A NEW NAME AND A NEW OUTLOOK
1934-1937

It is gratifying to write that in spite of all straits through which it passed during the depression, the university never defaulted or failed to meet in full a single obligation to any person on the outside. It was the "family" that suffered, that is the faculty and staff who lived for several years on half pay. Most of them made the sacrifice loyally and without complaint. They believed that the administration and trustees were doing for them everything that was possible. A few of them could not maintain their families and meet their obligations under such conditions, and they found positions elsewhere; that is, they accepted positions elsewhere when they were offered. During those years a teacher could not find a desirable position at just any time. Other people too were having their money problems.

Meanwhile, the president, the trustees, some of the faculty, and some alumni were working frantically to save the university; and when I write "save the university" I do not merely repeat casually a trite phrase. More than one good and influential friend during those years suggested that the only honest and honorable thing to do was to pay the debts out of university endowment, use the remainder of the money to operate in creditable fashion, and when these assets were exhausted to discontinue Simmons University and turn its plant over to Abilene public schools.

There were appeals to alumni, appeals to churches, appeals to individuals of means. There were efforts to secure funds from any and every conceivable source, with results that were always disappointing and generally negligible. Churches were
struggling with their own indebtedness; not many individuals had money; and those who had it generally held on to it.

Led by Solon Featherston, Guy Caldwell, J. D. Sandefer, Jr., Will Henry Haney, and a dozen other alumni and alumnae, ex-students organized a Dollar-a-Month Club of loyal friends, committed to give systematically a dollar or more twelve times a year to keep the school operating. The movement helped a little. Alumni generally never did join it, and many of those who did gave less than they would have given if they had been approached directly for a donation without the mention of a dollar a month. This is not to say that we were not grateful for those who helped. That dollar-a-month crowd continued for years and their loyalty to the university was inspiring.

It is a long road that has no turning. If it cannot be said that the Simmons road had a turning during the 1930's, it is a fact that there was an occasional bend or jog that broke the monotony with a new vista. Several trustees and a few other friends never did discontinue their giving during this era, although they often made genuine sacrifices to do so. The most remarkable benefactor of the early 1930's was Horace O. Coleman of Philadelphia, a Presbyterian, it may be added. Mr. Coleman had visited Abilene during the fat years, liked the city, believed it had a great future, and made substantial investments in Abilene real estate. Truett Edward Compere, Abilene realtor, Simmons alumnus and trustee, and son-in-law of President Sandefer, was Mr. Coleman's Abilene representative and became well acquainted with him. Discerning that his client was a philanthropist and a devout Christian, Compere saw to it that he paid a visit to Prexy. As Sandefer unfolded the story of his efforts to build here a university of academic excellence, with atmosphere genuinely Christian, Coleman was captivated. The qualities the president described were the very essence of what he had dreamed of for a school, and the man who set them forth conformed to his own ideals in
a remarkable way. At once the Philadelphia capitalist and the Simmons president became fast friends.

The Coleman properties in Abilene came to the university by the owner’s bequest some years ago and have aggregated in value more than $150,000. The feature that endeared Mr. Coleman to us most of all, however, was the check for a thousand dollars which he sent Prexy consistently each month through the worst years of the depression. Unlike so many other benefactors, the good Presbyterian capitalist could understand that money to keep a worthy institution operating is the best aid that can be given.

Another benefaction that brought great encouragement and gave a measure of relief was that of Thomas Gould Hendrick. Mr. Hendrick, whose ranch lands oil had turned into a fortune, moved to Abilene; and it became well known that he and Mrs. Hendrick were making plans for the disposal of their wealth. They were Baptists and interested in the West Texas Baptist Hospital, but Prexy Sandefer had not been able to bring out any evidence of their interest in the university. In September 1935, President Sandefer wrote a letter to Mr. Hendrick asking for a donation to help pay the tuition and fees of a number of students we had on open scholarships. In a day or two Mr. Hendrick invited the president to visit him, and Prexy lost no time in doing so. After he had poured out his heart about the urgent needs of Simmons, the philanthropist replied that he had “decided to help” him and handed him a check for $500. This was a great disappointment for the usually exuberant Prexy. For months and years he had yearned to have a talk with the capitalist, the richest Baptist in West Texas, who made no secret of his designs for disposing of his fortune. Hendrick had given a sympathetic hearing to an appeal of fervor and eloquence, and the result was $500.

But Prexy had wrought better than he knew. Mr. C. M.
Caldwell, a neighbor and intimate friend of Hendrick had been working also, as had Mr. George S. Anderson. A few days later the capitalist handed Mr. Caldwell a check for $100,000. "You men are all working so hard," he said, "I want to help you." The Hendrick gift was in the form of an annuity covering the lives of both of the benefactors; the interest rate was four percent. This money was given with the expressed agreement that it might be used to pay debts. Since the donor refused to accept the interest payment (except in the case of one year), the benefaction was of substantial aid by way of reducing interest charges.

