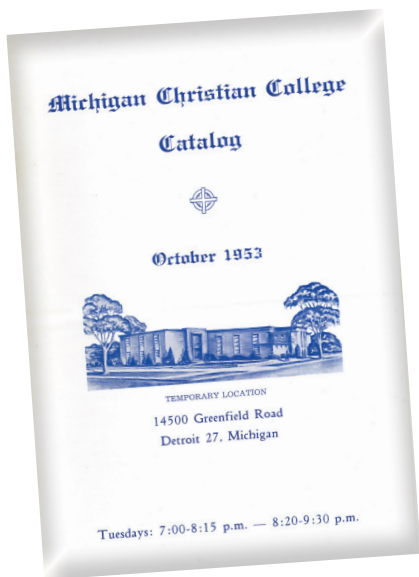


THE SEASONS OF
Rochester College



1958 **50** COMMITMENT TO
FAITH & LEARNING 2008
ROCHESTER COLLEGE

After months of searching for a campus location, Wheeler Utley and Lester Allen discovered the Maxon estate in rural Rochester. The “mansion” initially housed the library, chapel, and the Gatewood family. Within a year, offices occupied the Gatewood’s quarters and the building became known as the Administration Building. The college named the building Gallaher Center in 1973.



Organizers of a 1952-54 exploratory effort in Christian education named their institution Michigan Christian College.

Milestones Prior to 1959 Opening

- 1946 • Classes conducted at the Hamilton and Tuxedo Church of Christ in Detroit in an attempt to launch a Christian school
- 1952 • Evening courses organized at the Strathmoor Church of Christ in Detroit in another attempt to form a Christian school
- 1954 • Board formed to establish a Christian school in the North Central region
• Board organizes as the North Central Christian College Foundation
- 1955 • Documents for incorporation as a non-profit organization signed by board
- 1956 • First financial campaign for \$150,000 results in gifts of nearly \$250,000
- 1957 • Search process for a president initiated by the board
• Maxon estate in Rochester selected as a campus site
• First of several open houses conducted on the newly acquired property
- 1958 • Series of rallies for teenagers conducted on the future campus
• Campaign for \$500,000 launched at the first lectureship
• Otis Gatewood named president of the college at the first lectureship
• Lucien Palmer named dean at a rally in Detroit’s new Ford Auditorium
• Ground broken for first new facility, the Multi-Purpose Building
- 1959 • Rally at State Fair Coliseum with Pat Boone attracts over 8,500 guests
• Associates formed to raise funds for the college
• Opening of college delayed for two weeks while construction workers complete the Multi-Purpose Building

1954-1959

College officials hosted several open houses on the campus soon after the property purchase in 1957. High school students visited on several occasions during the spring of 1958, sparking vital student interest in the opening of North Central Christian College.



Lou Maxon included some of the furnishings from the house when he sold his estate to the college. Chairs from the living room seated guests in the lobby of Gallaher Center for many years. Bob Wineinger, a volunteer, recovered the chairs in 1985. The chairs appear in their original setting in the photograph on pages 12-13.



Prior to World War II, a relatively small number of Churches of Christ existed in the state of Michigan. That number increased substantially in the early 1950s as thousands of church members migrated to the Detroit area to work in the automobile industry.

Eventually, southeast Michigan became home to the largest concentration of Churches of Christ in the northern United States. Members within those churches began to yearn for the presence of their own Christian college. They dreamed of the day when their sons and daughters

would no longer have to travel across the country to attend such an institution.

On two occasions, one beginning in 1946 and another in 1952, church leaders offered a series of courses in area church facilities. While neither of those efforts survived, they intensified the desire of individuals who longed for the opening of a new Christian college in the region.

In 1954, a group of individuals initiated a movement that would turn the dreams of many into reality. Their efforts resulted in the establishment of North Central Christian College.

FORMATION OF A BOARD

In the spring of 1954, area Christians met at the Northwest Church of Christ in Detroit to discuss their interest in establishing a Christian academic institution. As a result of that meeting, participants charged four visionaries with the task of developing guidelines for the formation of a board to lead their efforts.

