

Peabody: A Tale of Two Centuries

by Jack Allen

The following article by Jack Allen appeared in the official program of Peabody's Grand Third Century Celebration. Allen, professor emeritus of history, served on the Peabody faculty from 1946 to 1979. He is the author or coauthor of some fifty books, booklets, and educational resources, as well as numerous professional articles. He is the author of "The Peabody Saga," an article in the Summer 1980 REFLECTOR, which traced the history of Peabody from its beginning to its merger with Vanderbilt.

"THE advance guard of civilization." This was James Robertson's expansive description of the hardy band he led into the western country to found a settlement on the banks of the Cumberland that would come to be called Nashville. Within five years Robertson enriched this pioneering effort by persuading the North Carolina legislature to establish a school in the new outpost. Authorized December 29, 1785, the school was named Davidson Academy. Thus was set in motion an educational tradition richer than anything Robertson and his followers could scarcely have dreamed.

The principal of the new academy was Thomas B. Craighead. Enticed to the position from Frankfort, Kentucky, Craighead was one of the most respected educators west of the Appalachians. In deciding to cast his lot with the new school, he became the first link in a compelling chain of educational circumstances. Time and again across the years, George Peabody College for Teachers and its forebears were a magnet that seemed resolutely to attract educators of distinction.

Davidson Academy had been in operation almost two decades when, in September, 1806, the trustees were granted a petition to convert the school into a college. Thomas Craighead was elected president of the new institution, named Cumberland College. In 1809 he was succeeded by another highly regarded Kentucky educator, James Priestley, the principal of Salem Academy in Bardstown. Cumberland College had a brief, checkered career.



George Peabody

Beset by financial difficulties, it closed its doors after James Priestley's death in February 1821. Nashville supporters were undaunted, however. A fund-raising campaign bore sufficient fruit to reopen the college in 1825, a new president having been selected the previous year.

The new president of a rejuvenated Cumberland College was Philip Lindsley. And what a coup it was! For almost twenty years Lindsley had been a teacher and administrator at the College of New Jersey (later Princeton). A noted educator at one of the nation's leading institutions of higher learning, why would he take the reins of a struggling little college that would begin classes anew with a grand total of twenty-eight students? The reasons remain unclear.

Upon Philip Lindsley's recommendation the name of Cumberland College was changed to the University of Nashville in 1826. Lindsley continued as president until 1850, the university remaining small, its reputation regional. Its graduation lists, nevertheless, included numerous individuals whose achievements were

noteworthy.

During the turbulent 1850s and 1860s the University of Nashville was ably led by John Berrien Lindsley, Philip Lindsley's son. A graduate of the College of Medicine, University of Pennsylvania, Dr. Lindsley became chancellor in 1855. He shepherded the University of Nashville, with its newly established departments of medicine and law, through the disruptive Civil War years. After the conflict he became a leading voice in stressing the need for educated teachers in the war-devastated South.

Enter George Peabody. The son of poor, humble New Englanders, Peabody was born in Danvers, Massachusetts, February 18, 1795. His first forty-two years he lived in the United States, advancing rapidly in the mercantile business. A growing interest in international trade and finance led him to move to England in 1837. London, the heart of international banking, would be his home for the remaining thirty-two years of his life.

Though a Britisher by adoption, George Peabody did not forget his native land. In the early 1850s he made gifts totaling a quarter of a million dollars to his home town, Danvers. In 1856, after an absence of almost twenty years, he returned to the United States for a visit. To the city of Baltimore, where he had first achieved business success, he made a gift of a million dollars, later increased to a million and a half. Significantly, during his American visit, he decided to travel through the South, stopping in Richmond, Charleston, New Orleans, and a number of other cities. He returned to England, his sensitivities attuned to gathering storm clouds that would shortly rain destruction on the region.

From his London vantage point, George Peabody followed the American Civil War with intense interest and concern. Sympathetic with the cause of union, he was nevertheless deeply concerned about the problems that plagued the defeated South. Early in 1867, he addressed a letter to a group of distinguished Americans. In it he stated that he had given long and serious

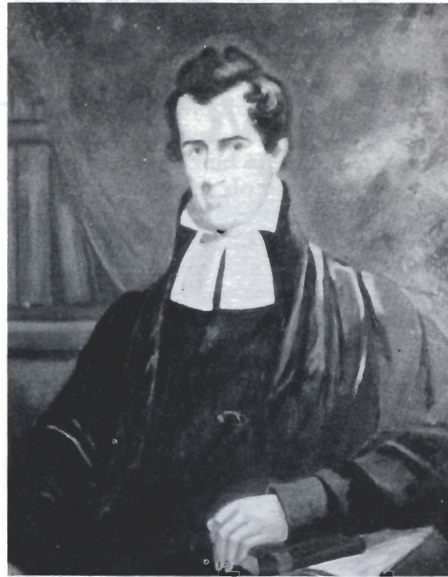
consideration to "the educational needs of those portions of our beloved and common country which have suffered most from the destructive ravages and the less serious consequences of the Civil War." From the letter came the establishment of the Peabody Education Fund. The original grant was one million dollars. Subsequent grants raised the value of the Fund to about two million dollars.

