

CHAPTER SEVEN

PRESIDENT WILLIAM FREDERICK SLOCUM¹

by James W. Park

Editor's Note: Recruited by Professor George N. Marden to become the third President of Colorado College, William Frederick Slocum, Jr., began his 29-year presidency in 1888. Under his leadership, the College blossomed into a thriving educational institution with a strong faculty, a growing student body and, eventually, the financial security of a sizeable endowment.

Virtually everything that is known about William F. Slocum's life before he became President of Colorado College is contained in the following article, which was featured in the Amherst College alumni magazine in 1913. It was part of an ongoing series entitled "The Amherst Illustrious."

The term "American College" in the article clearly refers to the American small liberal-arts college as distinct from the large university.

Two themes stand out in the article. One is William Frederick Slocum's lifetime commitment to the idea of a moral education – a college education that prepares an individual to live a moral and purposeful life. The second theme is Slocum's strong support for the "social gospel" – the belief that religious leaders should tend to the physical and social well-being of their parishioners in this life as well as the next one.

Through the retirement of President Harris last June, William Frederick Slocum, 1874, becomes the dean of Amherst men who are holding college presidencies. Dr. Slocum, who this year [1913] will complete a quarter of a century as president of Colorado College, Colorado Springs, Colorado, is one of the leading educators of America. He has gained this

¹ James W. Park, "President William Frederick Slocum," *Amherst Graduates Quarterly*, 1913, p. 239, located in Archives and Special Collections, Amherst College Library, Amherst, Massachusetts.

PRESIDENT WILLIAM FREDERICK SLOCUM

recognition by his work in raising Colorado College from insignificance to its present high rank in the collegiate world, and by his services in behalf of education throughout the West. Fiction would “lag after truth” in attempting to relate the difficulties which have stood in the way and the disappointments which would have crushed a weaker soul. But Dr. Slocum has never lost heart nor known the meaning of defeat. Success in large measure has crowned his work, and a grateful College and state bear testimony to his achievements. In the following pages, therefore, an attempt is made to point out some of the most interesting facts in the life history of this remarkable man. Amherst may well be proud to number him among her distinguished sons, for, like Tyler and Seelye and Hitchcock and Garman among teachers, he has done much to make her name illustrious.

The subject of the following sketch was born in Grafton, Massachusetts, July 29, 1851. His ancestors on both sides came of good old New England stock, in who were blended the blood of the Quaker and the Puritan. Through his paternal grandmother, Dr. Slocum is a direct descendant of William Bradford, first governor of the Plymouth Colony. William F. Slocum, the elder, was a Boston lawyer who made his home in Newton where his sons fitted for Amherst. The oldest son, Winfield S. Slocum, a Boston attorney and an authority on municipal law, was a member of the class of 1869; the second, Edward T. Slocum, who, for many years, has been on the bench in Western Massachusetts, was graduated in 1871; and President Slocum received his Bachelor’s degree in 1874. The father of these three distinguished Amherst men, although not an alumnus of the college, was the recipient of an honorary degree in 1871 from his son’s alma mater.

William Frederick Slocum, Jr., enrolled as a freshman at Amherst in 1870 and at once began to take a leading part in the various college activities. He became a member of the Delta Kappa Epsilon fraternity, and likewise joined one of the open literary societies which flourished in those days. Since he was keenly interested in debating and parliamentary law, he threw himself into the discussions of the club, where he was a recognized leader. In college Slocum was known as a “reader” rather than a “dig.” He haunted the library – not so popular then as now – and was to be seen almost daily carrying piles of books across the campus to his room on the top floor of East College.

PRESIDENT WILLIAM FREDERICK SLOCUM



WILLIAM FREDERICK SLOCUM

The third President of Colorado College, Slocum was the College's great "builder President." In 29 years as President, Slocum planned for and found the financing for ten major buildings. (Photograph from Special Collections, Tutt Library, Colorado College.)

