

*The Raymond Walters Diaries:
The Swarthmore College Days (1925–32)*

When Raymond Walters died in October 1970 at the age of eighty-five, the *Cincinnati Enquirer* summarized his professional accomplishments in this manner: “scholar—author—administrator.” Most of his scholarship, including several books and countless articles, was devoted to the study of the utility and value of higher education. He was a regular contributor to such magazines as *Scribner’s* and *School and Society*. He became something of an expert in statistical analysis, charting the fluctuations in student body populations at colleges and universities. A 1946 Associated Press story referred to Walters as the nation’s “statistician laureate of higher education.” His proudest accomplishment came from his service as president of the University of Cincinnati (1932–55). To this day, his is the longest tenure of any president in that university’s history.¹

Walters was born in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, in 1885. In 1907 he earned a BA in classics and an MA in English at Lehigh University, located in his hometown. After serving in the US Army during World War I, Walters returned to his alma mater to teach English classes, where, by all accounts, he was much beloved by his students. In 1921 Walters’s career received a boost when he was recruited by Frank Aydelotte, a dynamic pioneer in higher education. Aydelotte, the president of Swarthmore College, a small, Quaker liberal arts school just west of Philadelphia, hired Walters to work and teach. During his twelve years at Swarthmore, Walters taught English courses, worked as its registrar and Dean of Men, and served as President Aydelotte’s personal assistant.

Shortly after Walters’s death, his sons donated a set of their father’s diaries to the University of Cincinnati Archives. Walters began these diaries in 1925, when he was a thirty-nine-year-old English professor at Swarthmore College. His final entry was in 1960, five years after his retirement from his duties at Cincinnati, when he suffered a debilitating stroke.

¹“Dr. Walters, Former UC Head, Dies,” *Cincinnati Enquirer* (clipping), Oct. 26, 1970, Cincinnati Historical Society Library (CHS), Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, OH. By the postwar years, Walters, who had been compiling annual statistical reports since 1919, had developed a national reputation for his work. The Associated Press reference can be found in “Universities Will Turn Wartime Research To Peace Pursuits, UC President Writes,” *Cincinnati Enquirer* (clipping), Aug. 20, 1946 (CHS).

The diaries from the early years of Walters's career are useful primary sources on many fronts. They reveal valuable insights into both Walters's formative years at Swarthmore and important trends in higher education from the mid-1920s to the early 1930s.

Walters's diaries offer an insider's look into the machinations of Swarthmore College and, by extension, the history of higher education. Walters developed and taught innovative literature courses for Aydelotte's honors program. Beginning in 1922, Aydelotte, a former Rhodes Scholar, had introduced and pioneered several new educational techniques, which were designed to replace the traditional lecture format of teaching. Oral examinations also took the place of written assessments.

In addition to his classroom responsibilities, Walters was a man on the move. He and President Aydelotte traveled around the country, usually separately, to identify and interview candidates for the Rhodes Scholarship program. Walters also traveled extensively under the auspices of such professional organizations as the American Council on Education and the Association of University Registrars. These trips are well documented in his diaries. Many of his trips to college campuses required him to assess academic programs and curricula for the purpose of accreditation. During these trips, he also took the initiative to collect statistical information from the host schools. Beginning in the mid-1920s, numerous diary entries discuss Walters's effort to compile this data for publication for the journal *School and Society*.

Walters assisted Aydelotte in other important ways. As Swarthmore's student population swelled, he worked with Aydelotte to expand the physical footprint of the college. When Mary Clothier, the widow of Isaac Hallowell Clothier, a successful Quaker dry goods merchant in Philadelphia, offered a generous \$100,000 donation (almost \$1.4 million in 2017 dollars) to Swarthmore in 1926 for the construction of a much-needed auditorium, Walters worked with Philadelphia newspapers to develop interest in the new construction.

The diaries are also very instructive when it comes to the culture of higher education in the mid-1920s and early 1930s. During this era, university officials operated under the doctrine of *in loco parentis*. When mothers and fathers sent their children away to college, it was expected that school administrators would step in and act as substitute parents to their students. All aspects of student life were regulated, policed, and monitored. For example, dormitories, fraternities, and sororities required adult

supervision. It was not uncommon for Walters and his wife to chaperone dances. In 1925, when he was serving as Dean of Men, Walters endeavored to interview every single male student. He wrote: "I am a father confessor. It is a wonderful relationship." However, the diaries also document Walters's frustrations with this system. Despite the fact that he was a teetotaler himself, Walters, on several occasions, lamented the college's decision to enforce its zero-tolerance policy of no alcohol on campus.²

Walters lived and operated in a world that afforded men greater opportunities than women. While the 1920s proved to be a pivotal decade for women in higher education and society in general, the doors of admission at schools sometimes opened slowly for female students. Walters was often charged with the process of interviewing prospective students. Several diary entries suggest that female applicants were held to tougher standards for admission than were male applicants. Women also went through a much more rigorous interview and vetting process than men did. Walters took for granted the advantages his own gender conferred on him. He held a membership with Philadelphia's Franklin Inn, a private club that, until 1930, provided a setting for academically minded men (only) to deliver and attend lectures, negotiate book contracts, and conduct other forms of business over dinner.

As the protégé of President Aydelotte, Walters was regarded as a rising star in academia. Several colleges and universities sought him out to become their president. Walters hinted in his diary that some schools hoped he could replicate Aydelotte's honors program. Out of loyalty to his mentor, Walters routinely spurned such offers. That changed in 1932, when members of the Board of Directors at the University of Cincinnati began courting Walters. Aydelotte, the nurturing mentor, encouraged Walters to accept the offer.

Walters's diaries also chart the career arcs of several of his colleagues. Swarthmore College proved to be a breeding ground for talent during the 1920s, in part because Aydelotte generously worked to recognize the talents of his faculty and to advance their careers. In 1930 Walters's friend and next-door neighbor, Carson Ryan, left Swarthmore to become the director of education for the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Alan Valentine, a fellow English professor, became the president of the University of Rochester in

² Raymond Walters Diary, Dec. 9, 1925, and Apr. 18, 1932, Raymond Walters Diaries, 1925–1960, University of Cincinnati Archives, Cincinnati, OH.

1935. Aydelotte himself moved on to a new position in 1939, as director of the Institute of Advanced Study at Princeton University, where he worked for a time with Albert Einstein.

Any scholar interested in the evolution of higher education will find the diaries of Raymond Walters useful and illuminating. Walters's career spanned a period of change in the place higher education occupied in American society. The diaries chronicle the important and innovative curricular changes that were occurring at smaller liberal arts colleges such as Swarthmore. Walters's entries also confirm the dramatic demographic changes underway at Swarthmore and other institutions. The eight volumes that Raymond Walters recorded while teaching and working at Swarthmore College are available to researchers at the University of Cincinnati Archives.

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