

## CHAPTER FIVE

### EXCERPTS FROM “LOOKING FORWARD INTO THE PAST”<sup>1</sup>

by **E. P. Tenney**

*Editor’s Note: More than two decades after he left Colorado College, Edward P. Tenney wrote a book describing his efforts to invigorate the College and put it on a sound financial footing during his presidential tenure from 1876 to 1884. The book was as much about Tenney’s great religious faith as it was about his work at Colorado College.*

*There was another recurring theme in this Tenney memoir. The College never would have come into existence without the religiously inspired monetary contributions of a group of successful Massachusetts businessmen*

*Tenney began by telling the story of the Rocky Mountain Institute, the proposed college for Colorado that never got started but which Tenney considered the forerunner of Colorado College.*

My loyalty to California I transferred to Colorado and to whatever else of land and water might be in the unknown heart of Western America....

Within twenty-four hours of my arrival I began to confer about founding a college [the Rocky Mountain Institute]. I was told that Colonel Greenwood of the railway Survey would give twenty acres on the Divide<sup>2</sup> for this purpose, and afterwards that he would give forty. What he actually

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<sup>1</sup> E. P. Tenney, *Looking Forward Into The Past* (Nahant, MA: Rumford Press, 1910). Page numbers are listed after each excerpt.

<sup>2</sup> Editor’s Note: Tenney probably means the Palmer Divide between Colorado Springs and Denver rather than the Continental Divide. Near the Palmer Divide is located the Greenland Exit on Interstate 25, which leads to a cattle ranch and an open-space preserve.

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would have done, or ever did do, as to any written agreement, I could never ascertain. I took no interest in the project beyond that of directing the course of studies and general policy.

This being agreed to, I began to prepare the way for organizing and establishing a college upon the Oberlin Colony plan at Greenwood. To give form to this project, trustees were chosen, September 29, 1868, at a conference of the five Congregational churches of Colorado held at Georgetown. The college was incorporated, and a definite plan adopted to open the work by securing the requisite land.<sup>3</sup>

It was less than ten years since the gold discovery had opened Colorado. It was the land of dreams, of great expectations, the land of the by-and-by of wealth untold; the mountains were full of money; my chief deacon - one of the college trustees - pulled out a quarter of a million in gold one day; another took out a thousand dollars of daily silver. Silver was nothing accounted of in the days of the "Rocky Mountain Institute." There was a mine under my meetinghouse, another in the street. All anybody had to do was to dig.

Superintendent Cushman and Deacon Wolcott - two other trustees - [were] plucky Puritans who had legs that came over in the Mayflower that could not dance. [They] spent three hundred and thirteen days in digging a hole, a large-mouthed, fairly deep and remarkably clean, good-looking hole; it ought to be there now.

To this land I was a latecomer, a tenderfoot. The veteran founders of this cloudland empire, from one to two miles above sea level, were full of projects. [One was] a college, of course. Had I just thought of it? One of our trustees [Thompson] was a born educator wearily watching as pastor at Boulder for the territorial university to emerge from its pigeon-hole, which it did many years after Thompson returned east, where he achieved distinction as a teacher. Another of our trustees was a man from Utah, with always a new scheme, who nominally stood by the Institute four or six months, so long as it would favor some other notion, and then abandoned Colorado forever.

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<sup>3</sup> The trustees borrowed money with which to set the ball to rolling. For reasons that I may not properly here detail, the ball never even started to roll, but the money was finally paid back.

*LOOKING FORWARD INTO THE PAST*

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**EDWARD PAYSON TENNEY**

*He is shown here in his later years, about the time he was writing "Looking Forward Into The Past." (Photograph from Special Collections, Tutt Library, Colorado College.)*

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Another trustee was Phipps, freshman from his studies, the wise and enterprising Bishop of Empire and Georgetown, who had since devoted a lifetime to maintaining the character of Connecticut as the land of steady habits.

There were two trustee merchants from Central [City] and Nevada. Another was the Superintendent of the Bob Tail, an eminent engineer from the Keystone state. There were others whose names and faces do not return to me.

I made one horseback ride of eight miles to see if Governor [William] Gilpin would favor some scheme so to unite the educational forces of the Territory as to create a university town. This was before Greenwood was fixed on. I was some years too late. It was as useless as the attempts I later made at Colorado Springs to unite denominational educational interests.

