



Spring 2023

Richard Nixon at Whittier College: The Education of a Leader

Joseph F. Dmohowski

RICHARD NIXON AT WHITTIER COLLEGE

The Education of a Leader

By Joseph F. Dmohowski

ABSTRACT: Richard Nixon's character traits were shaped, in part, during his early family life. This article traces the development of those traits and their evolution during his elementary and high school years. But it finds that it was in his four years at Whittier College, 1930–1934, particularly in his co-curricular engagements there, that his personality, values, work habits, and skills fully emerged.

KEY WORDS: Richard Nixon; Whittier College; extracurricular college experience; Whittier, California.

From an early age, Richard Nixon dreamt of leaving his quiet hometown and attending college at an Ivy League school. He had always earned outstanding grades and excelled in debate and public speaking in high school. Both Yale and Harvard offered him tuition scholarships. Unfortunately, the Nixon family was nearly bankrupt and could not afford Richard's travel expenses or the cost of room and board at an eastern school. His only choice would be to stay home and enroll at Whittier College, a small, private liberal arts school founded by Quakers. He claimed not to be disappointed by his change of plans and to be excited about attending Whittier. He converted his thwarted Ivy League dreams into a determined seizing of every opportunity at Whittier. In turn, Nixon's impact on the Whittier campus from 1930 to 1934 was legendary.

“Richard Nixon at Whittier College: The Education of a Leader” examines his early family life and college experiences. In particular, it explores how his “out of the classroom” experiences dramatically enhanced his personal growth and character development. The narrative centers on the transformative effect of Nixon’s participation in extracurricular activities during those Great Depression years. The first section, “Family Life,” describes the roles of his “Family Life” and his Quaker upbringing in shaping Richard’s character. The following segments assess the extracurricular student activities in his early education and especially at Whittier College that contributed to his development: “Clubs and Organizations,” “Drama,” “Athletics,” “Debate,” and “Student Government and Service.” Lessons learned in these collegiate activities directly benefited Nixon’s political career. While his academic success at Whittier was certainly noteworthy, the co-curricular activities were instrumental in shaping Richard Nixon’s political skills and personal growth. An unforgettable campus leader emerged from the Whittier College Class of 1934, one who ultimately achieved national prominence.

FAMILY LIFE

Richard Nixon’s father, Frank Nixon, was born in 1878 and raised in a Methodist family in Vinton County, Ohio. He was an industrious worker who would become a “jack-of-all-trades” after his formal education ended in the fourth grade. Frank arrived in Los Angeles in 1907 and was hired by the Pacific Electric Railway Company as a motorman. He drove a “Red Car” on the line between downtown Los Angeles and Whittier, fourteen miles away.¹

Hannah Milhous was born in Butlerville County, Indiana, in 1885 and moved with her large family to Whittier when she was twelve.

The author wishes to dedicate this article in loving memory to his parents, Anthony and Eartha Dmohowski. He extends his most sincere thanks to *Southern California Quarterly* editor Merry Ovnick for her dedication and invaluable assistance in helping to reduce a much lengthier original version of the article for the current publication.

1 Stephen E. Ambrose, *Nixon: The Education of a Politician, 1913–1962* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 14; Richard C. Gardner, *Fighting Quaker: The Story of Richard Nixon* (Whittier, CA: Whittier College Library, unpublished manuscript, 1953), 6; Richard M. Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Warner Books, 1979), 5 (hereafter, Nixon, *Memoirs*); Roger Morris, *Richard Milhous Nixon: The Rise of an American Politician* (New York: Henry Holt, 1990), 36.



Frank Nixon, the motorman, standing beside his L.A. to Whittier Pacific Electric "Red Car," 1907. *Each image featured in this article, unless otherwise noted, appears courtesy of the Whittier College Special Collections and Archives, Wardman Library, Whittier, CA.*



Olinda Street in the small farm town of Yorba Linda, California, c. 1920.
Courtesy of Yorba Linda Public Library, California History Collection.

Hannah's parents, Franklin and Almira Milhous, became prominent members of the community. Franklin opened a tree nursery and planted an orange grove on their property.² Frank Nixon met Hannah Milhous in Whittier on Valentine's Day in 1908 and they married four months later.

