to wait until adequate finances became available.

Some revenue had been expected from student tuition. The first bulletin asked \$28 total (of which \$18 was designated for food) at the ten-weeks summer session in 1934, yet this meager sum was not always realized as the college accept "kind" (goods or produce) as payment instead of cash. Then, too, the small enrollment hurt the cash flow derived from tuition monies. President Brown gave one projection:



while no definite figure could be released on the number of registered students, Donald Brown, president of the college stated that the summer registration must be limited to sixty students.<sup>42</sup>

The school architect planned for not over fifty and the staff thought a desirable number would be thirty to forty students.<sup>43</sup> A frequent visitor said, "The most students I ever saw was seventeen or eighteen."<sup>44</sup>

The college was, therefore, forced to search elsewhere for financial support. The other base of operations besides Hardin County was Evanston, Illinois. Sympathetic friends in that community gave small donations of five or ten dollars. One, Mrs. Herman Fabrey, gave over \$300 during 1935, a sizeable contribution when projected against the Great Depression. Owing to general economic distress, little support came from the business sector. In addition to a little support from local mining companies, the Cable Piano Company presented a used instrument. The college turned to state and national government agencies, some of which had an economic relief basis for existence. The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of the State of Illinois was limited in helping as the college was a private institution. The Illinois Emergency Relief Commission was able to approve Project No. 1918, Herod, Illinois, College in the Hills, August 1, 1934, which provided salaries for six teachers at \$50 per month plus \$15 for supplies. The source and rates of pay are a reflection again of the severe economic stress of the 1930s. Furthermore, one official recognized a storm warning in a need for community approval before assistance was given. This happened before the teaching of the first class.

...It occurs to me that the people in Washington might hesitate to offer assistance unless they can be convinced in some way that the project would have at least the moral support of persons properly qualified to pass judgment on it and who live in Illinois.<sup>45</sup>

This "moral support" had evidently not been gained by the college's second year. In an application to the Federal Emergency Relief Administration the institution identified some of its difficulties locally:

At this point it might be well to consider the fact that although an honest attempt has been made by professional relief workers to keep relief on a strictly nonpartisan basis in Illinois, the county politicians have tried again and again to use the large relief rolls to their political advantage. It seems incredible to them that one is not a Republican or a Democrat, and that one's interest is in having people clothed and fed rather than in gaining a political ad-

vantage, or that all one is trying to do is to teach people to see their social environment as it is.<sup>46</sup>

It appeared that when federal and state relief agencies tried to tie their efforts to county outlets, it had an adverse effect on the college. Local officials rejected help for personnel on the grounds the faculty was not a family unit nor had been residents of Hardin County two years. It is hard to think of any financial schemes the college did not try, e. g., payment on land and building materials were postponed as long as possible, a benefit concert at Evanston was co-sponsored with a medical clinic featuring the Paul Whiteman Orchestra which netted about \$125 for each sponsor, and there was a fruitless proposal to raise sheep on the college farm. Still these efforts simply could not raise enough revenue. The staff began to take positions in southern Illinois government agencies in a last desperate effort to keep the college in operation on a reduced scale or to revive it when it temporarily closed. Five members of the original staff (Monson, Cent, Rolfe, Bonniwell, and Aronson) met December 7, 1935, and signed an agreement that monies earned by them in the form of salaries or wages would be apportioned as follows:

- a) one-third to apply on the college's debts, amounting to \$873.32,
- b) one-third at disposal of the individual to meet family obligations and personal debts and
- c) one-third reserved for the personal expenses of maintenance and clothing as each may have.

Discouragement began to show in the Advisory Board discussions. One member (Todd) recommended that "we close up shop and leave the place flat," but another (Van Riper) opposed the idea [saying] the college personnel "had no other place to go and it might be necessary for us to remain there and go on relief if no jobs were forthcoming..." "It all ended in their softening it to the letter Behre (another Board member) sent us."<sup>47</sup>



It is an unusual fact that only three months before this depressing correspondence was written, the College in the Hills became a corporation on October 9, 1935. It is not clear from the records why this legal step was not taken in the beginning days of the college's formation or even before. Illinois' Secretary of State Edward J. Hughes issued Certificate Number 3474 (Hardin County and not for pecuniary profit) to Alvin Lee, Donald Monson and Walter S. Voss as incorporators and named faculty members (Aronson, Bonniwell, Cent, Edgar, Lee, Monson and Rolfe) as "the Directors to control and manage said corporation for the first year of its corporate existence." The legal purpose of the college was defined differently in the corporation statement than in the original published aims.



