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# Grandest of Enterprises: Illinois State University, 1857-1957

Helen E. Marshall

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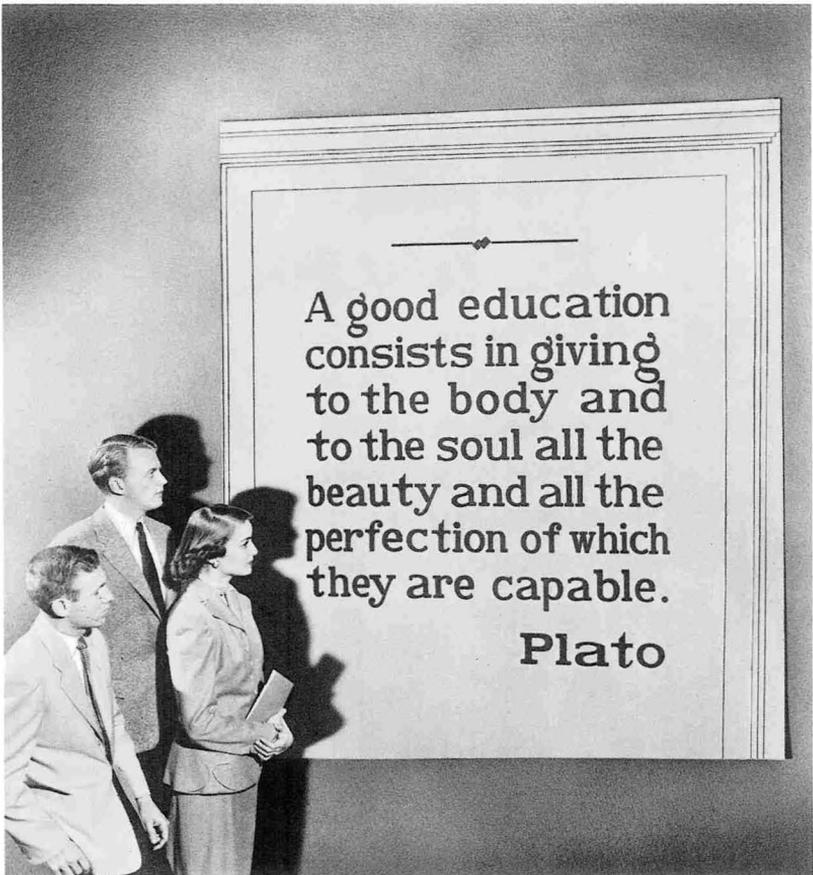
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## Grandest of Enterprises







A good education  
consists in giving  
to the body and  
to the soul all the  
beauty and all the  
perfection of which  
they are capable.

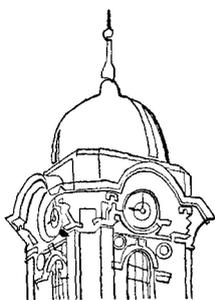
**Plato**

# Grandest of Enterprises

*Illinois State Normal University*

1857-1957

BY HELEN E. MARSHALL



Normal, Illinois · December 1956

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Illinois State Normal University

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*For the children of the free,  
and their teachers*

“The education of the children of the state  
is the grandest of enterprises,”

—*Richard Edwards*, 1867

## *First, A Few Words*

ALMOST a hundred years ago young Justin Richardson of Bloomington wrote in his diary that he had on Tuesday, September 29, 1857, attended the laying of the cornerstone of the State Normal University. The speakers, he wrote, seemed to gather inspiration from the "transcendent importance of the occasion." He was elated that he, only a boy barely out of his teens, had been asked to write out in his firm long hand the names of the county officials, and of those persons who had made donations for the construction of the building, so that they might be placed in the cornerstone.

Reminiscent of the oratory of the afternoon, he mused at length upon "the untold influence for good the institution might exert in years to come."

"Its powerful and salutary influence," he prophesied, "shall be more enduring than the granite foundation, it shall be perpetuated from one generation to another. . . ."

He envisaged the great building of brick and stone that would presently rise above the cornfields and dominate the landscape. "May this proud structure be but the emblem of its own proud eminence among many similar institutions. It overlooks the surrounding prairie spread out in all its beauty and loveliness. . . . May coming generations rise up and call us blessed for establishing such an institution."

Today Illinois State Normal University, a teachers college granting both bachelor's and master's degrees, is the rich fulfillment of the dreams of Daniel Wilkins, Jonathan Turner, Simeon Wright, George Bunsen, Jesse Fell, Newton Bateman, Charles Hovey, and other men of action who called it into being. From a single building high on a lonely prairie, the school has grown into a beautiful tree-shaded campus with many buildings, a faculty of nearly three hundred, and a student body of thirty-four hundred. Its alumni are numbered in thousands; its graduates are teaching throughout the world.

Great teachers such as Thomas Metcalf, Charles DeGarmo, Charles McMurry, Frank McMurry, Henry McCormick, Orson L. Manchester, Lida Brown McMurry, June Rose Colby, and such able administrators as Richard Edwards, John W. Cook, David Felmley and Raymond W. Fairchild have implemented the ideals of the founders, and have kept Illinois State Normal University what it was intended to be—a training school for teachers.

At intervals of twenty-five years commemorative volumes have recorded the progress of Normal University. James V. McHugh and John Williston Cook, later president, published the history of the first quarter-century in 1892. The *Semi-centennial History* published in 1907 was a cooperative faculty enterprise under the direction of John A. H. Keith. In 1935 the publication of *The Development of the Teachers College in the United States with Special Reference to Illinois State Normal University* by Charles A. Harper marked the anniversary of the first graduating class. The last pages of this centennial history were written with a deep sense of obligation, not only to those who in the past have written so succinctly and understandingly, but toward those who cherished and kept old programs, clippings, letters, diaries, and scrapbooks.

I am especially grateful to Ellen Edwards who preserved the voluminous papers of her father, President Richard Edwards, in the hope that they might someday become the property of Normal University, and to her brother, the late Owen Edwards, who executed this trust; to Mrs. Agnes Gale who gave me access to her collection of materials relating to her father, President John W. Cook; to Mrs. Laura Hayes Pricer of the English department and Mrs. Florence Sample Fleming, alumna, who supplied rich anecdotal material; to Dr. Robert Guy Buzzard, President of Eastern Illinois Teachers College, who read several chapters and made valuable suggestions; and to the late Dr. Raymond W. Fairchild, President of Illinois State Normal University, at whose request I undertook the writing of this volume. His confidence and encouragement were ever heart-warming and inspiring. Miss Eleanor Welch, Director of Libraries; Mrs. Inez Dunn, McLean County Historical Society; Miss Elizabeth Abraham, Withers Library; and the late Dr. Harry Pratt of the Illinois Historical Library, helped greatly in locating material and facilitating research. Dr. Gertrude

Hall, Director of Publicity, secured many of the illustrations for the earlier years, and Mr. Nelson R. Smith, University photographer, has given unstintingly of his talents and time in procuring photographs of the later period. Dr. Esther Vinson, professor of English, has read the entire manuscript and made suggestions as to style; Mr. Harry J. Owens, alumnus, and various of his professional associates, have assisted with matters of content, illustration, and format. To Mr. Paul Cary, my secretary, and to Mrs. Dorothy King, who typed the final draft, I am likewise indebted.

What a privilege it is to serve in the training of teachers, to help young men and young women comprehend the magnitude of their calling and the trust that reposes in the schools of America.

HELEN E. MARSHALL

Normal, Illinois  
September 22, 1956

