

# Story Of A Great Life

President J. H. T. Main Has Passed  
From This Life into a Greater  
Life Beyond

CAREER WAS MARKED BY  
HONORS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

His Devotion to Grinnell College Has  
Been the Guiding Principle  
of His Career

Grinnell's leading citizen has passed to his final reward. After forty years of service to Grinnell college and the town of Grinnell President Main's eyes have closed in their last sleep. His ever alert and active mind has given its last expression of love and service to the people of Grinnell, Iowa and to the world. He died as he lived, his mind creative, keen, kindly and thoughtful to the very end.

President Main was no laggard. To the last minute his active and resourceful strength and vigor were at their best, and his face was turned to the future.

He entered the service of Grinnell college in the fall of 1892, a devoted, lovable and helpful wife giving him comfort, cheer and assistance in all important work he had to undertake. As a teacher he was a marvel of industry and inspiration. His pupils in the class room knew that they were in the presence of a master mind. They loved him for his scholarship, for his breadth, and his intimate knowledge of the subject he was teaching. He became a friend in the classroom, on the playground, on the street, and in his home. In every activity he was helped by his cultured, beautiful and devoted wife.

He had been a student and a teacher before he came to Grinnell but here his mind blossomed out into the richness and fullness of vigor which kept him to his last days.

He was appointed dean of men and when President Dan Bradley resigned Professor Main was elected to the position of acting-President and so well did he serve the college, and with such force, dignity and inspiration, that in 1908 he was given the full title and full power of President.

# President Main's Latest Picture



The beloved head of Grinnell College seen at his desk, busy at the work from which death called him.

The coming June would have marked the completion of twenty-five years of inspiring, Christian service in the presidency of the college loved. He became known far and fit as a successful and popular President and other positions with the same powers and a larger salary were opened up to him. He preferred to remain with the college he loved, and here he worked for the manifold improvements and the developments which have marked Grinnell college in the last twenty-five years. During this period the college has seen broadening usefulness and influence which could not have been anticipated twenty-five years ago, and would not have been believed if its development had been forecast.

It is stated that President Lowell of Harvard once said to President Main, "Main, don't you know that the man who originates anything seldom gets the credit for it?" This was not true of President Main. Those who knew him gave him full credit for the great things he accomplished, accomplished because of his masterly determination and the loving spirit which marked his performance of the duties of the place he honored and exalted.

Among things which have been accomplished in a material way during President Main's service are the building of Herrick chapel, the Christian Association building, Alum-

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# Grinnell Honors

GRINNELL, IOWA, FRIDAY, APRIL 3, 1931.

# President Main

ni Recitation hall, the women's quadrangle, the men's dormitories, the grand stand at Ward field, the heating plant on the campus, the President's home, the swimming pool and the installation of the Memorial Pipe Organ.

In intellectual and Christian development there have been the organization of the Women's league, the Harvard Exchange, the Gates Memorial lectures and the Congregational Conference. These are not all the things which have marked his work here in twenty-five years.

The crowning effort of President Main's life was made to secure the gift of \$500,000 offered by the Carnegie foundation. It has been hard work. The deflation period following the close of the war when prices were high and money was easy has made the task an especially difficult one. He might almost have lost confidence in the outcome and have given up in despair but through the entire campaign his heart was always hopeful and his encouraging words inspiring. "We've got to raise the money". His inspiration helped the friends of Grinnell college to go deeper into their pockets when they felt they had given all they could and resulted in raising and reporting to the foundation board that the amount needed had been made good by Grinnell.

President Main has not lived to see the fruition of his hopes and labors expressed from the trustees of the fund but he did live to know that the amount necessary had been raised and evidence placed in their hands.

During his life here President Main has been the center of a group who worked faithfully for Grinnell college and for Grinnell. A scholar and a student, the duties of his position made him at times oblivious to the presence of others but always he enjoyed the relaxation and the diversion of meeting his friends.

When opportunity presented he was a regular attendant at the Kiwanis luncheon and with the Kiwanis club went on several visits to the country to meet with the farm people when they entertained the club.

His wife has been his constant companion in all events in which she could take part. They were frequent entertainers of many people in Grinnell and the regular Christmas party for the Elizabeth Earle Magoun club was one of the high points in the social life of President Main.