The object for which it is formed is to furnish for the residents of Hardin and adjacent counties in southern Illinois a center for promoting educational and recreational opportunities, for teaching social hygiene and progress in various industries, particularly agriculture, to own the necessary equipment and property to provide such facilities, to do such experimental work in industry and agriculture as may be necessary to accomplish the purposes above states.

The meaning of "social hygiene" above was never expanded, and by the time the college was incorporated, it had been in operation over a year under the guidance of the same newly named faculty-directors. This shakedown period perhaps modified the earlier goals. Although the College in the Hills had ceased to exist as a functioning institution several months prior, it was not until April 27, 1939, the Attorney General in the Superior Court of Cook County (Chancery No. 108301) formally dissolved the corporation.

### Paying for the Land

The \$1000 promised in payment for the 38 acres was a never-ending burden. The minuscule tax had been overlooked and found by accident.

Dear Astrid,

...Also we found in the *Hardin County Independent* the delinquent tax list and that Kane has not paid the \$5.32 tax on this place and it will be posted for sale on 21<sup>st</sup> along with the rest, at the sheriff's (who is also collector) office at E-town. Penny and I were wondering if we should get there first and bid it in, we could acquire possession, this is, title to the place. It would be a sardonic joke, nicht wahr?...

Ethlyn Potter Rolfe

Donald Monson asked help from friends of the college living in Evanston to get "the basis of an assured income started," but his plan did not materialize adequately. The full amount was not paid, and a special meeting of the directors (D. Monson, Astrid Aronson Monson, Edgar, Cent and Rolfe) was called July 10, 1945. W. C. Kane, the former owner, and the assignee of the purchase money notes, agreed to pay \$450.00 cash to the corporation to surrender the deed and a release of all claims under the bond for deed dated March 3, 1934, which offer was accepted. [Note: *This is confusing in that Armistead has already indicated the corporation was formally dissolved April 27, 1939. G.D.*] Thus, ownership of the land had come full circle in eleven years back to the attorney who had sold it to the college.

### The Last Difficult Days

Persons outside the college had recorded their adverse premonitions—after some had happened—in the school's early days.

A wise man once said: "when troubles come, they come not single spies, but in battalions." You had no means of knowing what to expect in way of difficulties...The old ladies used to say that children need something hard to cut their teeth upon. You'll soon have your teeth cut and when you do, grit 'em, set your jaw and if you need more jaw, borrow some of that long Scotch Presbyterian jaw of Monson's and keep it set in the right direction.<sup>48</sup>

The author slipped on his facts. Donald Monson was a Lutheran of Swedish ancestry, but his forebodings throughout the college's existence held true to a remarkable degree. Now enough students and revenue were committed to have classes in 1936. Most of the faculty scattered to other jobs and in October 1936 Penny Cent rented the large college building four months to Pervious Partain, Hardin County resident, as living quarters for his family.

I had just married. The college people had been gone several months, but there were lots of stuff stored there: windows, hinges, books carefully boxed and several afghans, which would be valuable now. Everything looked like they planned to return. Before they did there was a fire after we moved. Perhaps all that property left there was a motive for the stealing and burning.<sup>49</sup>

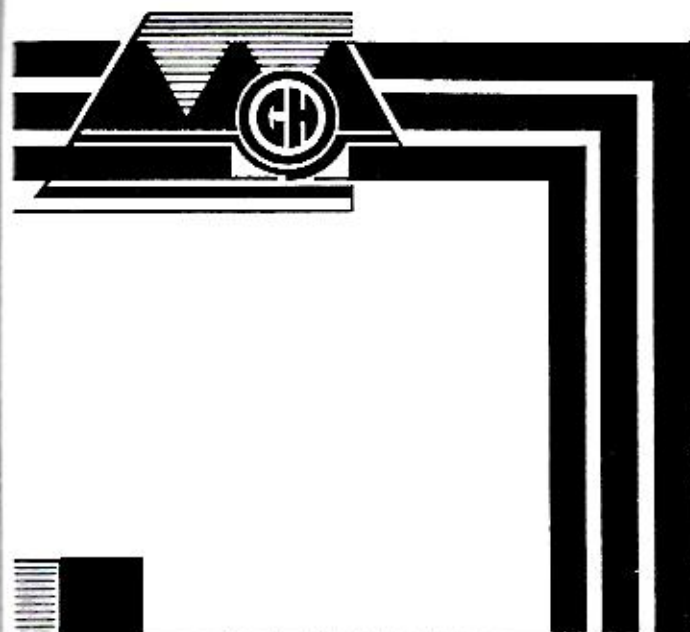
The large rock chimney was about the only relic left for many years to mark the site of the College in the Hills, and it gradually disappeared as local residents pirated the stone for building materials, since it was easier to remove it than to quarry more in adjacent creek-beds.

