

Getting By: A “Lost Generation” Member’s Local History of the College Extracurriculum

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Abstract: This article features the diaries and letters of a college student, John Price, who attended Denison University from 1917 to 1921. It shows how Price was pushed and pulled into writing in the extracurriculum by his literacy sponsors, which resulted in his founding a humor magazine as “the jock” took over as “the big man on college campuses” across the US. The article explores how writing in and for the extracurriculum among male college students developed, historically, in tandem with the emerging “modern college man identity.”

When John Price arrived at Denison University in Granville, Ohio, from Chicago, IL to enroll in college in 1917, there was little reason for his parents, Enoch and Louise, to believe he wouldn’t be a serious student like his brother Allen, a brilliant student or “shark” at history who went on to teach high school social studies; or his brother Owen, a responsible student and patriot who dropped out of college temporarily to fight the war in Europe; or his sister, Lillis, who also attended the same college and became a math teacher after graduation; or his several uncles, all Denison graduates who went onto pursue prestigious careers in academe and the clergy. Yet they were in for a disappointment. At the end of four years, Louise would be wringing her hands and Enoch waving his finger. That Johnny was a slacker!

Nearly upon his arrival at college, Price showed he had little interest in being a “shark.” He put off completing his math homework, wrote themes a few hours before they were due, barely ever did his French homework, and also “bucked” his public speaking course when he wasn’t prepared and didn’t want to be “smeared” by his professor. As he describes these study habits in his diary:

“Was going to study hard, but spent too much time monkeying.” (Nov. 20th, 1917)

“All Freshmen had to study at House all afternoon, under student tutelage. I spent an hour or two on Math, and then slept the rest.” (Jan. 13, 1918)

“Studied Geog Inf. notes this a.m. with Jingles and took quiz. Think I got by.” (March 4, 1919)

“Didn’t do history reading, but got by on quiz.” (May 13, 1921)

As his college career progressed, Price had “bucked” so many classes he risked not graduating; university leaders had instigated a policy that deducted student credits if they missed too many classes or chapel services, leading to conversations with the college dean and Price’s father. Eventually Price was rescued by a civil engineering professor, Ted Johnson, who supervised a mechanical drawing class for a few credits so that Price could graduate on time. Neither contrite nor regretful about his

behavior, Price decided not to attend his commencement ceremony “as one way of showing [his] contempt for two thirds of the learned faculty.” After the ceremony his Phi Gamma Delta fraternity brothers brought him his diploma, got him a cap and gown, “and held a Commencement out in the front yard” of the fraternity house (June 5, 1921).

Price’s “extracurricular” graduation ceremony was a capstone to a collegiate career cultivated outside of college classrooms. Late with deadlines for school assignments, he successfully met deadlines while a newspaper reporter and editor for the college paper the *Denisonian*, features editor for the yearbook the *Adytum*, writer and editor for his fraternity newsletter, the *Lambda Deuteron Fiji*, and as the editor of a college humor magazine that he helped to found, *The Flamingo*. Price’s diary and related documents, letters home, and notes to him from school officials show his accelerated interest in pursuing extracurricular interests to the sacrifice of schoolwork, as he seemingly dug a deeper hole for himself by bucking more classes while working on the magazine. In January of his senior year, for example, he reportedly “[b]ucked Short Story and Ec[on] to get a haircut, etc.” But later he and his friend “[Ford] Weber. . . ordered letterheads and advertising contracts for *The Flamingo*, and had a discussion on business matters related to it” (Jan. 11th, 1921). Price’s interests as a writer apart from his scholastic assignments—when a newspaper reporter for the *Denisonian* and editor for *The Flamingo*—prepared him for a lifetime career as a well regarded and “careful journalist” for the prestigious *New York Herald Tribune*, a longtime competitor of the more liberal *New York Times* and a paper with a reputation for high quality writing (Kluger 270; 477-78). While Price was “getting by” while “bucking” classes, even his journalism classes, he *was* learning at school, just not so much in school, putting effort instead into work in the “extracurriculum” on writing that “occurs regularly and successfully outside classroom walls” (Gere 78).

This story of the privileged fraternity man intent on bucking classes at the expense of his school work, and to the chagrin of his teachers, might seem an often-told story, but John Price’s archival documents can contribute to a greater understanding of how students have historically negotiated the demands of the academy while mediating these experience through writing. More specifically, Price’s choice to spend relatively more time on extracurricular activities than on his assigned studies can help historicize college students’ engagement and interest in the “extracurriculum.” These choices arguably foreshadow recent tensions between college students and college faculty as contemporary students presumably put greater energies into extracurricular activities than into their schoolwork, especially as new media competes with their time and attention to more traditional literacies. Furthermore, Price’s relatively ordinary college career features some extraordinary particulars when considering his family’s deep and vast interest in writing and higher education. When highlighting these particulars shaping Price’s experiences as a college student and a writer, I situate Price as a pivotal historical figure because he witnessed the final death of the college orator as a campus hero, on his own campus at least, as the sports hero took over as the big man on campus across the nation and as college sports programs, and college football programs in particular, grew exponentially. As a founder of a humor magazine at the beginning of these magazines’ heyday on college campuses, Price had a hand in responding to this transfer of adulation from the orator to the sports hero. He did so by creating a fragile but significant place for a college student interested in writing in the extracurriculum who could still seem masculine, or at the very least hip, as he cultivated and maintained what I call the modern college man identity. This modern college identity is cultivated through contempt for school via the completion of self-assigned activities rather than homework, the reliance upon “natural smarts” for scholastic success, and the denial of preparation for the future.

