PATERNALISTIC PRESIDENT

Manfred W. Deputy of Bemidji State College

Arthur O. Lee

TIME WAS when Minnesota college presidents ran their schools like feudal kingdoms. A word from the president came like a voice from Olympus, and a presidential reprimand was fearsome to students and faculty alike. From the colleges' earliest days through World War II, boards of regents seemed bent on choosing patriarchal, no-nonsense presidents who would rule their small schools firmly. They tended to be moralistic and ministerial regardless of whether or not the school was affiliated with a church. But the era of benevolent despots for college presidents is past, Samuel I. Hayakawa of San Francisco State College notwithstanding.

A prototype of the now all-but-extinct breed of paternalistic educational administrator was Manfred Wolfe Deputy, president of Bemidji State College from 1919 to 1938. Deputy was one of the last, for example, who expelled students for cutting classes on the day before or the day after vacations. He was one of the last to chastise a male faculty member who allowed the stem of his pipe to protrude from his coat pocket, thus permitting students to view the odious object. He also was one of the last to rescind, reluctantly, a decision to fire a female instructor who improperly closed her office door while talking with a male student.

Yet, however dated his personal prejudices, President Deputy was passionately dedicated to education, especially the education of future teachers. As he said time and time again: "It's a great thing to be a teacher; it's a greater thing to be a teacher of teachers."

For nineteen years Bemidji State College was "the lengthened shadow of this man." Leading the school in its most difficult times — its infancy and the depression years of the 1930s — Deputy was both an optimist and a pragmatist. He regularly reminded students and faculty who were concerned about the little school's slow growth to remember that "we are still in our swaddling clothes" and hence must be content to grow slowly but wisely. Even after the school had been in operation for fifteen years, he wrote to a newly-hired science instructor, "You probably know that the college is just a few years old and is just getting underway."[1]

Bemidji State College had begun operation in June, 1919, as Minnesota's sixth state normal school.[2] Its opening had been preceded by some ten years of

[1] *The Northern Student*, May 28, 1937, p. 2 ("shadow" reference); Manfred W. Deputy to Alfred Elliott, December 3, 1934, in the Manfred W. Deputy Papers, A. C. Clark Library, Bemidji State College. All letters hereafter cited are in this collection.

[2] An act of the legislature in 1921 (Minnesota, *Session Laws*, 1921, p. 306) declared that all normal schools were to be called "teachers colleges," and a subsequent act (*Session Laws*, 1957, p. 721) declared the teachers colleges simply "state colleges," the title they currently hold.

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squabbling over which town — Bemidji, Cass Lake, or Thief River Falls — would get the school. Legislative financing for building caused more delays.[3]

In 1919 the chosen community of Bemidji had nearly 7,000 residents but still possessed the aura of a rough lumberjack town: saloons dominated the downtown business district, and incidents of crime and lawlessness were on occasion resolved by vigilante justice. Located about a mile from town, in a twenty-acre grove of timber along the shore of Lake Bemidji, were the three buildings of the new teachers college. This distance pleased Deputy, for he did not want his students — nearly all girls — to become involved with what he called "those rowdies downtown."[4]

DEPUTY HIMSELF had a rural upbringing. Born in 1867 on a farm near Vernon, Indiana, he attended rural schools. His professional preparation included a two-year course at Southern Indiana Normal, Mitchell, and four years at Indiana University, Bloomington, where he received a B.A. degree in philosophy and psychology in 1904 and an M.A. degree in education in 1905. After graduate work at Columbia University he taught in rural schools and served as high school principal, city superintendent, and county superintendent of schools, all in Indiana. In 1909 Deputy went to Eastern State Normal at Charleston, Illinois, where he taught pedagogy and directed the elementary school. From 1911 to 1916 he taught pedagogy and directed the elementary school at Mankato Normal School in Minnesota. From 1916 to 1919 he directed teachers' training and extension work in the public schools of Kansas City, Missouri. He organized a standard two-year normal course there.

