Student-Initiated Cocurricular Activities

Young men who attended Luther in the early days of the college, like students of today, had energy, talent, and initiative that went beyond class preparation and attendance. They sought entertainment, physical exercise, artistic and intellectual expression, competition, and a chance to serve and shape their world. One would be surprised only if there were NOT a number of activities and organizations, initiated and fueled by their creative energies.

For example, when the college was only four years old, a group of students published a journal they titled *Moderlandet*, ("The Motherland."). Within a year a rival group issued a satirical response titled *Mamaland*!

For a small student body, the number of literary societies early on is impressively large. The first, *Clio*, held weekly meetings devoted to speeches, essays, and debates (in English!) already in 1862. Some were reading societies—members paid dues to purchase newspapers and books for placement in the college library. One, drawing courage from "Lady Nicotine," conducted mock trials and spoke out against college rules, presumably under a cloud of smoke. A rival society appealed to the younger set, not yet allowed to smoke. Campus publications titled *The Fly* and *Svein the Fearless* appeared. The current student newspaper, *Chips*, made its debut in 1884.

Organized football and baseball began in the 1870s—organized by students, not coaches. For a particular annual football contest on the lawn north of Main, two captains would each pick as many as 75 players for their side. For baseball, in addition to forming their own teams, students often played with one of the town teams in the area. Luther teams competed favorably with large schools like Notre Dame and Iowa long before Luther began to hire coaches for the teams. (The first professional coach was Arthur Laudel, hired as baseball coach in 1917.)

Choral music was a part of Luther’s fixed curriculum from the beginning in 1861. Before long, ensembles, apart from the classroom, formed. The Idun Quartette was an early choral group (1869). An "orchestra" of two violins and a cello organized in 1877. The following year it expanded to include a guitar, flute, and cornet. Washington Prairie's Pastor U.V. Koren, who had been part of a well-known vocal group at the University of Oslo, encouraged these student efforts. A student-led band began in 1878. (Haldor Hanson, in 1888, was the first regular faculty member in music.)

Then, as now, trips to the wonderful Decorah countryside were another favorite activity for Luther students.