Still we had not solved the problem of an operating deficit. O. S. Burkett, university auditor; J. T. Haney, business manager; Robert A. Collins, and I worked half a day on a proposed budget in 1937, and we could do no better than show a deficit of $36,000 for the ensuing year. Athletics, mainly football, was costing the school $25,000 a year. The outlook changed greatly that year, however, as a result of the benefactions of Mr. and Mrs. John Gresham Hardin a subject we now turn to.

In the midst of these difficult times, while the president and trustees of the university were striving so desperately to maintain its integrity, it received the greatest gift and bequest in its history. It was in 1934 that word came that John G. Hardin of Burk Burnett, a well to do farmer made rich by oil, was planning to leave his fortune to philanthropy, and that he favored Baptist causes. Solon Featherston of Wichita Falls, always loyal and alert in the interest of the university, acquainted Prexy with the situation and secured for him an interview with Mr. Hardin. The president was encouraged at the interest Hardin showed as he portrayed to him Simmons and its great potential for Christian service, but he did not get any commitment from him. Through his gifts to Buckner Orphans Home Mr. Hardin had already established the reputation of being a benefactor, and several dozen institutions and literally hun-
Hundreds of individuals were appealing to him for gifts. Even so, President Sandefer, Featherston, and other friends of Simmons were hopeful that the loyal Baptist, on whom we felt Simmons had a special claim, was keeping his eye on the university and would not forget it. Those who knew him best and who knew his assistants and intimate counselors, Jack Chatham and Ike Harwell, cautioned that he could not be hurried, that he insisted on taking his own good time to make important decisions.

While we were thus marking time, a bit of news that reached us quite casually one day chilled us like the first whiff of a January norther. The bearer of this news, strangely, was no other than the business manager of the Abilene Christian College student newspaper, who breezed into our office one afternoon to sell Hardin-Simmons University an advertisement. And why should Hardin-Simmons be advertising in the Abilene Christian College *Optimist*? Oh, this was a special issue: the Burkburnett-Wichita Falls capitalist, John G. Hardin, was making a generous gift to Abilene Christian College, supplying some $200,000 to purchase the bonds outstanding against the college, thus securing for it a new lease on life. Surely Simmons University would want to congratulate Abilene Christian College on this good fortune.

Now, we had nothing but the kindliest feelings toward Abilene Christian College. The two institutions had never been regarded even as rivals, and there had certainly never been any rancor and jealousy between the two; they were having about as difficult a time as we. But we were puzzled and discouraged. Here a Baptist school was sorely in need of aid, while a Baptist layman seemed to ignore its needs as he settled his benefactions on another denomination a mile and a half to the east. Later we learned that the gift was made in memory of John G. Hardin's first wife, who had been a devoted member of the Church of Christ.
This news, this figurative clap of thunder, came on the 23rd day of February 1934. As it turned out, it did not presage a figurative frost in April, as the old weather saw goes. But it did stimulate a series of lively acts on our part. Even so, at times the situation smacked of discouraging failure before success crowned the efforts of Prexy and the trustees.

Some serious handicaps had to be overcome before our appeal to Mr. Hardin would even have a chance of success. Chief of these was the fact that Mr. and Mrs. Hardin doubted the loyalty of Simmons to the denomination. The fact that Simmons was controlled by the Sweetwater Baptist Association rather than by the Baptist General Convention had been pointed out to them. The importance of this fact had been exaggerated by certain persons in talking with the Hardins. It was true that the institution had acted independently at times. President Sandefer, furthermore, had not been as vociferous in denouncing the Fundamentalist Baptist leader, J. Frank Norris, as certain cooperating Baptists thought he should have been, and the attention of the philanthropists had been called to that fact. Thus, in the minds of Mr. and Mrs. Hardin there was a prejudice against Simmons that made a formidable barrier.

After various conferences, a group of friends gathered on Wednesday afternoon, March 7, to make plans for approaching the Hardins. Mr. Caldwell, Mr. Anderson, and Mr. T. T. Harris of the trustees were on hand, as were Prexy, D. M. Wiggins and I. The immediate subject at hand was how to approach Dr. George W. Truett, Pastor of the First Baptist Church of Dallas and the foremost Baptist of Texas and the South, to enlist his aid in convincing the Hardins that Simmons was "loyal to the denomination." At the mention of the subject President Sandefer became quite disturbed. Besides carrying the burdens of the university with little aid from the denomination, he said, he and his faculty had for years helped manfully in every
denominational cause. Indeed, for three years he himself had been president of the Baptist General Convention, and why should any person question the loyalty of Simmons? Yes, to have to get witnesses to vouch for the loyalty of the institution that Jefferson Davis Sandefer had headed for years was drinking deep of a bitter cup. He agreed to proceed with the idea, nevertheless. Mr. Caldwell was instructed to write Dr. Truett at once, and Dr. Truett responded graciously and enthusiastically then and later in defense of the Simmons denominational record.

