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Brighter picture at Niagara

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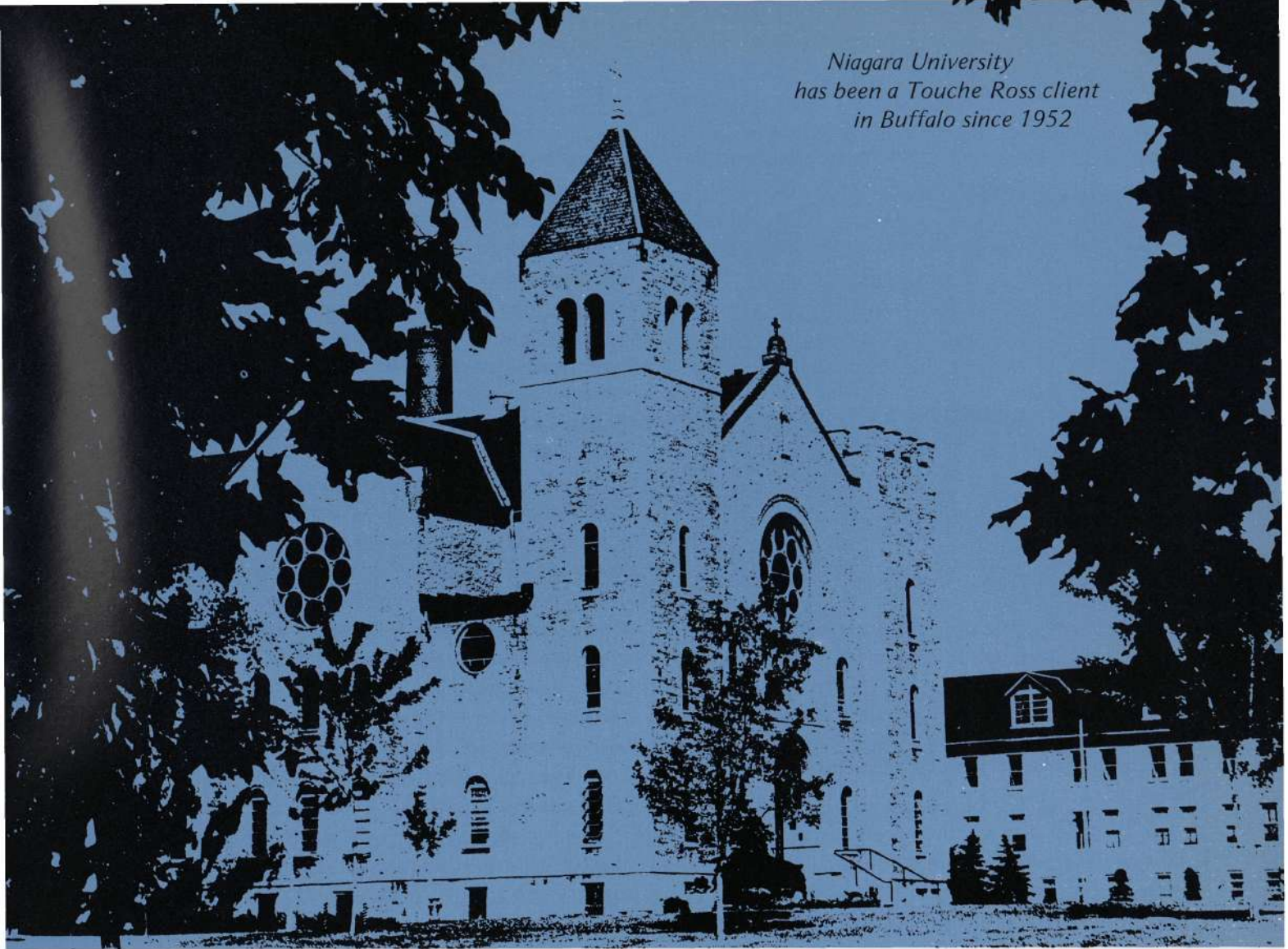
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*Niagara University
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Alumni Hall, site of the faculty offices and campus chapel at Niagara University.

