

*In
Memory
of*

Roger A. Watkins

Printer

A man's life is best defined and remembered in terms of the institutions and activities to which he is committed and by the values that guided his decisions and actions as he lived out his years in service to these organizations.

Roger A. Watkins was a committed man:

To his God through the specific doctrines and activities of the Advent Christian Church.

To his family—children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, of whom there were ten at the time of his death.

To a free society—free socially and economically as exemplified in his founding and successful guidance of The Strathmore Printing Company for over forty years.

And to Christian higher education as evidenced by his continuing interest in Aurora College.

This churchman, husband and father, businessman and college board member was also an avid reader, especially of history and biography. Because of his love of the printed word and because of the joy and satisfaction he found in books it seems appropriate to publish this memorial for his family and for friends, colleagues and former employees.

The three statements chosen for inclusion in this memorial booklet were written by three different men each of whom had known Roger Watkins over a long span of years. Each was speaking for a different and specific occasion.



A legacy of support which continues . . .

In the Spring 1976 issue of Aurora News we reported on the "discovery" of the painting "Yosemite Valley" by Albert Bierstadt which hung in Lowry Chapel. Following an appraisal of its value, the Board of Directors determined that the expense of insuring and protecting a painting of museum quality would be impossible. It was consigned to Hirschl and Adler Galleries in New York where it was recently sold.

"Yosemite Valley" was one of a group of paintings purchased for Aurora College by Roger A. Watkins, a member of the college board and long-time benefactor and friend.

Commenting on the sale, College Vice-President Roger Parolini said, "a portion of the proceeds will be used this year to balance the college's operating budget, a task not unknown to Roger Watkins whose personal generosity and ability to raise funds so often pulled Aurora College through difficult financial times. The debt of gratitude which we owe this great man continues to grow even after his death. We are hopeful that a portion of the proceeds can also be used to underwrite some campus improvement projects and to help build the college endowment funds which Watkins so strongly believed were needed to insure the college's future financial strength."



From the collection of Jo Ann and Julian Ganz, Jr.

In June 1962, Aurora College awarded an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Humanities upon Roger Albert Watkins. Mr. Orrin O. Singletary, then Treasurer and Business Officer of the college, made the following citation in presenting the candidate for the degree.

President Stephens:

The man I present has contributed uniquely to the development of Aurora College. He became a member of the Board of Directors in 1927 during the presidency of Dr. Orrin Roe Jenks, and secretary of the Board in 1929. He has served continuously from then until now, thus spanning the full term of your own distinguished career as president. His years have been spent, not in the pursuits of scholarly life, but in fostering a college where genuine scholarship might grow and thrive.

The energy and enthusiasm which enabled him to build a successful business enterprise have been freely given to advance the cause of Aurora College. He saw in our small beginnings the potential for future growth, and he has worked untiringly for its realization. Difficulties have always challenged him to go forward and to give more generously of his time and his means. His faith in other persons has inspired them to greater effort and higher achievement. These qualities of spirit have made him a faithful supporter, a wise counselor, and a true friend of Aurora College.

I am happy to present to you for the honorary degree of Doctor of Humanities, Roger Albert Watkins.

President Theodore P. Stephens' remarks upon awarding the degree:

Roger Albert Watkins, a business leader, a faithful service of your church, a dedicated director of Aurora College, a sustaining friend of a college president — I confer upon you the honorary degree of Doctor of Humanities.

On the occasion of the dedication of the Roger A. Watkins Residence Hall on the Aurora College Campus, April 19, 1970, former President James E. Crimi made the following address.

As most of you know, circumstances have kept me off the campus most of this academic year. That I chose this dedication as my first

attempt at public speaking since last September is an indication of how important and meaningful an occasion it is to me.

The students moved into this building in stages as construction was completed, beginning in late November and finally occupying it fully by the middle of January. Their move was without ceremony, and construction has gone on until very recently.

When the matter of a dedication was suggested to the students, I was at first a little shocked as they reacted with questions such as "What for? Why a ceremony? We've been living here for months. What is there to dedicate?"

As I thought back to my own days as a student, however, I gradually came to understand this attitude. I don't remember that we ever gave a thought to Wilkinson, or Davis, or Eckhart; who they were, or why the buildings were named for them. It was all ancient history, of neither interest nor importance to us.