Frank and Hannah's personalities could not have been more different. Richard Nixon described his parents as "completely devoted to one another" and that no sacrifice was ever too great for their sons:

I loved my parents equally but in very different ways, just as they were very different people. My father was a scrappy, belligerent fighter with a quick wide-ranging raw intellect. He left me a respect for learning and hard work, and the will to keep fighting no matter what the odds. My mother loved me completely and selflessly, and her special legacy was a quiet, inner peace, and the determination never to despair.³

² Nixon, *Memoirs*, 5.

³ *Ibid.*, 12–13.



Nixon family portrait, 1916:
(left to right) Harold, Frank, Donald (seated), Hannah, and Richard.

Richard's own personality fused predominant traits from each parent—introspection and internalization from his mother, and a competitive streak from Frank.

Early in their marriage, Frank and Hannah depended upon Hannah's family for financial support. Franklin Milhous bought potential citrus property near Lindsay, a small town sixty miles north of Bakersfield. The Nixons—Frank, Hannah, and Harold (b. 1909)—moved there while Frank laid out an orange grove for his father-in-law. They lived with Hannah's sister and her family while they were there.⁴

After eighteen months in Lindsay, the Nixons returned to Southern California. Frank was drawn to an undeveloped ranch property in Yorba Linda, a predominantly Quaker "village" in northern Orange County. He bought an eight-and-one-half-acre parcel of land in Yorba Linda in 1910. His father-in-law lent him \$3,000 towards the purchase. In early 1912, the family moved into a 900-square-foot, two-story home that Frank had assembled from a mail order catalog of plans. The building lacked electricity and indoor plumbing. Hannah drew water for the kitchen from a well by using a hand-pump. Richard Nixon was born in Yorba Linda on January 9, 1913, in the "house that his father built." His brother Francis Donald, commonly known as "Don" or "Donald," arrived in 1914.⁵

Frank's ultimate dream was to grow lemons on their Yorba Linda property. Nurseryman Franklin Milhous supplied the lemon tree stock. Lemons often develop slowly and may take five years to mature. Since Frank Nixon was a skilled carpenter, he found work on building projects around town while his lemon plants were growing. As co-owner of the only tractor in town he also regularly plowed others' plots in the area. Frank's lemon grove suffered from the poor soil found on the Nixon property and his stubborn refusal to invest in fertilizer. It never produced a viable crop. The family, now with a fourth son, Arthur (b. 1918), endured a very difficult time financially in Yorba Linda. Hannah even

4 Mildred Gibbons Fink, interview by Dr. C. Richard Arena, October 21, 1971, p. 1, *The Richard Nixon Oral History Project*, Wardman Library, Whittier College. (Hereafter, RNOHP; all interviews by Arena).

5 Jonathan Aitken, *Nixon: A Life* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1993), 12; Edward Nixon & Karen Olsen, *The Nixons: A Family Portrait* (Bothell, WA: Book Publishers Network, 2009), 27; Nixon, *Memoirs*, 4.

took on a job at the Sunkist packing house to help ends meet. Richard Nixon reflected on the family's life in Yorba Linda as "hard, but happy."⁶

Richard enrolled in the first grade at Yorba Linda Elementary School in 1919. Hannah had already taught him how to read. Mary Skidmore, his first-grade teacher, recalled her famous pupil:

In those days, the Nixons were very poor and, like other youngsters, in mild weather Richard always came barefoot. Every day he wore a freshly starched white shirt with a big black bow tie and knee pants. He always looked like his mother had scrubbed him from head to toe. The funny thing is, I can never remember him ever getting dirty.

She decided that Richard was "too advanced in his learning skills" to spend the next year in the second grade and promoted him to the third grade in September 1920.⁷

The Nixon family moved to East Whittier early in 1922 following the failure of their lemon ranch. Frank's job prospects were uncertain. He worked in the Santa Fe Springs oil fields briefly, then considered several potential local business opportunities. Frank and Hannah bought an acre of land in East Whittier and opened a service station, again borrowing money from Hannah's father. The venture was promising: there were no gas stations between Whittier and the adjacent city of La Habra. The family business thrived in East Whittier and the "mini-mart" eventually became a "full-service" store.⁸

Frank Nixon bought the old frame church building across the street when an expanded East Whittier Friends church replaced it. The structure served to enlarge the store and family dwelling space. "F. A. Nixon—General Merchandise" featured a butcher shop and a fresh produce section. Each member of the family worked at the market. Richard

6 Gailerd C. Page and Mrs. Viola Bemis Page, interview, January 18, 1972, 7–8, RNOHP; E. Nixon and K. Olsen, *The Nixons*, 33; Joseph Dmohowski, "From a Common Ground: The Quaker Heritage of Jessamyn West and Richard Nixon," *California History* 73, no. 3 (Fall, 1994): 221; Nixon, *Memoirs*, 4. The Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum is situated on the site of Frank's failed lemon ranch.