In her 2004 College Composition and Communication Conference keynote speech, Kathleen Blake Yancey also offered a historical perspective on cultural shifts that have changed the way young

people read and write outside of classrooms. “Note that no one is *making* anyone *do* any of this writing,” she claims. Yancey compares “the proliferations of writing outside of the academy” to another historical movement—“the development of the reading public in the 19th century when new technologies such as the new steam printing press and cheaper paper democratized reading and writing print” (298). An historical study of college students’ engagement with the extracurriculum during the World War I era is perhaps more or equally relevant to studying the effects of nineteenth-century technologies on literate behavior when historicizing current trends. This period in American history can not only provide historical context for student behavior that is obviously not entirely new, it might help us better understand how the lack of engagement with school-sanctioned scholastics might relate to particular identities that current college students have inherited, such as the modern college man identity—identities which are related to a set of behaviors that have become mythic to the point of being prescriptive, such as putting partying before studying.

Kathleen Welch criticizes “conventional sources” of the history of college life because these sources “reflect the mentality of the fraternity men who controlled them” (35). The identities and sources of even “conventional” subjects like fraternity men, which include Price’s father Enoch and his uncle Ira, deserve better study, particularly if we become more concerned about prescribed identities of masculinity shaping attitudes about schoolwork, and also continue to investigate the value of today’s extracurriculum as a site for young people’s identity formation. Even students whose histories were associated with so-called shallow or conventional identities, like those of fraternity men, can add to a richer understanding of the history of Composition.

Insights Garnered from Local Histories

A lifetime diarist, Price carefully retyped the many artifacts that documented his four years at Denison, which included handwritten entries from the diaries he kept for each year he was at college, and letters he sent and received from family members and friends, including tuition bills and report cards. In this self-designed archive, Price strove for authenticity. For example, he described the color of ink used in some of the items he retyped, preserving also the grammar and spelling errors made by others who wrote to him, including even the few errors his mother made in her correspondence with him. Price also annotated some of his diary entries when he retyped them in the 1950s and early 1960s. Price’s extracurricular writing extends beyond his diary, to his *Denisonian* articles, yearbook entries, *Flamingo* copy and also articles in *Lambda Deuteron Fiji*. Price’s archive is one arm of a larger set of records compiled and left behind by his family members, including his grandfather, Thomas, his uncle Ira, and his father, Enoch, all diarists as well. Members of the Price family on the whole were interested in mediating experience via writing as well as collection as memorial, values reflected most profoundly in Price’s methods as a writer and as a preservationist of his own materials.

Price reportedly typed up these artifacts so his son might read them, but he most likely carefully edited his diary and related materials with an awareness that they could bring the customs and attitudes of this era to life for general readers when he defined historical terms such as “bucking,” reflected on how he interpreted some of his habits years later, and also provided a list of the people discussed in diary entries and letters. He also donated a copy of this archive to the Denison University library where I discovered them while researching an article about Price’s father Enoch’s diary. Some of Price’s high school papers, including two diaries, are housed at the Ridge Historical Society, which is in the Chicago neighborhood, Morgan Park, where Price grew up. Price’s brother Owen, in fact, helped to establish this historical society. Most of Price’s family’s archives are kept at the Ohio Historical Society library in Columbus, thirty miles from Granville, home to Denison University. I have been able to secure copyright for John Price’s archival materials housed at Denison University in

Granville, Ohio from Price's son and daughter. Partly as a result, I have taught with portions of this diary manuscript in various writing classes over the years, experiences from which I garnered several of the themes featured in this article, most particularly the inheritance of the modern college man identity among contemporary college students.

Although Price was in many ways a twentieth-century college man, he embodied a greater history of college life, if a local one, which can be traced to the mid-nineteenth century when his grandfather Thomas began a diary, helped launch a college, and began a literacy society, which I will discuss later. An apple farmer, Thomas was responsible for his sons' educations in that he became a significant donor to Denison University, then Granville College, several miles from his farm in nearby Newark, Ohio. In 1853 Granville College's trustees devised a creative way to raise funds for their new school and offered a "perpetual" scholarship to local Baptists and "friends of education in general" (Ira Price). Conceivably anyone could have sponsored a student continuously for as long as he or she lived. Neither Thomas nor Granville College fundraisers would guess that Thomas would have eight sons—no daughters. Eventually Thomas struck a deal with school administrators so that his scholarship endowment would be transferred towards free tuition at the school for all of his sons, five of whom graduated from Denison (one inherited the farm, one son died while in college, and one son went to Ohio State where he became dean of the agricultural college).

