DEDICATION OF TRUMAN A. WARNER HALL OCTOBER 27, 2000

In 1937, when Truman Warner walked down the steps of the Warner family home on Division Street heading for Danbury State Teachers College and his first day as a freshman, he began a journey that would have immense importance to thousands of students and colleagues. Arriving at the White Street campus, he saw a college of only two buildings: Old Main, the center of all activities from classrooms to library, and Fairfield Hall, the women's dormitory. Among the first male students to be accepted at the previously all-female institution, he certainly knew the campus well. After all, he had graduated only months before from Danbury High School, located next to the College. Hardly could he have suspected that two-thirds of a century later, his name would be placed upon a building next door to the old high school. It would be a meeting of the "W"s --- White Hall and Warner Hall.

Truman was the only child of parents whose lineage extended back centuries in the Danbury region. He chose to attend the Teacher's College for geographic and financial reasons --- it was close to home and, being in the midst of the Great Depression, family finances were tight. Besides he wanted to become a teacher. During the four years of college, he was a "man for all seasons," multi-talented and intelligent. He added positively to a college well known throughout the State of Connecticut for providing an excellent education. On Monday, June 9, 1941, along with forty other classmates, he graduated from college, on the very stage that is now the Ives Concert Hall in White Hall. The News-Times mentioned that the selections by the a cappella choir, of whom Truman was a member, " were of a quality which matched the high standards that mark all the activities of the college."

Service in World War II quickly took Truman away from Danbury; he served valiantly as a medic in the Italian campaign. He wrote often to his parents, dozens of letters that are now in the Warner Archives of Haas Library. For his actions in the War, he received commendations for bravery. Once discharged, he used the GI Bill, as did millions of others, to advance his education. From Columbia University he gained a Master's in American History and, later, a Ph.D. in Anthropology. Teaching in Old Lyme and Briarcliff Manor schools gave him teaching experience, but needing to be close to his aging parents, he decided to take the offer of Ruth Haas to be director of admissions at his alma mater. His high school teaching provided the know-how to go into high schools and sell students on Danbury State. Ed Rosenberg, emeritus professor of the math department, remembers having observed Truman in action. "He wasn't just director of admission: he was IT, shuffling an awful lot of papers; not even a secretary." When Truman would come into the Quonset hut lunchroom, he'd often tell the assembled faculty: "Got another one." Students were then, and throughout his life, the be-all and end-all of existence, but the existence he wanted was to be in the classroom as a teacher.

Fortunately for him, a full-time professor in social sciences believed that life, even as an administrator, should be sampled. Truman leaped at the opportunity and exchanged places to begin a college teacher's life that would last a third of a century. He introduced new courses that cut across subject lines and served as Chairman of the joint department of history and social sciences. He traveled to Mexico, to Africa, to China, to Japan---all these experiences he introduced into classes raising high the banner of non-western cultures that remains an unusual offering in the curriculum of Western. Even in his final years, he was ever the student, thrilled to learn more and more about computer

databases and how they were making material so much more readily available both in libraries and on-line at home.

Today we are in Warner Hall, surrounded by the spirit of a teacher and his era. When Truman was a student at Danbury State Teacher's College, he loved to add his baritone warblings to musical offerings, from Gilbert and Sullivan operettas to the songs by the a cappella choir. He also had a penchant for the stage, having the lead in the senior play. As I thought back on this, it occurred to me that the artistic amalgam of music and drama often turns out to be opera, that unique melding of word, action, and melody. With this subtle transition, let me tell you about a particular opera and how it suggests to me several important aspects of Truman and, in fact, education in general.

When Truman took his journey on the trans-Siberian express across Russia and northern China in the early 1980s, I don't think he ever met anyone quite like the Princess Turandot. This woman is the centerpiece of Giacomo Puccini's final opera entitled, appropriately enough, Turandot. A bitter, icy ruler in ancient China, she could not forget how her ancestor, a beautiful young princess, was murdered by an invading Tartar prince. She vowed revenge on men; to marry her, a man had to answer three riddles. A wrong answer to any of the three riddles and the suitor was beheaded. A stranger appears, aware of this possibility, and strikes the gong to summon the Princess. In one of the great scenes of opera, the Princess appears at the head of an immense staircase outside her palace and proposes the first riddle to the prince far below: "What is it that in the dark night hovers like a phantom, spreading its wings over the infinite blackness of humanity. Everybody longs for it. It vanishes at dawn, but every night it is born again, and every day it dies!" The stranger pauses and then, in a burst of tenor magnificence, answers the riddle correctly: "Speranza --- Hope." A simple word, but the essence of a teacher like Truman, who always retained the essential hope that education creates better persons and through them, a better society.

Puccini did not live to complete the opera. He died with only sketches of the final scenes outlined; Arturo Toscanini, the great conductor and friend of Puccini, asked another composer to complete the opera in the style of Puccini, which was done. Though the entire opera was rehearsed for the Milan premiere in 1926, when Toscanini conducted that first performance, to the complete surprise of the audience, he stopped the performance when the orchestra played the last measures actually written by Puccini. Toscanini turned to audience and spoke quietly: "This is the end of the opera, which remains incomplete because of the composer's death." Truman also had to "lay down his pen," with more projects to complete than could ever be accomplished in several lifetimes. His name on this building recognizes the chain of learning, the never-to-be-completed work of education. A good thing begun will find its life in others. All we have to do is begin. Truman began when he first walked up White Street to Danbury State Teacher's College.

James Pegolotti