Deputy finally found his niche in May, 1919, when he arrived in Bemidji to start the normal school and serve as its first president. He continued in that position until his mandatory retirement on December 31, 1937.[5] In 1927 Deputy reflected on his appointment at the new school: "I had expected to spend the rest of my days in Kansas City, but I had been raised and brought up on a farm, and had the true spirit of the Northwest within me. I had been at Mankato and knew the sturdiness of the people: I had faith in this northern Minnesota country. I was sure that the Bemidji school was being established because you needed it."[6]

Deputy ran his small teachers college with a paternalistic hand extended to all his associates, whether teachers or students, janitors or secretaries. Creating a highly moralistic atmosphere, Deputy hoped to make Christian ladies and gentlemen out of his young students. Instrumental to this end were Deputy's twice-a-week assembly programs. Each began with church hymns and responsive readings and ended with a recitation, by all attending, of the Lord's Prayer — Methodist version — in unison. Students sat in assigned seats, and attendance was mandatory. Equally concerned with nonstudents connected with the college, Deputy once wrote a member of the janitorial staff that he would be retained as requested "only on condition that your domestic affairs have become reconciled so that you will be maintaining your home agreeably."[7]

MANFRED W. DEPUTY

In keeping with this general outlook was Deputy's abhorrence of alcohol and tobacco. Though he attempted to prohibit smoking on the campus, his fail-

[3] In 1909 the legislature awarded the site to Cass Lake after a long and bitter fight, but Governor John A. Johnson vetoed the bill. This long "normal school fight," as it was labeled, was followed closely — and very emotionally — in the newspapers of the towns vying for the school: the *Bemidji Daily Pioneer*, the *Cass Lake Times*, and the *Thief River Fall News-Press*. Bitterness engendered in this dispute lingers on today. The decision to locate a state college at Marshall in 1963 generated similar controversy.

[4] Interview with Mabel E. Parker, professor (emeritus) of sociology, 1924–1963, Bemidji State College, April 17, 1967.

[5] *Bemidji Daily Pioneer*, February 24, 1919, p. 1.

[6] *Bemidji Daily Pioneer*, May 28, 1927, p. 8.

[7] Deputy to Mr. and Mrs. Will Clark, April 21, 1932, Deputy Papers.

ure to do so was revealed each spring when the snow melted and cigarette butts were found on the ground outside the back door of the main building. The incriminating evidence annually led to a stern lecture on the evils of smoking at the next student assembly. Reportedly, Deputy was dismayed when he learned that his grown daughter, Mary — his only child — was smoking in the attic of their home. "Mr. Deputy never fully recovered from the shock," was the way a former faculty member summed up the incident.[8]

During Deputy's long presidency, the Bemidji college averaged better than 200 students in the regular school year and approximately 400 students in the summer school. (Peak enrollment in the Deputy years was reached during the 1924 summer school when 537 students registered.)[9] Yet Bemidji was the smallest of the state colleges. From 1925 to 1938 the physical plant consisted of just three buildings: the main one (now called Deputy Hall), one wing of which housed an elementary school connected with the college; one dormitory, Maria Sanford Hall, which housed fifty girls; and a small heating plant. Constantly crowded conditions caused Deputy repeatedly to address the State Teachers College Board about the problem. On one occasion he wrote: "Increased enrollment causes oversized classes, with much overcrowding in library, toilets, locker and work rooms. It has become necessary to arrange some regular classes for the noon hour, on Saturdays, and in the evening, made possible only through the good spirit of the faculty and students."[10]

Though the board recommended that the legislature appropriate lump sums to the teachers colleges in general, the lawmakers made separate allocations to the individual colleges. Hence each college president waged his own battle for money and contended with other presidents to get it, despite several resolutions by the board to discourage such activities. This competition, of course, hindered efforts of the presidents to make common cause for legislative gains. Understandably, the situation also led to altercations among the presidents (Deputy fought openly, for example, with St. Cloud's president, George Selke, and Mankato's, Frank McElroy) who met irregularly several times a year to seek agreement on uniform calendars, athletic eligibility, and the like.