On June 8, George Ford, Warren Jones, Wheeler Utley, and James Vaughn issued a letter to Churches of Christ in the region, requesting the names of individuals who would be

willing to serve on a board. The four men noted in their letter, "We realize that if this effort is a success it must have the support of all Christians in the area and have the blessings of the Lord."

A second area-wide meeting took place on September 20 at the Fisher YMCA in Detroit. The participants, who represented several congregations in Michigan and Northern Ohio, selected a nine-member board. The board included Oliver Bunting, George Ford, Harold Hawley, Wesley Hawley, Paul Lutz, Gerald Montgomery, James Thomas, Wheeler Utley, and James Vaughn.

At its first meeting, the newly-formed board elected George Ford as chairman, Wheeler Utley as vice chairman, Paul Lutz as treasurer, and James Vaughn as secretary. A year later, the board selected Wheeler Utley as chairman and Jim Thomas as vice chairman in the absence of George Ford, who had been drafted into special duty by the United States Army.

The board signed documents for formal incorporation as a non-profit organization on January 17, 1955. Incorporated as the North Central Christian College Foundation, the board immediately appointed committees for publicity and fund-raising. Those committees hosted a meeting at the Hamilton Church

of Christ in Detroit on May 19 for anyone interested in Christian education. At that meeting, board members shared their initial plans for the future and launched their dreams into the public arena.

INSTITUTIONAL CHARACTER

At its first meeting in 1954, the board discussed the nature of the institution that it would establish. Those individuals involved with the 1946 effort leaned toward the establishment of a high school because of the financial investment required to begin a college. Consequently, this critical question had to be answered before the board could proceed.

After considerable discussion, the board abandoned the idea of establishing a high school and decided to work toward the establishment of a junior college. Board members expressed an interest in adding a high school in time, but decided that the opening of a junior college was a more attainable goal and the most critical need.

The board described the proposed institution in printed materials as a "liberal arts college with Christian ideals." Those early leaders emphasized their commitment to a quality education that would meet requirements for

accreditation by the North Central Association. They often spoke of their plans for the college to become a four-year institution as soon as growth would permit.

The early board also expressed a strong desire for the college to be Christian in every respect. In an interview with the *Rochester Clarion*, Chairman Utley emphasized that the board had not designed the college to serve as a preacher training institution and that it would be open to students of all faiths. The board published an institutional goal of training "capable, enthusiastic, creative, and devoted Christian leaders."

Memories of the Early Board by Jim Thomas

In 1954, I was invited by Hobart Ashby to attend a meeting of those interested in establishing a Christian school. We met in a YMCA building in Detroit. I was among nine men selected that evening to serve on the board. We immediately began meeting on the third Monday of every month in order to keep focused on the task of opening a school as soon as possible.

There were many discouraging moments in the early years. Many times Wheeler Utley would give a pep talk to keep us on course. Lester Allen later was added to the board. He was full of energy and confidence and helped us a great deal. Often we had to lean on one another for support and encouragement. One time a board member came to a meeting intending to resign. When the meeting was over, he told me that I said something during the meeting that changed his mind. I have no idea what I said to cause that decision, but he continued to serve.

Finding the property on Avon Road was a significant milestone that really helped us stay together. Thoughts about buying property replaced thoughts about not succeeding in our plans to open the college. The price of \$200,000 for the estate was a lot of money in those days, but we managed to purchase the property and move forward with our planning.

It was a great privilege for me to work for 40 years with the men and women who made up the Board of Trustees. Through the years those men and women exhibited zeal, humility, cooperation, and a desire to succeed. I count it an honor and a blessing to be a part of such a great body.

"I Know the Lord Will Find a Way for Me" was one of the favorite songs of the Gatewoods. The sentiment of that song certainly was true for North Central Christian College as well. We experienced tough times in those early years, but the Lord did find a way for us to establish the college and watch it grow.

Jim Thomas served on the Board of Trustees from 1954 until 1994. Jim's wife, Raída, attended the first meeting of the Associates and is a charter member of the group. The board honored Jim as the first trustee emeritus. Jim and Raída are model volunteers who played an integral role in the formative years of the college.

