

# Merger Creates Ward-Belmont

If anyone had tried to prepare them for what lay ahead, not one of the 300 "ladies in brown" would have believed that their beloved Belmont College would ever merge with their arch rival, Ward Seminary. Or, even worse . . . that *Ward* would *precede* the name of Belmont!

Ward Seminary was a much older and larger school. Now 48 years old, the school was located in downtown Nashville on Spruce Street (8th Ave.) between Church and Broad Streets. The school was looking for more space in a suburban location at the time when the Belmont College founders wished to retire.

Historical journalist Louise Davis wrote of the announcement in January, 1913:

It was like Doomsday at Belmont College . . . when the Misses Heron and Hood stood together at the main dinner table to announce to the student body that their school would soon be consolidated with their blue-coated rival, Ward seminary.

"Everyone was simply stunned, and after they recovered you never heard such crying," one of the Belmont girls of the class of '13 wrote 20 years later.

"I know the Ward girls felt just the same," she was able to understand after the intervening years. "But you can imagine how we felt. Ward was our rival."

The rivalry was especially keen over the Vanderbilt boys. Once, after a football game when the Vandy boys had cheered first and more for the Ward girls, the Belmont girls in mass meeting voted not to buy a single ticket to the upcoming Vanderbilt Glee Club performance. They felt great satisfaction when a Vanderbilt delegation, including cheerleaders and class presidents, came to the Belmont campus to plead with the girls to reconsider their decision.

The first year of the merger, 832 young women (more than 300 from Belmont and 500-plus from Ward) were enrolled in the new Ward-Belmont School, now headed by a man, Dr. John Diehl Blanton. Unable to give up either the Ward blue or the Belmont brown, the school's uniforms were described as "a hideous brown and blue striped" with brown blouse and hat. Though the first year was a hard one because of previous rivalries, a trip to Washington for Woodrow Wilson's inauguration and on to New York was a memorable event for the new school. Newspapers carried photographs of the sight-seeing girls and reporters quoted them as if they were celebrities.

A member of the class of 1914 wrote, "I returned the following year and after the first few weeks, all the rivalry was forgotten and everyone was happy because they saw in Ward-Belmont the beginning of a fine school."

Both schools "brought to the marriage" a rich heritage of culture, religious values, high moral standards and strict requirements for deportment. Any infringement of the rules brought swift punishment. But, there was very little rebellion against constraints.

Writing of their own experience, almost 40 years later, Sarah Bryan Benedict ('33), Ophelia Colley Cannon ('32) and Mary Elizabeth Cayce ('28) said in an article in *The Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, "Generally speaking, the *esprit de corps* was one of compliance and respect, without challenge, for authority and the girls lived within the sacred walls of Ward-Belmont School in a happy and cooperative frame of mind." Parents, especially, felt secure about the excellent care of their daughters.

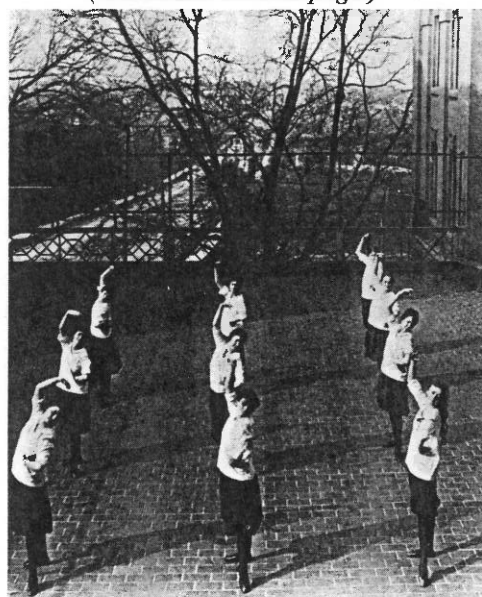
Academically, Ward-Belmont was a leader among schools for girls. It was the first junior college in the South to become fully accredited. Its Speech and Music Departments enjoyed excellent reputa-

tions. Plays, pageants, operettas, concerts and lectures contributed greatly to Nashville's cultural life. Many prominent entertainers and lecturers were heard on the Ward-Belmont stage. Among them were Nelson Eddy, Jose Iturbi, Jascha Heifetz, and South Pole discoverer and North Pole Explorer Roald Amundsen.

Ward-Belmont was granted a license for the first radio station in Nashville. WDAA went on the air in May 1922. The 20-watt radio transmitter was built by John H. DeWitt, Jr., then 16 years of age. The station was operated in a hallway, just off the stage of the school auditorium in North Front. Whenever prominent speakers or artists came to the school, their programs could be heard over a fairly wide area of Nashville. Gaetano deLuca, voice teacher at the school often broadcast Caruso and other famous artists, using his Victrola.

Equestrian pursuits were popular and many a young lady came to Ward-Belmont with her own horse which was stabled and

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Dance class on the roof of Founders Hall