Within a few months from the time when it was found that the “Rocky Mountain Institute” wheels could not be made to go round, I returned east, and within two years those most interested in it were no longer residents of Colorado. (Pages 48-51)

As to the relation of all this to Colorado College, it is a point in the educational history of Colorado that the “Institute” was not only the herald but the forerunner of [Colorado] College.... (Page 53)

At Braintree, too, Dr. F. B. Perkins, of Jamaica Plain, was one of my clerical neighbors; as, some months later, when I was at Ashland, he was my neighbor at Wellesley Hills. He it was, who, as a health seeker, and wandering Home missionary, in Colorado in 1876, gave my name to Secretary E. N. Bartlett of the [Colorado] College trustees with kindly words, saying, moreover, that since I had already been in Colorado, I might go again. In this way the Rocky Mountain Institute of 1868 proved the forerunner of Colorado College in 1876. (Page 58)

In entering, therefore, upon pastoral service at Ashland, I did it with so great an opposition in my own mind that I have always believed it was the divine plan that I should go there, since in that neighborhood half a dozen men were discovered who proved to be ready at call to aid social conditions in the New West through introducing religious ideas out-wrought by collegiate enterprise. My welcome to the parish was so cordial, and so large-

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mindful were the [plans] of the people, that I could not maintain my reluctance to make my home there.

Nor need it be said that the bond established between myself and the foreordained donors to [Colorado] College was distinctively religious, since it was primarily the relation between pastor and people, an influence that providentially outreached into other communities.

One of these friends believed that through the parochial ministrations he received a definite spiritual uplift, in certain particulars a new ideal to go by, with an on-pointing in the path of unselfish and un-thanked social service.

One of the most influential made a certain business arrangement for the sake of the spiritual good he desired and received in domestic life.

One of these men had already taken a pledge to promote, by his own personal appeal and influence, the spiritual good of a hundred youth.

Here was another, who, after crowded hours in a dingy office, used to spend dog-day evenings in solitude, poring over the *Missionary Herald* to see how he could best give away the money he had made in the day. My first acquaintance with him was through his asking how he could best invest educational money in the Turkish Empire. He did not want his own pastor or his own church to know what he did. The last I saw of him, he was supporting a city missionary in East Boston, and a medical missionary in Micronesia. He gave several thousands of dollars to Colorado College in the early years, as a home missionary investment for evangelizing the New West.

Here was another, who would not take up the banking business when urged to it. "I do not want my sons," he said to me, "to get their money through making three cents or five on small transactions, or be all the time calculating interest." In giving one son several thousand dollars, he told him: "This is your capital to begin business with. I want you to make money, so as to give away money in a large way by system." How worthy was he to be associated with the first decade donors to Colorado College.

Here was another, who used to go early to his office and set in motion the wheels of the day's work, then return to his house and take an hour for Bible study and prayer in the middle of the forenoon. In this way he nourished his fixed purpose to abide with God, in all the ins and outs of a most complicated business; and in this sacred hour he came ultimately to nourish great thoughts of doing good through Colorado College.



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One of them at life's meridian, in most honored years, already representing large social and financial and fiduciary interests, remembered with sensitive conscience that when he was a mere boy, in his earliest teens, he had defrauded another to the total amount of half a dollar. One day he called me into an inner office, and told me the story, and asked what course he had better pursue. The defrauded was still living, although his often infirmities would soon bear him away into the eternal world.

At my friend's request we prayed about it. Then he computed compound interest on that half dollar for more than thirty years, and journeyed two-hundred miles to see his old time acquaintance and insisted on leaving with him the money. Such a man, a conscience incarnate, was worthy to be one of the founders of Colorado College, which he believed would become a savior of our American social and civic life. It was at a most critical time that his gifts were made to our work, and they were as essential as any ever made to it. Without him, the earliest combinations could not have been made.

Here was another man, one of our best helpers early and late, who stoutly refused to live in a village, or in a large town where he had the offer of remunerative business. "I do not want," he said, "to have my children depend on others to amuse them. I want them to be so situated that they have to read and study in our long winter evenings."

Here was another man, who was all the time planning to make money and give away a certain percent of it. He lived snugly, and kept his family within the limits of a moderate expenditure, that he might all the time be helping out those who were unfortunate, and helping by [a] rigid self-denying system the local church work of every sect in a large needy town. Without him I could not have re-opened the College in 1876.

