

art@hendrix! 1930s-1950s

By the mid-1930s, Hendrix had firmly established its role as a small, residential liberal arts college. The school's ties to the United Methodist Church were central to its existence, but also posed an issue for students hoping to host or attend social events. After World War I, faculty had prohibited students from attending both on and off campus dances, hoping to crack down on social misconduct. But in 1931, Hendrix student leaders published a formal letter requesting that the Booster Club be allowed to sponsor dances on campus.

In a 1931 report to the Board of Trustees, President John Hughes Reynolds advocated for on-campus dances with faculty supervision, hoping it would make students less likely to leave Hendrix and commit a "clandestine violation" of the rules. The board proved sympathetic and allowed students to dance at functions held at a list of approved locations, like Conway's Bachelor Hotel. When this policy did not result in serious misconduct, the college launched a campaign to sponsor on-campus dances. In March 1933, Hendrix's Vice President, C.J. Greene, sent a letter to numerous ministers and friends of the college asking that the experiment be given a fair and sympathetic trial, assuring recipients that Hendrix would not sponsor the "promiscuous dance of evil fame."

The strength of opposition delayed action until November of 1935, when the Board of Trustees endorsed a plan for conducting "high class student dances" in the college's Axley Gymnasium. The plan required events to end by 11:15 pm and mandated faculty presence. The next year, social dancing arrived on campus without incident, though many Methodist members and laymen viewed the decision unfavorably.

The 1930s brought further changes to student life with the establishment of a Greek system. In the spring of 1932, student committees worked alongside Hendrix faculty to establish four fraternities and three sororities. The college's first rush week occurred in February 1933, starting with a smoker for men and tea for women, then culminating in an interfraternity dance at the Bachelor Hotel. Over the next several years, Greek life facilitated a significant expansion of students' social lives through hayrides, cookouts, dances, and dinner at the Owl Café. However, students voluntarily disbanded the Greek system in September of 1945, frustrated by the college's prohibition of frat houses and conflicts with intramural teams organized by dorm floors.

By the time Hendrix fraternities disbanded, the campus had undergone significant changes due to the second World War. The school cancelled its annual homecoming dances, and the Booster Club reallocated their funds to send care packages to alumni in military service. The college's enrollment declined as male faculty and students enlisted, while the percentage of female

students soared. Hendrix courses also became more vocational, teaching the principles of radio, the chemistry of explosives, and first aid.

In July 1943, an Army Specialized Training Corps (ASTC) unit began operating on campus. The 225 men occupied Martin Hall while attending class separate from civilian students. The Hendrix staff taught courses for the unit, including math, chemistry, geography, and physical education. The men ate in the Hendrix cafeteria, played in the college's band, and had representation on the Student Senate until their departure in March of 1944.

In 1945, President John Hughes Reynolds announced his retirement after 32 years of leadership. Dr. Matt L. Ellis took over his position and oversaw the enrollment of many WWII veterans. In an attempt to return Hendrix to its pre-war normalcy, Ellis launched a revived general education program and established a closer relationship between Hendrix and Arkansas's United Methodist Church.

By the 1950s, Hendrix students again felt unsatisfied with the status of their social lives. The *Profile* published numerous editorials citing a shortage of recreational facilities and events on campus. In October of 1955, the magazine's editor wrote that 90% of Hendrix students either went home each weekend or attended a party at the University of Arkansas. Hendrix's social committee sponsored a forum on social and dating life at the college in November of 1955, urging faculty and staff to expand student social opportunities. While Hendrix officials were sympathetic to these student complaints, they faced more pressing concerns, including an emerging push for racial integration and the resignation of President Ellis in 1958.