7 Mary Skidmore, interviewed at her home in Azusa, California, by Greg Bolin, October 23, 1970, in Renee K. Schulte, editor, *The Young Nixon: An Oral Inquiry* (Fullerton, CA: California State University, Oral History Program, Richard M. Nixon Project, 1978), 78; Aitken, *Nixon: A Life*, 17.

8 Nixon's Service Station sold Atlantic Richfield gasoline and was located at the current intersection of Whittier Blvd. and Santa Gertrudes Avenue. Frank Nixon borrowed \$5,000 from his father-in-law on this occasion. Nixon, *Memoirs*, 4; Ambrose, *Nixon*, 34–35.



recalled with pride that his father always believed, “with hard work and determination a man can achieve anything in America.”⁹

Richard Nixon characterized his days in Whittier as centering on “family-church-and-school.” Frank had converted from Methodism to Quakerism after he married Hannah. He was fervent and enthusiastic about his new-found religious faith. Richard described the distinctive styles of worship of their Quaker congregation in Whittier:

I grew up in a religious environment that was at once unusually strict and unusually tolerant. My mother and her family belonged to a branch of the Friends Church that had ministers, choirs, and virtually all of the symbols

9 Morris, *Richard Milhous Nixon*, 72; Ambrose, *Nixon*, 31.



Yorba Linda Elementary School, 1919: first grade class, with teacher Mary Skidmore (back row, center). A barefoot Richard Nixon sits at the end of the first row, far right.

of other Protestant denominations. The differences were the absence of water baptism and communion, and the heavy Quaker emphasis on silent prayer.

Richard attended four church meetings every Sunday. He was musically talented and played piano at East Whittier Friends Church functions every week during his high school and college years.¹⁰

Richard began taking music lessons at the age of seven. When he was eleven, his mother sent him to Lindsay for more advanced piano instruction with her sister Jane Beeson, an accomplished music teacher. He was away from home for six months while staying with the Beeson

¹⁰ Nixon, *Memoirs*, 13.



Nixon's Service Station, Whittier Blvd., East Whittier, c. 1922, before the family expanded their business by opening a full-service market.

family. Living in the countryside with Aunt Jane and Uncle Harold Beeson and his cousins proved to be a formative experience for Richard. He was diligent with his piano lessons and practiced regularly. His aunt described him as “just a beginner” when he arrived. Six months later he left Lindsay able to play selections from Chopin. During his stay, Richard also enjoyed a variety of recreational adventures with Alden and Sheldon Beeson. The boys “skinny-dipped” in a local pond, made up outdoor games, and hunted rabbits. Richard returned home in June 1925.¹¹

Just two months later, his younger brother, Arthur, died suddenly. He was only seven years old. Arthur's death was the first major tragedy

11 Nixon, *Memoirs*, 9; Jane M. Beeson, second interview, October 21, 1971, 2, RNOHP; Joseph Alden Beeson, interview, October 21, 1971, 10, 12, RNOHP.

that “shook” the family’s faith to the core. He succumbed one week after contracting a high fever in August 1925. The doctors who treated the Nixons’ youngest boy were unsuccessful in diagnosing or treating the illness. The cause of death remained uncertain though the symptoms suggested a deadly viral infection.¹²

Each member of the family suffered tremendously following Arthur’s death but reacted in their own way. While Hannah displayed stoicism, Frank Nixon was angry about Arthur’s medical care. Richard cried every day for weeks on end after Arthur’s funeral. His brother’s death shocked the family because it was so unexpected. They were already facing another medical tragedy that would stretch on for more than a decade. Harold Nixon had been diagnosed with early-stage tuberculosis in the seventh grade, three years before Arthur died.¹³