John Berrien Lindsley was quick to sense the potentialities of the Peabody Education Fund. By the summer of 1867, with the concurrence of his trustees, he presented to the Fund a tentative proposal for a program of teacher education at the University of Nashville. The response was one of considerable interest. In assessing the Lindsley proposals, it was the hope of the Peabody Fund that the Tennessee legislature would see fit to establish a normal school to which the Fund could contribute. But, as is not uncommon with deliberative bodies, the legislative wheels ground with fits and starts. Finally, in 1875, the legislature gave the University of Nashville authorization for a charter change "to make an agreement with the trustees of the Peabody Fund for the establishment of a normal school."

Given legislative approval, action was swift. In September 1875, Eben S. Stearns was elected president of the new institution. Named State Normal College, it opened December 1, 1875, with an enrollment of sixty students. Stearns came to the presidency of the new normal school having served as the second president of West Newton Normal in Massachusetts, the first state normal school in America. Again, an inexplicable example of the lure of Nashville and its educational challenge.

During its early years the young normal school provided President Stearns and his colleagues challenges aplenty. The Peabody Fund continued its support, but the Tennessee legislature was apathetic to the school's needs. Observing the situation were lawmakers in neighboring Georgia, whose thoughts of enticing the normal school to their state were matched by some show of interest in the idea among trustees of the Peabody Fund. The gravity of the situation stirred Nashvillians to action. A concerted local drive for funds in the spring of 1880 was successful, leading trustees of the Peabody Fund to continue support for the school in Nashville.

As if the Georgia take-over threat



Philip Lindsley

were not problem enough, the Stearns administration encountered stormy seas on campus, including at least two efforts to force the president's resignation. But a dogged Stearns moved ahead, exercising leadership in the development of a viable teacher education curriculum and obtaining funds to renovate facilities. He died in office in April 1887 after an extended illness.

An uneasy campus interim was alleviated with the arrival in Nashville early in 1888 of a new president, William Harold Payne. Again a stroke of good fortune! For Payne was an educator of national and international distinction, having moved to the University of Michigan in 1879 to fill the first Chair of Education in the United States. He was reluctant to leave his prestigious post at Ann Arbor, but after considerable soul searching, he accepted the Nashville position, believing it contained great potentialities for leadership in teacher education.

William Harold Payne's administration brought significant changes, and quickly. In 1888 the State Board of Education honored the contributions of George Peabody by renaming the normal school Peabody Normal College. A Bachelor of Arts degree was inaugurated the same year, and a Master of Arts was added in 1889. In response to an expanded and enriched curriculum, faculty was greatly strengthened, library holdings grew, and student enrollments increased in size and diversity. Through the 1890's Peabody Normal College pursued a

singular goal: to develop a teacher education institution of such quality that it would be emulated by normal schools throughout the Southern region.

William Harold Payne resigned as president of the college in 1901, citing continued ill health as one compelling reason. He was succeeded by former Tennessee governor, James D. Porter, the seventy-two-year-old chairman of the University of Nashville Board of Trustees. Thus began a significant transition period in Peabody history.

In 1903 the trustees of the Peabody Fund, using permission granted by George Peabody's will, voted to allocate funds for a "George Peabody College for Teachers." The action stated simply that such an institution would be established at a suitable location in the South. It immediately set in motion a vigorous lobbying campaign in behalf of Nashville. The result was a notable success with supportive voices amply backed by dollars. Bolstered by matching grants from individual contributors, the state of Tennessee, the city of Nashville, Davidson County, and the University of Nashville, totaling more than half a million dollars, the Peabody Fund voted in January 1905, to endow its teachers college in Nashville.