Denison College shared a destiny similar to other small colleges that are now, ironically, associated with a privileged student body. Amherst College in Massachusetts, for example, was founded to uplift the upwardly mobile but disadvantaged, accommodating young men who didn't inherit their family farms and needed to make places for themselves in the world, mostly as clergymen and schoolteachers in the expanding west. As David Allmendinger explains, these colleges "were one means by which hard pressed people sought to save some of its sons from failure in a declining rural order that could not absorb them" (11). Similarly, the first students to attend Granville College were "local boys" who often walked to and from their families' farms each day to school, or traded work at the school for room and board (Chessman 60), as was the case with Price's father, Enoch, and four of his brothers. As a result of Thomas's investment in his nearby higher educational institution, his sons were able to propel themselves into the middle class and beyond as clergymen, academics, and professionals, life destinies that paralleled the growth of college itself as a vocational training ground—first for ministers like Price's older uncles, and next for a burgeoning professional middle class, of which Price's father, Enoch, a lawyer, was a member.

Gretchen Flesher Moon argues for the value of "local histories" of Composition because of the "complex layering of institutional, teacher and student documents" (10) they can embody. Price's documents certainly illustrate the layers between an institution, a student, and his teachers, during a certain point in time, and also the layers that are embodied by any individual's history. David Gold similarly argues for a pluralistic history of Composition studies: "As historians of rhetoric and composition, we are no longer complicating an overly simplified past; we are complicating an already complicated one" ("Remapping" 23). Gold argues furthermore that these local studies can "illustrate, inform, challenge, and inspire larger histories" (*Rhetoric at the Margins* 7). Price's local history is complicated by generational layers that bought him his privilege (nearly literally), which include a grandfather interested in higher education, a previous generation of college men in his family attending the same college as him, and the experiences of his brothers and sister who also attended the college. These layers might be represented by Price's literate practices as a diarist and letter writer. His diary keeping and mediating of experience via text was deeply steeped in a family tradition of record keeping and text production. Price's parents' courtship was even fostered via writing when the couple wrote to each other while in college, even when at the *same* college. While Price took pride in

rejecting studiousness and organized religion valued by his elders, Price's writing about Denison University, Granville, Ohio, and its environs in his diary and letters home contributed to the Prices' family memory about these places.

These literate practices also scaffolded onto his other endeavors in writing outside of school assignments and when taking on a role that was considered somewhat risky or radical as a heavy-handed yet somewhat fledgling authority on the post-World War I Denison University campus. When short of copy for the first issue of *The Flamingo*, in March of 1921, Price added one of his freshmen themes, a nostalgic reflection on his childhood trips from Chicago to the Granville area to visit the family farm via train ("Going to the Farm"). Yancey notes that no one is making contemporary students write in the extracurriculum. Yet looking closely at the particulars shaping one man's literate practices with the long view of hindsight, it becomes more evident how this writer was pushed and pulled into writing for the extracurriculum, by what Deborah Brandt might call Price's "literacy sponsors," which are "any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, and model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way" (19). No one required Price to keep a diary, write letters home, or write articles for the *Denisonian*. However, considering the familial and institutional frameworks in which Price lived and wrote, it's obvious that Price wrote particular genres and for particular audiences in response to both explicit and tacit prompts from his literacy sponsors.

Also arguing implicitly for the value of local histories, Barbara L'Epplattener describes the history of Composition and Rhetoric as a collage of photos: "We see small pictures—individuals or groups or specific moments in time—and then, stepping back and looking at many small pictures, we can see a larger picture—trends, movements, ideologies" (75). Not only can Price's experience be linked to trends among two generations of particularly literate family members who were also men and women of their time, Price was also a man of *his* time. Price bucked classes while his fellow American college students were bucking convention, which included the entire adult supervised educational system. As historian Paula Fass explains, "Participation in extra-curricular activities was the critical demonstration of peer group affiliation. It was a measure of group loyalty and the road to achievement" (182). By starting a popular literary magazine that was looked upon suspiciously by adults and was not a parents' dream, Price was a successful college student by his contemporaries' standards. Price's work launching *The Flamingo* during his senior year at Denison in 1921 corresponds with the beginning hey-day of college humor magazines on college campuses. This was the era in which popular writers, for example, wrote for the magazine "with a college education" that was called *College Humor* and that published writing by well known American writers such as Zelda Fitzgerald and James Thurber. By the 1920s there were over 100 college humor magazines (Carlinsky 12; Herrmann 63).

