

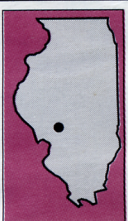
TEACHING IN TRAINS

Blackburn College's Pullman Car Buildings



Above: President William H. Hudson, who re-invented Blackburn College during his tenure from 1912 to 1945, poses in the center foreground of one of the Pullman cars acquired in 1927 for his office. Staff and students stand to the right and left.

Right: One of the Pullman cars is hauled to its site on campus in 1916. (Photo courtesy Blackburn College Archives)



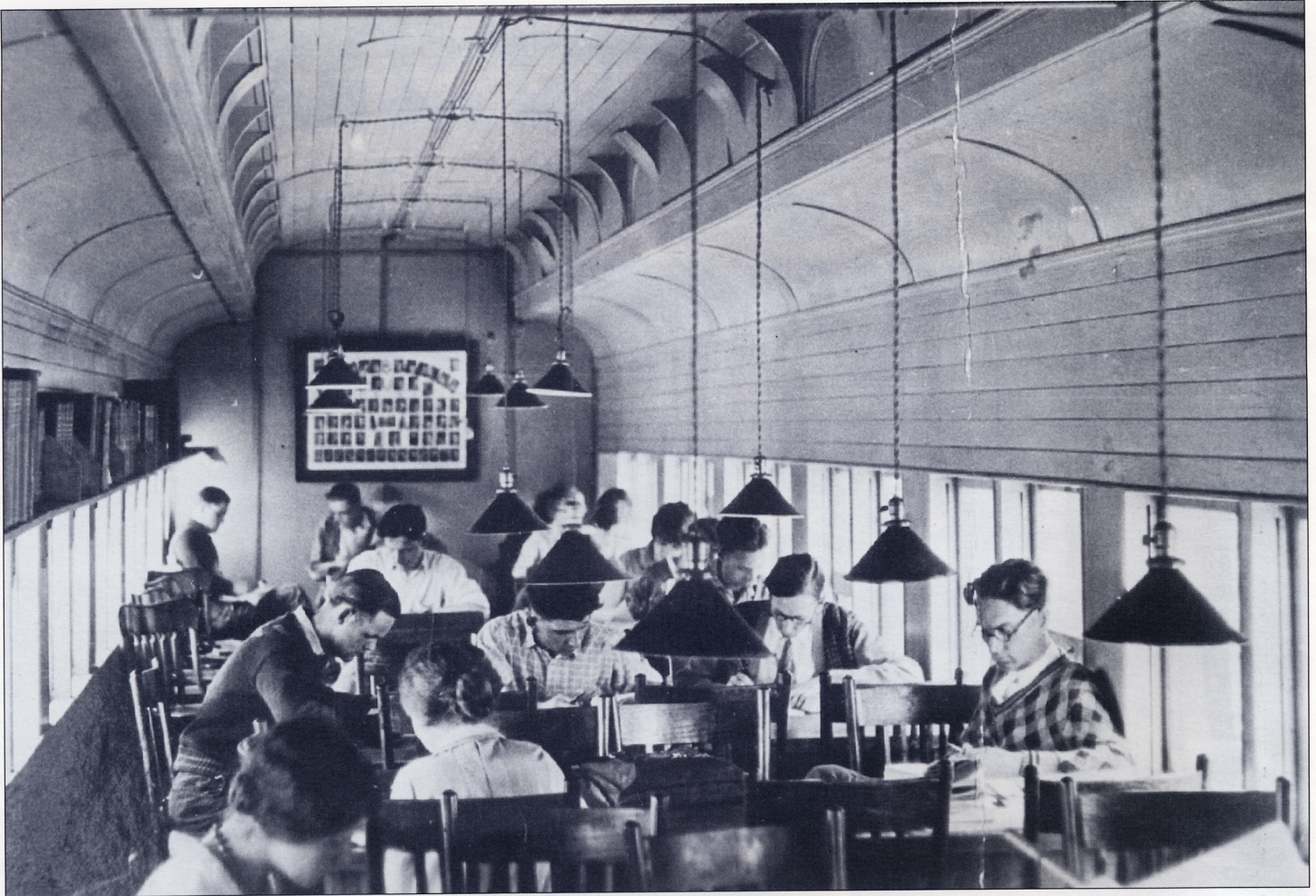
MACOUPIN
COUNTY

Blackburn College is nestled in the gently rolling prairie on the eastern edge of Carlinville, the county seat of the largely rural Macoupin County. Even though its largest enrollment grew to 575 in 1987, Blackburn College is still considered a small liberal arts college, providing Carlinville with an essential element of what Americans hold dear in their small-town and rural heritage.

Blackburn College's history, however, is more variegated than the look of its seemingly simple landscape. Blackburn

College has always been a determined enterprise. Founded in 1837, only eight years after Macoupin County was organized, the college initially served as a seminary to furnish ministers to the area's frontier pulpits. Between 1918 and 1947, the college cut back its four-year education curriculum to concentrate on a two-year study program. Blackburn's heritage of "strong purpose and imagination"—to use

the catalog's characterization—persists. Blackburn is well known for its work program, which enables students of strong academic ability to gain a college education despite limited financial resources.



