

Retirement dinner and roast for Alden Dunham
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Chicago Art Institute

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In a sincere effort to lend a bit of dignity and scholarly distinction to this occasion, I went to the library to inquire about the scholarly output of our distinguished guest.

When I asked the librarian for the scholarly works of E. Alden Dunham, she located ~~one largely forgotten~~ book entitled, Colleges of the Forgotten Americans. Unfortunately, by the time she had dug it out of the archives and dusted it off, I had forgotten who wrote it or why I wanted it.

To refresh the memories of those in this scholarly audience who may have forgotten this contribution to our research on higher education, let me quote from Alden's introduction. I assure you that the words are Alden's own, accurately quoted -- albeit not in their entirety -- from the introduction to Colleges of the Forgotten Americans.

I was pleased to find that the scholarship of E. Alden Dunham addresses early on his methodology. We are informed that:

"I visited these 14 campuses on the basis of whim...and my impressions were bound to be superficial. Yet my goal was simply to soak up the atmosphere of the campus...I would spend considerable time wandering around the campus...reading notices on bulletin boards and chatting informally with students and faculty...The coffee was often very good and the thick shakes were superb!" (p. xiii).

Given that Alden was
~~After~~ consuming those thick shakes, I suppose we should not be surprised to learn that "on most campuses [he] scheduled an appointment with the best tennis player available," and we are informed, without even a blush of scholarly modesty, that he beat most of them. We can probably assume, however, that the games were not played for money and that he was accountable for the responsible use of research funds, since he takes pains to point out that he purchased T-shirts for his children "on sale at several campuses." (p. xiii, emphasis added)

I deeply regret that Alden has retired from Carnegie. I have only recently submitted a proposal to Carnegie, following largely the research design of Alden's landmark study. I proposed to spend some time at some colleges selected "on the basis of whim," but located in attractive parts of the world, "soaking up the atmosphere" and recording my "superficial impressions" in a book to be entitled, Superficial Impressions of Forgettable Colleges. At the time, my one small departure from Alden's research design did not seem of much consequence. Since I am a hiker rather than a tennis player, I proposed hiking with faculty and students, assuming that it would be somewhat easier to collect data while hiking than while playing tennis. But since I was told by Alden's successors at Carnegie to "take a hike," I can only assume that they have forgotten the scholarly contributions of their own distinguished colleague.

While Alden's activities in retirement may not seem to most of you to differ very much from his years of scholarly productivity, I offer my own best wishes to Alden, hoping that he will now be free to form more substantive impressions of our higher education

enterprise, to pay full price for any and all T-shirts purchased in campus bookstores, and to lose a few games of tennis to still-embattled academics.