A BRIGHTER PICTURE AT NIAGARA

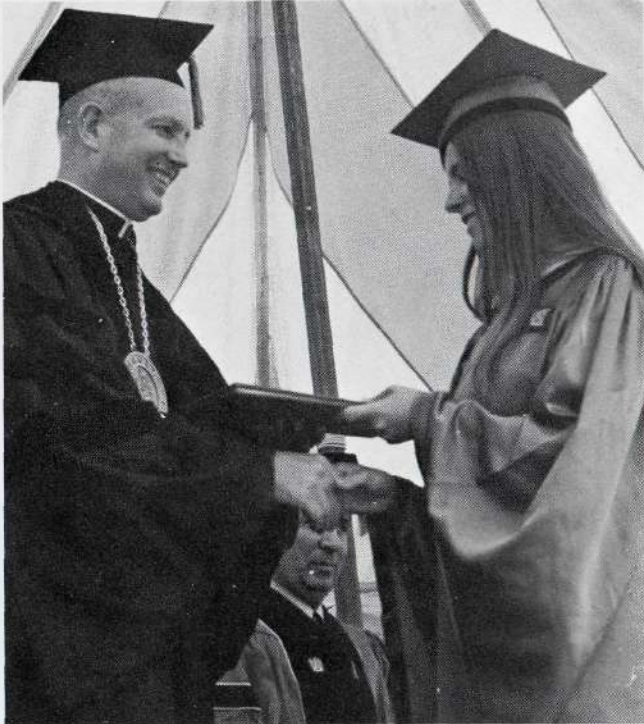
Today, colleges and universities, both public and private, are beset by serious problems. It is an era when many, drowning in a sea of red ink, are scrambling desperately for state funds. And, in an attempt to remain attractive to new students, many are giving them an ever-increasing voice in the operation of such institutions.

But at Niagara University, an institution with deep religious roots perched atop Mounteagle Ridge overlooking the spectacular Niagara River gorge, the school's board of trustees made a vital decision. It decided not to seek state aid under New York State's Bundy Law (which would have meant possible receipts of \$250,000 annually), and also rejected a student body proposal for coed interdormitory visitation.

Now, somewhat to the surprise of all concerned, the future of Niagara University appears brighter than it has for some time.

NU has its highest enrollment in history, received a record number of contributions during the last fiscal year, and will have an annual operating surplus for the first time in four years.

Just over a year ago, in December 1970, Niagara faced the bleak picture of a projected \$2.5 million cumulative fiscal deficit by the ensuing June. At the time, the prospect of receiving \$250,000 or more each year from New York State must have been attractive, indeed. Yet, to qualify for this aid, Niagara would have been compelled to "secularize"—to drop religious training as a required subject, and show no preference for the



The Very Rev. Kenneth F. Slattery, C. M., Niagara's president, awards degree to student at 1971 commencement.

Judeo-Christian moral ethic that is naturally the foundation of such a school.

Taking these steps, in the view of the Very Rev. Kenneth F. Slattery, C.M., Niagara's president, would be going against a religious heritage dating back to 1856. In his letter of January 11, 1971, to members of the alumni association, he stated, "Were we to accept Bundy money, Niagara would become defunct. True, the campus would appear the same. But the soul, the spirit of Mounteagle Ridge would be no more." So, even with the examples of secularization by such renowned institutions as Fordham University before them, the trustees voted not to seek state aid with those "strings" attached.

The trepidation with which Niagara greeted 1971 can only be imagined. For proper atmosphere, the scene would have to have been one of those blustery, icy-cold days for which the Niagara area is noted. There, close by Campus Drive, is the budding but not yet 3-year-old Institute of Transportation, Travel and Tourism, housed in turreted St. Vincent's Hall. A short distance across the 110-acre campus, preparations for the erection of a \$2.5 million nursing education building are underway. And behind the Dutch Colonial and Gothic of the original campus buildings are glimpses of modern architecture—a new science and laboratory building, an

ultramodern library facility, and two high-rise residence halls. Comes the question in echo-chamber somnolence: "All for naught?"

To quote again from Father Slattery's letter to the alumni, "As you know, your alma mater faces a financial threat to its very existence. We are not disheartened. Rather this is an occasion for us to put our trust in Divine Providence and to redouble our efforts to preserve the life and identity of Niagara University."

The University began the grim task of tightening its belt for the lean months or years anticipated ahead. Faculty and administrative salaries were frozen. New hiring came to a virtual standstill. Departmental budgets were trimmed. Tuition for the '71-'72 academic year was raised 12 percent to \$1800 and room and board by 10 percent to \$1100. The school's computer center was closed in favor of free time made available by a friendly industrial neighbor.

Still, even with these economies and fee increases, the prospects were none too good. But slowly and surely, even as these events were taking place, the tide was beginning to turn.

So many institutions of higher learning are hard-pressed for money these days that the report of another relatively small religious university on the verge of financial disaster would hardly get news space outside its own area. But when that university decides to forego a quarter of a million dollars per year on principle for the sake of retaining its own unique identity—and, to top it off, rejects a student-body proposal for the same reasons of principle—well, that's news!

After the first flurry of press coverage, Niagara's determination to remain unsecularized was the subject of a feature story in *The Wanderer*, a national Catholic newspaper, and of a syndicated column by William F. Buckley, Jr., brother of U.S. Senator James Buckley and editor of the *National Review*. Besides applauding the University's courage in taking its position, both articles decried the incongruity of state law where millions of dollars are given to "non-state-supported" secular schools but religious institutions are refused any monies.