### Later History of the Faculty

The college's records are silent on the lives of most of the staff following their Hardin County experiences of the 1930s. But another note can be added to the biography of Donald Monson. He was forced to spend a year in a Chicago hospital, victim of tuberculosis. Upon recovery, he went back to school at Northwestern and did some research as a spin-off from the College in the Hills years when he wrote *A Sociological Analysis of the City of Harrisburg* to detail the living conditions and other community limitations of the coal miners there.







# COLLEGE IN THE HILLS

## FALL QUARTER 1934

### HARDIN COUNTY, ILLINOIS

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participate in the same classes, but live at home. Resident students will spend the morning or an equivalent amount of time on construction and maintenance, leaving the rest of the day free for study and classes. They will pay only for their food and incidental expenses, which will amount to twenty dollars for the fall term of nine weeks.

Day students will be charged five dollars per course. Those who wish to earn their way will be given tuition in exchange for six hours' work a week. The work schedule will be adjusted, in so far as possible, to the convenience of the student.

This summer's experience has shown that there will be hard work involved, and the College will have little appeal for those who are not able to enter into the spirit of it. It has by no means been a vacation resort, but we believe that by learning to live under these conditions and in solving the problems that have arisen, we have made definite educational gains.

For lighting we are at present relying on gasoline lamps. This fall the building will be heated with fireplaces, and coal stoves will be installed where necessary. Coal can be had at the mines for about two dollars a ton, while there are ample deadfalls in the extensive forests nearby to provide firewood for a long time to come. Water is hauled from tested wells, and is chlorinated before using.

The College has a well-balanced and unusually up-to-date library of about twenty-five hundred books, which is being added to constantly.

The student will have to provide plenty of blankets, along with sheets, pillow, pillow cases, towels, and other items of personal use. The College provides cots. High boots, overalls, and rough, warm, outdoor clothes are essential.

All fiscal and corporate affairs are decided by the faculty in residence. All matters dealing with student life are decided by the College as a whole.

#### page one

#### FORWARD

The College in the Hills is a venture in education, based on the theory that a worthwhile training for life can be made available to a group of students who are willing to live and work together on a thoroughly cooperative basis. As a result of this theory, we have been able to make the cost to each individual lower than ordinary living expenses at home. At the same time we are attempting to bring the College into the community through extension classes and adult education groups. In building an education to serve this present age, the College in the Hills has aimed at two ends:—we are helping to build a new social, economic, and political order in our time, and we are trying to make ourselves into human beings capable of living in that better order.

#### GENERAL INFORMATION

The College opened last June and ran a ten-week quarter ending August 31. During that time a temporary building was constructed, which is now being made winterproof. This structure will house the kitchen; a combination living-room, dining-room, and library; and the women's dormitory. Other structures are planned in accordance with our conception of organic architecture, using the native oak, and stone from a quarry on the campus. We are trying to put up a building with the maximum possible usable space; one wholly utilitarian and yet in keeping with the landscape of the region.

According to present plans the staff and students are to put up these structures without any outside help. Finishing the job of weatherproofing the present structures and starting on the next units are the biggest jobs on campus. Preparing meals and daily maintenance are our other two major tasks.

There will be two groups of students in the College, those actually in residence, and the day students who

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Should the students wish to set up any further organization, it is their privilege to do so. It is the plan of the advisors to have the student body govern itself, on the assumption that it is composed of adult men and women.

The campus of the College in the Hills is located in the Ozark hill country of Southern Illinois, a region of unusual scenic beauty. It consists of a forty-acre tract on Illinois Route 34, sixteen miles southeast of Harrisburg, and fourteen miles from Elizabethtown, county seat of Hardin County and a famous old river port. The region is largely in an agricultural stage, and the log cabin is still standard equipment in much of Hardin County. Yet it is only twenty minutes by road from the campus to Harrisburg, a city of 12,000 on the southern edge of the Southern Illinois coal field.