Foundation board members held regular informational meetings to keep interested individuals aware of their progress. Wheeler Utley, Oliver Bunting, Jim Thomas, Harold Hawley, and Paul Lutz served on a panel for one of those meetings.



Members of the board ► outlined their case for Christian education in the North Central region with a small brochure entitled "More Precious than Rubies."

They noted, "Our children are our most prized God-given possessions. We spare neither expense nor effort for their health and the physical development of their bodies. We labor untiringly to give them happy homes and an abundant share of worldly goods. Often we forget that which is much more important, the training of their minds."



▼ Ernie Stewart, Warren Jones, and Arnold Watson served as chairmen of the first fund-raising campaign for North Central Christian College. The board hired Henry King, a professional consultant, to assist with the 1956 fund drive. The campaign resulted in gifts and pledges totaling nearly \$250,000.





SEARCH FOR A CAMPUS

Completion of a successful financial campaign in 1956 provided the funding necessary for the board to begin the search for an appropriate campus site. Lester Allen led the process, which remained a priority on board agendas for several months.

By its February meeting in 1957, the board had considered 12 potential sites, including an abandoned school building in Detroit and a farm in Chelsea, but none of the locations seemed just right. Wheeler Utley reported his discovery of an estate near Rochester that seemed worthy of further investigation. That investigation so charmed the committee that a special meeting was called, and the board decided to pursue the Rochester property with a \$125,000 offer.

Months of counter offers and indications the owner might keep the property caused the board to feel a need to look for alternative sites. Finally, Lou Maxon, the Detroit advertising agent who owned the estate, decided

to accept an offer from the board and signed a purchase agreement on September 20. The agreement included the entire 37-acre estate for \$200,000 with a down payment of \$50,000 and a 10-year land contract with 5 percent interest on the balance.

The Maxon estate had been appraised at \$250,000 in 1952 and represented an estimated \$500,000 investment by the original owner. The *Detroit News* hailed the property as “an Oakland County beauty spot.” The paper described the grounds as the site of a former gravel pit Maxon had elaborately landscaped, complete with hundreds of large trees that were imported to expedite development of the property.

Responding to concerns that the Rochester location was too remote and too far from the city of Detroit, the board issued a response in an October newsletter. Committee members noted a site closer to Detroit was not possible because of price and the scarcity of large parcels of land with suitable buildings. They further



affirmed their conviction that the quiet atmosphere and scenic beauty of the Rochester site would make an ideal place for students to study and meditate.

FUND-RAISING EFFORTS

The board launched its first fund-raising effort in 1956 by engaging Henry King to direct a campaign for \$150,000. Realizing strong grass-roots support would be needed to make the campaign successful, the board established an advisory committee consisting of 53 members representing 40 congregations. This short campaign resulted in gifts and pledges of almost \$250,000, which provided funding for initial operating expenses and the down payment on a campus site.

After securing the campus site, the board launched its second major fund-raising drive in 1958. A spokesman for the board noted in a newsletter, "To have a Christian school worthy of our desires and worthy of our young people, we must learn to give and give again." Lester

Allen and Ernie Stewart served as directors for this \$500,000 campaign. Many canvassed not only members in their congregations but also friends and neighbors. Some gave their entire savings, and even children did their part. One little boy was quoted as saying, "This ain't much money, but Tommy and me raked leaves to get it. We want to go to NCCC when we get big." One evening, Lester Allen's 4-year-old daughter prayed, "Dear God, help me to do without some ice cream so we can give more to North Central Christian College."