Local histories can be used to build a broader understanding of students writing within the context of cultural trends, and they can also showcase ambivalence among individuals about assigned cultural identities or prescribed behaviors inevitably shaping their habits and tastes. Individual lives deviate from the norm, even if the lives of these individuals, such as fraternity men, can be (paradoxically) used to demonstrate the norm. For example, Fass uses the testimony of 1920s-era young people published in college campus magazines and newspapers to prove her thesis that these young people shunned associations with adults as part of a larger mood of rebellion among youth who were challenging the Victorian norms of their parents and other adult authority figures. She claims, "On the whole students were suspicious of those who cultivated faculty members because such contacts both went against prevailing values and, by introducing adult personalities into a youth world, threatened to disrupt peer controls" (181). Price, in fact, worked pretty hard to "get by" on shirking schoolwork,

but he counted faculty members as his friends and associates, including the previously mentioned Ted Johnson. Several diary entries feature his fellow Phi Gamma (Fiji) and Physics Professor “Coonie” (Clarence Coons) who was one of Price’s self-described best friends at Denison. Head of the local draft board, Coonie was also his boss when Price worked as a stenographer during the war. Had Fass looked into the private worlds of the young people she studied, she might have found more nuanced relationships between young people and their elders on campus than the impression she garnered from published records when mining data for trends. Price’s enthusiasm for sports as a spectator, outlined qualitatively in his diary, along with his sporadic participation as an athlete himself, might be one more example of how the details of individuals’ daily lives can show their resistance to cultural norms, although these individuals might appear to conform to these norms on the surface and as evidenced by published and public reports. Finally, the details of individual lives through local histories might teach us more about the identities and methods of outliers like Price, a man interested in reading and writing, who could not prove his manliness as a member of a literary society like his forefathers, or on the campus athletic fields as a sports hero, but made a place for himself as a campus hero of a new brand when founding a humor magazine. Knowing Price’s deep connection to Denison University’s history, including the history of its literary society, and knowing the challenge he was up against as the college sports hero took over as the big man on campus, can help explain the set of reactions and behaviors that propelled his work in the extracurriculum, which eventually led him to found *The Flamingo* amidst the backdrop of a developing and redeveloped youth culture.

John Price, the College Man Identity and World War I College Culture

As a college education became a status symbol of the middle class for young people like Price, the modern Greek system experienced a growth spurt when many of its oft-repeated rituals were codified. As one result, the image of the college fraternity man, either indifferent to scholastic pursuits or possessing “natural smarts,” became synonymous in the popular imagination with the average college student as rituals of college life were circulated in the mass media (Fass, 176; Syrett 183-85). Young campus leaders no longer impressed their peers in the debate halls as they had in the nineteenth century. As newspapers and radio programs began featuring college sports, the college jock had completely taken over as the campus hero and also in the popular imagination, a trend that began after the Civil War (Schmidt 1; Syrett 118). Radio programs began featuring broadcasts of college football games in 1920 (Schmit 5), and by 1928, sociologist of 1920s college life, Robert Cooley Angell, observed cynically that the college athlete “attains ten times more notoriety than the most illustrious professor” (107). Meanwhile, the mass production of the automobile, and the growth of high school culture, also allowed youth both the space and autonomy to socialize apart from parental supervision (Mintz and Kellogg 118). The conflict between youth and authority figures was also psychological. When the war to end all wars failed to do so, and its violence exploited youth lives, young people of this “lost generation,” feeling their innocence shattered, turned away from the values of their Victorian parents, particularly Christian piety (Cowley 3).

Like many of his World War I era peers, Price was critical of adult leaders who’d hope he’d attend class instead of consorting with his peers and drinking, smoking, gambling and attending movies. A student preoccupied with adult-sponsored scholastics risked the derogatory label of “grind” (Fass 173). Historian Nicholas Syrett traces the modern college man relying on “natural smarts” for his success to the nineteenth literary society culture that glorified a student’s success in the extracurriculum rather than in the otherwise dull, school-sanctioned curriculum, a curriculum that was not very dynamic in its time or by contemporary standards, and was certainly not student centered. Students who achieved as orators via nineteenth-century college literary society activities were

admired, but as with a trend that became commonplace and codified in the early twentieth century, “[s]tudents who spent too much on their studies were known variously as grinds” and also as “‘digs,’ ‘grubs’ or. . . ‘polers’ (Syrett 91). Fass estimates that 1920s college students, who dodged work and also perhaps peer ridicule, spent four to five and a half hours a week studying, and the rest of their free time socializing (178). Price graduated with a B- average, but most students were, in fact, C students. John Price’s fictional contemporary, F. Scott Fitzgerald’s Armory Blaine, for example, described his Princeton University math classroom as a “study in stupidity” and his teacher, Mr. Rooney, as a “pander to the dull”(95). Writer Vincent Sheehan, who attended the University of Chicago the same years as Price attended Denison, recalls popular disdain for rigorous study during the era, symbolized for Sheehan by the “snap courses” with which he built his own college curriculum: “The football players, the socialites, the pretty co-eds, and all the other students who regarded study as an inconvenience, rushed to inscribe themselves for [them]” (3). Angell put it this way: “The ambition of many—it would probably not be an exaggeration to say most—undergraduates is aptly expressed by the phrase ‘getting by’”(3). If “getting by” was a course, John Price’s diary could have been the textbook.