Richard attended Fullerton Union High School from 1926 to 1928. He enjoyed performing with the school orchestra and played on the high school football team. He excelled in debate and public speaking at Fullerton but transferred to Whittier Union High School at the start of his junior year. Harold’s condition had worsened and sunk the family into deep financial turmoil. Richard commented that the family was “moderately well off” at the time, except for the costs of Harold’s illness.¹⁴

Richard assumed responsibility for buying fresh fruits and vegetables for the Nixon Family Market when he was fifteen years old. He awoke at 4:00 a.m. each weekday and drove the family’s panel truck an hour each way to the Seventh Street Produce Market in Los Angeles. Richard grew adept at bargaining with the vendors for the best prices. Upon his return to the store in East Whittier, he would wash down the fruits and vegetables for display and remove the less presentable items. After finishing his tasks at the store, Richard would be on the way to his 8:00 a.m. class. Hannah was up every morning by 3:00 a.m. to make homemade cakes and fresh fruit pies for the family store.¹⁵

¹² Richard A. Ragsdale M.D., a pulmonary specialist from Redding, California, interview by the author, June 30, 2021. Dr. Ragsdale confirmed that it was more likely that Arthur Nixon died of a viral infection, such as encephalitis, rather than a bacterial infection similar to tuberculosis. Aitken, *Nixon: A Life*, 21.

¹³ Nixon, *Memoirs*, 10–11; Nixon and Olsen, *The Nixons*, 34.

¹⁴ Nixon, *Memoirs*, 4.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 5; Gardner, *Fighting Quaker*, 47.



The Nixon Family Market, c. 1940: Nixon cousin George Brickles managed the produce section after Richard finished college.

RICHARD NIXON AT WHITTIER COLLEGE

Whittier College: A Brief Sketch

Members of the Religious Society of Friends founded Whittier as a “Quaker colony” near Los Angeles in 1887. The town was named after the most prominent Quaker of the era, poet John Greenleaf Whittier. Although he was invited to visit the town named in his honor, Whittier was never able to travel to Southern California.¹⁶ In later years, the college sports teams would be nicknamed “the Poets.”

The Quakers placed substantial importance on the value of higher

¹⁶ John Greenleaf Whittier died in 1892. Roland H. Woodwell, *John Greenleaf Whittier: A Biography* (Haverhill, MA: The Trustees of the John Greenleaf Whittier Homestead, 1985), 490.



Founders Hall, pictured around the time Richard Nixon attended, was the original Whittier College building. His classrooms were located inside, and his debates and drama productions were performed here.

education. During their westward movement, the group typically “planted academies and colleges wherever Friends had settled.” They founded Whittier Academy as a secondary school in 1887; it became Whittier College, an accredited four-year liberal arts college, at the start of the twentieth century.¹⁷

Richard Nixon entered Whittier College in the fall 1930 semester when his dream of enrolling in an Ivy League school failed to materialize. His college years coincided with the Great Depression. Whittier College historian Charles Cooper noted, “Those were hard times for college students

¹⁷ Whittier College was officially chartered by the State of California in 1901. Charles W. Cooper, *Whittier: Independent College in California* (Los Angeles: Ward Ritchie Press, 1967), 5, 34.



The Class of 1934 was the largest entering group of students up to that time (fall 1930). Richard Nixon is partially obscured, standing on the left side of the third row. 1931 *Acropolis*.

... the parents of many students were impoverished—unemployed, savings wiped out, property values deflated.” A lack of spending money was common for most students and unemployment was very high.¹⁸

Richard was seventeen years old when he started college and was accompanied by a sizable contingent of his Whittier Union High School classmates. Whittier College was not his first choice:

I decided to go to Whittier . . . my folks needed me . . . in the store. There was no way I could go [to college in the East]. After all, Harold was still sick and this was the time when the medical expenses were enormous. So I decided to stay home and I have no regrets . . . I was not disappointed because the idea of college was so exciting that nothing could have dimmed it for me.¹⁹

18 The Great Depression unemployment rate peaked at 25.6% in May 1933 in the United States. National Bureau of Labor Research/Bureau of Labor. <https://www.cnbc.com> (May 19, 2020); Cooper, *Whittier*, 216.