PRESIDENT WILLIAM FREDERICK SLOCUM



**CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
IN GRAFTON, MASSACHUSETTS**

*William Frederick Slocum was born in Grafton, Massachusetts, in 1851.
(Photograph by Robert D. Loevy.)*

PRESIDENT WILLIAM FREDERICK SLOCUM

Without doubt his health, which had been seriously affected by an attack of typhoid fever during his freshman year, was still further impaired by his habit of reading far into the night. A fellow student tells an interesting story about walking into Slocum's room one morning at seven o' clock to find him with his "student lamp" still burning, though the sun had risen above the Pelham hills and was shining brightly into his windows. This was at a time when Hawthorne had gripped the young man and he had spent the entire night over "The House of the Seven Gables," oblivious to everything except the story. This fondness for books which Mr. Slocum acquired at Amherst has continued through his life. It was at Amherst, too, that he began his collection of books which has grown into a large and choice library.

But young Slocum was also keenly alive to the stimulating influence of great teachers. In the early seventies Amherst had some men of unusual power and enthusiasm. To several of these noble men Mr. Slocum came with willing mind and eager soul. He sat at Tyler's feet and from his lips learned to love the beauty and majesty of the language and literature of the Greeks. He was drawn to Dr. John W. Burgess, who had just come to the college from the German universities, filled with new methods for the scientific study of history. It was Burgess who stimulated the great love for American history and the Constitution which have furnished a source of recreation and study during Mr. Slocum's life and have given the training which made him an editorial writer upon public affairs. The graduation address which he gave three years ago before Leland Stanford, Jr., University, upon "The Nation's Guarantee of Personal Rights," an address which was later elaborated and published, was the outcome of the work done at Amherst with Professor Burgess.

President Seelye also put the young student under lasting obligations and turned his mind to the study of Philosophy for which he has never lost the impulse given to him by Amherst's great President. When he accepted the presidency of Colorado College, Dr. Slocum organized the Department of Philosophy, of which for twenty-five years he has been the head. Professors Harris and Emerson gave him an insight into scientific methods and principles. For these gentlemen he has always had the warmest regard as possessing the genius of true teachers and scientists.

PRESIDENT WILLIAM FREDERICK SLOCUM



AMHERST COLLEGE

William Frederick Slocum spent his undergraduate college years at Amherst College, a small liberal arts college in Amherst, Massachusetts. He kept close contact with Amherst College throughout his presidency at Colorado College. One of the reasons Colorado College is a small liberal arts college probably is that Slocum modeled Colorado College after his own alma mater – Amherst College. (Photograph by Robert D. Loevy.)

PRESIDENT WILLIAM FREDERICK SLOCUM

In college Slocum followed his intellectual tastes, paying little attention to subjects which did not interest him, and giving more time to reading than to anything else. His recreation was walking, and, with a few other students or frequently alone, he could have been seen every Saturday, from morning often until late into the night, walking over the hills about Amherst, which he loved passionately, and up and down the Connecticut [River] Valley, which appealed strongly to his imagination. He was always hunting for historical associations, and knew everything in that region bearing upon early colonial history and the Indian wars.

Immediately after graduation in 1874, Mr. Slocum sailed for Europe to carry on his studies in Germany, having received a newspaper appointment which made it possible for him to pay his expenses and gave him exceptional advantages for travel, and especially for acquainting himself with European political movements. This threw him into contact with a number of correspondents of English and other newspapers, and as the "Eastern Question" was an intense one at the time, he had unusual opportunities for gaining an insight into public affairs in Europe. Much of his time was taken up with this work; but he gained a knowledge of German university life and work which was of help to him later. This he kept fresh by frequent visits to Europe, and particularly to Germany, of which he is especially fond. The order and discipline, and the educational and industrial development of that nation, greatly [aroused] his admiration.