How are names chosen for buildings? Perhaps out of history books? It really didn't concern us! It dawned on me that of the 187 residents of this building probably not more than half a dozen have any idea who Roger A. Watkins is, or why the building should be named for him. Perhaps most of them didn't even wonder about it.

I have read recently that "history" is at an all-time low in student popularity. It doesn't interest the "now" generation, as some adult critics have called them. "Today's problems are all-important, and what does history have to do with them?"

If the students do feel this way we have failed badly in our teaching, for certainly the only way to understand "today" is through adequate, relevant knowledge of yesterday. What I would like to do in the next few minutes is to give a bit of the history of Aurora College and its relationship to a man called Watkins. It will serve to illustrate two principles: the fact that all history is really biography; and the fact that a college is created out of the lives of people who care.

In 1906, a boy traveled from a farm outside Baraboo, Wisconsin, to Mendota, Illinois, to enter a tiny, 13-year-old college academy, the forerunner of Aurora College. Since that day, 64 years ago, his life has been involved with the college in a host of ways.

Mendota College moved, and became Aurora College in 1912, a year after he completed his academic work. He remained to work in Mendota, and was married that same year to Grace White in the Mendota women's dormitory, where Grace's parents had been what we would now call head residents.

When the Watkins family decided to leave Mendota in 1920, their choice was to follow the college to Aurora. At that time there were only about half a dozen houses on Calumet Avenue. As you have walked up

and down Calumet you must have noticed four brick houses of similar age and architecture. They had been built by college people, almost literally in the cornfield. You know three of them as the Robbins House, built by Aurora's first dean, and recently a residence hall; the Dewing House, built by a beloved professor and also used as a residence hall in recent years; and the home of President Orrin Roe Jenks, now the residence of Dr. Hewitt. The fourth similar house, just north of the Jenks House, became the new home of the Watkins family in 1920.

Roger Watkins soon purchased a printing plant which became The Strathmore Company, and which has been vitally connected to Aurora in two ways. I wish it could be determined how many students have worked their way through college at Strathmore over the years. It has been a sort of college tradition. There has been a steady stream from the early 1920s to this very week, and the total must run to several hundred. There always seemed to be a job for one more, especially in the days when jobs were scarce. My first job was as a janitor at Strathmore, though I rose to the position of assistant shipping clerk at 50 cents an hour.

Those were difficult days financially for the college as well as for the students. Grace and Roger Watkins and the Strathmore Company became a financial mainstay, especially throughout the depression. The budget never seemed to balance in those days either. For years it was frequently Roger Watkins who at the end of the year made up the difference, so that the college doors could open again in the fall. His first big gift came in the early 1930s when he surprised Dr. Stephens by paying off the remaining mortgage on the construction of the original buildings. Thousands have given and still are giving to build this college; but let it be recognized and never forgotten, that in those crucial depression years without the generous commitment of Grace and Roger Watkins Aurora College probably would not be here today.

Giving is sometimes a relatively impersonal thing, but Mr. Watkins' relationship to the college was close and personal. In 1927, he was elected to the board of directors, and in 1929 became its secretary. He still holds that position, surely some kind of record. This was no empty honor. With it came intimate involvement with every college problem over the years.

He was an advisor, confidant, encourager, friend, and visionary stimulator of three presidents—Dr. Jenks, Dr. Stephens, and myself. He was always a courageous innovator—a man of unusual vision, always seeing opportunities for progress. His powers of concentration always amazed me. I recall his telling me once that he often thought out problems while driving. (This was before the days of the toll road, incidentally.) He said, "I often get in the car and drive to Chicago with a

problem on my mind. The next thing I know I have the problem solved and I'm in Chicago and I have no memory of the driving." For all my respect for him, after that I rode with him as little as possible. At the age of 81 he is still thinking and concentrating, especially on the problems of the college.

Grace White Watkins died in 1956. You are all aware of the Watkins Room in the library, but I wonder how many of the students know that it is the Grace White Watkins Room. On the wall to the left of the door appears a plaque which reads, "In tribute to an alumna whose life expressed clearly the enduring values of the Mendota-Aurora College tradition."