By late January, letters—and donations—in support of Niagara's independent stand were being received, many from people who had no connection with the school whatsoever. A Presbyterian minister sent his personal check for \$50. Another supporter sent \$100 and promised more as soon as his \$500 pledge to his alma mater was paid. Other donations ranged from a

Syracuse, N.Y., priest who pledged \$5,000 to an Iowa priest who sent 55 shares of stock worth \$3,800, to a woman who sent two \$1 bills. In all, Niagara received \$16,126 in unsolicited gifts as a result of the publicity.

Of approximately 500 letters from across the nation, almost all were warmly favorable to the University's position. A New Jersey resident wrote, "That's telling them, Father. Right on." A comment from a Nebraska woman, "It's about time someone else besides students ran our universities." And although the donations helped, to be sure, perhaps these expressions of sympathy and understanding—and the knowledge that people cared—was even more important.

Then, almost as if to make certain Niagara University did not fall from the headlines, a brown-haired, brown-eyed senior, Elisabeth May Condon, captured the Miss New York State 1971 title. Both the Niagara Falls community, which she represented at the beauty pageant, and the University turned out en masse to welcome back "Queen Elisabeth" with a parade and dinner reception in her honor. Two years before, Miss Condon had made it to the semi-finals as Miss Northern Erie County, but now, as Miss Niagara, she went all the way—and the change in her "luck" may have been a harbinger of better times for Niagara University.

In the meantime, the Institute of Transportation, Travel and Tourism (ITT) was receiving some very nice publicity. The *New York Times'* Paul J. C. Friedlander devoted his May 30 '71 column, "The Traveler's World," to ITT's unique success in developing students to step right into key slots in industries that move people and

goods. He wrote, "Unquestionably, in another 15 years, many graduates of the T.T.T. Institute will be sitting in the lonely chairs of executives of airlines, transportation companies and hotel organizations. On their way there, they will be working diligently upward, starting not at the bottom but, because of their . . . intensive training in their chosen business, just below the middle."

And in September, the United States Travel Service paid honor to ITT's founder, Dr. Samuel I. Porrath, at the start of a 6,500 mile "Selling of America" campaign. "We had a special reason for stopping at Niagara Falls," remarked C. Langhorne Washburn, assistant secretary of Commerce for Tourism. "Certainly Niagara Falls is one of the nation's greatest natural wonders and a major stimulator of U.S.A. travel, but, more importantly, we flew here from Washington today because we wished to salute a man who is doing a tremendous job for this country's tourist efforts—Dr. Samuel I. Porrath.

"As founder and administrative chairman of Niagara University's Institute of Transportation, Travel and Tourism, Dr. Porrath took a bold and imaginative idea and developed it into an institution that has given the tourist profession a stature it has long needed. ITT was the first school in the country, and perhaps in the world, to offer academic degrees in tourism and travel.

"We are delighted to be here today to pay tribute to ITT and Dr. Porrath. We consider him to be one of the travel industry's greatest benefactors."

But the real test lay not in the newspapers but in the start of the fall '71 semester—and Niagara came through with flying colors. Undeterred by the hike in fees stu-

View of the Niagara campus showing a portion of the student center, the library, and the science building.



dents flocked to the University in record numbers, bringing the enrollment to an all-time high of 3,341. Particularly significant was a 6.5 percent increase in entering freshmen and students which, compared with a national trend toward smaller entering classes, gives credence to the contention religion-oriented colleges and universities still have a place in our increasingly secular society.

And then Niagara got a quarter of a million dollars. The money came as a gift from Francis J. Dunleavy, a 1941 NU graduate who is executive vice president of the International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation. Father Slattery announced the gift would go toward the cost of the nursing education building slated for completion later this year. In appreciation for the gift, the newest addition to the campus on Mounteagle Ridge will be named "Dunleavy Hall."

Although Niagara has improved its current financial crisis, the administration is obviously still worried about

the long-range prospects. It feels that, unless some basic changes are made, all church-related schools face a future of continuous hand-to-mouth survival such as the period Niagara is experiencing.

On the occasion of the Dunleavy gift, Father Slattery said, "In the last analysis, Niagara's permanence on the educational scene depends on direct state and/or federal aid—not as a handout or a gratuity, but as a recompense for our dedication to the traditional American concept of pluralism in high education.

And again in the *Wanderer* interview, he underscored the same theme: "At Niagara we are moulding future professional persons, teachers, lawyers, professors, physicians and educators, scientists and nurses—those who will contribute to commerce and industry, become officers in our Armed Forces. We need governmental help to do the job. If it is not forthcoming, I see the demise of church-related colleges and universities and that would be a tragedy for America."

Aerial view of the Niagara campus with the Robert Moses Power Plant in background.