Here was another of these early donors to the College. He gave seven-hundred dollars to a hard-working self-sacrificing neighbor, who, on turning about to thank him for it, was met by the curt reply - "I don't want to be thanked for it, I did only what I ought to." Such a man is worthy of immortal fame and undying influence as one of our College founders. The work could have never been re-opened in [eighteen] seventy-six but for this man.

If the ten foregoing paragraphs - to aid in the disguising - do not relate to so many as ten men, they do relate to men whose composite character is to me as one, to whom undying gratitude is due from all future friends of our College. These men were intensely religious, and whatever there was in me

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that was hot-hearted for “revival” service, and for being much alone with God, and for unselfish faraway mission enterprise, appealed to them.

Our hearts grew together and became like the heart of one man. Too conscious of my own frailties, that should have been made less conspicuous in some employment less public than college-building, I cling the more stoutly to what I know concerning the little handful of the earliest donors to the College. If I have idealized them in my own mind, it is because they appeared to me - and still so appear in loving memory - to be among the noblest of mankind.

To me they were, to me they are, the evidences of Christianity. [They were] doing by grace exactly opposite what they would have done by nature.

So true it was that in the identical years, 1870-1875, in which General Palmer, Professor Haskell, and President Dougherty were making ready in Colorado for the College that was to be, the Moral Governor of the Universe, who sees the end from the beginning was, in these self-same years, in the Old Bay State [Massachusetts], preparing the minds of the chief actors for what they were to do for opening up the College work in the autumn of 1876. (Pages 59-63)

Unless Colorado College had been picked up and carried forward by a religious motive power, it could not have been done in 1876. If a college is sometimes built by local money, it could not then have been done in Colorado. And when our friends in the East talked about sending money two-thousand miles away into an unknown land, where there was nothing but a name to build to, that thing could be done only by a deeply seated religious conviction of the need of such work for civic safety.

[In] the late spring or early summer of 1876, Rev. F. B. Perkins - of Jamaica Plain and Wellesley Hills, at that time a semi-invalid and general missionary to Colorado - visited Colorado Springs. He told me that he attended a “College prayer-meeting,” where Secretary Enoch N. Bartlett, Father Bristol, and others, met to pray for the “suspended” College. And he made up his mind that [God], who put it into the hearts of these friends to pray, had a purpose to revive the College. Upon this, he suggested writing to the Ashland pastor, who had once been a pioneer in Gilpin County. After consulting with Dr. Henry M. Dexter, Secretary Bartlett wrote me at Manchester-by-the-Sea, [Massachusetts], where I was summering.



**MANCHESTER-BY-THE-SEA**

*Edward Payson Tenney spent his summers in Manchester-By-The Sea, Massachusetts. He was in this charming oceanfront community northeast of Boston when he was offered the position of President of Colorado College. (Photograph by Robert D. Loevy.)*



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Looking Forward into the Past, it is easy to see, from Chapters preceding, that I had long taken to heart Cary's famous maxim to expect great things from God, and to attempt great things for God. Deep in the Cape Anne woodlands there is a great boulder, related to Colorado College as Plymouth Rock is related to our national life. It had been frequented by me in 1864-7. [It was] the very rock to which I had carried the "Rocky Mountain Institute" project.

Now I carried to it Secretary Bartlett's letters, and there prayed that - if it should accord with the divine plan - Henry Cutler might become the divine instrument for putting new life into Colorado College. Nor did I leave the rock until I was assured that if the plan was wise and according to the Divine Mind, Mr. Cutler would take hold of it.

Then I went to see Henry Cutler, knowing that if it commended itself to him, it would to others. Seated upon the door-step of the ell part of his house at Ashland, I made up my mind from our conversation that if it should finally approve itself to my judgment to do anything about the College, Mr. Cutler would help. Had it been otherwise, I certainly should not have acted in the matter so promptly as I did. I found that he was already predisposed to engage in some such way of doing good, by his saying that P. P. Stewart of Troy, [New York,] a stove inventor and founder, had interested himself in Oberlin College, and that this gave him something to live for outside of mere money making in his business.

In the quaint Hebrew imagery it was said that there were vials in which were kept the prayers of God's people. The prayers of Stewart and Shipherd in the woods of Oberlin, in 1833; and [my] prayers in the Essex Woods in 1864-7; and the prayers that F. B. Perkins joined in, at the College schoolhouse on [North] Tejon Street, in 1876; and the prayers of Henry Cutler that engaged his forenoon hour day by day at his house near the mill at Ashland in 1874-6 - were now put together in a certain relation to that which came after.