In 1962, the honorary degree of Doctor of Humanities was awarded Roger Watkins at the June 4 commencement exercises.

I haven't mentioned students. Many board members are relatively remote from students, but this has not been true of Roger Watkins. It could not be, for in addition to his hiring many at Strathmore Company, his four children attended Aurora college, and brought dozens of friends into the home at 221 Calumet. Each of the four married an Aurora College student. And to date there have been six grandchildren enrolled, two of these current students and residents of this hall. Three nieces and a nephew have also been Aurorans, including one that you all know, Mrs. Marshall Bezanson.

This is the bare outline of the story, and the reason for naming this, The Roger A. Watkins Residence Hall. Sixty-four years of service, generous giving, direct involvement. It is out of such loyalty, commitment, faithfulness, and vision that worthwhile institutions are built. They don't just happen, and money alone doesn't build them. They owe whatever spirit, whatever heart, whatever uniqueness they have to the lives of men like Orrin Roe Jenks, Theodore Stephens and Roger A. Watkins.

*Members of the family
present at Dedication:*

Mrs. Walter Pierce, sister
Miss Elizabeth Jackson
Miss Joan Watkins
Mr. Daniel Watkins
Mrs. Robert Jackson
Mrs. Mark Trumbo and Dean Trumbo
Mr. and Mrs. James Watkins

The plaque on Watkins Hall reads:

**THE
ROGER A. WATKINS
RESIDENCE HALL**

In honor of Roger A. Watkins, actively involved with the growth of Aurora College for over sixty years — a student of Mendota Academy from 1907-11, a member of the board of directors since 1927, a consistently generous donor, a wise friend and discerning counselor.

*"A faithful man shall abound
with blessings."*

Dr. Moses Crouse, Professor of Bible and Theology at Aurora College, offered this Eulogy at Mr. Watkins' funeral on July 30, 1977.

The Roger A. Watkins Residence Hall was dedicated on April 19, 1970. That was an occasion of satisfaction and fulfillment for him, who with his wife Grace, had been friends and benefactors of Aurora College for many years.

For more than three score and ten, the destiny of Aurora College has been entwined with these people, for it was in the Fall of 1906 that Roger Watkins left his farm in Baraboo, Wisconsin, to enter Mendota Academy. He graduated from Mendota College in 1911, just one year before that institution was moved to Aurora, Illinois, to become Aurora College.

The records show that Roger was an active leader during his college days. One year he gave one of the three orations listed on the College Day Program of January 8, 1910; he was elected president of the Athletic Association and of the College Literary Society; and he served as business manager of *The Epitome*, the student publication of those days. The banter and jokes printed in the student gossip columns confirm the notion that this handsome young man was a lively and popular campus individual. Nevertheless, Roger was a good student. He excelled in mathematics, science, and history. One would judge, however, that the fanfare of the classics faculty would not be overwhelming. One of his classmates was Grace White of Buffalo, New

York. They were married on August 15, 1912, and continued to live on in Mendota for the next eight years.

The Western Advent Christian Publication Association maintained its printing plant in Mendota. This young college graduate became the manager of that establishment. Some years later Clarence Kearney wrote of Mr. Watkins' work with the Hope Press. He said, "Roger Watkins was manager of this plant, probably the most efficiently operated printing establishment in the history of the Advent Christian denomination." That judgment was based upon the fact that while he was manager Roger introduced effective cost analysis, won the confidence of his clientele, secured up-to-date equipment, and developed commercial accounts until that small religious printing company was doing a thriving business. It seems, however, that the removal of their alma mater from Mendota to Aurora created a void in the lives of Grace and Roger. In 1920 they moved their family to this city where Roger bought two small printing plants and merged them into one. The Strathmore Company was born.