19 Quoted in Aitken, *Nixon: A Life*, 31.

Richard took advantage of a \$250 tuition scholarship that was set up for Milhous descendants by his maternal grandfather, Franklin Milhous. These funds covered most of his expenses for the entire school year. There were 419 full-time students enrolled at Whittier College when Richard Nixon arrived. He lived at home all four years and worked at the family store the entire time as well. Richard Nixon majored in history. He claimed that “getting good grades was his top priority.”²⁰

During the time Richard Nixon attended Whittier College, a conservative and Quaker-dominated Board of Trustees sternly governed academic and extracurricular activities. Cigarette smoking, card playing, drinking alcohol, and school dances were all prohibited on campus. National fraternities, sororities, and honor societies were also banned. In their place, local “societies” eventually gained a foothold. The Franklin Society, started in 1921, was the first student social group on the Poet campus.²¹

Clubs and Organizations:

The Orthogonian Society and the Men's Glee Club

Richard Nixon's involvement with freshman year activities at Whittier College was truly extraordinary. He studied very hard but did not concentrate solely on academic pursuits. Nixon was elected freshman class president, acted in dramatic productions, took part on the varsity debate team, and wrote articles for the school newspaper, the *Quaker Campus*. He also played on three Poet athletic teams while continuing to manage the produce section at the family store. His most significant accomplishment of the school year involved helping to start a new men's society during his first semester. Dean Triggs ('33) became Richard's good friend at the start of the school year. Triggs resented the Franklins, whom he regarded as “kind of snobbish.” He conceived the idea of starting a new organization composed mainly of Whittier College athletes and men who were working their way through college. They would be called “the Orthogonians” (aka the “O's”). The O's “blue collar” background contrasted with the

20 Quoted in Aitken, *Nixon: A Life*, 31–32; Bela Kornitzer, *The Real Nixon: An Intimate Biography* (New York: Rand McNally & Company, 1960), 102; Ambrose, *Nixon*, 50; Cooper, *Whittier*, 216.

21 Aitken, *Nixon: A Life*, 32.

“high status” Franklin Society members. Nixon was enthusiastic about the project and eagerly joined Triggs in working out the details.²²

A mythology involving the establishment of the Orthogonian Society appeared over the years. Journalist Stewart Alsop asked Vice President Nixon about the group’s founding in a 1960 interview. Nixon explained that upon his arrival at Whittier College “he was almost immediately asked to join the Franklins,” but that he “refused their invitation—on principle.” He believed that the Franklin’s social monopoly “was unfair and contrary to the democratic spirit.” Hubert Perry (’35), who joined the Franklin Society in 1933, informed biographer Evan Thomas that they *rejected* Richard Nixon’s “bid” for membership. Perry’s Franklin-centric version of events has been widely accepted as true on the Whittier campus.²³

Dean Triggs invited English professor Albert W. Upton to serve as the group’s first faculty advisor. Upton accepted Triggs’s invitation to work with the two students and later reflected upon this decision: “What I remember is that I got acquainted with some of the finest young men that I’ve ever had anything to do with.”²⁴

Triggs originated the idea for the Orthogonians but needed Richard Nixon’s organizational skills and Albert Upton’s creative flourishes to add the finishing touches. Upton helped create the name “Orthogonian,” which means “square-shooter” in Greek. He worked with Nixon and Triggs in defining their philosophy. The advisor also assisted with the O’s motto, “Écrasson l’infâme.” The French-language phrase translates as “Stamp out evil.” The O’s mission involved “developing campus spirit and promoting the ideals of good sportsmanship and fair play among the members of the student body.” Nixon was elected the first president of the society and wrote their constitution and song.²⁵