Late in 1875 the young man returned to the United States, rather uncertain whether he should follow the example of his family and study law, or enter upon a business career, which had many attractions for him. But though several flattering commercial offers were made to him, he refused them all and decided to go on with his studies. The religious problem had always interested him, especially on its philosophic side and in its historical development in relation to political institutions. Accordingly in the spring of 1876 he entered Andover Theological Seminary, where, in a little over two years, he completed the three years' course. His seminary environment gave him a fresh opportunity for wide reading; and with two other students for whom he formed a strong and lasting friendship, he discussed those problems which interested them most deeply, but were not always in line with the regular schedule of a theological school.

PRESIDENT WILLIAM FREDERICK SLOCUM



ANDOVER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

If there was a mother institution for Colorado College, it was Andover Theological Seminary in Andover, Massachusetts. The founder of Colorado College, Thomas Nelson Haskell, prepared for the Congregational Church ministry at Andover, as did Colorado College presidents Edward Payson Tenney and William Frederick Slocum. The seminary subsequently moved to Newton, Massachusetts, becoming Andover-Newton Theological Seminary. These buildings are now apart of Phillips Andover, a well-known independent college-preparatory boarding school. (Photograph by Robert D. Loevy.)

PRESIDENT WILLIAM FREDERICK SLOCUM

This little group of men had been deeply stirred by the new interest which was being taken in sociological questions, and the feeling that something should be done to improve conditions among the working classes. They read Thomas Carlyle's essays and were profoundly moved by his "Sartor Resartus" and "The Latter-Day Pamphlets." They believed that America was entering upon a struggle that might very seriously affect its institutions. These sociological problems, therefore, interested the young students more than the hard and fast systems of dogmatic theology; for they felt it was the business of earnest men everywhere to open their eyes and prepare to judge intelligently and sympathetically of conditions and tendencies among the rapidly-growing working populations in our cities. Pleasant and profitable were the days spent in the quiet old town of Andover, since they gave opportunity for such study and thought as Mr. Slocum most needed, and for which he longed.

At the end of his seminary course, the young clergyman was called to the pastorate of a church in Amesbury, Massachusetts, a factory town, where there were many interesting problems to be solved. He accepted the invitation gladly and entered upon a period of five years' earnest and successful work in that community. During this time Mr. Slocum made scores of friends of all classes, who have followed his career with the greatest pride. Here, too, he was married. While a student at Andover, Mr. Slocum had met Miss Mary G. Montgomery, a teacher in Abbott Academy and a woman of rare strength and beauty of character. The young people, drawn together by similar aims and ideals, were led to unite their lives. This marriage has been singularly beautiful and happy, for Mrs. Slocum, being in complete sympathy with her husband's work, has been to him a never-failing source of inspiration and help.

After five interesting years in Amesbury, greatly to the regret of all classes and conditions of people who turned to them for help and friendship, Mr. Slocum accepted a call to the "First Congregational Church of Baltimore, Maryland," and Mrs. Slocum and he began their work there the last part of 1883. This was the time when Johns Hopkins University, under the leadership of that remarkable university president, Daniel Coit Gilman, had gathered into its halls a group of brilliant scholars and teachers who were establishing graduate courses ranking with those of the German universities.

PRESIDENT WILLIAM FREDERICK SLOCUM



AMESBURY, MASSACHUSETTS

William Frederick Slocum's first pastorate as a Congregational minister was in the factory mill town of Amesbury, Massachusetts, north of Boston, Massachusetts. It was while dealing with the economic and social problems of the mill workers that Slocum became an adherent of a "social gospel" of religious leaders dealing with the real-world problems of their parishioners. In the year 2000, these old mill buildings in Amesbury were being rehabilitated as office space. (Photograph by Robert D. Loevy.)

PRESIDENT WILLIAM FREDERICK SLOCUM

[Daniel Coit Gilman thus] brought together [at Johns Hopkins] from all over the country a large body of students, the majority of whom came from western colleges and were men of great force and earnestness of character.

Many of these young people attended the church where Mr. Slocum officiated, and not only were welcome guests in his home, but were ever ready to talk over those problems in which their pastor was most deeply interested. Many, because of this opportunity, came to see a larger meaning in the religious problems and the mission of Christianity to the American people. President Gilman often spoke of this church as the "University Church," because so many students turned there for help and the interpretation of Christian truth which they received not only from the pulpit but especially from their personal relations with Mr. and Mrs. Slocum.

