Memories of the 1910s

In the Beginning (1911)

The Manitoba Agricultural College was built largely, indeed grandly, on the banks of the Red River. To canoe this stretch of water in those days and to come across these immense buildings must have been an impressive sight. The College, in building these structures, brought trades and skills from across the province. They scooped out the foundation with horse-drawn dredges, hauled materials to the site by rail with steam locomotives, and laid foundations of solid stone. The foundations were well-laid.

But they built much more than a building here. Following the horses and the tradesmen and the materials have come generations of men and women who have filled these halls with the joys and struggles that are at the centre of the human and academic adventure. We came to learn, to share, to give.

When The University of Manitoba joined the Manitoba Agricultural College, Taché Hall (first known as the Girls’ and Boys’ Dormitories) was the major activity center for the fledgling campus. With its two gyms, two swimming pools, dining room, assembly hall and lounges, it formed the residential and social heart of the University.

It was intimately involved in all the affairs of the University. It housed the Dean of Men (the last of whom was Dr. Sisler) and we, its members, contributed much to the social, cultural, recreational, and academic life of the University. Its alumni have been loyal to the University. There is something different about the students who “lived” at the University. We sensed the pulse and the problems of the University more readily; it was easier for us to learn from each other and to contribute to the institution. We lived here. It was a thriving human community.

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Taché Hall is unique among Canadian university residences in that student self-governance was granted in 1914.

In 1914, the handbook for the dormitory of the Manitoba Agricultural College said:

This is the day of the development of local self-government. It is therefore in keeping with the spirit of the times that students of mature age in a college should be impressed with their responsibility as individuals in relation to all influences governing them.

To make each man, as much as possible, feel his own responsibility, and to develop his individuality and power of self-control, the president entrusts to a committee of the students the maintenance of proper order and decorum among their fellow students.

For this purpose the students are organized into what is called “the students’ self-governing organization,” of which every student is a member. At the beginning of the year they elect their own president. His executive council is composed of the Presidents of the Years, the President of the literary society, the President of the YMCA, the President of the athletic association, and the Chief of the fire brigade. Thus every important student organization in the College has a representative on the Executive Council.

This executive was the recognized medium of communication between the College authorities and the Student Body, and met the President or the Dean of Residence, as arranged, to confer with him and to express the wishes of the students. Much of the success of this organization depended upon the responsibility assumed by the individual student.

The presidency of this executive was the highest office and most responsible position at the disposal of the student body, and fell to the strongest and most popular leader among them.

The College Dormitories formed a Women’s Residence House Committee and a Men’s Residence House Committee, and these committees were responsible for social activities, the clubs to which Residence students belonged, and the rules and discipline of everyday Residence Life.

The Resident Students’ Association and its executive committee, RSAC, was an outgrowth of the original students’ self-governing organization.

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Home Economics students going to class in the Administration Building.
Home Economics students tending their gardens on the campus grounds.
The Residence Auditorium with the original wooden chairs and light fixtures around the balcony balustrade.
E.A. August and Family (1915)

Just a short note to say that while I was not a Resident of Taché Hall, I always appreciated its architectural design. I am glad it is being preserved and that you are also preserving its Century as a Residence in the planned publication. I hope you have many photos from which to draw your final selection. Despite the poor quality and camera angle, I thought I might add these to your collection.

E.A. August is a bit of a distant relative to me but he was a much loved and admired Grandfather of a favourite cousin of my father. Unfortunately, I do not know much more about the photo than what is noted on the slide.

E.A. August’s son, Archie, was a teacher but would have been trained at a Normal School and not at the University. E.A. August was the MLA for the R.M. of Dufferin in the Norris government (Tobias Crawford Norris was the Premier of Manitoba from 1915–1922).

From the Brown & Gold (1919)

The Glee Club has again carried through with great success. The class of music rendered on Glee Night was a treat to those musically inclined, and speaks well for those taking part.

To all these organizations we owe much for our pleasant dormitory life, but it must be borne in mind that our efficient Self-Government has added much to the success of our enterprises. Law and Order prevails in our halls due to the efforts of our Executives.

Certainly the most important part of our life is work. Where dormitories are provided, and, in fact every convenience of modern life is at our disposal, the students of MAC are indeed in a very desirable position.

Our time is all taken up with one kind of progressive activity or another. Education and scholarship are the fundamental desires of all. Knowledge is power, say the ancients, and surely our association at MAC speaks well for the future strength and prosperity of Agriculture and the Home.
One of the swimming pools, or plunge baths, in the basement of the Centre Block. Years later the plunge baths would be filled in and first become two Canteens and then Club Condo.