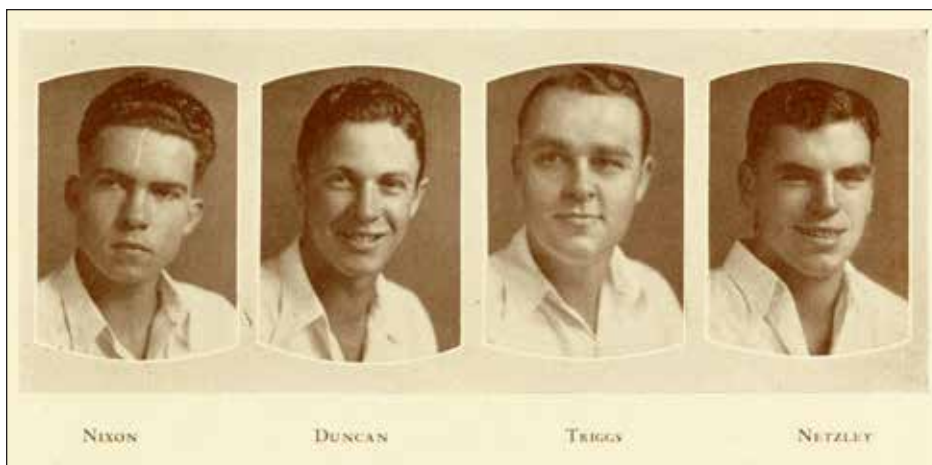
The Franklins posed for their yearbook photos decked out in tuxedos and broad smiles, at a time when many American families suffered severe

²² Gardner, *Fighting Quaker*, 52–53; Nixon, *Memoirs*, 17.

²³ Hubert Perry joined the Franklins in 1933. He was not yet enrolled at Whittier College when the Franklin Society members “rejected” Richard Nixon’s application. Stuart Alsop, *Nixon and Rockefeller: A Double Portrait* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1960), 131–32; Evan Thomas, *Being Nixon: A Man Divided* (New York: Random House, 2015), 12.

²⁴ Albert W. Upton, second interview, September 17, 1971, 2, RNOHP.

²⁵ Gardner, *Fighting Quaker*, 53–54; Nixon, *Memoirs*, 17; Aitken, *Nixon: A Life*, 33.



The original cabinet of Orthogonian Officers, 1930–31.
Dean Triggs and Richard Nixon were the co-founders. 1931 *Acropolis*.

economic deprivation during the Depression. The Orthogonians displayed a more proletarian look by posing in the yearbook wearing white, short sleeve, open-collared shirts and serious expressions, emphasizing the social class distinction that separated the two men's societies. Nixon later lamented, "They were the Haves and we were the Have nots."²⁶

As a founding member of the Orthogonian Society, Richard Nixon had been exempt from the challenging initiation rites of passage that pledges later underwent to gain membership. However, he enjoyed attending the new member initiation ceremonies each year. While the O's initiation ceremonies and practices remain confidential, some alumni have described the "rough" experience that they underwent, which clearly constituted "hazing." Whittier College eventually barred these hazardous practices several years later because of possible liability issues.²⁷

²⁶ Aitken, *Nixon: A Life*, 33.

²⁷ "Hazing" is defined as "committing acts against an individual or forcing an individual into committing an act that creates a risk for harm in order for the individual to be initiated into or affiliated with an organization." Defined by Michelle A. Finkel, quoted in "College Hazing: What It Is and How to Stop It," *Best Colleges*, <https://www.bestcolleges.com/blog/college-hazing/>.

Men's Glee Club, 1934. Richard Nixon, standing, third row on the left. After enduring a difficult initiation rite, he became their Master of Ceremonies. 1934 *Acropolis*.



Other student organizations also featured potentially harmful initiation rites. Nixon informed his biographer Jonathan Aitken about the painful experience he endured to join the Men's Glee Club in his senior year:

I remember that when I was initiated into the Glee Club they had a rather crude kind of custom and that was you'd have first to take off all your clothes. And they had a huge cake of ice there. You'd sit on the ice for a while and then they'd take a big paddle. You'd get up and they'd slap you



over the rump to warm up. Well, by the time you'd gone through that a while you were pretty tired. And I got so tired I got pneumonia. I was knocked out for at least a week.

Richard's mother was extremely upset about her son's condition following the Men's Glee Club initiation rite. Frank Nixon was livid and threatened to file a lawsuit against the group. Richard told his parents to "forget it" and ended up having a wonderful time with the group. He wanted to join because they offered the prospect of traveling and an opportunity to

sing some fun songs. After surviving their hazardous initiation custom, Nixon took over as Master of Ceremonies. He coordinated a successful spring 1934 tour and booked all of their concert appearances.²⁸

Richard Nixon's roles as co-founder and the first president of the Orthogonian Society were remarkable achievements, especially considering that they began at the start of his first semester at college. Although he was not a gifted athlete, Nixon gained the trust and respect of fellow members who were some of Whittier's finest football players. His success with the Orthogonians certainly raised his confidence level and encouraged him to strive for greater accomplishments at Whittier College.