He never failed an appointment at any of his club activities until his recent illness at home. The next to the last meeting of the Fortnightly club should have been at his home and the paper should have been prepared by Mr. Main. His illness prevented this and it may be said truthfully that this is the first time in his twenty-five years of membership in the Fortnightly club and his eleven years of membership in the Kiwanis club that he has failed of a duty when given one to perform.

Through all his life though wrapped up in his college work he has been a lover of the simple activities to which he was born and which molded his early life into the thorough scholar and successful executive of his later years.

His home has been a social center for college groups, both student, faculty and others, and here have been entertained some of the greatest men and women honored in political, civic, intellectual and social activities.

He was active also outside of his college work at home. He was a trustee of the Carnegie foundation for the advancement of teaching and was present at a recent meeting of the trustees. He served as a member of the American Relief Commission to the near east and spent six months in Turkey and Armenia immediately at the close of the great war. He was a member of the American Phil-

ological Association and the Archaeological Institute of America, and contributed to magazines and educational journals, and was a member of the following clubs: University Club, Chicago; Grant Club, Des Moines; Century, City, Transportation and Harvard clubs, New York.

But in and above all he was a dominating influence in his home town. He was an active and leading influence in many local organizations. He and his faithful wife were members of the Grinnell Congregational church, active in every movement among the women and men which meant the betterment of the community and the advancement of Christian, moral and mental culture among our people.

Mrs. Main is a member of many of the leading women's clubs, Missionary society, Elizabeth Earle Magoun club and others.

President Main was a Mason, raised to that position in his home town lodge, a member of the Fortnightly Club, of the Kiwanis club, and of other clubs founded for the purpose of social and civic improvement. He was also a 32nd degree Mason of the Des Moines consistory and was signally honored by being made a Knight Commander of the Court of Honor.

In every part he took in public life, at home or abroad, he was an outstanding figure. In the pulpit, his sermons emphasized Christian integrity and were marked by a manly spirit and soul sympathy.

He was gladly welcomed to all the social and civic meetings which he attended and he himself enjoyed these meetings more than his friends knew. They were to him a relaxation from the onerous but delightful duties of his service to the college and the community.

His addresses to the graduating classes were an inspiration to them because every student knew he spoke from the soul, with a heart full of goodwill and love.

# Impressive Funeral Services For Grinnell's Great Leader Are Held This Afternoon

President Main's body was taken to the chapel today where it lay in state in the vestibule from one o'clock to two o'clock p.m., when funeral services were conducted. Rev. Robert Inglis, pastor of the Congregational church was in charge and talks were made by Dean J. S. Nollen and Rev. N. W. Wehrhan.

Rev. E. M. Vittum gave the biblical selection, "I am the resurrection and the life."

The music at the service included a solo by Miss Leah Pratt from the Messiah, "He shall feed his flock." This was followed by a solo by Mrs. E. B. T. Spencer, also from "Messiah", "Come Unto Him." The final selection on the organ at which Professor Hugo Goodwin, presided, "O Lord and Father of us all."

Active pall bearers at the funeral were Professor H. S. Conard, Professor R. H. Perring, Professor D. E. Peck, Professor R. B. McClenon, Professor E. D. Strong, and Professor L. P. Sherman.

Honorary pall bearers were Honorable H. W. Spaulding, W. G. Ray, Professor H. W. Norris, Professor W. J. Rusk, Professor John W. Gannaway, and Professor C. F. Lavell.

At the close of the service the people in the audience filed out of the chapel leaving Mrs. Main alone with the body. The body was taken to Des Moines for cremation and sometime Saturday, hour not named, the ashes will be interred in Hazelwood cemetery at a private service.

## Dean J. S. Nollen's Eulogy

John Hanson Thomas Main—the name is long and large and powerful, fit for the tall, commanding frame, the masterful face, the far-reaching mind, the heaven-searching spirit of the man. The masculine syllables of this name sound like a paean of victory, symbol and oracle of a life lived triumphantly.