#### ADMISSION

In the case of either resident or day students, admission to college courses ordinarily requires high school graduation. Students of mature years and any others who may not have had sufficient formal preparation may attend classes but can not expect college credit through examinations upon matriculation at another college or university.

#### REGISTRATION AND LOCATION OF CLASSES

Both resident and day students are requested to register at the College Thursday and Friday, October 11 and 12. Classes will begin Monday, October 15. They will meet either at the College or at some point more convenient to the majority of students registering for the course.

#### COURSES OF INSTRUCTION

The school year is divided into four quarters, of



which the summer session is counted as one. Evening classes will meet twice a week for two hours each night. Day classes will be arranged to suit the convenience of adviser and students.

The College in the Hills does not believe that a formal system of grade marking makes for the best relationship between adviser and student, nor is it conducive to the highest type of scholarship. In the case of students wishing a report to be given to other institutions, a statement of the amount and quality of the work done will be sent on request. In the case of Lower College students, this report will be sent to parents at the end of each quarter. A criticism of his progress will also be given to the student.

The academic work of the College falls under four divisions: the Humanities, the Social Sciences, the Biological Sciences, and the Physical Sciences. Each student in the Lower College normally completes a basic course, requiring three quarters to complete, in each of these divisions. At the end of two years, or earlier, if he feels prepared, he takes a comprehensive examination on this material. Advanced students are enrolled in one of the central seminars, and may devote their entire time to the work of that seminar and some project connected with it, or they may enter such additional courses as they feel will best serve their needs.

#### COURSES AVAILABLE IN THE FALL QUARTER, 1934.

##### THE HUMANITIES

- 1A THE MODERN WORLD. This is the first quarter of the introductory basic course in the Humanities. It is a study of our civilization as a base for the study of literature, philosophy, religion, and art.
- 4A GERMAN LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE. A beginning course looking toward an understanding of German thought as well as the use of the language.
- 7 THE PLAYCRAFTERS. An advanced group of seminar rank, for those who have had experience or have ability along the line of creative dramatics. Plays will be

studied, written, and produced in cooperation with community dramatic groups. Experience in directing and producing plays will be provided.

- 8 ART THEORY. Art fundamentals; form, content, and direction of contemporary art; the art reflex and art purpose in society.
- 9 ART TECHNIQUE. Linear black and white; brush black and white; painting in color; poster graphic.
- 10 CREATIVE COMPOSITION. An introductory course aiming at the development of the ability to express oneself clearly and well in writing.

Advisers: Donald P. Brown, Mildred George, Penny Cent.

##### THE SOCIAL SCIENCES.

- 1A GENERAL INTRODUCTORY COURSE. The basic course of the Social Sciences combines a study of the evolution of the social, economic, and political order with the methods by which the social sciences approach their problem.
- 2 THEORIES OF ECONOMICS AND THEIR ORIGINS. From Adam Smith through Marx and Mill to the struggle for mastery in the present day. Emphasis on the economic basis of capitalism, fascism, socialism, with an analysis of the economic trend of the United States under the New Deal.
- 3C AMERICAN LABOR HISTORY AND PROBLEMS. The recent story of American Labor. Students in this course will study, at first hand, and from personal contact, the problem of labor in the coal fields, in the spar mines, and in the rural area.
- 4 CONTEMPORARY EUROPE. Intensive reading and discussion toward the understanding of the world before the war. The transformation from pre-war Europe to the conflicting interests of post-war states will be studied, particularly the rise of post-war Germany, Russia, and Italy.
- 5A AMERICAN GOVERNMENT. The first quarter of the course in Political Science. Historical backgrounds in the development of the national government will be used as a basis for the analysis of the present political picture.

- 6 SOCIAL PATHOLOGY. A study of the problems confronting society today in terms of their history, causes, consequences, remedies, methods of prevention, and inter-relationships with other problems.
- 7 GROUP ORGANIZATION. Techniques and theory of the organization of children's and adult groups, with special reference to group control, personality and social adjustment, and socialization as the ultimate objectives of the leader.
- 5 SURVEY OF SOUTHERN ILLINOIS. An advanced seminar and research group which will make an intensive study of the entire Southern Illinois area from many points of view---geographically, culturally, economically, politically---with the intention of publishing the results of their survey at the end of two years. In addition to contact with the economic and social problems of the coal industry, there is a smaller problem of the fluor-spar industry concentrated at Rosiclare on the Ohio, sixteen miles to the south.