Having consulted the American College Society officials as to the fundamental principles for wise action, and conferred with that wise master builder, President Butterfield of Olivet, as to methods, and having advised with Henry Cutler and others of the foreordained donors, I arranged for a trial trip to Colorado to see what ground there was to go upon.

Since it would be easier to revive a going concern than one "suspended," I hired Professor Winthrop D. Sheldon, of Yale, the late

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Principal of Western Reserve College Preparatory Department, to go out and give instruction for one term; then went myself to Colorado to interview each trustee; and then returned to report to them that sent me. The trial-trip bills, for one term of instruction, and for travel, were paid by Henry Cutler and Benjamin T. Thompson of Ashland, James G. Buttrick of Lowell, Alvan A. Sweet and Samuel Crooks of Hopkinton, all in Middlesex.

In looking back to trace the history of the progress of my educational thought, I can see that between my days at [San Francisco] in 1858-9, and my days in the woods of Cape Anne, 1864-7, and my days at Central [City, Colorado,] in 1868, my ideas of what ought to go into a college were greatly intensified by my experiences at Braintree in 1870-1872, and through meeting those whom for rhetorical convenience I have called the foreordained donors to the College in 1872-6. (Pages 66-69)

When, however, I found that Secretary Bartlett had been to school to my father in Northern New Hampshire when a boy; and when I, too, like Perkins, went to the “College Prayer-meeting;” and when I heard a woman, who had been Lady Principal at Oberlin, pray for Colorado College; and when one who had been Principal of the Preparatory Department at Oberlin came to supply the church that had been ministered to by Professor Edwards and by President Dougherty - then I conscientiously reported to the friends in Middlesex that – religiously - the collegiate enterprise could probably be tied to. (Pages 69-70)

And in February 1877, I agreed with the trustees to accept definitely the position that had been offered me during the summer preceding. But I decided to have no installation till we should have one permanent building erected, and have a College class to graduate.<sup>4</sup> (Page 70)

Upon a certain rock in the woods of Ashland the endowment papers were drafted; and to this rock I often went for prayer before going to see the men whom I sought for subscribers. (Page 71)

The relation between these men and myself was first and foremost our unity of religious experience, desire, and purpose. During critical formative

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<sup>4</sup> These conditions were met in 1882.

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years, they thought of me as voicing what they wished to say, and doing what they wished to do. It was in respect to the College as if, in the psychological conditions of our interviews, the thoughtful planning prayer on my part was met by planning thoughtful prayer on their part, interviews surcharged with energy and enthusiasm to be transmitted down the ages to come. This was when the College was a forlorn hope, and there was nothing to go upon save the priceless privilege of sacrificing self in some way practically wise, for the sake of the great hope and expectation.

Nor was the method different from this in all my life as a College Beggar. (Page 72)

*Editor's Note: In its early days in the 1870s and 1880s, Colorado College founded preparatory schools throughout the Rocky Mountain West to serve as feeder schools to the College. Two of the most important were in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and Salt Lake City, Utah. The preparatory school in New Mexico is still in existence.*

Pioneer railway builders and colony founders, in early Colorado days, were thought by some to be too early in the field.

When the Mexican and Mormon advance began, Colorado College had three teachers, an assistant pupil, and sixty-six students: one sophomore, two freshmen, twenty-two preparatory, twenty-five normal, and sixteen special. It was but a pioneer project. Was the advance too far forward for that generation? Did the College go outside its chartered province in seeking to promote popular education in Utah and New Mexico? To serve as a fountain of fire was within its legitimate province.

And for the College itself, it was this secondary education movement for the Mormons and Mexicans that lifted the College from the position of a small high school in a frontier village into the position of a national factor with a commanding moral power for shaping the destinies of the New West. It not only advertised the institution widely but made a multitude of friends, and differentiated the College from every other institution west of the Mississippi. Indeed, the relation which Colorado College sustained to at least three academies was without a parallel in the history of American colleges. (Pages 115-116)

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**CUTLER HALL**

*The construction of Cutler Hall was Edward Payson Tenney's major accomplishment for the campus when he was President of Colorado College. (Photograph from Special Collections, Tutt Library, Colorado College.)*

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Every person privileged to engage in such work [as building a college] must feel that he is lost in the multitude - the great army of self-sacrificing givers and doers. The individual experience is like that of the great agitator Wendell Phillips, who told me that he felt like a man continually emptying buckets of water into a river - pouring out life, unstinted vitality, into the current of his generation - leaving no trace.