It is exactly thirty-eight years since I first met President Main, then Professor Main, fresh from the great Gildersleeve's seminar, at Johns Hopkins, and in his first year of teaching Greek at Grinnell. He was then peculiarly the scholar and teacher, quiet, studious, retiring, quite the cloistered academic type; but already his personality was making itself felt. His major students, among them some of the most brilliant minds we have had on this campus, were drawn to him with loyal devotion and recognized in him the master of their intellectual life. Already he was a leader in the work of the Faculty. Gradually he built himself into the life of Grinnell, so that we could not well think of this College without him, and the most flattering offers from other institutions could not tempt him away. Responsibility naturally sought him out. He was secretary of the Faculty, member of the most important committees, Acting President during an interregnum, Dean of the Faculty, and then President for just short of twenty-five years. This last quarter century saw the building of the Grinnell of to-day: curriculum, character of the Faculty, endowment, effective plant, campus organization, these are

in large part the work of his unflagging energy. And these twenty-five years saw the evolution in him of the public man, whose voice was heard with respect throughout the country among leaders in education.

It has become a trite saying that an "educator" is a person who has long since stopped teaching. This remark

loses its point with reference to President Main. Though it was many years since he had left the classroom for wider fields of activity, still all his thinking to the last day remained educational in the truest sense. Not only in the rebuilding and modernizing of the curriculum and the choice of instructors, but in the planning of residence units for men and women,

in the development of student government, in the Gates Memorial Lectures and the Harvard Exchange relationship, he thought always in terms of a liberal education. The Women's Quadrangle and the Men's Dormitories are perhaps the most characteristic expression of this dominant interest of his life, and because he embodied unique educational values in the structure and the furnishings of these student homes, they became a model for other institutions far and wide.

Above all, President Main had a zeal for the building of character, and he could contribute greatly to this end because he was himself endowed with a rarely rich and powerful character, some of whose outstanding qualities no one could fail to observe and admire. Like the good Greek that he was, he remained a follower of Plato, an uncompromising idealist; he could not deliver an address without reference to eternal and absolute verities, and his clear eyes were unwaveringly fixed on the Hellenic triad of virtue, the Good, the True and the Beautiful. He was a man of faith, a loyal Christian, to whom Jesus was not a vague image in the dim distance, but a living presence calling men to follow him, the very master of life. He had abounding courage, and never turned his back on a baffling problem or a threatening foe. He was sincerely a man of peace, and yet had the qualities of the good soldier; when he was most conscious that he was the target of "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune," he could truly say "my head is bloody but unbowed." He had a power of persistence of will that carried him through every crisis of his severely tested administration and that bade him in the end drive himself with the last ounce of his waning strength, that his great task might be fully accomplished. His was a sensitive spirit, responsive to every fine and lovely thought or thing, sympathetic and affectionate beyond the imagination of those who could not penetrate beneath the outer shell of reserve that always encased him, to the core of tenderness in his heart.

The last word in this swift summation of his character must be devotion. He believed in Grinnell with a loyalty that claimed his whole being. Grinnell was his life, Grinnell was his religion—I do not mean just Grinnell that now is, in the building of which, he had so great a share, but the more glorious Grinnell of his dream and his vision; to this he gave himself with an utter self-abandon akin to the sacrifice of the martyr who pours out his life-blood for a holy faith.

# Main Hall Named for Nationally Known Grinnell College

## President

### School Dedicated Building Following Educator's Death in 1931

(This is the sixth of a series of articles to appear in The Scarlet and Black concerning the men and women for whom the buildings of Grinnell college have been named. Campus buildings, dormitories, and quadrangle cottages will be included in the series.)

The name of no person who has been connected with Grinnell college is more widely known or more respected than that of John Hanson Thomas Main, president of Grinnell for over 25 years.

After his death, April 1, 1931, numerous tributes to him appeared in leading newspapers and from prominent persons all over the country. It was significant of this regard for him that Main hall, one of the two freshman cottages, was named in his honor only two months later, at commencement. (sketch follows)

#### Born in Toledo

Under President Main's administration, numerous changes were made in the college, and a number of new features were added to college life here, in all of which he was prominent. The student homes were built under his direction, and student government was his idea.

#### Prominent in Other Activities

Besides serving as president of Grinnell, Mr. Main was prominent in a number of outside activities, which made him internationally known.