Roger Watkins was an astute business man. Being a man of courage and sound judgment he was not afraid to take risks. He was an enthusiastic competitor and a persuasive salesman. Though the founder and manager of a rapidly expanding business, he was responsive to the needs and feelings of his associates. His employees were appreciative of him and his employment practices. He used his business not only to produce quality merchandise, but as an instrument of expression of his concern for people. Being well aware that many college students had to struggle to meet their financial obligations Roger repeatedly brought them into his plant so that they might be able to meet their expenses. A close estimate of the number of Aurora College students so befriended totals well over two hundred individuals, your memorialist is included in that company. This openness to the needs of people, along with a goal to develop creative marketing ventures, marked the decades during which Roger was president of Strathmore Company. He retired as president in 1957 and in 1960 was named Chairman of the Board. His interest in printing never diminished.

It has already been indicated that Aurora College was another lifelong interest of Roger and the Watkins family. May we return in our thinking to that day when the Roger A. Watkins Hall was dedicated. On that occasion President James E. Crimi sketched the interrelations of the college and the man. He said in part:

Those were difficult days financially for the college as well as for the students, Grace and Roger Watkins and The Strathmore Company became a financial mainstay, especially throughout the depression.

The budget never seemed to balance in those days either. For years it was frequently Roger Watkins who at the end of the year made up the difference, so that the college doors could open again in the Fall. His first big gift came in the early 1930s when he surprised Dr. Stephens by paying off the remaining mortgage on the construction of the original buildings. Thousands have given and still are giving to build this college; but let it be recognized and never forgotten, that in those crucial depression years without the generous commitment of Grace and Roger Watkins, Aurora College probably would not be here today.

Later in the address Dr. Crimi added this tribute:

He was an advisor, confidant, encourager, friend, and visionary stimulator of three presidents — Dr. Jenks, Dr. Stephens, and myself.

These quotations indicate that indebtedness of Aurora College extends beyond financial aid. A full list of his contributions would be extensive. Some of them must be mentioned. Mr. Watkins was elected to the board of directors in 1927 during the presidency of Dr. Orrin Roe Jenks; he served as its secretary from 1929-1971, and was a member of the board's executive committee. He was also a member of the Citizens Advisory Board of the college. In 1962 Mr. Watkins was presented the honorary degree of Doctor of Humanities. Dr. Orrin Singlettery wrote the citation for that occasion. He included these words:

Difficulties have always challenged him to go forward, and to give generously of his time and his means. His faith in other persons has inspired them to greater effort and higher achievement. These qualities of spirit have made him a faithful supporter, a wise counselor, and a true friend of Aurora College.

President Stephens' response, as he conferred the degree, was as follows:

Roger Albert Watkins, a business leader, a faithful servant of your church, a dedicated director of Aurora College, a sustaining friend of a college president — I confer upon you the honorary degree of Doctor of Humanities.

An additional anecdote which ties Roger's interest in Aurora College to his keen judgment and business acumen relates to his selection, acquisition, and subsequent gift of the Bierstadt painting of Yosemite Valley to Aurora College. Although not a connoisseur of American art, through some instinct or just sheer good fortune, for a few hundred dollars he secured a painting that is currently quoted on the market, not in the hundreds, but more nearly two hundred thousands of dollars.

There was an integrity and wholeness about this man. The characteristics of the public figure about whom we have been thinking

are reflected in his home life. Grace and Roger established a stable home. Their family of two girls, Marium and Elizabeth, and two boys, James and Daniel, remains a close-knit entity. They recall a sense of freedom in their relationships. They could talk with their parents on any questions. They say of Roger, "he was a great dad." It is true that love is contagious when daily evidenced in the home. These children came to know the nature of the love of God, for they experienced love in their relations with their father and mother. Though a busy man, Roger had time for his children. Gladly would he go fishing with them and join in their fun. Yet he did not have favorites among them, but rather had the nice facility of making each of them feel special and appreciated. He loved to engage them in competitive games and sports. In that context he played to win and through that device taught them about life. They learned that when they won, theirs was no shame victory but a well-earned achievement. Roger has been a loved man: by many admiring persons, but most especially by his wife Grace who died in 1956, and by his children and grandchildren—these persons knew him intimately and are, who and what they are, in part, for having had such a father and grandfather.

Individuals who were close to Roger speak of his breadth of interests. He read widely and retained much of its content. Even until the last few months of his long life, his mind was clear and memory acute. He remained fully capable of detecting faulty reasoning and of rendering wise counsel. Roger had a special fondness for history, particularly that of the United States. He was aware of a diversity of points of view in any field and cultivated a charitable tolerance for ideas that ran counter to his own. He delighted in theological discussions and was well grounded in the particular tenets of the religious tradition which claimed his allegiance. These views were not held casually. Each was probed and questioned by an active mind which sought to test all things and retain only that which was good.