This University fellowship gave Dr. Slocum another opportunity for study along lines which deeply interested him. President Gilman extended the courtesies of the University without registration, so that the library and the lecture rooms were open to him. For four years he undertook regular work with Dr. G. Stanley Hall in Philosophy, Dr. Richard T. Ely in Political Science and Sociology, and Dr. Herbert B. Adams in History. For two years he was a member of a small group of Johns Hopkins instructors who met each Monday evening to talk freely over modern philosophic, religious, and social movements, and became one of the leaders among this brilliant set of scholars and original thinkers. It is President Slocum's firm conviction that the advantages of the university life and associations of Baltimore did more than anything else to fit him for his work in the making of Colorado College.

While in Baltimore a group of earnest men, among who were President Gilman, John Glenn, Amos G. Warner and Mr. Slocum, joined in organizing the Associated Charities. The charitable institutions of the city and county of Baltimore were set in order, many new laws were framed and movements for bettering the conditions among the laboring people and the poor were set in motion, movements which attracted the attention of sociological workers throughout the whole country. As an outcome of this work, Dr. Slocum wrote a pamphlet which had wide circulation, entitled: "The Relation of Private and Public to Organized Charity."

Among surroundings such as these, five happy, useful years were passed. Then, clear and strong, came the call for which all of Dr. Slocum's previous study and labor had been the preparation. Out in Colorado had been

PRESIDENT WILLIAM FREDERICK SLOCUM

founded in 1874 a college, the only institution of higher learning in the then territory. From the beginning, the little school had been forced to fight for its very existence. The struggle was hard; the obstacles in the way of success, almost insurmountable. From 1885 to 1888 there had been no President, and all but the most courageous friends of Colorado College had lost heart. In the latter years, however, they determined to make one final effort to save the institution which was to mean so much in the educational life of the West, and Dr. Slocum was called to the presidency and accepted.

To the young clergyman the call came as an appeal not to be denied, an opportunity too sacred to be refused. But to his friends his acceptance seemed to predict an unfortunate ending to a hopeful and promising career. And surely there was ample justification for their pessimistic views. Colorado College had absolutely no funds; even its campus had been sold for debt. There was only a single building on a barren prairie, a small faculty and a mere handful of students.

Mr. Slocum had felt for several years that the Rocky Mountain country is to play an important part in the life of the nation, and that there ought to be established in it a college of the highest rank, which should be one of the commanding institutions of the country. He has always believed that the American College is the most permanent and important element in the educational movements of the country; that in it are trained, more than anywhere else, the leaders who are the essential factor in the life of the Republic under its constitutional form of government; and that it is during the four years of undergraduate work, where learning for its own sake and the production of character in the individual are most thoroughly emphasized, that there is evolved this leadership.

The Rocky Mountain section of the country has largely [an] American population, which has come to it, for the most part, directly from the East and Middle West. Its children are vigorous young people, with great capacity for devotion to high ideals and power of achievement. In this new land, where the mountains and the wide-stretching plains stir the imagination, the new President believed that he wanted to try his experiment of helping to create an American College of the first rank, one which should train citizens for service in the Republic. This purpose has never left him in twenty-five years of incessant toil and never-flagging enthusiasm. And already his hopes have in large measure been realized; for the graduates of Colorado College are holding important positions all over this country, while

PRESIDENT WILLIAM FREDERICK SLOCUM

an unusually large number are rendering valuable service in mission work in foreign countries, chiefly as physicians and teachers.