Price’s methods for “getting by” were, not surprisingly, an extension of methods that he had employed while a high school student. In fact, in the first entry of his very first diary, which he began in the middle of his senior year of high school, he describes his study habits as less than stellar, although the curriculum at his elite high school was rigorous: “I don’t study much at home, usually an hour on Vergil and so the rest at school, or make a bluff in class” (January 1, 1916). At the same time, drastic changes on Denison’s college campus when Price was a sophomore seriously compromised adult authority and arguably reinforced Price’s slacker behavior that set him apart from his older brothers and his sister who finished or began college before the war started. For example, Price was at the right age and in the right place, on a college campus, to be an eyewitness to and participant in an extremely costly and wasteful military spending program when the US government instigated an ambitious program for college students, The Student College Training Corps (S.A.T.C., pronounced “satsy”), which also compromised adult authority. Price’s experience with this program also puts his behavior as a class “bucker” into a broader context. This program run by the US war department was designed to discourage young college men from enlisting en masse. Along with some of his fellow fraternity brothers, who were too young to fight in the war or who weren’t drafted, Price joined this program in the fall of 1918 as college dorms and classrooms across the country were transformed into army training compounds. Participants wore military uniforms, engaged in military drills, and took classes such as war issues and map making. The government also paid participants \$30 a month [\$430 adjusted for inflation] as well as their room and board (Willis 25-27). Denison S.A.T.C. participants, who avoided the risk undertaken by the estimated 6,500 American college students who died in the war, included Price’s friend, “Pepe the Italian,” “one of a number” who Price believed “would never have gone to college except for the chance to do so at Government expense and at the same time stay out of the war” (November 1, 1921).

The otherwise futile outcomes of S. A.T.C., put into action literally a month before the end of the war, led to some inevitable cynicism about its purpose by Price’s young colleagues. Price’s friend and first college roommate, George Ducro, may have aptly nicknamed the program as “Safe at the College” and “Saturday Afternoon Tea Club” (Ducro). A contemporary of Price, Pepe, and George, who was in a S.A.T.C. program at Ripon College in Wisconsin similarly quipped: “The story [of the S.A.T.C.] is that when the Kaiser heard of us being prepared he surrendered” (Henry Jones). Despite the efforts of S.A.T.C. to keep men like Price “safe at the college,” Denison was down a great number of men during the last leg of the war, and Price’s classmates were scattered across the country at different S.A.T.C. affiliated schools, fighting the war itself or awaiting deployment. During this fall of 1918,

and into the winter of 1919, when Denison college men, and Price's fellow "Fiji" brothers trickled back to school, Price was holding down the fort in Granville, almost quite literally, as a football player, president of the sophomore class, and "E," or president, of his fraternity when he came down with the now infamous Spanish flu during the fall of 1918 and was hospitalized for a few weeks. Price was among the most vulnerable victims of the flu, which killed mostly young people. Many of these young people who died were sequestered in close quarters because of military responsibilities such as S.A.T.C. programs or while awaiting deployment. The too swift preparation of military barracks and outposts, which brought army recruits into close proximity, accelerated the spread of disease among young people like Price (Barry 238).

Campus authorities at Denison made tepid attempts to maintain the structure of S.A.T.C. after Armistice Day in November in 1918, as leaders in Washington remained confused about whether, or how, to progress with a program for which there was no longer a concrete purpose but for which the momentum had already been built. In fact, a month after Armistice Day, Price and his cohorts at Denison received army issues: "shoes, hats, underwear, belts, shirts" plus "two kinds of shoes—dress and field" (December 7, 1918). Not surprisingly, when his alarm clock rang at 5 a.m. for reveille shortly thereafter, Price "got up and threw two of [the alarm clocks] out the window" (December 12, 1918). A few days later when his S.A.T.C. uniform arrived, Price celebrated by "buck[ing] all classes" (December 16, 1918). Price's final exam in a class called "War Aims" must have felt ironic on the first day in two weeks that he had actually gotten up for reveille—at which point Price reported in his diary that "discipline [was] all shot to hell" (December 18, 1918).

After the war, and as Price's friends and fellow fraternity brothers trickled back from their respective stations, either at US training camps, overseas or at other S.A.T.C. affiliated schools, Price continued his role as the rebellious leader. He and a few friends began a club called the "Wingless Angels," formed to organize harmless mischief around campus, and inaugurated by a signature move that could be out of a scene from the 1978 National Lampoon movie *Animal House*. Price and his buddy, Trump Noland, got a pushcart and took the chapel songbooks from the college's onsite private high school, Doane Academy, and stacked the books outside the county jail. Price even made up cards for the Wingless Angels, presumably to be left at the scene of the group's "crime[s]" (January 14, 1919). Price was delighted when the President of the University, President Clark Chamberlain, whom the students called "Prexy" (as in "Prez"), condemned the prankster who stole the chapel books. In Price's second prank that semester of which he was proud, he and friends painted over the signs written by freshmen Denison students, and in preparation for "Scrap Day," a type of field day competition between the freshmen and sophomore students. Price was delighted again when "Prexy" shortly thereafter spoke about the paint "as if it were murder" (January 19, 1919). Mischief continued when Price and friends were unable to remove the paint, tried using gasoline to remove it, and started a small fire on the sidewalk. Reports about these antics delighted Price's longtime love interest and friend from home, Margaret Heil, who declared in a letter, "I liked the chapel song-books part! Oh awfully! And the green paint!"