Advisers: Donald P. Brown, Astrid Aronson, Thomas Garrison.

##### THE BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES.

- 2 PSYCHOLOGY: An Introduction to Human Behavior. A study of the basic physiology of the human organism, problems of personality, and social behavior.
- 3 SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY. A study of the psychological factors in current social problems; the analysis of motivation in social situations.

Adviser: Dorothy Hilbert.

##### THE PHYSICAL SCIENCES.

- 1A INTRODUCTORY GENERAL COURSE IN THE PHYSICAL SCIENCES. This course gives a general view of astronomy, mathematics, geology, chemistry, and physics, with the purpose of presenting a unified view of the earth and the universe of which it is a part. During the fall quarter the emphasis will be placed on the first three fields mentioned above.
- 2 INDUSTRIAL AND COMMERCIAL GEOGRAPHY OF THE WORLD. A study of the economic inter-relationships of countries.

- 3 COLLEGE ALGEBRA. This course involves linear equations in three unknowns; the theory of determinants; third degree equations; graphs; cube roots; arithmetic, geometric, harmonic, and logarithmic series; the theory of numbers; and the theory of equations.
- 4 TRIGONOMETRY. This course involves the Cartesian system, trigonometric equations, inverse functions, polar coordinates, and graphs.

Advisers: Ethlyn Potter Rolfe, J. Harvey Renfrew.

##### THE STAFF

Donald P. Brown (president), B.A., Northwestern University; graduate work in sociology and political science.  
Astrid Aronson, B.A., Northwestern University.  
Penny Cent, Friedrich Wilhelm University of Berlin.  
Thomas E. Garrison, B.A., Northwestern University.  
Mildred George, B.S., Ball State College; graduate work in speech, Northwestern and Butler.  
Dorothy Hilbert, B.A., Antioch College.  
Donald Monsen, Northwestern University.  
Harvey Renfrew, A.B., University of Illinois.  
Ethlyn Potter Rolfe, B.A., Northwestern University; graduate work in geology and geography.

The fall quarter of the College in the Hills will begin on Monday, October 15, and will close on Friday, December 21. Mail should be addressed to the College in the Hills, P.O. Harod, Illinois.

MAIL





*An artist in every fiber of his being, Penny Cent's lack of inhibition concerning display of the human body no doubt kept the rumor mill well supplied.*



"What person do you remember who was connected with the College in the Hills?" Practically any southern Illinois resident old enough to recall the institution will reply, "Penny Cent."

His active association with the college was longest in time, and he was the most controversial, the most exciting, the most frequent target of idle chatter. Undoubtedly, the college changed his life-style. Some of his colleagues at Evanston remember him as an artist of the carefree playboy "hippie" type when he came to southern Illinois. Impatient with routine duties he had rather "go 'possum hunting with the local boys." Gradually he settled down in his profession to develop two styles of paintings: one, almost photographic to record pictorial landscapes of southern Illinois designed for local sale; the other, an abstract one which won him several Guggenheim awards. As the college's fortunes waned, Penny Cent's waxed into a frenetic pattern of advertising the college through speeches, radio appearances, organizing art groups. One of his first tasks at the college was to design the school's insignia or logo, a symbolic design of three hills representing two pyramids of Egypt (the term by which the region was known) and a circle depicting the college community in their midst.

James Stricklin, Harrisburg, remembered him as a devotee of physical fitness; "He taught me how to swim as well as teaching most of the little boys in Harrisburg who were my age. It was not unusual to see him head down the street toward the swimming pool followed by a crowd of boys."

When the college suspended classes, Penny Cent took an apartment in Harrisburg, but still tried to oversee the school's property. He made many personal sacrifices to provide a viable future for it by teaching private art lessons, painting and selling his watercolors and sharing his award monies from New York City.