DEPUTY DID NOT separate his faculty into departments or divisions. Nor were members of his staff given any professorial rank, regardless of degrees held. All were called "instructors," a title that doubtless grated on a few who held advanced degrees. (Only one faculty member in the 1920s held a doctorate, and he left after two years.) The faculty's small size — about two dozen on the average — meant very few formal meetings, and no minutes were kept. As one faculty member put it, "A couple of times a year Deputy would call his flock together, make some announcements, deliver some pleasant homilies, and then dismiss the group."[11]

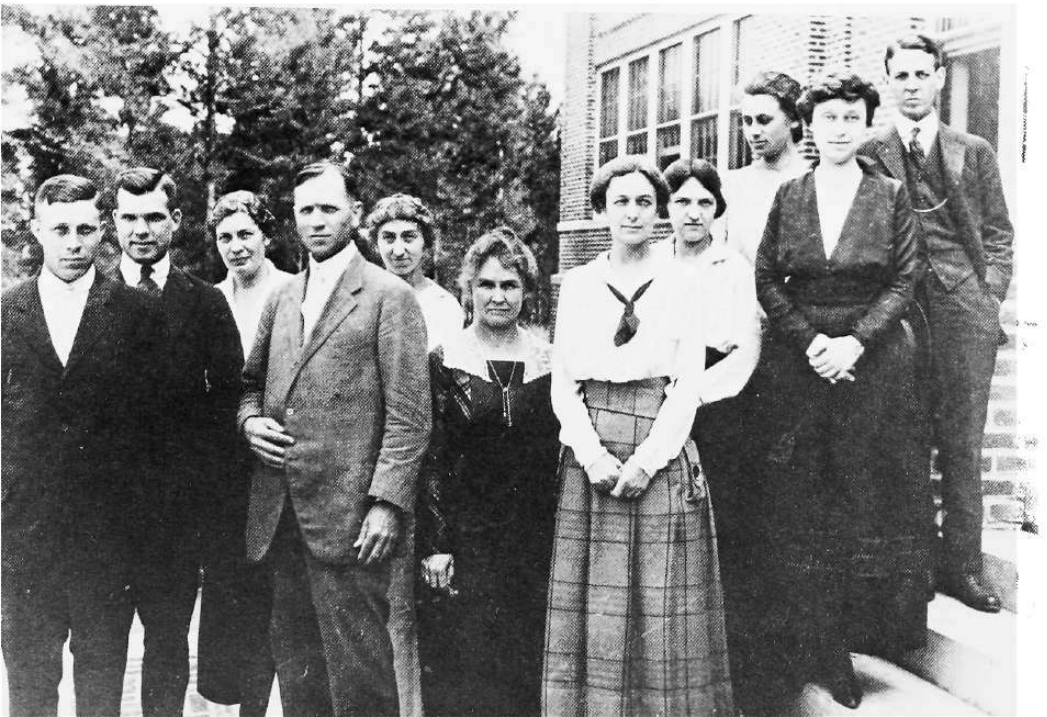
Deputy's faculty had no organization of any type to promote and work for faculty benefits. Very likely Deputy would have interpreted the formation of such a body as a crude hint that his judgments were in error and that he did not treat all members fairly. The subject of salaries was taboo among the faculty to be sure, and no one was supposed to know what anyone else

[8] Interview with Miss Parker, April 17, 1967.

[9] Registrar's Office, Enrollment File, Bemidji State College.

[10] *Quarterly Report of the President,* December 11, 1931, in the Deputy Papers.

[11] Interview of May 5, 1967, with Dr. Harold T. Hagg, professor of history who joined the Bemidji faculty in 1936.



BEMIDJI College's first (1919) summer school faculty: (from left) Harry Olin, J. W. Smith, Ellen C. Nystrom, Deputy, Ethel Kadlich, Mabel Bonsall, Eunice Asbury, Helen Reinheimer, Daisy Wood, Emma Grant, and Marion Atwood

received. Though teachers' salaries were published in the college board's minutes, that record was not made available to the staff. According to one faculty member, a salary increase of $100 a year under Deputy was regarded as approaching excess, and Deputy alone decided who received raises. Faculty salaries in the 1920s averaged approximately $2,500 for nine months, while Deputy's salary was better than $5,000 for twelve months. All took sizable cuts in pay during the early years of the depression.

Deputy expected all faculty members to be present at school functions. Whenever someone was missing, the president would corner the absentee as soon as possible to inquire whether he had been ill or out of town. Apparently these were the only excuses he would accept. He reluctantly permitted properly chaperoned dances on campus, largely to keep the students from going downtown or from frequenting what he called "those awful gas houses." The entire faculty socialized at least once a month with potluck suppers in members' homes, along with sleigh rides in the winter and picnics in the summer. Occasionally the faculty held formal dinners at the Markham Hotel in Bemidji. Before one such occasion, two male teachers decided against dressing formally and phoned Deputy to let him know. He replied: "It would please me very much if you would wear formal attire."[12] They wore their tuxedoes.