Considering the distraction of the war, the S.A.T.C. program, getting the flu, and his role as mischief maker and class leader, not to mention his habit of "bucking," Price's grades were abysmal during his second quarter that school year, which greatly upset his parents. He had gotten an incomplete in geography and English, Cs in history, physics and zoology, and an F in gym. Price's mother claimed in a letter to him that he was in danger of 'selling his birthright' for "a mess of pottage," adding, "You know you told me at Christmas that it was this S.A.T.C. and your being in the hospital that has made your work so poor, and we accepted that, but there is no excuse this term" (Louise Price). Thereafter, Price put a bit more effort into pleasing his parents, but continued to "buck" classes to sleep, work on

extracurricular activities, play cards and maintain his reputation as a fun-loving, party boy who at this point had started to smoke as well. Price's strategy for "getting by" is perhaps represented at this point in his college career by his decision to buck his psychology class after he got an A on a quiz. As he put it in his diary, "Got a Psychology quiz paper back with an A on it, so I bucked" (January 15th, 1920).

As Price's rebellious behavior made him more popular with his peers, at the same time it cost him an important opportunity when he was not picked to be the editor of the school newspaper, the *Denisonian*, in the winter of his junior year, potentially compromising his achievement as a writer in the extracurriculum where he was beginning to excel. The timing for this decision about the paper's editorship might have been bad for Price as another prankster had just circulated a pamphlet, called "The Pasquine" which presumably contained some radical statements about campus authority figures. Prexy assumed that Price was behind the magazine and, as Price explains in his diary, "Went to Prex this afternoon to get a letter for Craig. He kept me there from 4:30 to 6. Showed me a copy of 'The Pasquine,' a sort of stink sheet, which was printed by someone—not me. Said 'the boys' thought that I did it, but I convinced him I didn't" (March 24, 1920). Price's brother Owen thought that Price was rightly accused as the author and/or distributor of "The Pasquine." And as Owen put it in a letter to Price (while still serving time in Europe for the military in a post-war assignment):

I'd be willing to bet my whole pile against a ragged 5 *piastre* note that the reason you didn't get the Denny was because you have gotten the rep for such things as putting out "Pasquines" rather than being a sober-minded enough citizen to run an influential thing like the Denny. I know you could run it because I know more of you than the school at large sees, but this thing tearing around school at night, joining damn fool clubs, etc. etc. while perfectly innocent in itself fosters the rep that you're a "heller" even if you aren't.

According to Owen, Price had compromised his ethos as a leader of the newspaper through his rebellious frat boy behavior and, as a result, Price's work ethic, and his evenhandedness as a writer, was nearly invisible to outsiders.

Losing the editorship of the "Denny" was indeed a blow for Price, but the loss provided an exigency for a more inventive enterprise when he responded to an arguably larger calling, when he, unknowingly perhaps, filled a gap left by the folding literary societies by starting something altogether new, *The Flamingo*. Before the winter break of his senior year, along with several friends, Price called a meeting "to start a monthly magazine—humorous and literary" (December 3, 1920). The group formed an editorial board a few days later. Price wanted to name the magazine *The Schemer* for the slang term assigned to any member of an amorous couple who was able to finagle an unchaperoned date on or near campus, a name that surprisingly did not go over well with faculty. The board eventually "[d]ecided on *The Flamingo* as name, and for each member of [the] staff to put \$5 [about \$60 adjusted for inflation] as security in order to insure college against loss." Price and his friend Ford Weber "then went up before faculty" and "made [a] brief speech, and answered questions" where they got the green light to "go ahead with [the] first issue" (January 10, 1921). As mentioned earlier, this first issue was put out in March of 1921, a few months before Price's graduation date, and as his class bucks made this graduation tenuous.

The Founding of *The Flamingo* in a Historical Context

Price worked hard to maintain the identity of a slacker while "getting by," and he dabbled in sports as a sometimes football player, even though he only weighed about 130 pounds, but he was actually more productive and loyal to his birthright than it might have seemed to his parents. While slacking,

he also went about preserving a place for the college literary society hero as the campus literary societies on Denison's campus folded, and as literary societies on campuses everywhere in the US became "only a shadow of their former selves" (Syrett 181). Price had a stake in the preservation of these societies. Not only were Price's father and uncles members of literary societies, Price's grandfather Thomas helped found a local literacy society near Granville (Jones). The destiny of this Granville area literary society paralleled the growth and development of college literary societies of the time in the late 1800s, and during their most influential years in antebellum America. This Granville area literary society, like the college societies, also built and established a library (Ira Price). Price's father, Enoch, was a member of Denison's Calliopean Society, a literary society founded in 1836, five years after the college itself was founded and whose members created the first college newspaper, *The Denison Collegian* (Chessman 75, 156), and when only 3% of the population attended college (Lefkowitz 5-6). The *Collegian* folded in 1895 and morphed into the *Denisonian* (for which Price became a reporter and features editor.) In 1889, a year after Price's father, Enoch, graduated from Denison, the school sponsored the first inter-collegiate football game against Wooster College, but the young men of Denison still interfaced with the world outside of it when these men hosted and attended intercollegiate debate contests.