In 1927 a parlor car was converted into a library, shown above. (Photo courtesy Blackburn College Archives)

The college also symbolizes resilience, innovation, and pragmatism. From 1916 to 1933 Pullman cars served as administrative offices and classrooms. That may be due in part to the forward-thinking individual who joined the administration in the early 1900s. In 1912, claiming he had no other job offer, William M. Hudson took the job as college president. He set out to increase the college's enrollment of thirty-five students. He introduced the work program a year later, and as enrollment increased so did the need for more buildings. In 1916 the resourceful Hudson persuaded the president of the Pullman Company to donate two "sleepers" that were languishing in storage. One was adapted for a men's dormitory, the other as the infirmary. The school newspaper proudly added that "through the kindness of the Chicago and Alton [railroad], special arrangements will be made for a temporary switch and they will assist in placing these cars on the college campus."

The original plan was modified slightly. Contrary to the original plan, when the Pullman intended as the infirmary was placed on its final location, the infirmary

was outfitted at one end as a women's dormitory. The school newspaper declared that "both cars have electricity and have been made very comfortable. The students



Students gather outside their Pullman classroom between classes. (Photo courtesy Blackburn College Archives)



Blackburn College coeds relax on the observation platform of the Pullman car that became their dormitory in 1916. (Photo courtesy Blackburn College Archives)

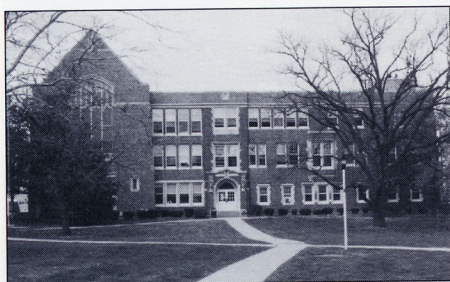


College men pose for the camera at the back of their dormitory in 1916. Old Main, visible to the left rear, burned in 1927. Four more railroad cars were then brought in to serve as campus buildings. (Photo courtesy Blackburn College Archives)

living in them are very well pleased." Hot and cold running water, central heating, and a sewage system were also furnished. When Stoddard Hall was completed in 1924 for the women's dormitory and Butler Hall four years later for the men's dormitory, the old Pullmans were once again outfitted for offices and the infirmary.

In August 1927 tragedy struck. Old Main and the Pullman car men's dormitory burned. Blackburn's reopening for the fall semester was threatened without the two facilities. Hudson approached corporate giants for help. He persuaded the Pullman Company to loan two parlor cars, the Standard Oil Company of Indiana to loan two day coaches, and the Chicago and Alton Railroad to lay a temporary spur to bring the new cars onto the campus. The dean, the registrar, and the bursar worked in one parlor car. President Hudson and

the college library occupied the other parlor car. The two day coaches became classrooms, but not for long; the line of windows along each side of the coaches invited the students' distraction. In 1930 the completion of Hudson Hall—the main classroom building—brought an end to the three-year-long use of the train cars for teaching. The following year the four railroad cars were removed from the campus, and by 1933 the sole remaining 1916 car had fallen into such disrepair that it was burned. An era had ended, now remembered only in campus lore.



The Pullman cars have long been replaced by permanent buildings like Hudson Hall, the main academic building at Blackburn College. (Photo courtesy Public Relations, Blackburn College)

Blackburn College's experience with the six Pullman cars has meaning beyond the school's folklore. Modernity has forced, among other things, flexibility, rapid adjustment to life's ever-changing and often-unexpected fortunes. Schools especially have witnessed a roller-coaster effect with a cycle of expanding and declining enrollments. School boards especially have been faced with the necessity of building schools that are all too often redundant in a generation. How many schools dating to the 1910s and 1920s stand partly used or altogether vacant? How many now occupy temporary buildings of low cost in an attempt to work within budget constraints? In retrospect, teaching in trains at Blackburn College seems forward looking.

Keith A. Sculle
Head, Research and Education



The last Pullman car on campus was deliberately burned in 1933. A colorful bit of probable apocrypha claims that President Hudson burned a flimsy Pullman replica specially built for the occasion, while one of the era's great movie companies, Pathe, filmed the event. (Photo courtesy Blackburn College Archives)

EDITOR'S CORNER

Historic Illinois Calendar Available

The 1998 edition of the *Historic Illinois Calendar* is printed and will be distributed to subscribers in late October. Nels Akerlund, an architectural photographer from Rockford, shot the high-quality images.

The calendar features twelve sites from across the state. Each photo carries a brief description of the site's history and where it is located. Additional information on each site can be found on the inside back cover.

The full-color wall calendar is similar in style to the 1997 edition and features twelve interior views. So you won't miss birthdays or appointments, we've provided plenty of room to record forthcoming events. The overall design rivals that of calendars found in bookstores for nearly twice the price. The cost is \$7 each, or \$5 each for orders of five or more. The *Historic Illinois Calendar's* price makes it a popular choice for gift giving. One calendar is included with a yearly subscription to *Historic Illinois*. If you would like to purchase more, please send a check or money order to *Historic Illinois Calendar*, 1 Old State Capitol Plaza, Springfield, IL 62701-1507.



The twelve featured sites are:

- James Charnley House Chicago (Cook County)
- Reddick Mansion Ottawa (LaSalle County)
- Colonel Kirk/Dillon Home Sterling (Whiteside County)
- Jubilee College Brimfield (Peoria County)
- Egyptian Theatre DeKalb (DeKalb County)
- Sargent Farm Lerna vicinity (Coles County)
- Trobaugh-Good House Decatur vicinity (Macon County)
- Principia College Chapel Elsah (Jersey County)
- William Fithian Home Danville (Vermilion County)
- U.S. Grant Home Galena (Jo Daviess County)
- Quincy Junior High School Auditorium Quincy (Adams County)
- Palmer House Chicago (Cook County)