Even if it is so with individual life, in which one's personality is merged in the multitude, it is not so with a great institution of age long activity. To Colorado College there came a fair share of this honorable and useful work in the very infancy of the College - before it had permanent housing, and before it could save by courtesy to be called a college.

In the entire history of American education, it is doubtful whether there was ever any other money expended for benevolent purposes, which providentially brought so large a return in permanent good as the small amount of money expended in the first half decade of the planting of Colorado College.

It was a planting not by any one man or any one set of men. By the working together of many most intelligent and potent instrumentalities actuated by one moral purpose, it providentially proved to be one of the foremost forces in effecting a series of patriotic educational movements in the New West domain through the aid of an enlightened Christian public. And the honor of it will not be dimmed by time. (Pages 160-161)

Were not the educational needs of the New West as a fire in my bones? How could I but say to myself at every new turn in our College affairs: "The crisis is now. Throw yourself into the breach at this minute. Perish the coward who will not do it." "The moral conquest of this land," said Austin Phelps, "needs to be conducted with the self-abandonment which determined men would throw into the critical moment in the critical battle of the critical campaign for a nation's endangered life."

He who, with dissolving chances, will take the risk of delay is no born leader of men. A year in a formative period is worth ten when the form is fixed. (Pages 164-165)

During six years not a dollar could be had for ordinary current College expenses without my individual agreement to pay it. During these six years, the College corporation could get no money, either West or East, without my



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name on the note. And when College property was acquired and it was sufficiently enhanced in value to give a basis of credit in Colorado without my name, it was on account of the work I had done in building up the real estate interests of the College. The most valuable part of the real property was acquired upon conditions which required of me not only personal devotion and my pledge to donors that I would continue in the work, but my direct financial liability for large amounts of money. Twenty acres of land were given to the College upon conditions met only by an agreement on my part definitely to lay aside my studies and all private plans, and to give myself wholly to the building up of the College; and forty acres more were given upon my personal subscription to the College, with the privilege of finding substitutes within a limited term. This prescription I protected by life insurance; carrying it for years. The ordinary credit of the College in the East I protected in like manner.

Perhaps it was all a mistake on my part, or would have been thought to be so by most prudent men, to seek to revive the College and carry it through its earliest years, by my shouldering such risks, where there was outside the campus no property save what was acquired by putting my character in pledge. But as a matter of history, this was the way the real property of the College was acquired. (Pages 168-169)

*Editor's Note: In 1883-1884, President Tenney sought to secure the financial future of Colorado College by investing in real estate in the area just to the north of the Colorado College campus known as the North End, now the Old North End. Unfortunately for Tenney, land sales were slow in his "New Massachusetts" development, and local banks and investors would not provide him the money needed to keep the project financially solvent. The failure of this real estate venture ended Tenney's presidency of Colorado College.*

If the pessimists of 1884, who hindered Colorado College from profiting by this [real estate] scheme, had been related in a business way to General Palmer's early railway and colony projects as they were to mine, there would have been no Colorado Springs and no Colorado College. They would have not only called him crazy for spending a million and a quarter at one stroke for building a railway and laying out towns for an emigration that

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had not yet arrived, but they would have stirred up his investors to sue him for a swindler, and thrown him out of the country. (Page 199)

To me there is nothing more beautiful than that the College has succeeded by other means than mine. It is but a waste of valuable energy to wail over what might have been: as well might the spirits of the antediluvians howl on age after age over their corner lots and garden lands swept by the flood. It is enough that a new world has risen out of the waters of the deluge: thanks to the noble donors to the College in its new era - not a few of whose names were already written upon the honor roll of the earliest founders of this educational plant in a new land. It is a privilege to have had to do with it, even if physically unequal to continuing in it and otherwise an instrument ill-fitted for carrying it forward to its highest degree of success. (Page 221)

In respect to those friends who were the friends of Colorado College, I am like a mediaeval painter, standing but in miniature relation to those who I would depict. The lines of their faces are constantly before me as I write; the tones of their voices are in my ears. Nor can I name them without partiality. Do I allude to possible faults? I would seek to hide them, or trace them in shifting sands soon lost in the tides of time; but their virtues I would engrave on tablets eternal. (Page 223)