A front page editorial in the 1890 issue of Denison's *Collegian* foreshadowed the waning influence of the literary societies, while also showcasing their influence at the time, considering the editorial's placement on the paper's front page. While arguing for the significance of the state's contest in oratory, the editorial argued of literary societies: "It is unfortunate that the interest in oratory has seemed to be declining in the last two years ("Editorial"). The following page of the newspaper describes a Denison football game against Ohio State. In a few years it would be unlikely that a college newspaper would feature interests of a college literary society on its front page. In fact, by the time Price got to Denison in 1917, the influence of the Calliopean Society and its rival, the Franklin Society, was disappearing. By 1921, the year Price graduated from Denison, the literary societies at Denison had folded completely (Chessman 289). The end of student-run literary societies at Denison also arguably marked the final divorce between oratory contests and fraternity life, two cultural developments that had grown up together on nineteenth century college campuses (Syrett 17-18), as had been the case on Denison's campus.

It was not necessarily a coincidence that *The Flamingo* was launched on Denison's campus the same year that the literary societies folded. "Getting by" was topoi in Price's diary and also a mode of operation. At the same time, "getting by" required that he achieve at something, a complicated endeavor while slacking, and this achievement did not include school-sanctioned scholastics or sports, with which his success was unlikely. *The Flamingo* preserved on some level the purpose of the earliest literary societies—providing college students a voice outside the confines of classroom curricula. Historian of Denison University, G. Wallace Chessman, describes the end of the literary societies at Denison University, in particular: "In 1921, in one of their last official acts, the literary societies turned over their responsibility for selecting candidates for the Lewis Prizes to the student-faculty council of debate and oratory" (289). The deaths of Denison's literary societies on campus corresponded nearly exactly with Price's founding of a humor magazine. As Chessman, argues, "*The Flamingo*, the *Denisonian*, and the *Denison Collegian*—each was a specialized product of the work of the old literary societies" (291). The focus of literary societies in general had been debating ideas, but humor was also a longstanding ingredient of society discussions (Harding 46). The establishment of literary societies also typically led also to the founding of literary magazines as members of these societies became interested in writing (Harding 59). As the editor of *The Flamingo*, Price reinvented, extended, and preserved a place for the college literary society hero who could co-exist with the college sports hero while giving some cachet to writers and artists who were otherwise losing the

limelight. *The Flamingo* was authored and illustrated by male and female college students alike, but the project also arguably mimicked another feature of the historical literacy societies—the promotion of expression as “essential to a gentleman’s manliness” (Syrett 29). The editorship of this magazine gave Price a manly identity that corresponded with his rebellious frat boy image. Meanwhile, his diary keeping, a waning habit among men by the twentieth century that had been popular with this group in the nineteenth century (McCarthy 279), as well as his weak stab at athletics, could cast him as a feminine type.

If Price was a preservationist, and his parents didn’t see it, Denison faculty didn’t see it either, at least not right away. In an initial meeting about the magazine, President Chamberlain had discouraged Price from starting the magazine by telling him a “story of financial fiasco in the publication line” at Denison (January 7, 1921). Price likely had a hand in the several articles without a byline published in *The Denisonian* that cited adult campus leaders’ skepticism about the magazine. After the first issue, which was popular immediately and sold well, faculty members gave the magazine mixed reviews, claiming it wasn’t literary enough and voicing their general distaste for a humor magazine. Denison’s dean, William Tanner, who was already frustrated with Price because of all the “bucking,” and had sent him several reprimanding notes about it, claimed with some curmudgeony, “It is difficult to publish a humor magazine, and keep it absolutely clean. There are different standards in judging and what some regard as coarse and out of place, others think of as only humorous and so do not concern themselves much as to whether it observes all the proprieties” (“Should the Flamingo Be Continued?”). Even though faculty at Denison were not enthused about the founding and distribution of *The Flamingo* at the time, and many faculty members, including President Chamberlain, were not surprisingly annoyed by John Price himself, Price’s interest in a literary magazine continued a tradition of extracurricular engagement these adult leaders may have valued on a larger level. As one perspective, Willis A. Chamberlain (perhaps a relation of President Chamberlain), a German professor who was an alumnus of Denison, had been the editor-in-chief of the *Denison Collegian* in 1890, the paper mentioned previously which was published by Denison’s Calliopean and Franklin literary societies.