Roscoe Pulliam was superintendent of schools at Harrisburg and friendly toward the college in its struggles. When he became president of Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, he provided Penny Cent employment on a government art project at the university—the last employment the artist had in southern Illinois before leaving the area. In retrospect, Penny Cent doubtless had many carping critics, ranging from those who disliked his German accent to others suspicious of his political beliefs and personal lifestyle as being unorthodox. Yet among those who disparaged his mode of living and influence were several who defended his memory years later. For example, one parent, Mrs. Nathan Yarborough, phoned April 8, 1978, to request Penny Cent's address and said, "My son worked for him in Harrisburg, cleaning his room and running errands. He was a real inspiration to Glen." Another friend was George Carr, well-known southern Illinois artist, and one of Penny Cent's former private art students. Whenever the charge was

made that Cent was a Red, Carr always vindicated his former instructor with such a remark as, "During all the time I was in his company as we worked, I never heard him discuss Communism or even mention it."<sup>50</sup> W. Russell Malan followed Roscoe Pulliam as superintendent of Harrisburg schools and like Pulliam was supportive of the college. "Many persons in our area wondered where Penny Cent got his financial support. They forgot or never knew he won many Guggenheim Awards in art."<sup>51</sup> The Guggenheim Foundation recognized Penny Cent's talent with non-objective paintings or "chromorphs," as he called them from a word he coined from the two Greek words—"chromas-color" and "morphos-form."<sup>52</sup>

Notwithstanding [Penny Cent's] high intelligence and superior efforts to save his college, the Great Economic Depression claimed its victim.

### Historical Evaluation: Successes and Failures

Most of the successes of the College in the Hills were short range. The brief existence of the college in its active days was a limiting factor. The impact of modern television to tell its story was not available then, yet the college appears to have used the single accessible AM radio station (WEBQ at Harrisburg) to advantage by furnishing refined entertainment and useful information. Whenever and wherever permitted, the faculty tried to cooperate with community leaders in small study groups of dramatics, music and art which gave promise in an area labeled as culturally blighted. Some efforts had longer effects, such as establishing the first public library in Hardin County or researching of neighborhood problems, if not their solutions, as an aid to state and federal government agencies. It is rather remarkable the school became involved in so many outside activities in such a brief period and still carried on its own instruction and administration.

Failures were more dramatic. The college failed to enroll many students from the immediate community or to influence significantly the nearby labor forces and their organizations—both primary objectives of the institution. The Great Economic Depression was both a catalyst and a retardant. The college could not afford to be lazy, yet [was] doomed by factors beyond the founders' control—and educational seedling that failed to take root. The fatal molehills of malicious rumors tripped the unwary staff at every turn, for next to the pathetic never-ending struggle to survive financially were the sabotaging bits of gossip and rumor seized upon by local enemies to discredit the college. Nevertheless, youthful enthusiasm, youthful enthusiasm, hard work, and willingness to undergo physical hardship did not produce more than a day-to-day base. No more poignant summary statement can be made than quoting the final entry in the "College Meeting" notebook, September 2, 1935: "Request by Rolfe that only two sugar shells of sugar be served each person at breakfast."



## Acknowledgments

1. Special thanks are due Mrs. Astrid Aronson Monson, former Secretary, College in the Hills, for preserving many original records of the school and providing the author with them and for her donation of them later to Illinois State Historical Society's archives. Also for the help of the late Senator Paul H. Douglas for locating the Monsons on an overseas mission.
2. Mrs. Earl T. George (nee Mary Hamp) for eyewitness accounts.
3. Clyde L. Flynn, Sr. former superintendent of Hardin County Schools.
4. Margaret Conley, public librarian, Rosiclare.
5. Otis Lamar, former Hardin County official.
6. Ronald Hansen, Research and Projects, and Dean Elmer J. Clark, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale.

<sup>1</sup> The Department of Community Development of the Division of Area Services. *Life in Southern Illinois*. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1953), p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> "A Journey Through Shawnee National Forest," *The Herrin Daily Journal*, May 15, 1936, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> John P. Steger for Charles J. Hendricks, Forest Supervisor, April 4, 1972, personal letter.

<sup>4</sup> Robert L. Hunsinger, Wichita, Kansas, taped interview at Harrisburg, Illinois, March 15, 1977.

<sup>5</sup> James Hicks, interview, Harrisburg, Illinois, January 30, 1971.

<sup>6</sup> Donald and Astrid (Aronson) Monson, interview at Kailua, Hawaii, December 21, 1976.

<sup>7</sup> Carmen Wier, "Youth in Revolt: Builds College in Hardin County Hills," *Decatur Herald and Review* (Illinois Magazine), July 8, 1934.

<sup>8</sup> "Former Professor to Establish New Labor College," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, May 16, 1934.

