

From chapter one, "The Trek." Excerpted from *More than Lore: Reminiscences of Marion Talbot*, The University of Chicago Press.

When we reached Hyde Park station the following afternoon, we were met by J. Laurence Laughlin, our old friend and associate. He waved a magazine in the air as he approached us on the platform, and said, "We have a real University; here is the student paper!" Ten days before the University opened!

We drove to the Hotel Monroe on Monroe, later Kenwood, Avenue, just north of Fifty-fifth Street, where we found a few of our new associates had already arrived; and soon we were all settled at dinner, one of the most extraordinary combinations of food I ever saw. We had barely finished when President Harper arrived and I met him for the first time, for he had appointed me on Mrs. Palmer's advice. There was, of course, no opportunity for intimate talk. One reason was that he had brought with him a student who had just appeared at his house, Elizabeth Messick. She had arrived that afternoon at the Union Station from Memphis, Tennessee. As was the custom, not only in Memphis, but in Podunk and Boston, she took a "hack," had her trunk strapped on behind, and told the driver to take her to the Hotel Beatrice at the University of Chicago. Then the journey began. They drove and they drove. Night began to fall. City sights gradually disappeared and were replaced by bits of open country. Fully aware of the perils lying in wait for a young girl in the wicked city of Chicago, she made eager inquiries of the driver as to how much farther they had to go; but his assurances that they would soon arrive, even though frequently repeated, did not deter her from making ready to leap from the vehicle, speed across the prairie, and disappear in the dusk. In about an hour, the driver thought they were somewhere near the University, but he had to make inquiries, as he had never been there. It was, in fact, several years before the University actually got on the local map—years before it was on the academic map. Having located the University, consisting then of four unfinished buildings—Cobb Hall and three men's residence halls, or "dormitories" as they were called—the next problem was to find the Hotel Beatrice, the only clue being that it was on Fifty-seventh Street. The first attempt proved, on inquiry, to be the Hyde Park High School, which later gave way to a series of other schools, public and parochial. Of course, the schoolhouse was closed and dark. Finally, the Hotel Beatrice was located; but it, too, was closed and dark and not even completely finished. What could be done? The young southerner, with a wit which justified her attempting to enrol as a student in a great University, said, "Let us find out where the President lives—it must be near here." A drug store was found at the corner of Fifty-seventh Street near the railroad, and it was learned that the President lived just around the corner on Washington, later Blackstone, Avenue. Soon the journey was over. The President was somewhat disconcerted to discover that an actual student, an attractive young woman at that, had deposited herself on his front doorstep. Even if never again, he took great satisfaction on that occasion in the fact that he had two women deans at hand to help him out of his difficulty. And so he came to call on his new Faculty, not alone, but with a tall, slender young girl, clad in a circular cape and small cap with a patent-leather visor, her cheeks glowing with excitement and her large dark eyes nearly popping out of her head.

There was no room in the little hotel for her, but she had to be housed, so the landlord said he would put a cot for her in the alcove in my room. This suited her so well that, taking advantage of the intimacy thus started, she hardly let me out of her sight for days except when I was at a Faculty or Council meeting or peremptorily engaged in some University duty where she would have been distinctly *de trop*.

It was not long before we moved into our new quarters, the Hotel Beatrice on Fifty-seventh Street. Our experiences there make a tale in themselves and a unique feature in the establishment of a University. While Mrs. Palmer and I were trying to get some order out of the domestic chaos in which we found ourselves, the little group of students busied themselves by day, and even by night, getting ready for their entrance examinations, just as students were accustomed to do in the old-time colleges of the East. These examinations were an innovation in the Middle West, but it did not take much time or effort for the students to create the conventional atmosphere of dread and excitement or to adopt very foolish and wasteful ways of preparing themselves to meet the tests. The examinations were taken; and after a due period of suspense, word came that all of our group at the Beatrice were admitted to the University.



Marion Talbot, 1892