

The Winning Personality: President Harvey Schofield, the Eau Claire State Teachers College, and the Great Depression

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“To President H. A. Schofield, whose wise planning has been the keynote of success of this institution, and whose leadership has won the respect and admiration of the students, the alumni, and the faculty...” —Dedication in 1928 yearbook, the “Periscope”



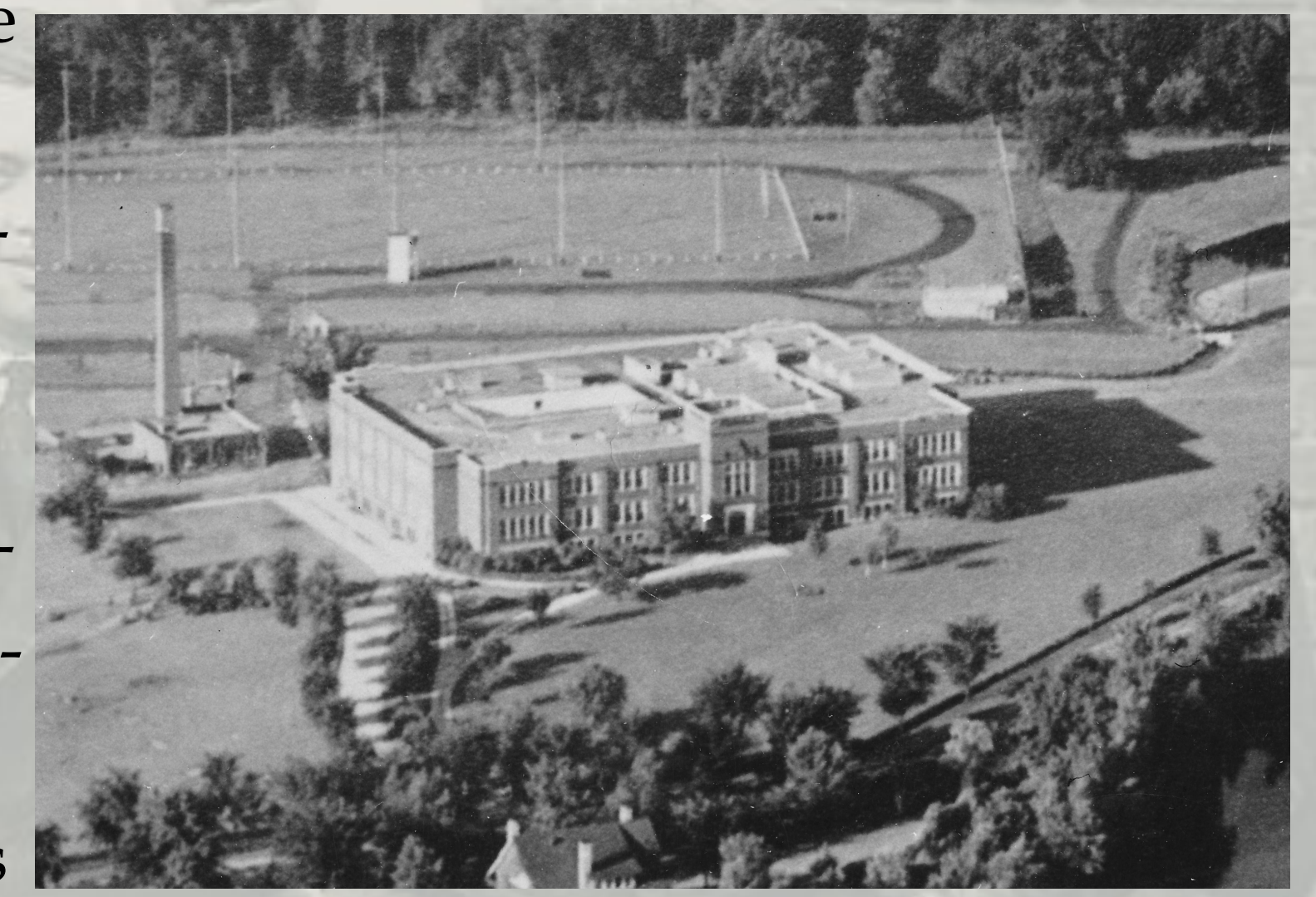
“Sociable ninety-nine percent of the time, and righteously indignant in the remaining fraction” —this was how an alumnus described Harvey Axford Schofield, first president of the Eau Claire State Normal School (now the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire.). Schofield was known as a capable educator and administrator, but this was often overshadowed by his powerful personality. He could be soft-hearted and generous on one hand; and opinionated, pugnacious, and stubborn on the other. His multifaceted character served him well during the Great Depression, when his own school — and higher education across the nation — came under threat.