<sup>9</sup> "Cooperative College is Set Up in Illinois," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, July 30, 1934.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> "Former Professor," op. cit.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Letter (President Donald P. Brown) to Margaret Vinson, June 14, 1934.

<sup>14</sup> Letter from Ervin Verdun to President Brown, December 3, 1934.

<sup>15</sup> Donald Monson, Acting Director, Letter to Ervin Verdun, December 26, 1934.

<sup>16</sup> Letter from Miss Astrid Aronson to Muriel Laycock, February 18, 1935.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Letter from Miss Astrid Aronson, Secretary, College in the Hills, to Leon Caraker, May 25, 1935.

<sup>20</sup> Letter from Miss Astrid Aronson, Secretary, College in the Hills, to Grace A. Davidson, May 9, 1935.

<sup>21</sup> Letter from Donald Monson (Acting Director or President) to Lland Baumbartner, September 19, 1935.

<sup>22</sup> Letter from Donald Monson, (Business Manager, College in the Hills) to Federal Emergency Relief Administration, August 23, 1934.

<sup>23</sup> Letter from Dr. Benjamin Van Riper to the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, February 19, 1935. Dr. Van Riper had tried to set up a \$300 per month adult education project as part of a larger program, but the state auditing department "put the whole project in the lap of the local authorities in the county: where it was not approved."

<sup>24</sup> Letter to Miss Margaret Gillis, Federal Emergency Administration, Washington, D. C. from Donald Monson, Business Manager, April 17, 1934.

<sup>25</sup> Letter to Mr. Sands, Transient Bureau, Illinois Emergency Relief Commission from Donald Monson, Acting Director, January 2, 1935.

<sup>26</sup> Letter from Astrid Aronson, Secretary, to Ray Odle, Parrish, Illinois, July 31, 1935.

<sup>27</sup> Letter to Donald Monson and Astrid Aronson.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Clyde L. Flynn, Sr., at Elizabethtown, Illinois, August 26, 1971.

<sup>29</sup> "Guernsey (sic) College in the Hills," *Herald Enterprise*, Golconda, Illinois, July 19, 1934, p. 1 (Guernsey was a faculty member).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Hunsinger, op. cit.

<sup>32</sup> Letter from Donald Monson to Dr. Benjamin Van Riper, Jan. 10, 1935.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Ralph E. Ferrell, Sept. 8, 1971 who was postmaster at Herod, Illinois, during the life of the college.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Mrs. Earl T. George (nee Hamp) Sept. 20, 1971.

<sup>35</sup> Hunsinger, op. cit.

<sup>36</sup> *Chicago Daily News*, May 18, 1935.

<sup>37</sup> Monson interview at Kailua, op. cit.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with L. J. Goetzman, merchant at Rosiclare for forty years, Sept. 15, 1971.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Pervious Partain, Oct. 6, 1971, who lived in the campus buildings after the college was discontinued.

<sup>40</sup> Lecture at Saline County Historical Society, Sept. 5, 1978, by Ryman Viche ("Vee") Jackson on "History and Legends of Hardin County."

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Mrs. August F. Hamp, October 6, 1971.

<sup>42</sup> "College in the Hills Will Commence in County Next Week," *Hardin County Independent*, June 14, 1934, p. 1.

<sup>43</sup> Monson's letter to Sands, op. cit.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Mrs. Earl T. George, op. cit.

<sup>45</sup> Letter from E. F. Bamford, Illinois Emergency Relief Commission, Chicago, April 19, 1934, to Donald Monson, 1015 Lake Street, Evanston, Illinois.

<sup>46</sup> Application to Hilda W. Smith, Specialist in Worker's Education, Washington D. C., May 4, 1935.

<sup>47</sup> Letter to Earl Edgar, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, January 7, 1936.

<sup>48</sup> Letter to President Brown from Mark E. Penney, Chicago office, Illinois Emergency Relief Commission, July 13, 1934.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Pervious Partain, Herod, Illinois, October 6, 1971.