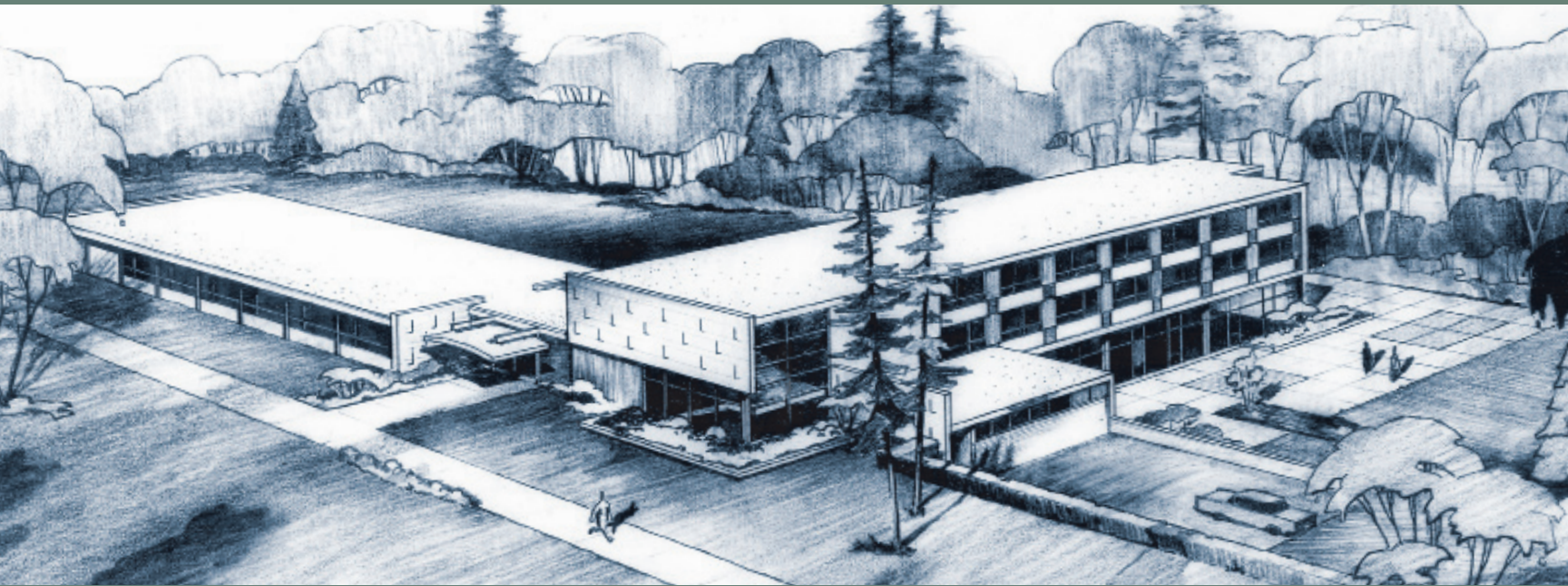
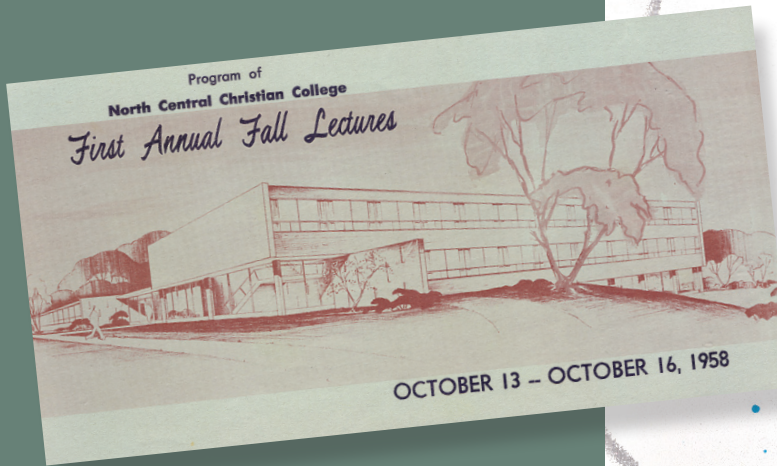
Without public ceremony, 30 individuals gathered on a snowy November day in 1958 to break ground for the first new structure on the college site, the Multi-Purpose Building. In order to assist with completion of that facility, the board approved its third fund-raising project in the summer of 1959. The group appointed Bob Utley to prepare a brochure for a national mailing list, requesting contributions to "Buy Bricks for North Central." Each gift of \$5.00 purchased 80 bricks.