Five days later the committee made a trip to Wichita Falls and Burkburnett to call on Mr. Hardin. Of this party the man who had known Mr. Hardin longest was Wiggins, who had been principal of Burkburnett High School some years before. George Mason, treasurer of the Baptist Foundation of Texas, met them at Burkburnett and worked zealously in the interest of Simmons; and Solon Featherston was always around.

The Simmons party was cordially received but was informed that the Hardins were considering an annuity gift of some $250,000 to Howard Payne College, and until that was disposed of they would not entertain the idea of any other gift. It was not long, however, until Featherston called to say that Jack Chatham, who, it will be recalled, was Mr. Hardin’s business manager and intimate friend, and Ike Harwell, Mr. Hardin’s nephew and with Chatham manager of his affairs, had told him that they were ready to “talk turkey” with the Simmons people. In fact, the only way one could talk business with Mr. Hardin was through those men. He had found that he had to have a fence to keep hungry solicitors away, and he had made these two men the fence.

It was at about this time that we learned that the Hardin money was not free money; it had to be bought with a price. No, the sturdy, thrifty Burkburnett philanthropist was not asking,
as is so often done in such cases, that his money be matched. He insisted that a commission be paid on it for the benefit of Chatham and Harwell. They were spending their time and energies working for Hardin, and their salary was zero without the rim. They were entitled to have pay for their services, and Mr. Hardin saw to it that his beneficiaries paid his employees. Every dollar secured from the Hardins, even as an annuity, would cost ten cents in fees paid to Chatham and Harwell. Thus, Simmons University, whose employees had been receiving half pay, or a little better, for two years and pitifully poor salaries during the last year and a half, would have to raise money to secure endowment, the income from which would pay salaries at some time in the future. In the words of the radical labor agitators, this was, in truth, nothing now, worse than nothing, but "pie in the sky by and by." In addition to the premium money which would have to be raised, the university would have to honor several dozen scholarships, aggregating many thousands of dollars. Still, when the opportunity came through at last, the faculty joined with the trustees and the bonus was raised.

In retrospect, from the vantage point of forty years after, I ask myself, why did the faculty not only stay on but join in a cause that was squarely against their own financial interests for the time being? It was loyalty, to be sure, but it was more than loyalty. It was confidence in the future of the institution. The hour had struck for Simmons; this was her great opportunity, and, we were determined not to fail her at such a time. The Hardin donations, furthermore, gave other people confidence in Simmons. Perhaps it can be said with truth that it was these benefactions that carried the university through the doldrums of the prolonged depression and made it an enduring thing. Yes, there was something magnificent about these years; while the United States government and millions of its people were borrowing money and taxing the future, Simmons was raising money for the benefit of the future.
The bonus money was not easy to raise. It was planned that the gift should be between two hundred and three hundred thousand dollars, which would mean from twenty to thirty thousand dollars in bonus money, half of which would have to be paid in cash. Every resource had to be exploited. T. N. Carswell, a trustee and secretary of the chamber of commerce, directed the effort to call on the business people of Abilene. Ex-students, among them Will Henry Haney, Leroy Jennings and wife, Mr. and Mrs. H. A. Pender, Owen Green, Johnnie Camp, and Gray Browne solicited local alumni; Wiggins, Emmett Landers, and I got off letters to out-of-town exes; and members of the board solicited personally the supposedly large givers. All of this organization and effort just to raise twenty or thirty thousand dollars! One who would ridicule such a program has never known, or has forgotten, the pinch of the depression years. I must repeat that but few people had money that they could give, and most of those who had it were clinging to it as an exhausted swimmer holds on to a lifebuoy.

While we were in the midst of the bonus campaign, Mr. and Mrs. Hardin paid us a visit; the Chathams and Harwells also came. Of course we sought to make the most of their visit. Prexy Sandefer's years had not dulled his radiant personality, and he was at his best. There was a great chapel program, and students, teachers, hostesses — all were on their very best behavior. My journal of that day reads in part thus:

As I sat [at the dining table] opposite Mr. Hardin and looked at him with his plain gray suit — which probably cost about $25 — and his rubber collar, his red tie (which looked like a bow tie tied as four-in-hand), I was impressed with his simple tastes and his avoidance of all pretentions. His brow is intellectual and his chin protrudes so far that he looks just a little dish-faced. He talks freely, when others start the conversation, but he is not garrulous and does not seem to care to talk about himself. He settled in Johnson County, Texas, fifty
years ago, coming there from Tennessee. In 1879 he located in Wichita County — the first settler in the county, he insists; that is, the first settler to stay in the county. He seems to be in good health, but is not robust.