Such was our leader. We cannot forget him. We know that his work will abide. We may not be untrue to him and his ideals. We can honor him best by striving with all our strength and devotion to realize his dream and his vision of the Grinnell that is yet to be.

#### Rev. N. W. Wehrhan's Tribute

In a little book, "Sizing up Uncle Sam", George Fitch says "Colorado has two outstanding mountains,

#### Pike's Peak and Ben Lindsay."

When the history of Grinnell is written, President Main will be pictured as the mountain peak in Iowa's Educational History. His physical stature was only indicative of a greater mind and heart. In going toward Mt. Tacoma this summer the guide called our attention to a Douglas fir perhaps a hundred and fifty years old. Its top towered toward the clouds. During the hundred and fifty years the coast of Washington has been swept by terrific storms. There have been numerous devastating fires. The woodman's ax has cleared most of the mountainside of its native timber; but here stood this gigantic fir tree, its branches strong and healthy, its trunk straight. Apparently the

many times as I turned back to look at the giant tree in Washington. I went to Chicago last week under protest. I thought I should not leave him but he said, "I will be all right and I want you to greet the Grinnellians in Chicago personally for me." Before I left I copied this paragraph from Rabbi Silver's book, "Religion in a Changing World." I gave it to him and said, "This is my idea of you."

"An ideal which a man can achieve in his lifetime is unworthy of him, unworthy of the reach of his imagination, the chivalry of his spirit, the hardihood of his faith. Only such tasks and ambitions are worthy of us which lay bare the finitude of our bodies and the infinitude of our souls, the impotence of flesh and the omnipotence of spirit, the brevity of our days and the eternity of our dreams. Blessed is the man whose dream outlives him! Blessed is the man who is strong enough to see himself grow old and powerless while his ideal remains young and green. For then old age assumes a dignity which compensates for his infirmities. The flame of life may burn low, but from the undefiled altars of his ageless soul the holy incense of his vision will rise heavenward."

fires and storms of a hundred and fifty years had left it unscathed. We wandered off some distance from it and just looked at it and I said to the group of tourists, "That tree makes me think of our President at Grinnell." During the period of thirty-nine years of service in this institution President Main has been aware of terrific storms, devastating experiences and the constant struggle for the maintenance of ideals. It has required strength of unusual quality during these long years of service to maintain those ideals. President Main had that quality of strength.

A week ago today when he was probably more conscious of his own condition than many of us who were close to him, he sent this message with me to Chicago Alumni:

"I am expressing my affectionate regards and devotion. I deeply regret that I am denied the happiness of joining you tonight in the fellowship of our annual meeting. I shall be with you in thought and in spirit and shall rejoice in you as loyal Grinnellians, a group that is growing larger and larger and more significant in national and world life as the years come and go. I rejoice that a group of my fellow laborers will be with you from the campus. I shall look forward eagerly to having their personal reports of the meeting. My greetings to you all!

Faithfully yours,  
J. H. T. Main"

It was just more than seven years ago that he asked me to meet him at a hotel in Omaha. In the week previous he had outlined to me a difficult task of reselling to Iowa the Grinnell College Ideal and I told him in a letter that I was not sure that I was equal to the task. Then came his telegram, "Will you meet me in the hotel in Omaha?" We sat there for perhaps two hours. He outlined for me the dream he had had for Grinnell. When I expressed to him some fear about the task or perhaps reluctance to do it, he got up out of his chair and walked across the floor and he said, "Remember the Grinnell Spirit." Perhaps, I had entertained up to that moment some fear of him. I changed my decision in the moment. During these seven years, I have tried to carry a modest part of the burden for him and I shall always remember these years as the happiest seven years of my life. He was sympathetic, kindly, and there never has been a single incident of friction in this period to mar that happy relationship. I shall turn back

President Main was an easy man to address when you knew him. He was a lovable man; he loved his friends and it was always a pleasure to greet them and entertain them on any plane of conversation which was introduced. But more than all the lovable things which can be said of this great man, is to say of him that he never had a thought of ill toward any one.

He had a broadening vision, was ever looking forward and even to his dying moment he was considering great things which might be done for Grinnell college. He dictated even up to the evening of the day before he passed inspiring and hopeful letters, in his last illness looking forward to what he could yet accomplish for Grinnell.