To trace the narrative of the growth of Colorado College during this quarter of a century is impossible in the space allotted to this article. Suffice it to say that the College was completely re-organized. Many exceptionally able and devoted scholars and teachers were drawn together, all filled with the President's ideals and enthusiasm. The standards of entrance and graduation were raised without qualification to those of the leading eastern colleges, and as a result no one was graduated for four years. But results have amply justified the action taken; for from less than thirty students the College has grown until this year there are two hundred and twenty freshmen in attendance, and the graduation class numbers between seventy and eighty. The total enrollment is between five and six hundred students who are doing work that would admit them to any New England institution. Several years ago the Phi Beta Kappa society, without a dissenting vote, granted the College a charter. It has been accepted by the Carnegie Foundation and the General Education Board. Nearly every state in the Union and several foreign countries are represented in the student body, which is under the instruction of a faculty of more than fifty teachers.

President Slocum himself, as head of the Department of Philosophy, has carried his full share of instructions every year, feeling that it is the place of the chief executive officer in a college to be known preeminently as a teacher. A recent article in an eastern publication says of his instruction: "Dr. Slocum has won a strong position among the best men of the West, and his students have taken high rank in the graduate schools of the East and in Europe. It is not too much to say that as a teacher he holds in western colleges the same place that President Mark Hopkins had at Williams."

Again and again Dr. Slocum has been called to the presidency of older and larger institutions than Colorado College, but he has refused all such offers and maintained his position of leadership in the great West. The University of Illinois and Oberlin College both tendered him the presidency; but he could not be tempted away from this one purpose to build in the Rocky Mountain country a college of the first rank.

PRESIDENT WILLIAM FREDERICK SLOCUM



PRESIDENT SLOCUM LECTURING

Throughout his presidency at Colorado College, President Slocum continued to teach Philosophy classes and give “ethicals” – sermons on ethical and moral behavior – at College religious services. (Photograph from Special Collections, Tutt Library, Colorado College.)

PRESIDENT WILLIAM FREDERICK SLOCUM

President Slocum regards as his most important service for the West, his leadership of the fight for the integrity of the pure American College and its four years of undergraduate study. A few years ago there was a distinct movement to crush out the college between the high school and the university; but those who see the necessity of the thorough scholarship and well-trained leadership in the development of our American life, recognized that the sacrifice of the undergraduate course of four years, which had been established earlier by the New England colleges, would spell disaster to intellectual and ethical standards. As a writer and public speaker, Mr. Slocum for several years threw himself into the movement to preserve the “colleges” as distinct from the state universities. Today the former hold an established place in the West and are performing invaluable service in furnishing many leaders for the political, ethical and religious life of the nation.

It was because of his position as a teacher and scholar that Harvard University, at its last Commencement, gave to President Slocum its highest academic honor, conferring upon him the degree of Doctor of Laws. This had already been done by Amherst College, Illinois College and the University of Nebraska. The words of [Harvard University] President Lowell, as the degree was given, were: “William Frederick Slocum, President of Colorado College, an institution of learning allied to us by an interchange of teachers, where he maintains the high traditions of the American College as a home of scholarship and a place for training citizens.”

Dr. Slocum also undertook the burden of the financial affairs of Colorado College. When he came to it in 1888, the institution was practically in bankruptcy. Heroic struggle had been made to save it by most devoted friends, but their success had been slight. The new president, however, refused to acknowledge that the financial situation was all but hopeless, and at once began an energetic campaign for funds. Year by year he has persevered until even those who best know the magnitude of his achievements, stand amazed at the results of his labors. During his administration President Slocum has raised more than \$2,000,000. With this vast sum he has created an endowment fund of over \$1,000,000 and expended nearly \$700,000 on the construction and equipment of artistic stone buildings. A library of 60,000 bound volumes and 40,000 pamphlets has been gathered, and the campus has been attractively laid out and parked.

PRESIDENT WILLIAM FREDERICK SLOCUM



WILLIAM FREDERICK SCOCUM

*This photograph of President Slocum was taken in his later years.
(Photograph from Special Collections, Tutt Library, Colorado College.)*

PRESIDENT WILLIAM FREDERICK SLOCUM

His knowledge of educational problems, especially in the West, led to Dr. Slocum's election to membership upon "The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching," to fill the vacancy caused by the death of President Harper, of the University of Chicago. He is at present Vice-Chairman of this Board, which has for its membership the most distinguished college presidents in the country.