"New Horizons" outlined the need and plans for North Central Christian College. Unique for the 1950s, the booklet included color photographs of the campus. Advertising for the first lectureship drew large crowds.

new horizons



with Christian Education



▲ An artist's conception of the Multi-Purpose Building, later named the Associates Campus Center, appeared on printed materials while the building was under construction.

The cafeteria in the lower level of the original structure featured large windows on two sides. The east windows disappeared with the addition of the cafetorium in 1961.

► Teen idol Pat Boone headlined a rally for North Central Christian College at the State Fair Coliseum on May 22, 1959. The program attracted nearly 8,500 individuals.



OPEN HOUSES

Immediately after finalizing the purchase of the Maxon property, the board issued its first general invitation to an open house. On October 26, 1957, the board proudly served as guides for the momentous occasion while those in attendance “walked the campus” and admired the superb acquisition. Since Maxon had not yet vacated the house, detailed flyers were given to guests specifying which items were included in the purchase. Visitors marveled at the numerous basement closets filled with suits and clothing formerly made available to guests of the Maxons.

In an attempt to begin generating student interest in the college, the board conducted a series of special events for teenagers during the spring of 1958. On five different occasions, an average of 200 teens from specific areas in southeast Michigan and northern Ohio gathered on the future campus. Other targeted open houses included one for the Rochester community, which attracted approximately 500 guests.

LECTURESHIP AND RALLIES

A new tradition began in October 1958, as 500 to 1,400 people gathered each night for the first of many annual lectureships hosted by the college. Although some

of the day sessions took place on the newly-acquired property, the majority of the program occurred at the Royal Oak Church of Christ and the Rochester High School auditorium.

At the close of the lectureship, the board announced that Otis Gatewood would serve as first president of the college. Prior to that announcement, a board committee had submitted the names of eight men whom the committee considered desirable candidates for the role. The insight behind that list of candidates became evident years later as six of the individuals became presidents of other Christian colleges.

November 1958 marked the first in a series of large rallies for the college. Nearly 2,000 attended the first rally in Detroit’s new Ford Auditorium and heard the plans for North Central Christian College. President Gatewood introduced the college’s first dean, E. Lucien Palmer, and reported that \$154,000 had already been given and pledged toward the \$500,000 campaign.

A second rally occurred in May 1959 at the Michigan State Fair Coliseum. By this time, everyone anticipated the opening of the college, which was scheduled for September 14. About 8,500 attended the event, which featured Pat Boone and Norvel Young. The May Rally continued as an annual event for the next six years.



Campus visitors admired progress on the college’s first construction project, the Multi-Purpose Building.

BIRTH OF ASSOCIATES

Shortly before the college opened, Alma Gatewood shared with a small group of women her vision for a fund-raising organization. She later wrote, "Everyone was so interested and enthusiastic about it, we almost had to organize that very night." Desiring to give a larger number of women an opportunity to launch the group, Alma organized an area-wide meeting for September 1, 1959.

Despite stormy weather, about 350 women from 38 congregations packed in and around the recreation room of the Maxon estate for the evening. Alma Gatewood chaired the meeting, which resulted in the formation of the Associates. The group elected El Meta Ford as its first president, chose the first Tuesday of each month for meetings, and set dues at \$1.00 per month.

The enthusiasm of those attending the organizational meeting of the Associates spread quickly among area congregations, foreshadowing decades of loyal support. Within a year, membership blossomed to over 1,000. Participants soon discovered the benefits of a strong network of women working for a common cause and began forming a unique bond among church members in the North Central region.

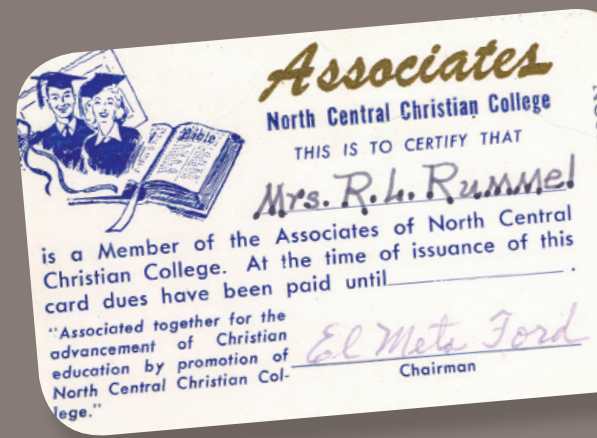
FINAL PREPARATIONS

An air of excitement filled the campus as opening day drew near. About 600 visitors filled the campus on September 7 for an open house that featured family picnics and tours. Construction workers labored feverishly toward completion of the Multi-Purpose Building, but finally realized their goal could not be reached by September 14. Consequently, administrators announced a two-week delay in the opening of the college.