President Main died as he lived with his face ever toward the rising sun. Weakness of body could not depress his dominating spirit. To the end his was the master mind looking to great things for Grinnell, himself always in the background.

He was a man of commanding thought, of untiring industry and directing spirit and even to the end these characteristics marked him in all their beauty and strength. He died as he lived, one of the master minds of the age, still looking to a wonderful future for Grinnell college and the age of universal peace, not to come, but coming now and ever. He died with his face to the light, and his unwavering body directing the future of the college he exalted.

# Carnegie Foundation Honors Pres. Main

THE CARNEGIE FOUNDATION  
FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF TEACHING

522 Fifth Avenue  
New York

JOHN HANSON THOMAS MAIN  
1859 - 1931

Dr. John Hanson Thomas Main was born in Toledo, Ohio, April 2, 1859. He died in Grinnell, Iowa, on April 1, 1931.

His college education was obtained in Moore's Hill College, Indiana, and in the Johns Hopkins University, from which he received the degree of Ph.D. in 1892.

His tastes led him into the life of a teacher. He became Professor of Greek in Iowa College (later Grinnell College) and in 1906 its president. Since that day his wholehearted service was given to Grinnell College. In great measure, through his scholarly enthusiasm and his untiring labor Grinnell College became one of that group of strong American colleges in the Middle West that were leaders of education in their own states. Even tax-supported education in Iowa owed much to the scholarship and the standards of intellectual sincerity maintained by President Main. His enduring monument is Grinnell College.

President Main became a trustee of the Carnegie Foundation at the annual meeting in 1924. From that date he remained an active and interested member of the Board and took part in all the problems of the last seven years. Not only at the regular meetings of the Board but in frequent visits to the office of the Foundation he kept alive his interests in its work.

This brief minute is inserted upon the records of the Board of Trustees in remembrance of this faithful service in the office of a trustee.

A true copy

HOWARD. J. SAVAGE.

# **EXTRA!**

## **THE GRINNELL HERALD**

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GRINNELL, IOWA, WEDNESDAY, APRIL 1, 1931.

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**President J. H. T. Main**

**Died At His Home This Morning**

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**Career of Noted Educator and Devoted Friend of Grinnell Is Cut  
Short — Was In His Twenty-Fifth Year of Constructive  
And Inspiring Leadership As President Of  
Grinnell College.**

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DIES IN THE HARNESS

"Prexie" Main is dead. The word was flashed about this morning. He passed away at 7:55 o'clock at his home. For the past six months he has been suffering from apastic anaemia, though not for most of the time confined to his bed or debarred from seeing his friends. He has been sick at his home for the past four weeks.

It is hard to think of Grinnell college, or of Grinnell, without John Hanson Thomas Main, whose life for

The writer was one of these students and recalls an incident of those happy student days which shows President Main as he was. He announced one morning that he wished the class to appear at his house that evening, bringing their textbooks with them and prepared for an examination. There was considerable consternation among the class and a good deal of talking about such a proceeding which speedily subsided when they arrived at the Main home

speaker which developed as additional responsibility was thrust upon him; for a broad, sane outlook on life; for a ready sense of humor which was disclosed to his intimates and above all for his devotion to the college which he loved and to the task to which he had set his hand. He never looked back but moved ever forward with the conviction that Grinnell was doing a great work and should continue to do that work in all the years to come. The Women's Quad-

University.

Mr. Main became professor of ancient languages in his alma mater, Moores Hill College in 1880 and continued there for nine years. From 1890 to 1891 he served as assistant in Greek and Latin at the Woman's College of Baltimore and during the following year was senior fellow in Greek in Johns Hopkins University. In 1892 he was invited to Grinnell, then Iowa, College as Carter professor of Greek language and literature. He accepted and since that time has

so many years has been so intimately linked with both. To the college he has given the last full measure of devotion. Through good times and bad he has stood in the forefront of the fray to carry on the tradition of Grinnell as a growing, working, Christian college. Plans were under way for a fitting celebration at the coming Commencement of his completion of twenty-five years as president of the college which he loved and served with such wholehearted fervor. This celebration is not to be but for many a year those who have known the college during these past twenty-five years and more will remember that tall, angular figure; that quick, nervous step; that flashing smile and warm hand clasp and all the things which have gone to make up "Prexie" Main. He has fought the good fight and has earned his rest and it is very appropriate that the end of this life should come so nearly at the resurrection time of Easter for President Main has always believed in the potential force of life, not of any earthly life but of a growing, abounding life even beyond the grave. It is the comfort of those who have loved him for all these years to think that in some such life he is still active and happy.