Except for taking an active role in the program of the First Methodist Church, Deputy associated very little with Bemidji townspeople. He was a member of a rather esoteric study club called the Philomatheau, but, as the late Archie C. Clark of the faculty observed, "Deputy stayed close to home."[13] Deputy's contemporaries maintain that there were few in town with whom he desired association. Because of his austere manner, high ideals, and — some say — arrogance, he was not what would be commonly considered a popular figure in the community.

One of the very few families with whom Deputy met socially was that of Judge Graham M. Torrance, the son of Judge Eliakim ("Ell") Torrance, who was an influential board member when Deputy was made president in 1919. An alumnus told with some glee how Deputy got his first — albeit tame — taste of alcohol. Mr. and Mrs. Deputy were having dinner at the Torrances, and Mrs. Torrance served a dessert with rum sauce. Not knowing what the sauce contained, Deputy thought it was so delicious that he asked for a second helping. This story was spread all over the campus the next day by a college girl who served as waitress for Mrs. Torrance that night.[14]

THE CENTER of campus life, now called Deputy Hall

Though Deputy's social connections with the Bemidji community were weak, he did exert wide educational leadership in northern Minnesota. For one thing, he was the principal founder of the Northern Minnesota Education Association (NMEA). And, of course, he made sure that each of his faculty members belonged to the district NMEA, as well as the state MEA. Paying annual dues to the MEA, one contemporary of Deputy observed, was "just like paying your light bill."[15]

DEPUTY KNEW personally every student on campus, and he regularly helped them work out class schedules. He also knew their personal and financial problems and often dug into his own pocket to help a student who needed money. During the depression years he was especially saddened by the number of students who either could not go to college or could not stay there because of financial problems. In his quarterly report of December 7, 1933, to the state board, Deputy made public his concern: "More than in any previous year, the students are under the handicap of limited means which makes it necessary for them to curtail their expenses, and in some cases live below their actual needs for wholesome food and clothing." Deputy's large home at 1121 Bemidji Avenue, two blocks from campus, was often opened to students for informal gatherings, and he and his wife gave formal dinners at their home for the graduates of each fall and winter quarter. At the end of each spring quarter, the entire faculty and student body were invited for an outdoor luncheon. Students with very limited finances were also invited regularly to the Deputy home for meals.

[12] Interview with Hagg, September 10, 1970.

[13] Interview with Archie C. Clark, January 5, 1966.

[14] The anecdote is ascribed to the late Mrs. Calvin H. McClintock, wife of a faculty member.

[15] Interview with Hagg, November 10, 1970.

Convinced that his students should learn the social graces, Deputy enlisted the aid of his dean of women, Margaret Kelly. Miss Kelly was in charge of Sanford Hall, and at the regular evening meals — conducted by candlelight at linen-clothed tables and served properly by students on a rotating basis — young women and men were carefully instructed in the rules of etiquette. Though there was some criticism of Miss Kelly's demanding requirements at the time, alumni reportedly sought her out at homecoming gatherings to offer belated "thank-you's."

Under Deputy, Bemidji College exhibited a one-big-happy-family atmosphere. The president's paternalism and the small size of the student body made this type of togetherness reasonably easy to achieve. The twice-a-week assembly programs that Deputy presided over — with the rest of the faculty seated in front on an elevated platform — could justifiably be compared with those of an English school where the headmaster called his charges before him to bestow upon the willing and unwilling alike the uplifting mantle of culture and civilization. In most of the one-hour convocations, Deputy or one of the other faculty members conducted the program. There were slides of someone's trip to China, a talk on character education, a symposium on proper dress, or a debate on political or educational problems of the day. Often Deputy would simply read to the assembled group, sometimes from the Bible, sometimes from Charles Dickens or William James, or, when he was in a lighter mood, from the writings of Mark Twain.

