

## Chapter Six

### The State University of New Jersey Otis Gage (1917-1920)

#### Postwar Rutgers College

The American involvement in World War I had an impact on Rutgers College. In the spring of 1917, 215 of the 512 students in the College withdrew. Most of the students went off to farm work, but 63 of them entered the military forces, along with four faculty members. In September 1917, there were 446 students in the College, but in the second semester 34 students enlisted or were drafted to military service. In September 1918, the Students' Army Training Corps (S.A.T.C.) was established at the College, with the provision that every student at the College over seventeen years of age who met the physical standards would be enrolled in the Corps on October 1. The members of the Corps received tuition and subsistence and a stipend of thirty dollars a month. The result was an entering freshman class of 274, the largest in the history of Rutgers College. Shortly after the program began, the armistice was announced, and on December 13, 1918, the S.A.T.C. was demobilized, resulting in the withdrawal of more than 100 freshmen students, and the return of 76 upper-class students whose work had been interrupted by war service.<sup>1</sup>

The gradual transformation of Rutgers College from a classical private college to a state university continued. It had begun with the opening in 1864 of the Rutgers Scientific School, which had been designated as the land-grant college of New Jersey, formally named the State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts. A movement towards Rutgers becoming a state university, at least in name, continued when the Legislature enacted a bill in 1917 that designated the Rutgers Scientific School as "the State University of New Jersey." In this way, a portion of Rutgers College became the State University of New Jersey.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>McCormick, *Rutgers: A Bicentennial History*, 165-167.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 154.

### Otis Gage (1917-1920)

Around 1918, members of the Roman Catholic community raised concerns about the requirements that the President of Rutgers College should be a member of the Reformed Church of America and that there should be a Professor of Divinity at the College. They also raised concerns that there were no Roman Catholics on the Board of Trustees. In 1920 the provisions of the Charter relating to the President and the Professor of Divinity were finally removed, along with anything else in the Charter that might be interpreted as sectarian. These changes in the Charter severed the last connections to the Dutch Church. Shortly after, in 1922, a prominent Roman Catholic layman was elected to the Board of Trustees.<sup>3</sup>

In 1918 the New Jersey College for Women opened. At that time the only four-year college for women in New Jersey was the small College of St. Elizabeth at Convent Station. There had been several attempts to have women admitted to Rutgers College. In 1881 the Trustees rebuffed a proposal by the Rutgers College Faculty that women be admitted to the College. In 1895 the Trustees rejected a proposal that the Rutgers Female Seminary in New York City become associated with the College. In 1911 the State Federation of Women's Clubs became enthusiastic about having women admitted to Rutgers. President Demarest was opposed to coeducation at Rutgers College, but supported the idea of an affiliated women's college, provided that the money for buildings and maintenance could be obtained from private or public sources. In 1914 the Trustees went on record in favor of an affiliated women's college.<sup>4</sup>

In 1917 the Smith-Hughes Act promised Federal assistance for courses in home economics. Meanwhile, two properties near the College Farm became available and some gifts of money were directed towards the new college. The Trustees provided a loan for purchase of the property, and the State agreed to provide annual appropriations for support of the New Jersey College for Women. N.J.C. opened in 1918 with Mrs. Mabel Douglass as Dean. Members of the Rutgers College faculty offered to assist with the instruction for a year without compensation. In the first

---

<sup>3</sup>McCormick, *Rutgers: A Bicentennial History*, 181.

<sup>4</sup>Poulson, "A Quiet Revolution," 134.

## Otis Gage (1917-1920)

year a freshman class of 54 students entered N.J.C. By the fourth year there were a total of 286 students at N.J.C.<sup>5</sup>

### Physics and Astronomy

When Professor Van Dyck retired in 1917, Otis Gage joined the Physics Department as Chairman and Professor of Physics. Gage had received the Ph.B. degree from Rochester in 1899, publishing a paper in the *Physical Review* on “Magnetism of Bricks,” finding that all of the bricks tested were magnetic, presumably due to the presence of magnetic iron oxide.<sup>6</sup> He received the Ph.D. degree from Cornell in 1910, publishing a paper in the *Physical Review* on the point discharge in air under pressure, concluding that the velocities of positive and negative ions became nearly equal at high pressure up to seventeen atmospheres.<sup>7</sup> Before coming to Rutgers, Gage taught at Rochester for two years, at Cornell for three years, and at Wisconsin for ten years. In his first year at Rutgers, Gage was assisted by Frank Egerton, an instructor in electrical engineering. Frank Pratt was on leave during 1917-1918, but returned in 1918.<sup>8</sup>

Physics instruction at the New Jersey College for Women began in 1919. Frank Ferguson was hired as an associate professor to teach physics at N.J.C. He taught physics at Rutgers College and N.J.C. for two years, before going on to full-time teaching at N.J.C. in 1921. Ferguson received his A.B. and A.M. degrees from the University of Michigan, and taught at the Carnegie Institute of Technology for two years before coming to Rutgers.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup>Demarest, *A History of Rutgers College*, 536, 537.

<sup>6</sup>O. A. Gage and H. E. Lawrence, “Magnetism of Bricks,” *Phys. Rev.*, v. 9, p. 304 (1899).

<sup>7</sup>O.A. Gage, “Point Discharge in Air under Pressure,” *Phys. Rev.*, v. 30, p. 720 (1910).

<sup>8</sup>*American Men and Women of Science*, 1921 edition; *Rutgers College Catalogues*.

<sup>9</sup>*Rutgers College Catalogues*; *American Men and Women of Science*, 1933 edition.