

The Associated Colleges of Illinois

A History 1952-1962

**Chapter One: The Founding of the
Associated Colleges of Illinois**



The Founding of the Associated Colleges of Illinois

Higher Education at a Crossroads

The Associated Colleges of Illinois was born of necessity in the early 1950s, during a time when privately funded higher education was at a crossroads. Simply stated, small private schools were struggling to keep pace with large state universities, which were receiving vast public monies as well as private donations. The resource development environment at this time was complicated by a significant historical trend: In the mid-twentieth century, all institutions of higher learning saw a marked decline in enrollment, as the boom from the post-World War II GI Bill went bust. For small independent colleges, this dip in enrollment was especially problematic when combined with rising costs and declining corporate support, an important source of funding for such institutions. For the first time in their history, some of these colleges were operating at a deficit. Something needed to be done.

And so, on Monday, September 15, 1952, the presidents and trustees of thirty-seven of Illinois' small private liberal arts colleges met at the Union League Club in Chicago. These individuals, highly regarded in their field and dedicated to the ideals of higher education, had an important mission: to further the cause of Illinois' independently funded institutions of higher education in an increasingly challenging environment.



**Cartoon from the *Chicago Sun-Times*,
October 1952.**

Led by Dr. Theodore Pierson Stephens, president of Aurora College, and Dr. Harold C. Coffman, president of George Williams College, the group convened to discuss the incorporation of the Associated Colleges of Illinois. Like their counterparts in Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, and other Midwestern states, where similar organizations had formed in recent years, ACI's founders concluded that the financial independence of small private colleges was in jeopardy. With declines in corporate and foundation funding, the possibility loomed large that many private colleges soon might devolve into

state-subsidized institutions, in whole or in part, leaving the U.S. system of higher education devoid of an important competitive factor. Without private colleges, these individuals theorized, students would have fewer choices, and the overall quality of the system would decline. United by a shared mission—addressing the critical funding needs of private higher education—ACI's founders believed that by uniting in a common purpose they would become a force powerful enough to obtain previously untapped financial resources for their individual institutions.

Drawing on the deliberations of various committees that had met throughout the previous summer, the group finalized ACI's mission and bylaws and established a process to help put funding of Illinois' private institutions on more solid footing. The organization's first mission statement charged ACI:

To aid the cause of independently supported higher education in the state of Illinois through acquainting the citizens and leaders of corporate enterprise with the work and accomplishments of said institutions and to accept funds for the benefit of member colleges or schools and thus provide a channel through which donors may contribute to the independent colleges of Illinois.

On October 17, 1952, the Associated Colleges of Illinois received its official articles of incorporation from the State of Illinois.

At the first official meeting of the Associated Colleges of Illinois on October 23, 1952, Dr. Frank Sparks, president of Wabash College in Indiana, was the featured speaker. Sparks, who had been instrumental in founding the Associated Colleges of Indiana, long had been considered one of the originators of the associated colleges movement. As he explained it:

I am, of course, tremendously interested in this movement because of the years that I spent in business and my complete conviction that there is a genuine common stake between the privately financed college and the private enterprise economic system. Practically every one of our colleges was financed at the beginning by a businessman or group of businessmen who were proprietors or partners. In recent years our industries' wealth has become locked up in corporate form, and in the process the flow of money from business to private colleges has tapered off, but the interest continues, and I think this movement indicates a very good prospect that we will reestablish a working relationship that will help our whole country—not only our colleges.

In Sparks' view, the core issue was providing private institutions with sufficiently diversified sources of funds to enable them to retain their independence. This independence, he argued, was critical to providing a viable alternative to state-supported institutions. Corporate support would be mutually beneficial: Corporations that supported such institutions ultimately would benefit from the valuable human resources returned by the colleges to the business world.

Welcoming Charter Members

The fledgling organization began its activities with twenty-two charter members, each of which contributed \$1,000 to ACI's first annual budget.

Accreditation by the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools was a prerequisite for ACI membership, and each prospective member was subject to approval by a two-thirds majority of the existing member schools. It was expected that the president or an executive officer of a member school would "support the activities of the Corporation with a generous allotment of his time. Such activities will be devoted normally to the solicitation of funds

for the Corporation either by each president or executive officer individually or in association with some other representative of this Corporation.”

The twenty-two charter member colleges were a diverse group. Not only did the colleges represent both urban and rural locations across the state of Illinois, they were also diverse in mission and in the composition of their student bodies.

The charter members were:

Augustana College (Rock Island)	James Millikin University (Decatur)
Aurora College (Aurora)	Lake Forest College (Lake Forest)
Barat College of the Sacred Heart (Lake Forest)	Lincoln College (Lincoln)
Blackburn College (Carlinville)	MacMurray College (Jacksonville)
Carthage College (Carthage)	McKendree College (Lebanon)
Eureka College (Eureka)	Monmouth College (Monmouth)
George Williams College (Chicago)	Mundelein College (Chicago)
Greenville College (Greenville)	North Park College (Chicago)
Illinois College (Jacksonville)	Quincy College (Quincy)
Illinois Wesleyan University (Bloomington)	Roosevelt College (Chicago)
	Shimer College (Mount Carroll)
	Shurtleff College (Alton)

Coffman was appointed ACI’s first president of the board of trustees, and Brinton H. Stone, a skilled college administrator and development officer, was appointed the organization’s first executive director. Stone had worked previously at Haverford College, Beloit College, and the University of Chicago. Both Coffman and Stone brought to the organization vast knowledge of fundraising and organizational structure, and the combined experience of these two men would prove vital to ACI’s early success.