In the middle 1930s Deputy allowed the students to take a larger role in arranging assembly programs, and they began offering songs, skits, readings, and the like. In addition to faculty and student programs, some, of course, featured out-of-town visitors invited by Deputy. When he judged the lecturer or entertainer to be of sufficient quality or reputation to invite the general public, as in the case of American socialist Norman M. Thomas or news photographer Julien Bryan, Deputy would have the performance moved from the small assembly room in the college's main building to the high school auditorium, two blocks from the college.[16]

The college held a six-week summer session each year which began about the middle of June. Though a boon to the school because of the relatively large enrollments, these sessions were also beset with problems, notably a shortage of classrooms and student housing. To accommodate the numbers on campus, Deputy had a large tent erected behind the main building for several successive summers in the mid-1920s. Normally the tent was used for assemblies for the entire student body (the summer programs were held daily and again attendance was required); however, it sometimes housed large classes and choir rehearsals. Erected at the end of the regular school year, the tent was sometimes used for spring as well as summer graduation exercises.

As a site for graduation ceremonies the tent apparently left much to be desired. One staff member told how the faculty would march up the aisle in the loose sand and straw, sit in their academic garb in often sweltering heat, and swat mosquitoes or pick off other flying bugs. Moreover, as they sat there trying to look dignified and very serious, a male faculty member would rustle the straw behind the chairs of the women and loudly whisper, "Mouse!"[17] The lengthy exercises included a speaker, remarks by Deputy, songs by the glee club or choirs, and the usual handing-out of diplomas. Sometimes programs were enlivened by rather unorthodox entertainment, as in the 1923 ceremony when "Mrs. Edith Ness, secretary to President Deputy, gave a whistling solo."[18]

In the 1920s all Bemidji graduates readily obtained positions, but in the 1930s this situation changed, as a letter from Deputy to a faculty member on leave indicates: "Not many graduates are yet placed. There are absolutely but few vacancies."[19] For the state teachers colleges, a temporary halt came in the generally steady progress which had characterized the previous decade. In many ways the depression years were as difficult for the college as the beginning years had been. For the institution as for many individuals it was a difficult period of trying simply to hang on to what had been accomplished and of waiting for better days that might be ahead. Regularly Deputy had to fight against budget reductions. On September 15, 1932, for instance, he wrote rather desperately to Commissioner of Administration Edward J. Pearlove: "We are under the greatest handicap with an *emergency situation.*"

A serious threat to Bemidji and other schools was a determined attempt by some legislators to abolish all the state teachers colleges so that the buildings might be used for insane asylums, reform schools, and prisons. Senator Charles Orr of St. Paul submitted a

[16] Information on assembly programs came from student newspapers and interviews with former faculty members who taught under Deputy. Students began publishing a weekly newspaper, *The Northern Student,* on November 20, 1929. Its contents reveal a happy-family atmosphere at the school and a wealth of do-it-yourself entertainment.

[17] Interview with Miss Parker, April 17, 1967.

[18] *Bemidji Weekly Pioneer,* July 26, 1923, p. 8.

[19] Deputy to Telulah Robinson, April 20, 1932. Two years later 54 per cent of the degree students and 57 per cent of the two-year graduates found teaching jobs. See *The Northern Student,* October 23, 1934, p. 1.