On September 12, employees participated in their first meeting and picnic. Under the leadership of Otis Gatewood and Lucien Palmer, such individuals as Fred Alexander, Clyde Balderson, Doyle Earwood, Maurice Hall, Hugh Mingle, Bob Waggoner, and Morris Womack began serving as faculty members who would leave an enduring mark on the institution during its formative years. Many held second jobs during evenings and on weekends to support their families, demonstrating their commitment to the cause of Christian education.

As construction workers completed finishing touches on the Multi-Purpose Building, others converted facilities from the Maxon estate for college use. The greenhouse was adapted for science classes. The estate house, already known as the President's Mansion since it served as a home for the Gatewood family, was outfitted for student activities. The recreation room would serve as the location for chapel and the east wing basement as the first home for the library.

The library officially opened on September 21, 1959. An area formerly dedicated to the storage of clothing gave way to the pursuit of learning. In that modest location, three tables, a card catalog, and cedar-lined closets filled with 2,500 books awaited the pioneer class of North Central Christian College.



A functional dorm room plan designed for the Multi-Purpose Building served students well until the residence hall was converted to offices in the late 1990s.

Workers imitated the design in Barbier Hall while renovating that dorm in the summer of 1976. ▶



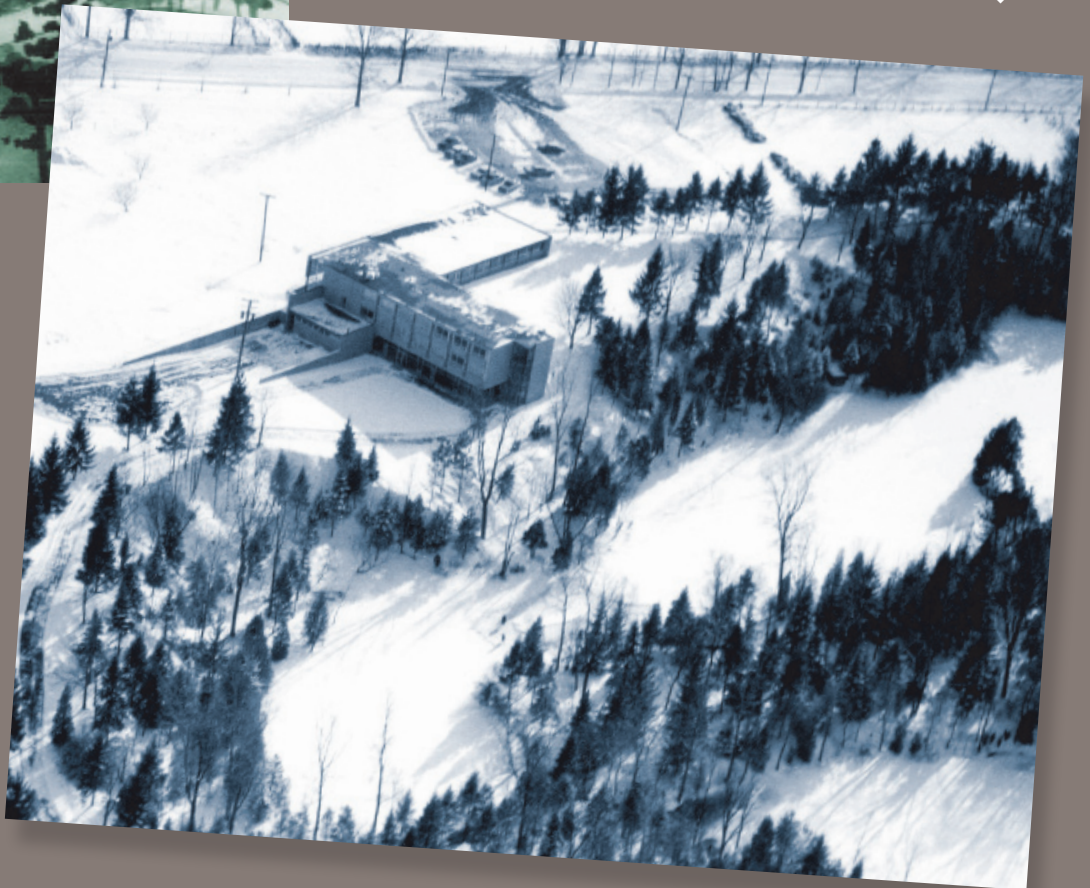