The dust had scarcely settled on the Fund's decision when a heated controversy flared. It was fired by a recommendation of a committee of Peabody Fund trustees that the college be located near Vanderbilt University. Individuals and groups favoring the recommendation were led by Vanderbilt Chancellor James H. Kirkland. President Porter was a formidable leader of the opposition. Ultimately, the Kirkland forces gained at least a partial victory. A defeated Porter resigned his presidency in the summer of 1909. Shortly, on September 30, 1909, George Peabody College for Teachers was duly chartered, the articles of incorporation specifying that the new institution be located "in close proximity to Vanderbilt University." To still any "misapprehension" concerning merger with Vanderbilt, representatives from the Peabody Board of Trustees and the Peabody Fund subsequently issued a statement emphasizing "cooperation" that contemplated "nothing more than . . . arrangements between two independent institutions."

With a new charter in hand and plans afoot for a campus relocation, the Peabody Board of Trustees launched a lengthy, intensive search for a

president. Meanwhile, the Peabody Normal College continued to function after a fashion, before finally suspending operations in 1911. Earlier that year the presidential search had been concluded successfully with the naming of Bruce Ryburn Payne to head the new George Peabody College for Teachers. A thirty-seven-year-old professor of education at the University of Virginia, Payne was an untried administrator. His selection would have a profound influence on the character and direction of Peabody College for more than a quarter of a century.

Modern Peabody opened its doors in a rousing fashion in June 1914. Welcomed were more than 1100 students to what would become an institutional hallmark for years to come: the wide-ranging, cosmopolitan Peabody Summer Session.

Two distinctive features, physical plant and curriculum, quickly established the character of the new Peabody. An architectural plan borrowed heavily from Mr. Jefferson's design for the University of Virginia evolved into a quadrangle of columned buildings (the "Pillars of Peabody") dominated by a rotunda at the head of the campus. A curriculum, fashioned primarily to serve the purposes of a graduate school of education, placed heavy academic emphasis on the arts and sciences as companions to professional requirements associated with teaching and learning. Offering advanced degrees through the Ph.D., the melding of academic and professional studies made the Peabody curriculum virtually unique among the nation's colleges of education. It had, as one consequence, a profound influence on the state teachers college movement that would experience a heyday in the 1920s and 1930s.

The Peabody student body between 1914 and the end of World War II remained relatively small during the academic year. Characteristically it numbered some 600 or 700 students, at least three-fourths being candidates for graduate degrees. In sharp contrast, enrollments quadrupled and more during the busy twelve-week summer sessions, as many as 90 percent or more of the enrollees being graduate students. The regular, full-time faculty was a small community of scholars, male and female, fiercely individualistic and closely associated with students, functioning within a sparse administrative structure. During the summer sessions, the regular faculty



An early plan of Peabody's physical plant borrowed heavily from Thomas Jefferson's design for the University of Virginia.



This early aerial photograph shows how the campus evolved into a quadrangle of columned buildings dominated by the Social Religious Building.

was augmented by an array of visiting professors, broadly representative nationally and internationally, but also, not uncommonly, from neighboring Vanderbilt.

The legacy of the Bruce Payne years (President Payne died quietly and unexpectedly in the spring of 1937) was carried forward by a succession of Peabody presidents; S. C. Garrison, Henry H. Hill, Felix C. Robb, John M. Claunch, and John Dunworth.

President Garrison, a psychologist and Peabody graduate dean, influenced closer Vanderbilt relations through support for establishment of the Joint University Libraries. He was also instrumental in the creation of what developed into a prestigious School of Music and headed the college through difficult war years until his untimely death in January 1945.

Henry H. Hill, Garrison's successor, was a nationally recognized educator who sparked a spirited post-war resurgence. Burgeoning enrollments and fresh program developments called for the addition of new faculty to augment an inherited core of scholars. Responding to the Hill leadership, the consequence for Peabody, in the 1950s, could properly be described as an educational renaissance.

Rising rapidly in the Peabody scheme of things during the late 1950s was the developing field of Special Education. At Peabody the movement gained added visibility in 1965 with the establishment of the John F. Kennedy Center for Research in Education and Human Development. The Center came into being during the administration of President Felix Robb, Henry Hill's successor in 1961. Robb, who had served as Peabody's dean of instruction for almost a decade, would leave the Peabody presidency in 1966 to head the Southern Association of Schools and Colleges.

The departure of President Robb brought Henry Hill out of retirement for a time, until a new president could be named. The next Peabody head, John M. Claunch, a political scientist from Southern Methodist University, followed a Robb practice in the enrichment and expansion of undergraduate programs. His administration also witnessed the continued flourishing of programs in Special Education. On a darker side, his presidency was plagued with inherited fiscal problems that had first been manifest in the late 1930s, reappeared in the late 1950s, and became more acute in the 1960s.