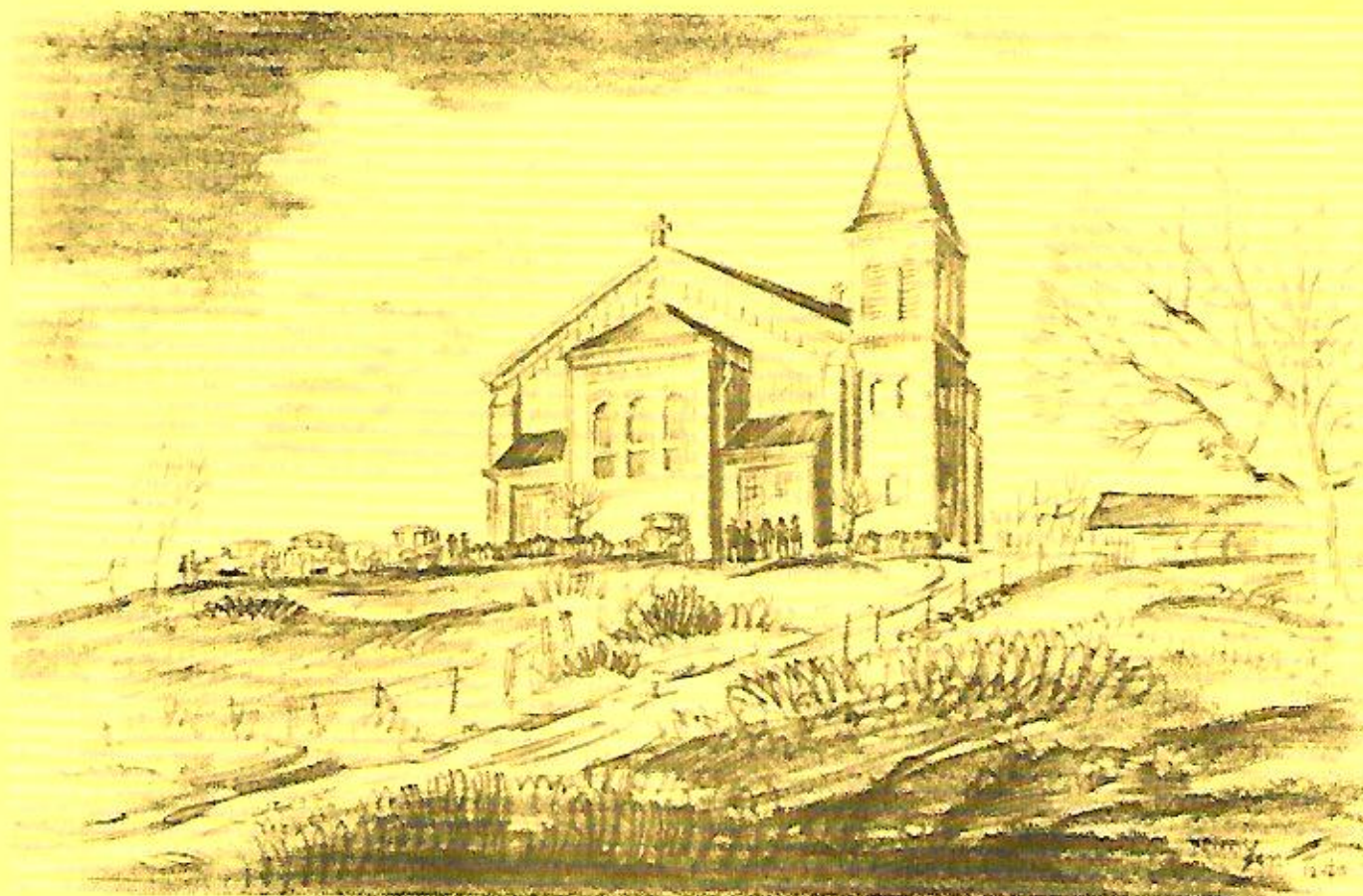
<sup>50</sup> Telephone conversation with George Carr, Harrisburg, March 29, 1978.

<sup>51</sup> Telephone conversation with W. Russell Malan, Minneapolis, Kansas, April 3, 1978.

<sup>52</sup> *The Evansville Press*, August 14, 1938, p. 10-C.







*Penny Cent did more than merely drew the church; he also made the picture frame and provided a brief description of his work. "St. Joseph's Church near Elizabethtown, Illinois (the famous Illinois Ozark Country). Drawn on December 23 and 24, 1934, Christmas, by special request of Mrs. M. Humm Hosick, Village Clerk of and at Elizabethtown, member of the Church of St. Joseph."*



*The Henry Hamp, Sr. farmhouse—now gone—near the College of the Hills. The original painting is owned by Andrew and Judy Hamp and is dated April 4, 1935.*