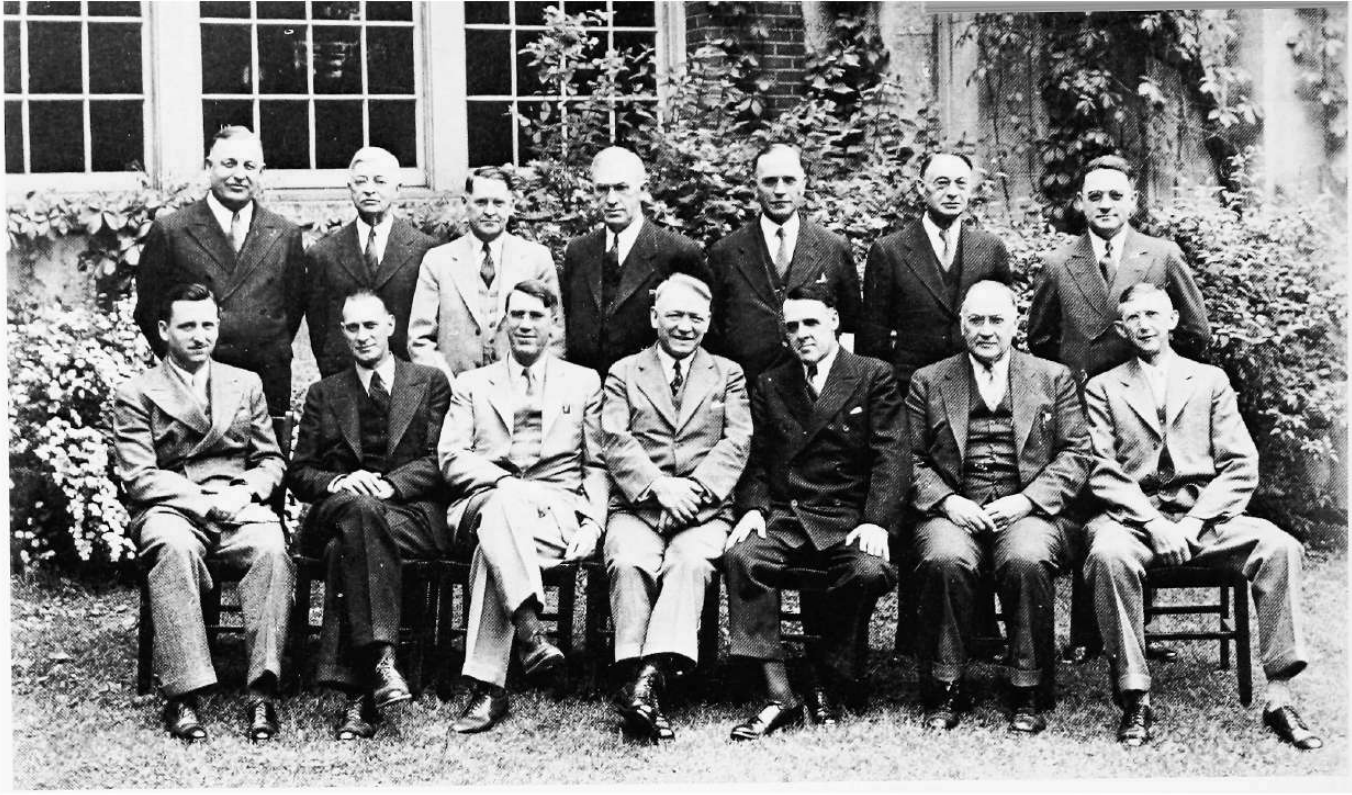
proposal to that effect to the 1933 legislature. Deputy, as president of the school with the highest cost per student of all the colleges, felt particularly vulnerable. As in almost all legislative years, he went to St. Paul to testify before legislative committees. This time he arrived armed with support for his school ranging from student-signed petitions to copies of full-page newspaper statements by alumni concerned about saving the teachers colleges. When the session ended, Deputy described the outcome to a friend: "Our legislature is just closed, and I am informed that we are still intact as a four-year degree-granting college but that our budget along with all others has been slashed." In addition, teachers colleges were required to charge tuition, reversing a practice, dating from the founding of the schools in 1860, that allowed free tuition for all who intended to teach.[20]

IN JANUARY, 1937, Deputy began his last calendar year as president, though he was unaware of the fact at the time. A five-to-four decision of the state board, passed on May 4, 1937, to become effective January 1, 1938, made it mandatory for all state college personnel to retire at age sixty-eight. Deputy was then seventy years of age. "News of retirement came rather as a

[20] Deputy to Dr. Thomas H. Briggs, April 20, 1933 (quote); Minnesota, *Session Laws*, 1933, p. 385–386.

ISOLATED from metropolitan life, students made their own fun, as seen in this photograph, c. 1922.

CLASSROOM FACILITIES were so crowded that assemblies such as this one in 1922 were held outdoors.



STATE TEACHERS college administrators of 1935: bottom row (from left) board members F A. Baker, John G. Rockwell, Dewitt H. Garlock, Hugh J. McClearn, James J. Quigley, Gilbert L. Gosslee, Benjamin Drake; top row (from left) presidents George A. Selke (St. Cloud), Eugene W. Bohannon (Duluth), Guy E. Maxwell (Winona), Frank D. McElroy (Mankato), Deputy (Bemidji), Ray B. MacLean (Moorhead); and board member Frank A. Sheehan

surprise," the student newspaper quoted him as saying. A former faculty member, remembering the day the board's decision was announced, observed, "Oh, but that was a dark day around the halls of the main building. It came as a real blow to him."[21]

The question of terminating employment at age sixty-eight had been discussed at board meetings for two years before the decision was finally made. Presumably the favorable vote was prompted by the desire to attract younger staff members and improve the employment situation, but it also appears that the board, dominated by members of the Farmer-Labor party, wished to find replacements with the political point of view of the majority.[22] The more radical members of the board fought for a mandatory retirement age of sixty-five, but they were unsuccessful. Contemporaries of Deputy asserted that no one on the board was out to "get" him; rather, if the decision was aimed at anyone, it was at the Duluth State Teachers College president, Eugene H. Bohannon, who had had some difficulty getting reappointed by the board.