He was also for a number of years a member of the "Sociological Group," of which Bishop Potter was chairman and Charles Dudley Warner, Washington Gladden, Richard T. Ely, Francis G. Peabody and William M. Sloane were the other members. This company of writers and thinkers at one time combined for the purpose of publishing articles upon sociological and educational topics, meeting twice a year in New York and Newport. While with this group Mr. Slocum published several articles which attracted attention, among them one in *The Atlantic*, entitled "The Ethical Problem of the Public Schools," and another in *The Forum*, "Reconstruction in Theological Education."

President Slocum's interest in public affairs has led to his being urged on two occasions to enter politics and to accept the nomination for Governor of Colorado; but from these suggestions he has always turned away because of his purpose of creating a college which should become a power for the making of citizens, and of remaining a teacher of Philosophy and Ethics. Always feeling deeply the duty which college men owe to the state, he acceded to a request from the Governor of Colorado in 1891, to organize "The State Board of Charities and Corrections," and for seven years was chairman of that organization. During this time an enormous amount of work was done by this board without compensation. All of the penal and charitable institutions of the state were reorganized, the old laws were re-codified, many new ones were made, the State reformatory prison was created, with conditions similar to those in the celebrated Elmira Reformatory under Z. R. Brockway, and much other important work was completed. During these seven years the state institutions were free from even the suspicion of graft and have been generally regarded as models of their kind, while numerous laws which were made during this period have been copied by other states.

Mr. Slocum was also asked to organize the State Board of Pardons, of which he served as a member for three years, helping to reorganize the method of granting executive clemency, a method which greatly reduced the

PRESIDENT WILLIAM FREDERICK SLOCUM

number of indiscriminate pardons. As a member of these boards he rendered important service in carrying the state safely through the dangerous condition of the "Waite administration." At one time he went into the mining district about Cripple Creek and addressed hundreds of excited and armed miners. His efforts were of great value in bringing about a settlement of "The Bull-Hill War" and to the peaceful resumption of mining operations.

But though President Slocum has been most successful in everything he has attempted, his supreme desire is to be known as a teacher. He believes that every college which does not create leaders in the state who love justice and righteousness above everything else, fails to accomplish its true mission. Moreover, he looks upon every instructor as a failure who is not dominated by this great purpose. "Seek for that which is right, and then do the right because it is right," are the central ideas both of his philosophy and his ethics. Striving to impress these principles upon the minds and hearts of the young people under his charge, he has, for more than twenty years, made a practice of giving an address each Friday morning at the chapel service. Earnestly he urges upon his hearers that they must be their best selves in order to do their duty to the state. It is no idle assertion that hundreds of graduates look back to these chapel addresses and say, "They gave me my life conception of truth and duty."

Such then are some of the characteristics of this distinguished son of Amherst, this foremost educator of Colorado; scholar, public servant, executive, teacher. He has done a great and noble work; but there is still much which he longs to do. His College is about to enter upon a new period of development and leadership. What the future may hold in store for it and for him, no one can tell. But that President Slocum may continue to guide its destinies and hold aloft its ideals is the prayer of all its admirers and friends.



SLOCUM RETIREMENT HOME

When William Frederick Slocum retired from the presidency of Colorado College in 1917, he and his wife, Mary Montgomery Slocum, retired to this private residence in Newton, Massachusetts, a suburb of Boston, Massachusetts. (Photograph by Robert D. Loevy.)

PRESIDENT WILLIAM FREDERICK SLOCUM



THE GRAVES OF WILLIAM AND MARY SLOCUM

William Frederick Slocum and his wife, Mary Montgomery Slocum, are buried in the Slocum family plot in a cemetery in Newton, Massachusetts. There is no indication on the grave marker that William Slocum was the President of Colorado College for 29 years. (Photograph by Robert D. Loevy.)