President Main came to Grinnell in 1892 first as professor of Greek and in this capacity he served happily and usefully for many years. He was a student of ripe attainments and a most happily inspiring teacher. Those who sat in his classes during this period, will always think of him first as a teacher, in spite of the distinguished success which he later attained in wider fields.

books in a corner and to enjoy a social evening. President Main delighted in such little surprises and the inherent kindness of his nature was a quality which he never lost, no matter how much he was harassed by the responsibilities of his position.

President Main started this college year full of hope and apparently full of strength. He was striving to add to the record of his achievements the securing of the endowment from the General Education Board toward which Grinnell had been working for several years. The year has witnessed great progress toward the attainment of the end which will mean so much to the financial stability of the college and without doubt the unremitting zeal with which President Main devoted himself to this work had much to do with the appearance of the trouble which ultimately caused his death. He continued as his strength permitted and many have remarked that President Main never spoke better than on the occasions on which he appeared in public during the past few months. Even when he was forced to remain at home he refused to give way to the disease which was undermining his strength. He was unremitting in his planning for the college. He sent for his friends and talked with them and only on the day before his death was he finally forced to take to his bed. The end, when it came, was quick and without pain and President Main was conscious up to the last few minutes preceding his death.

President Main will be remembered for ripe scholarship; for gifts as a

Alumni Recitation Hall are proofs of that faith which refused to be discouraged and which drove on and on toward fulfillment of the dream which this man had dreamed for Grinnell.

One of President Main's favorite hymns was "O Love, that wilt not let me go." How many times all of us have sung it on baccalaureate Sundays. And how truly it epitomized his own life. His love for Grinnell was a love that would not let him go and which impelled him ever to greater exertions and more promising plans.

Only a few days ago Rev. James L. Hill of Salem, Mass., trustee of Grinnell, early alumnus and friend of Grinnell for many years was called to his last reward. Now President Main, leader, counsellor and friend, has passed to the other shore. But the spirit for which both of them stood, of progress, of hope and of optimism, remains and will find Grinnell still forging on and on.

John Hanson Thomas Main was born at Toledo, Ohio, April 2, 1859, a son of Hezekiah Best and Margaret (Costello) Main. He passed away just one day before his seventy-second birthday. He graduated in 1880 from Moores Hill College, Indiana, with the degree of A. B. and received his A. M. from the same college in 1883. Later he pursued postgraduate studies at Johns Hopkins University of Baltimore, Md., receiving the degree of Ph. D. in 1892. The Honorary degrees of LL.D. have been conferred upon him by Oberlin College, Iowa University, Grinnell College and Harvard

been actively identified with Grinnell. He served as acting president from 1900 to 1902 and as dean of the faculty from 1902 to 1906. He was elected to the presidency of the college in January, 1906, and the relation thus begun continued unbroken until his death this morning.

President Main was married June 18, 1881, to Miss Emma Myers, of Jeffersonville, Ind. During all the years Mrs. Main has been at his side, a devoted and self sacrificing helpmeet. She survives him and to her the sincere sympathy of this entire community is extended in this hour of sorrow and bereavement.

President Main was first and foremost an educator. He was a leader of youth and commanded the affection and respect of his students in an unusual degree. He believed in the capability of young people to govern themselves and Grinnell has been the scene of an interesting and successful experiment along that line. His high ideals, his inspiring leadership, his rich scholarship and his love for his work and for the college which he had made his own in such a peculiarly personal way have combined to make him a leader admired, honored and beloved. His reputation is more than state wide and everywhere those who know him will sorrow that so rich and so fruitful a career has been cut off with so much of fulfillment still before it.

Funeral arrangements had not been completed at time of going to press.