Roger Watkins was a good churchman. As a member of the Aurora Advent Christian Church he was repeatedly elected to its official board and was frequently asked to serve as chairman of its finance committee. Beyond the local scene he served his church in important capacities. His vision and drive in securing the property at Camp Rude, just north of St. Charles, is typical. His hopes and dreams for that property, now known as Riverwood Christian Center, is just now coming to fruition though now administered and sponsored from a broader base. Two more significant associations must be noted in the area of his religious contributions. One, he was for many years a member of the Board of Publications of the Advent Christian General Conference. The other was his interest in, and service on the board of International Christian

Leadership of Washington, D.C., the group that initiated the program of Prayer Breakfasts throughout this country and in many other lands. Mr. Watkins' other associations included former memberships in the Rotary Club, Elks Club, the Aurora Country Club, and the Union League Clubs of Aurora and Chicago. Roger Watkins made a host of friends. Most of them have been from the Midwest, yet there are others in every corner of our land. Many new friendships have developed in and about the Advent Christian Home of Dowling Park, Florida, where he and his wife Anne have made their home these last few years. We who survive him believe the quotation on the dedicatory plaque in the Roger A. Watkins Residence Hall relates well to him. It reads: "*A faithful man shall abound with blessings.*" Many people have been pleased to count Roger Watkins among their friends and his life has fallen as a benediction upon many.

—Moses C. Crouse

COMMITTAL SERVICE

Psalm 121

*I lift up my eyes to the hills,
From whence does my help come?
My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.*

*He will not let your foot be moved,
He who keeps you will not slumber.
Behold, He who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.*

*The Lord is your keeper;
the Lord is your shade on your right hand,
The sun shall not smite you by day,
nor the moon by night.*

*The Lord will keep you from all evil;
He will keep your life.
The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in
from this time forth and for evermore.*

COMMITAL

Forasmuch as our brother, Roger Watkins, has died, we tenderly commit his body to the ground, commend him to the care of our heavenly Father, and believe that as he has shared our common mortality, so shall he also share in renewed life and blessed immortality.

PRAYER

O merciful God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the resurrection and the life; we pray that You will raise us from the death of sin into the life of righteousness, that we, together with our honored dead, may hear the gracious words of our Savior, saying: "Come O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Grant this our prayer, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Now the God of Peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

ROGER A. WATKINS 1888 — 1977

Born — August 31, 1888, Baraboo, Wisconsin

Entered *Mendota Academy* — 1906

Graduated *Mendota College* — 1911

Manager *The Hope Press*, Mendota, Ill. — 1912-1920

President *The Strathmore Printing Company* (and its predecessor companies, Eugene Smith Printing Co. and Fox Valley Printing Co.) — 1920-1957

Chairman of Board of *The Strathmore Co.* — 1960-1971

(Honorary Life Chairman 1972-1977)

Board of Directors of *Aurora College* 1927-1971

Died — July 24, 1977

Married:

Grace Hughson White, August 15, 1912; died Sept. 12, 1956

Anna Belle Fenton, June 28, 1957

Children:

James White Watkins

Mrs. Mark H. Trumbo (Mariam)

Mrs. Robert C. Jackson (Mary Elizabeth, Betty)

Daniel Hughson Watkins

Grandchildren:

Mark Watkins Trumbo

Beth Trumbo Howard

Jon Ernest Jackson

Calvin White Jackson

Elizabeth Jackson Zane

James Bennett Jackson

Roger LeRoy Watkins (Jerry)

Joan Watkins Matheny

Barbara Watkins Hinricks

John Daniel Watkins

Great-grandchildren:

Karin Lowe Trumbo

Julia Grace Trumbo

Edward Trumbo Howard

Emily Mariam Howard

Kelly Allison Watkins

Todd Mathew Watkins

Amanda Michelle Watkins

Christopher James Matheny

Lisa Nicole Matheny

Rebecca Duryee Zane