A Revolutionary Experiment

Shortly after ACI’s first meeting in October 1952, the *Chicago Sun-Times* published an editorial extolling the virtues of the associated colleges movement and the Associated Colleges of Illinois in particular, stating:

Twenty-two smaller Illinois colleges have banded together for what, in this state, amounts to a revolutionary experiment...they have joined forces in a unified drive to obtain financial contributions from private corporations to help keep the colleges afloat. While there is a substantial and constant need for state-subsidized universities, it is equally true that there is a substantial and constant need for maintaining private schools in competition with them. It would be a sad day indeed for academic freedom and scholastic standards if higher education should become a state monopoly.

The newspaper went on to quote Irving S. Olds, then chairman of the board of United States Steel, who recently had called on corporations to do their part in support of private higher education. "American business has a direct obligation to support the free, independent, privately endowed colleges and universities of this country," Olds said. "Unless it recognizes and meets this obligation, I do not believe it is properly protecting the long-range interests of its stockholders, its employees, and its customers."

The Associated Colleges of Illinois had the widespread support not only of the press and of noted intellectuals, but also of those in corporate America who could influence private industry. Understanding the need to form mutually beneficial partnerships with civic-minded business leaders would prove to be the cornerstone of ACI's success for years to come.

Putting the Plan into Motion

At the third meeting of the Associated Colleges of Illinois on March 10, 1953, President Coffman echoed the sentiments expressed by Sparks at the October 1952 meeting. "Industry's needs—the three Ms: money, materials, and manpower—illustrate the importance of independent colleges to the nation," he said. "A study of 33,500 executives shows that eighty-eight percent are college trained and that seventy-one percent were educated at independent colleges and universities." Nevertheless, Coffman believed that independent colleges were in grave danger. "Independent colleges now have three choices," he said, "...to go out of existence entirely; to accept partial or total subsidy from government; or to unite in a continuous appeal for current funds, which will broaden the base of their support and reduce the cost of appeal promotion."

Coffman and his compatriots dedicated themselves and their new organization to the third of these choices, and the Associated Colleges of Illinois set about

creating detailed plans to present its ideas for enhanced funding to various corporations, associations, and foundations. Soon after incorporation, its leaders met with and received the support of the Illinois Manufacturers Association, which was considered an important first step. In addition, in November 1952 the group undertook a four-day fundraising campaign in Chicago. During that campaign the organization's founders approached 120 corporations and garnered \$11,030 in immediate donations.

At the March 1953 meeting, Executive Director Brinton Stone underscored that the organization's greatest obstacle in fundraising would be to prove to corporations that their money would be well spent. "To do this," he said, "we must be armed with facts, opinions that carry weight, and a persistent, contagious conviction that our colleges are performing a vital function."

Imbued with Stone's conviction, ACI's leaders moved forward with a long-term fundraising mission, which helped redefine resource development for small independent colleges in Illinois for generations thereafter.

1952-53 Donor List

The Associated Colleges of Illinois' 1952 fundraising campaign produced a list of committed corporate donors who contributed slightly more than \$11,000 to the cause. By 1953, the donor list had increased fivefold and garnered more than \$117,000 in corporate contributions.

1952 Donors

A. B. Dick Foundation

Birtman Electric Co.

Guardian Electric Co.

Kraft Foods Co.

Marquette Cement Mfg. Co.

Mojonnier Brothers

E. R. Moore Co.

Morris Paper Mills

Motorola, Inc.

Sterling Steel Casting Co.

Wabash Screen Door Co.

1953 Donors

A. B. Dick Foundation

Aetna Ball & Roller Bearing Co.

W. D. Allen Mfg. Co.

Allis Chalmers Foundation, Inc.

American Cabinet Hardware Corp.

American Lumber & Treating Co.

American Well Works

Anderson Brothers Mfg. Co.

Arvey Corporation

Barber-Greene Co.

Bates & Rogers Foundation
Birtman Electric Co.
Brock & Rankin
Burny Brothers, Inc.
Bertram J. Cahn
Central Solvents
& Chemicals Corp.
Chicago Paper Co.
Chicago Roller Skate Co.
James B. Clow & Sons
Concora Foundation
Deena Products
Elco Tool & Screw Corp.
Foote Brothers Gear
& Machine Corp.
The General Fireproofing Co.
Goss Foundation, Inc.
Guardian Electric Co.
Hammond Instrument Co.
A. L. Hansen Mfg. Co.
The Harmony Co.
Hart, Schaffner & Marx
Edmund J. Haugh
Ingersoll Foundation
Inland Steel Foundation
International Harvester Co.
Jahn & Ollier Engraving Co.
Johnson Fare Box Co.
W. W. Kimball Co.
Kraft Foods Co.
Harry Levy
Lincoln Mfg. Co.

F. J. Littel Machine Co.
Marquette Cement Mfg. Co.
Midland Paper Co.
The Miehle Foundation
E. R. Moore Co.
Morris Paper Mills
National Lock Co.
The S. Obermeyer Co.
George C. Peterson Co.
Revere Copper and Brass, Inc.
Rockford Machine Tool Co.
Joseph T. Ryerson
& Son, Inc., Fd.
Sangamo Electric Co.
Schulze & Eurch Biscuit Co.
Standard Oil Co. (Indiana)
Sterling Steel Casting Co.
Stewart-Warner Foundation
Symons Clamp & Mfg. Co.
Transparent Package Co. Fd.
Union Carbide & Carbon Corp.
Vapor Heating Corp.
Wabash Screen Door Co.
Williamson Candy Co.
John Wood Co.
Woods Charity Fund, Inc.
(Sahara Coal)

***Creating opportunities
by building on strength.***

1952-2012



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Colleges of Illinois

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