



Imagination, drive and vision

Forward-thinking bold leadership of previous five presidents sets the stage for JMU as a national educational leader BY JAN GILLIS ('07)

In 1908 slightly over 42 acres of farmland fronted Harrisonburg's South Main Street. The land was marked by a gradual rise that crested on an east hill. Observers noted that a school built on the site would be in full view of the surrounding area, its turnpike and railroads. It was the spot chosen to build the State Normal and Industrial School for Women at Harrisonburg — a school that, a century later, would be known as James Madison University, one of the top universities in the country.

How do you go from an open field to an institution with award-winning programs, professors and students? This would not have been possible without the men appointed to lead — each possessed of his own unique blend of traits that proved to be the right thing at the right time. And common to all were the gifts of purpose, imagination, drive and vision.

It was his visionary skill that Julian Burruss put to immediate use when he was

appointed president of an institution yet to be built. Frequently urging that “the school should be planned for the future as well as for the present,” Burruss worked in tandem with architect Charles Robinson. The blueprint for the new institution was in fact a detailed plan for the future. The phrase “the next 25 years,” was in frequent use in 1908 when Burruss began his tenure as president of the State Normal and Industrial School for Women at Harrisonburg. His vision was not just for the stone and mortar of the new school. Burruss was consumed with purpose for the school's students, for what their education would mean. The school should “teach its students to do as well as to think.” The value of the students' knowledge would be found in application in real life. Burruss had begun with the unknown, the undeveloped and untried; when he left office in 1919 the school was an institution respected throughout the state with a 49-acre campus.

Samuel Duke, the school's second president, applied his enthusiasm to fulfill his own vision — continued growth. Particularly adept at bringing hopes to reality, he employed a creative gift for fundraising so expertly as he addressed the capital needs of the school that he earned two monikers — “builder” and “financial wizard.” His tenure, 1919–1949, saw world war and the Great Depression, yet Duke stayed focused on meeting the needs of students and faculty. The results were undeniable. During his presidency, as nine major campus buildings were constructed, enrollment quadrupled. By the end of his tenure, the institution had gone from normal school to teachers college to Madison College. It was a name Duke had argued for, pointing out that no other college honored President James Madison, an early champion of higher education.

In 1949, G. Tyler Miller brought Madison College the right vision at the

Welcome >> FROM PAGE 33

'The school should teach its students to do as well as to think.'

JULIAN BURRUSS, *president 1908*

right time. When Miller was appointed president, he had a reputation as a strong advocate for the teaching profession who had conceived important and critical changes in the state's educational system. He led Madison College in fulfilling the need for teachers in a postwar baby boom society. His administration revamped the curriculum, developing a full liberal arts program to join the teacher education program. In 1954, the expanding school began to award master's degrees. He won approval to build residence halls for men, so the college could become fully coeducational. His foresight to buy land proved significant to the school's future. In addition to adding 19 major buildings, Miller enlarged the institution's campus by 240 acres. That land would give the institution growing room.

Madison's fourth president, Ronald E. Carrier, came to campus in 1971. It was a time of societal change, and time for change on campus, a time for Madison to expand into a different type of institution. Carrier demonstrated a canny ability to bring what was needed, when it was needed. There was no regional, residential university in the state's system of public higher education. Carrier seized the opportunity. His efforts brought

name recognition, diversity, expanded curriculum — and football. Beyond expanding acreage, adding buildings and increasing enrollment on an aggressive scale, the transformation gave birth to a comprehensive, regional, coeducational institution of distinction.

In 1998, Linwood H. Rose took office as the institution's fifth president convinced that JMU offered the best features of a liberal arts college and a research university. Rose committed his presidency to the well-rounded educational experience. He had spent his career at JMU and had a firm belief in "the magic" great teachers work with students. Rather than making increased enrollment a goal, and despite a tenure that would see continued expansion including the construction of the Forbes Center for the Performing Arts, Rose wanted, and achieved, a climate that allowed "faculty members to flourish ... and alter the lives of their students." The result was graduates who were engaged, enlightened citizens.

By 2012 JMU's first five presidents had taken the institution and its environs a long way from the rural landscape of 1908. The school on a hillcrest easily observed by passersby is now recognized nationally as an educational leader.

Sixth President Jonathan R. Alger brings a vision of his own — a plan to establish JMU as the national model of the "Engaged University," a place where knowledge, creativity and critical thinking skills are put to use addressing the most pressing challenges of society. **M**

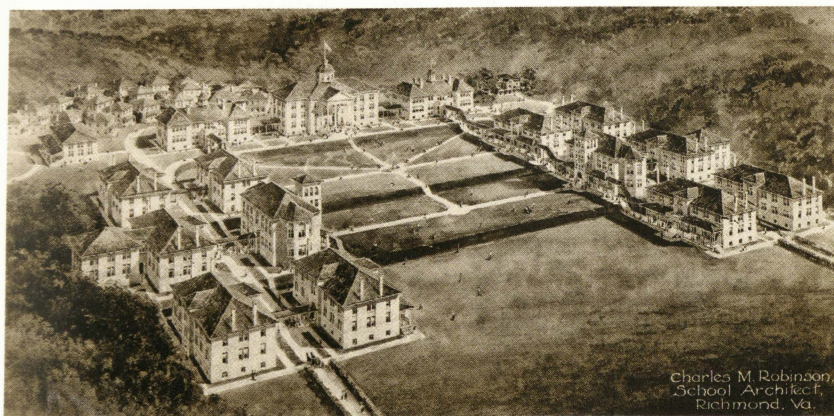
ing the love for JMU into a future for JMU is quite an undertaking. However, President Alger, you have the capacity and the people to do it. You are a dynamic speaker and have a very engaging personality. Your warmth and sincerity is the key to any development undertaking. I know that JMU will continue to be a great school in Virginia and across the country. However, do not lose sight of what makes JMU a special place — the people, the personality. Reach beyond, but let everyone know that we will not become too big that we cannot 'hold open a door, share a smile and show the true spirit of being a DUKE!' I am a member of the Class of 1987 and have a daughter who is a rising sophomore. Thank you again for all you are doing for JMU!

— ELIZABETH LILES ('87, '15P)



'Congratulations on your inauguration as the sixth president of the magnificent academic institution we call James Madison University. It was a pleasure meeting you on your "Why Madison?"

CONTINUED ON PAGE 37 >>



When Normal School President Julian Burrus left office in 1919 the Normal School had six buildings, 49 acres and room for future growth, as depicted in this architectural drawing by Charles Robinson.