Bruce Ryburn Payne

Claunch's successor was John Dunworth. A national leader in teacher education, with service as a college dean and school administrator, he assumed the presidency in January 1974. Resting squarely on the Dunworth shoulders was a mandate from the Board of Trustees to recommit Peabody to its traditional educational mission. The new president moved expeditiously to initiate a study that led to an innovative reorganization of the college's academic and administrative structure. One of the most poignant aspects of the reorganization was the decision to close the venerable Peabody Demonstration School, an institution that could trace its origins to the Winthrop Model School, established in 1889 as the first campus laboratory school in the South. In addition to new internal configurations, the college moved externally, as Peabody centers for graduate study were established at several locations in the United States, England, and West Germany.

The Dunworth administration,

likewise, sought to revitalize the crucial development area. Unfortunately, however, a Capital Funds Campaign launched enthusiastically with the approval of the Board of Trustees failed to bear sufficient fruit to deal effectively with college fiscal problems that had continued unabated through the 1970s. Ultimately, the college administration felt obliged to conclude that drastic measures were required if Peabody was to continue as a quality institution. The Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees concurred. Thus were opened conversations with Vanderbilt University that led, in 1979, to a formal alliance.

Given the perspective of some three quarters of a century, the merger that produced George Peabody College for Teachers of Vanderbilt University was, in some respects, an evolutionary development. There were powerful voices in support of the merger idea at the time of Peabody's location on its present campus. Across the years, after 1914, there was easy movement of students to classes in both institutions.

Not uncommonly, Vanderbilt faculty members served as visiting professors during the large Peabody summer sessions. On occasion, individual trustees held membership on both Boards of Trust. The establishment of the Joint University Libraries brought cooperative enrichment. In 1961 a joint committee of Vanderbilt and Peabody trustees supported a study of "possible closer cooperation." Another study, carried out in 1969-70, broadened cooperative arrangements in creating the Nashville University Center.

Even so, the movement of Peabody into the Vanderbilt orbit was not without its wrenchings. Many loyal Peabodians, strongly supportive of an independent, free-standing college, found it difficult to accept the loss of institutional sovereignty. For Peabody faculty in the arts and sciences, the loss was more personal, since the merger agreement removed these curricular components with the resultant loss of positions. Administratively, the office of president was replaced with a deanship.

Peabody thus acquired certain new characteristics. Now, with an altered administrative structure and stripped of faculty and curriculum in the arts and sciences, it more nearly resembled, in organization and personnel, colleges of education found typically in major

American universities. Much of Peabody's uniqueness, as a consequence, would need to be developed and projected within a changed context.

The Peabody of the 1980s, under the leadership of Dean Willis Hawley, merits a certain pride in the assertion: "We make a difference." So Peabody does. And so it has across the years. In 1976 U.S. Commissioner of Education T. H. Bell, later Secretary of Education in the Reagan Cabinet, was led to declare: "Peabody is to teacher education what M.I.T. is to engineering, and the Mayo Clinic is to medicine." Bell's observation was influenced to a degree by earlier contacts with Peabody's Division of Surveys and Field Services, an educational enterprise widely recognized in the 1930s and in the years following World War II. He, likewise, was doubtless cognizant of Peabody's seminal role in the Special Education movement. What he might have been aware of generally, but perhaps not explicitly, were earlier contributions to the Peabody legend. Like, for instance, the impact of the famed Peabody Scholarships, 3,751 of which were awarded between 1875 and 1909 to deserving recipients who became classroom teachers, school administrators, and college professors,

deans, and presidents, all central to the educational development of the New South. Like, also, Peabody's early twentieth century leadership in race relations, school building construction, and library services. Like Peabody's enduring production of educational leaders for schools and colleges. And like, past and present, a campus outpouring of a sea of textbooks and other types of learning resources for schools and colleges.

Today as Peabody enters its third century, it continues, through research, service, and policy studies, to explore avenues that make a difference in the processes of teaching and learning: centers devoted to educational leadership, effective teaching, learning technology, mental retardation; programs for the preparation of corporate educators, nonteaching roles in human services, specialists in the management of information technology; innovative approaches to more traditional types of teacher education. And, like Peabody programs of the past, the links are both national and international, as the college maintains a long tradition of carrying its message around the world. All, with a firm resolve to abide by George Peabody's timeless admonition: *Education, A Debt Due From Present To Future Generations.* **PR**



Peabody Demonstration School after 1925