The teachers college board began seeking Deputy's successor soon after it had announced the mandatory retirement decision, and it formed a committee to suggest candidates. On August 2, 1937, the committee presented the names of seven candidates. The board, by a six-to-one vote, chose Charles R. Sattgast to succeed Deputy. At the time, Sattgast was at Columbia University completing his work for a Ph.D. degree. His duties at Bemidji were to begin January 1, 1938, but, because of a delay in completing his doctoral thesis, he received permission to begin February 1, 1938.[23]

During the last quarter of Deputy's presidency, he was honored in many ways. The school paid tribute to him in a brochure; the Northern Minnesota Educational Association set up a "Special Deputy Scholarship Fund"; the state School Master's Club presented him with a gift in honor of his services; several recognition banquets and teas were held for him. Deputy himself spoke more often than usual that fall at the student assembly programs, and he also gave an address, entitled "The Power of an Idea," at the fall graduation exercise. Community and school newspaper editorials reflected the regard held for Deputy and

[21] *The Northern Student*, May 28, 1937, p. 1; interview with Hagg, May 5, 1967.

[22] Dudley S. Brainard, *History of St. Cloud State Teachers College*, 78 (St. Cloud, 1953).

[23] Dr. Earl W. Beck of the Bemidji faculty served as acting president for the month of January, 1938, and he is sometimes considered the school's second president. Dr. Sattgast was president until his death on March 24, 1964.

what he had done for Bemidji, the college, and the entire area. A statement that became familiar from repetition gave Deputy credit for being "the best-loved school man in Minnesota."[24]

The state college presidents held a dinner for Deputy and Eugene H. Bohannon of the Duluth school "as an expression of the long-time cordial relations among the individual members of the group."[25] The teachers college board added a resolution of commendation to its December 14, 1937, minutes in behalf of both retiring presidents.

On December 31, 1937, Deputy served his last day as president of Bemidji State Teachers College. Seven days later he and his wife left on a 9,000-mile tour of the southern and eastern United States, returning the next May. After a summer in Bemidji, they moved to Florida, where he accepted a teaching position at Southern College in Lakeland. He taught education courses there until 1942.[26]

After the death of his wife in 1942, Deputy enrolled as a graduate student at Indiana University. Sporadic illness, as well as an operation at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, interfered with his doctoral studies. Nevertheless, he did complete the last of his requirements and received his Ph.D. degree at the age of eighty, an achievement referred to by Indiana officials, with some understatement, as "notable and unique."[27]

Soon after receiving this doctorate, Manfred W. Deputy died on March 13, 1947, at the home of his sister in Lake City, Iowa. He was buried next to his wife in Red Hook, New York, at the request of his daughter, Mary Lois Lamson, a landscape architect in New York City. He was reportedly interred in his Ph.D. gown and hood.

In the fall of 1967, minor student agitation prompted the Bemidji college administration to have the words above the entrance to the main campus building, "State Normal School," plastered over. In their place "Deputy Hall" was substituted in large steel letters. Considering the man, his personality, and his dedication to education and the training of teachers, one can speculate that he would have much preferred the original name to remain on the building.

THE PHOTOGRAPHS used with this article were furnished by the author.

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[24] One place the quotation appears is in Deputy's obituary in *The Northern Student*, April 22, 1947, p. 1.

[25] Minutes of the Presidents' Meetings, Minnesota State Teachers Colleges, December 14, 1937. Unpublished record, on file in the Bemidji State College library.

[26] Deputy made very few visits to Bemidji College after his retirement; one of these was on the occasion of the school's twenty-fifth anniversary in 1944.

[27] Quoted in *Bemidji Daily Pioneer*, March 14, 1947, p. 2.

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