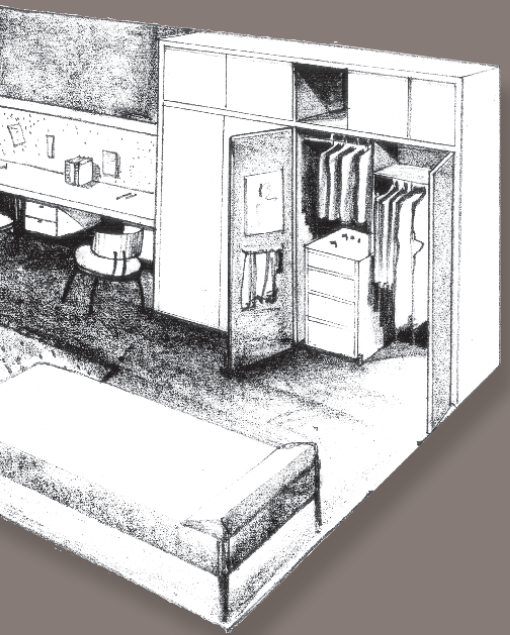
◀ Nearly 350 women gathered on the campus of North Central Christian College prior to the official opening to consider the formation of a fund-raising organization. The enthusiasm demonstrated that evening resulted in the formation of the Associates. Iola Rummel served as a faithful Associate until her passing in 2005. El Meta Ford, first president of the group, signed membership cards for the charter members.

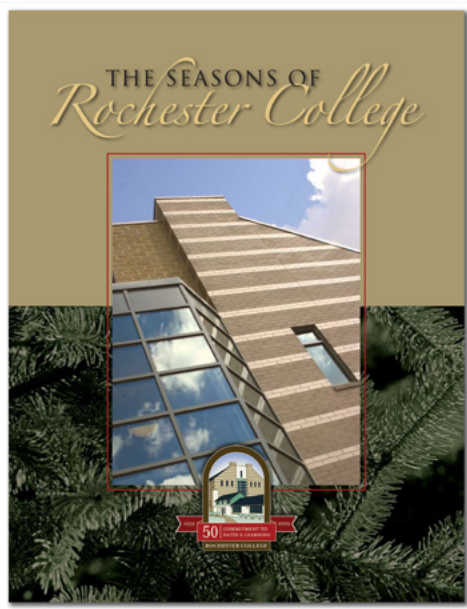
Administrators Otis Gatewood, Maurice Hall, and Lucien Palmer provided leadership on campus as the college community made final preparations for the arrival of the pioneer student body. ▶



◀ Architects prepared the college's first master plan while designing the Multi-Purpose Building, which appears in the plan on the left of the large building with the slanted roof. Parking needs, city regulations, and wetlands issues eventually necessitated a total revision of the master plan.

Aerial photography captured the campus as it would have appeared to the pioneer student body. The Multi-Purpose Building sits at a similar angle as shown in the master plan. ▼





Now Available!

Relive the exciting history of North Central Christian College, Michigan Christian College, and Rochester College. The Seasons of Rochester College recreates the institution's story in a beautiful 9x12 hardbound coffee table book. Memories will flood your mind as you view over 300 photographs and read the stories in this colorful 144-page keepsake!



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