Despite personal troubles during the 1930’s, including failing

health and the death of his wife, he remained president for twenty-four years, the longest of any chancellor at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire.

HIGHER EDUCATION DURING THE DEPRESSION

While education was highly valued during the Depression, educational institutions operated under the looming specter of financial ruin. Public colleges and universities’ share of state budgets was slashed nearly in half, and students’ families were paying tuition with whatever they had, including I.O.U.’s. Students who had to drop out due to financial difficulty were often among the most talented. Those who could stay in school were sometimes found to be starving.



Eau Claire State Normal School, 1928. (Courtesy of UWEC Archives)

Unlike many universities, teachers colleges’ geographical and financial ease of access made them an attractive alternative for poorer students, whether or not they planned on teaching. President Schofield had himself come from a lower-middle class background and had taken advantage of an inexpensive education at a normal school. He understood the dilemma his students faced and did his best to ensure that anyone who came to him for an education would receive one, regardless of their financial situation or social class.

WHAT IS A TEACHERS COLLEGE?

Teachers colleges had their beginnings as normal schools, which were 2-year diploma institutions for training teachers. By the 1910’s and 1920’s, many educators, including President Schofield, were recognizing the limitations of these schools and the detriments of an only two-year teacher training period. During this time, normal schools transitioned to four-year teachers colleges, which granted bachelor’s degrees. Eau Claire State Normal School made the transition in 1927.

THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

and the Teachers Colleges were often at odds during the 1930’s. The fact that more students were choosing to attend the relatively inexpensive teachers colleges rather than the University emphasized the rivalry between them.

“I am sick and tired of kowtowing to the University staff.” — President Harvey Schofield