Mrs. Hardin, five years younger than her husband, is a friendly old lady, with a twinkle in her eye that suggests humor. She talks more readily than her husband and takes pride in the fact that she comes from “Old Virginia.” She was dressed as plainly as her husband, but she wore nothing that was the counterpart of his rubber collar.

The Hardin Gift came through and was announced on high school senior day, that is, April 28, 1934. It was disappointingly small, however, some $200,000 which was at the very bottom of our expectations. Furthermore, even beyond the cost of the bonus money, the gift would represent a burden to the university during the life of either benefactor. The school had to guarantee a six percent annual payment into the Hardin trust on the amount of the benefaction. The securities in which the fund was invested earned only about five percent or a little better, so that the institution would have to pay out nearly one percent annually to meet the terms of the agreement. Again, from the standpoint of immediate returns, the greater our long-time assets, the worse off we were. We hoped, nevertheless, that this gift was just a beginning. More surely would be forthcoming.

A season of delay and disappointment awaited us, however. Word came that the Hardins had been favorably impressed with us but that other suppliants were pressing them. The people of Wichita Falls voiced a mighty appeal that the philanthropist “keep some of his money at home,” by a gift to the municipal junior college that would be named Hardin College. Chatham reported also that “some preachers” came and talked
at length with the elderly people pressing fervently the claims of another Texas Baptist college, and this visit "tore them all to pieces."

The place of Simmons in the future of Hardin benefactions seemed to diminish with each passing day. For awhile Simmons was to get at the death of the last benefactor one-tenth of a trust fund of $900,000; then for awhile the name of Simmons was stricken from the list of beneficiaries. That news was sorely disturbing and grievous. Judge Caldwell hastened to Wichita Falls and conferred at length with Chatham; but the benefactor's representative was adamant. Chatham liked Simmons and its trustees, liked to do business with them because they would do what they promised, he said (an implication that some other recipients, in their eagerness, may have promised more than they could do). Chatham insisted that he and Harwell were helpless to serve the Simmons cause in any way; the decision against us had been made by others and they could not change it.

No, he did not want Mr. Caldwell to talk with the Hardins and to have them "all torn up again." In the course of the conversation, however, mention was made of adding the name of Hardin to the university. Mr. Caldwell said that he thought it might be possible to add it, but that the name Simmons could never be dropped. Chatham then relented, talked with the couple, got them to increase the Simmons share in the terminal trust, and then mentioned the possibility of adding the Hardin name to that of Simmons. Mr. Hardin said that if that were done he "would appreciate it very much." If John G. Hardin ever made any other statement relative to adding the Hardin name to Simmons I never heard of it. There was never any promise or commitment of any sort.

The question of changing the name of the university then became the subject of repeated meetings by night and by day.
Nearly everybody opposed the change at first. The name of the institution was not for sale, men said repeatedly, and called attention to the fact that, even if it were, no price had been offered. There was no assurance that the Hardins would give the university another dollar. Even our share in the terminal trust could be taken without a day’s notice.

But, one by one, opponents of the change of name joined those who favored it. The faculty, some members voting thus with reluctance, agreed unanimously to the change. T. N. Carswell, board member, opposed it to the last but agreed to accept it “on faith.” In the meeting of trustees that made the fateful decision there was a most wholesome spirit; the meeting rose above sharp argument and repartee. Prexy pointed out that the covenant between Simmons College and the Simmons family did not pertain to the name and suggested that if the voice of James B. Simmons could reach from the great beyond, we would hear: “Change the name if it will insure the perpetuation of the institution, if need be, leave out the name of Simmons.” It was an hour filled with emotion and there were not a few tears. I recall Ben Allen’s pathetic question.”Does this mean,” he said, choking with the urge to cry, “that we shall have to discard our old Simmons yells and yell for Hardin-Simmons or Simmons-Hardin? I can never get reconciled to that.”

The change of name turned out to be a profitable decision. From the Hardin fortune all told, the university received some $900,000, the greatest benefaction from any one source in its history. It took toil and effort to raise the money for additional bonus payments and to pay the difference between the six percent that the annuity contract called for and the five percent that the securities in the foundation were bringing; but since the university shared generously in the Hardin terminal trust it was simply laying up for itself funds for the years to come. Mrs. Hardin died in 1935, Mr. Hardin two years later. Their deaths released to the university its share of the Hardin
fortune. These monies were no longer encumbered, except to the extent of the indebtedness on the bonus payments to Messrs. Chatham and Harwell, which was soon paid off.