Conclusion: Insights Garnered From One Local History

Price’s experience as a college literary hero, at least of the World War I era brand, might first provide a history lesson about how curricula have potentially been scaffolded onto students’ interests in the extracurriculum. Denison University actually sponsored the scaffolding of Price’s extracurricular and school literacies by establishing a journalism program by his junior year (“Journalism Next Year”). Price, of course, “bucked” several of his journalism classes, but he considered the new director of the program, Professor Dickerman, a smart and sophisticated role model. Dickerman’s pedagogy was refreshing and exciting, from Price’s standpoint, particularly when Dickerman helped students analyze the media treatment of the sinking of the Titanic, taught the students to critically analyze the school paper, and also brought in papers from around the country for students to assess (September 13, 1919; September 30, 1919). Dickerman also sat on *The Flamingo* editorial board.

Journalism programs at US colleges were then common but not ubiquitous. Several US colleges had added journalism programs at the end of the nineteenth century. Other private colleges like Denison, such as Emory University and Grinnell College, added their programs as early as 1912 (Garay 15-17). David Levine credits the need for “experts” during and after World War I for the growth of more vocationally oriented college curricula like journalism and the fine arts. Of course, the addition of more vocationally oriented coursework caused some despair among the traditionalists (45-47). Considering all the writing that Price did as a journalist outside of school as a college student, in the

extracurriculum, he nearly had a double major in journalism had he the opportunity to work in school with his interests, and for a grade. When concluding their study of contemporary students' reading, which points to a generation gap between student interests and the goals of college educators, David Jolliffe and Alison Harl in fact recommend curricula "that invite[s] students to engage in their reading and to connect texts that they read to their lives, their worlds, and other texts" (613). Cynthia Selfe et al. make similar observations and recommendations for revamped curricula when studying computer gamers' enthusiasm for learning via games versus their apathetic attitude toward school literacies (30).

The evolution of US college literary societies potentially embodies a similar lesson about how curricular innovation can be born in the extracurriculum. College literary societies evolved in part because of campus leaders who had been members of these societies elsewhere, valued them, and then implemented them when they could. For example, Robert Hamilton Bishop, who was president of Miami University of Ohio from 1824 to 1841, helped to establish literary societies at his school because he had been influenced by literary societies as a college student himself at the University of Edinburgh (Harding 119). Each college literary society has its own history, of course, as does each college, but these societies' waning influence can also tell the story about the evolution of the extracurriculum. By the end of the nineteenth century, the methods and topics of the college curricula more resembled those of the literary societies. Popular literature and real world issues were at last welcome topics in the classroom; emphasis on the classics waned (Harding 262; Graff 45). Presumably, when literary society members became faculty members themselves, they brought some of the methods of reading, writing, and thinking they had learned while members of these societies into their college classrooms. The work of the literary societies had become more fully absorbed into college-sponsored programming and curricula. This was the case at Denison most explicitly with the folding of the literary societies when its longtime contest was transferred to a college-sponsored program and, as mentioned earlier, "the student-faculty council of debate and oratory" (Chessman 289).

This local history, overall, showcases one young man establishing an identity as a modern college man during a pivotal time in American history as the college jock took over the role of the male campus hero that at one time had belonged to the literacy society orator. Price's work in the extracurriculum shows how he attempted to preserve and extend the role of the college literacy society hero with the explicit and implicit help of his literacy sponsors, most specifically his family members who shared a collective memory of Denison University and who had a stake in its evolution and also its ongoing quality. Price's story, although a local one, provides some historical evidence about how and why students chose to excel in the extracurriculum rather than with school-sanctioned scholastics. Price's experiences also show how the maintenance and development of identities can push and pull students into this extracurriculum. Price's experiences might also be linked to an ongoing trend among at least some of today's college students who perennially come of age in a culture that continues to glorify the party boy, not the scholar. Hence, Price's effort to craft a leadership role for himself as a writer amidst cultural tension may parallel or foreshadow legitimate identity crises among contemporary young college men. Authors of a recent study of contemporary college men, for example, describe how their subjects have felt beholden to behave like a certain type of college man who crams as much partying as he can into four years. Studying and preparing for the future is not considered masculine for these college students, as was the case for John Price nearly 100 years ago (Edwards and Jones 217-218). As with John Price nearly one hundred years ago, prescribed cultural identities strongly shape how contemporary college students think about their lives, which in turn can shape how and how much they learn while in college.

The study habits of college students, historically, as well as the intersections between these habits and gender—which may be garnered from materials John Price left behind—are particularly relevant when considering that in our contemporary culture, colleges are failing, on some level, to attract men to them. Although the majority of US high school students start college, more of them are women. In 2011, 72 percent of high school women entered college as compared to 64.6 percent of the men (“College Enrollment”). As historian Daniel Clark argues when addressing related statistics about dropping college attendance among males: “Might not our present debates about the purpose and place of college education (what value it adds) be advanced by a deeper understanding of the genesis of the American embrace of college education almost a century ago?” (4). Today’s trends might be a blip related to a strained economy, but these trends might also encourage more studies about the development of the extracurriculum among past, present, and prospective college students as these developments relate to gender, and even more specifically to the longstanding cultivation and evolution of the modern college man identity.

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