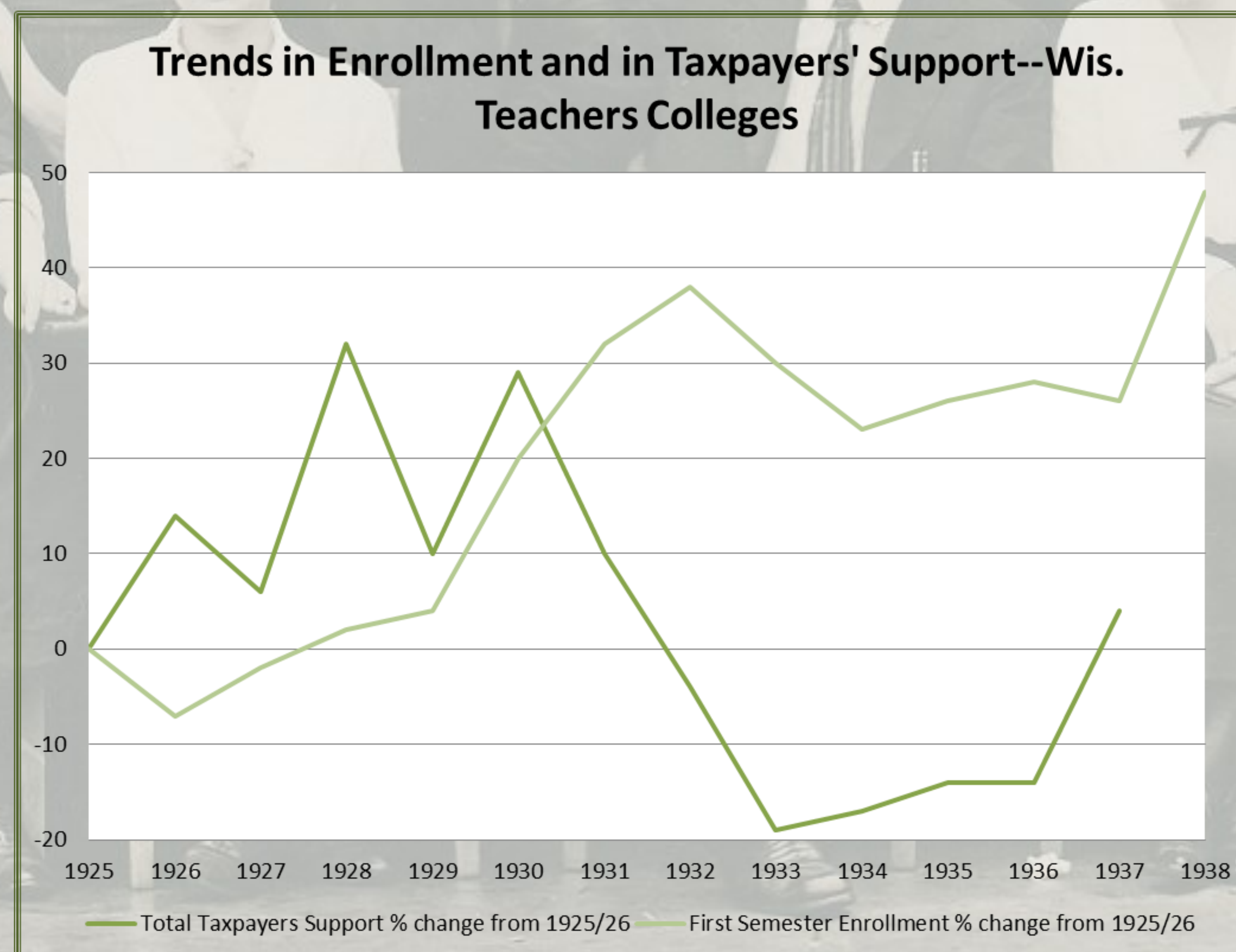
◊ In early 1937, a bill to abolish the Eau Claire State Teachers College was introduced into the legislature, with the purpose of then turning the four-year college into a two-year University of Wisconsin extension. According to Schofield, “the bill would have practically wrecked this school”. Largely through his efforts — he “got busy on the bill” the moment he discovered it on his desk — the sponsors of the bill withdrew it.

◊ In 1938, more pressure came from the University. Among other things, UW President Clarence Dykstra tried to force the teachers colleges to grant extension students a full 2-year diploma for only two summer school sessions of work. Schofield was asked by his fellow presidents to head a committee to have a “show down” with the UW extension division, as the one teachers college president who had the “intestinal fortitude” to do so.

“In my very modest way, I told them where they could go.” — President Harvey Schofield

LEGISLATIVE SUPPORT

Trends in Enrollment and in Taxpayers’ Support--Wis. Teachers Colleges



Reproduction of data sent to Harvey Schofield from Vernon van Patter, 2/16/39 (Chancellor’s Correspondence, UWEC Archives)

Education was often the first thing to suffer when budget cuts needed to be made. According to Schofield’s calculations, the Teachers Colleges and the University of Wisconsin took 12.33% cuts in funding in 1939, while other state programs were cut by only 4%.

Selected Sources

Levine, David O. *The American College and the Culture of Aspiration, 1915-1940*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986.
Chancellor’s Correspondence, UWEC Archives.
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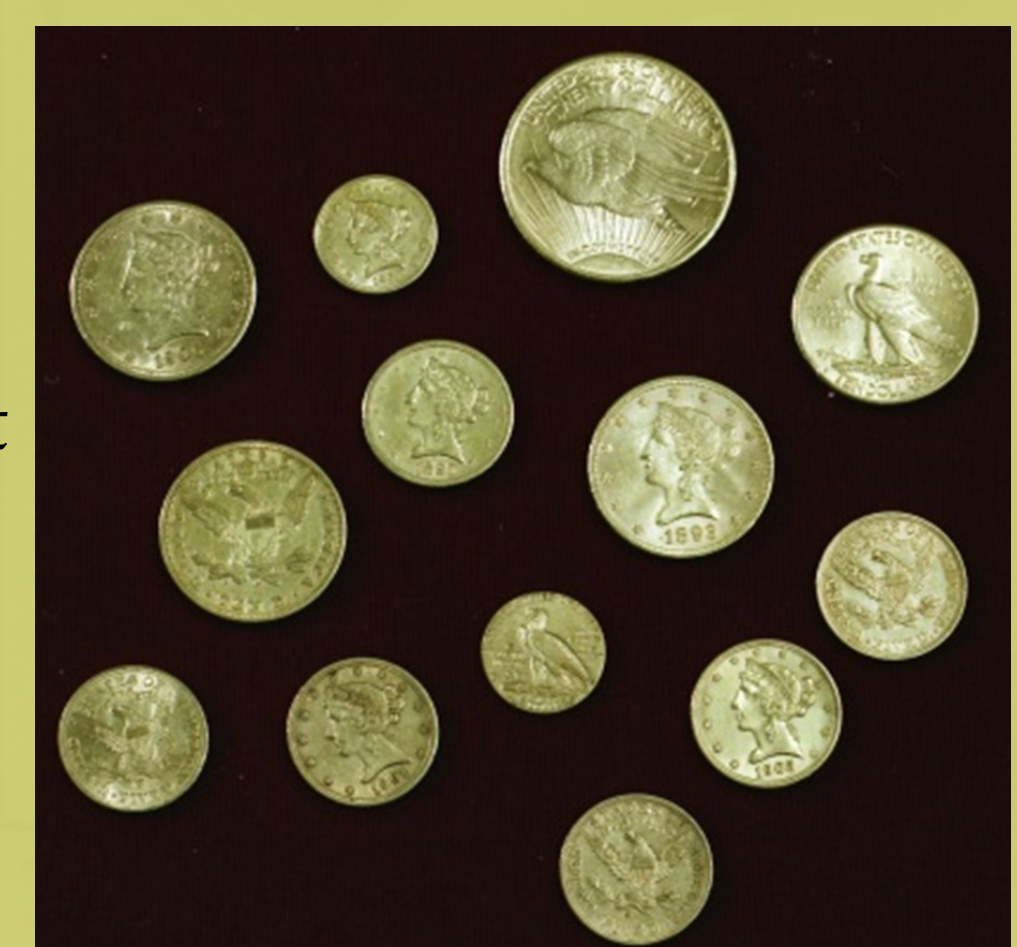
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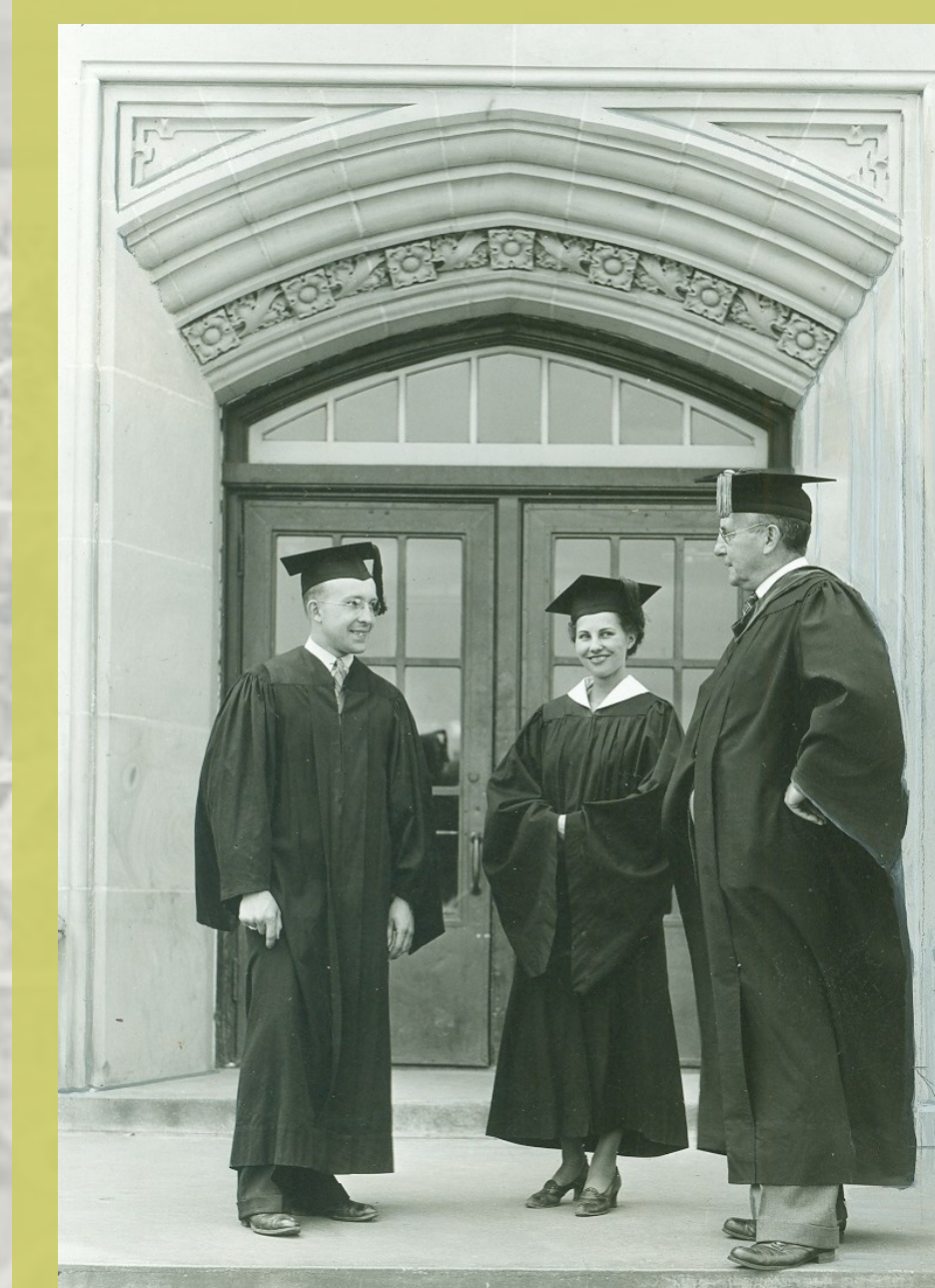
PAYING FOR COLLEGE

◊ The National Youth Administration (NYA) was a federal program that allowed colleges to find students employment. When the program first came to Eau Claire, Schofield managed it almost singlehandedly, hiring students at the school for everything from landscaping to cafeteria work. In many cases, he paid students more than federal standards decreed.

◊ Some Eau Claire students chose to pay for tuition and other expenses with gold coins, after the Gold Confiscation Order of 1933 made it illegal to have more than a small amount of gold in one’s home. While it may have been illegal for him to do so, Schofield accepted these as payment and never turned them in to the government.



Some of the coins accepted as payment. (Courtesy of UWEC Archives)



Schofield with students at graduation, 1932. (Courtesy of UWEC Archives)

◊ Although Schofield’s salary had been cut by 1/6, he personally paid for a variety of things ranging from copies of the *Periscope* yearbook to a grand piano for the student union room. According to at least one source, he was also paying some students’ tuition during the Depression, so as not to deny any deserving student an education.