Drama

Richard Nixon's theatrical debut occurred in his senior year at Whittier Union High School. The Latin Club presented a special "Roman banquet," accompanied by a shortened rendition of Virgil's *Dido and Aeneas* in May 1930. Richard landed the lead role of Aeneas; his soon-to-be girlfriend, Whittier High classmate Ola Florence Welch ('34), co-starred. Nixon recalled a nightmarish toga-clad stage debut: "It was my first experience in dramatics, and it was amazing that it was not my last." The high school audience was extremely bored—until Richard and Ola Florence attempted the script's unrehearsed stage hug and kiss that evoked "catcalls, whistles, and uproarious laughter."²⁹

The most significant benefit of Richard Nixon's awkward acting debut was getting to know his co-star, Ola Florence Welch. They became a couple after finishing the Latin Club play and would stay together through all four years at Whittier College. They shared a mutual interest in debate, public speaking, and politics. Their relationship was turbulent at times and Richard dated other Whittier coeds when things were not going well between them. The couple broke up for good following Richard's completion of his first year at Duke Law School in 1935.³⁰

28 Aitken, *Nixon: A Life*, 35; "Whittier Glee Club Completes Northern Tour," *Quaker Campus* 21, no. 24 (April 13, 1934): 1.

29 *Dido and Aeneas* is "Book IV" of Virgil's epic poem, *The Aeneid*. The Latin Club's rendition of the play was only performed once at Whittier High School. Nixon, *Memoirs*, 14; Aitken, *Nixon: A Life*, 59; Morris, *Richard Milhous Nixon*, 109.

30 Aitken, *Nixon: A Life*, 58, 60.

Once at Whittier College, Nixon rebounded from his embarrassing high school stage experience and appeared before the footlights multiple times. He acted in two plays during his freshman year. He performed in the very first *Orthogonian Play* while serving as the president of the O's. The show was written by "Several Orthogonians" and premiered in April 1931. The setting was Wardman Hall on the Whittier campus. The amusing three-act farce reportedly "brought down the house." Richard Nixon portrayed his debate team captain, Joe Sweeney ('33). Other members of the cast also played actual Whittier College figures, including football coach Wallace "Chief" Newman.³¹

The Poet freshman class sponsored a presentation of Booth Tarkington's comedy, *The Trysting Place* (1921), in May 1931. Nixon performed the role of the "dithering" Mr. Ingoldsby, "a man of fifty-five or sixty," in the play. A favorable review in the *Quaker Campus* recognized the "well selected cast of characters" and saluted the Class of 1934 for producing a "decisive hit."³²

Richard Nixon's great break in his acting career occurred in the fall semester of his junior year. The Poet Theatre in Founders Hall had been renovated, with new lighting and sound equipment in place for the junior class play, *Bird in Hand* (1929), by John Drinkwater. Two performances were scheduled during Homecoming Week, in November 1932. Professor Albert Upton, the faculty advisor of the Orthogonian Society, was also the director of the Drama Club and served as the "acting coach" for *Bird in Hand*. Nixon impressed Upton with a solid audition and was awarded the challenging role of Thomas Greenleaf, the "irate" keeper of the "Bird in Hand Inn." Upton described Nixon as "conscientious and industrious" in learning the role and as "the most coachable student" he had ever worked with.³³

There is a lengthy soliloquy during the second act of *Bird in Hand*. No one else who auditioned for the part had the ability to remember so many lines. Nixon's retentive memory was already legendary on campus.

³¹ 1931 *Acropolis*, 105.

³² "Campus Drama—The Trysting Place," *Quaker Campus* 18, no. 29 (May 8, 1931), 2.

³³ "Dramatic Season Will Open with Drinkwater Play," *Quaker Campus* 19, no. 3 (September 30, 1932): 1; "English Comedy to Be Given in Poet's Theater: Nixon Heads Play Cast in Role of Crusty Inn Keeper," *Quaker Campus* 19, no. 8 (November 4, 1932): 1; Albert W. Upton, interview, November 5, 1971, 20–21, RNOHP.



Richard Nixon portrayed the “crusty” innkeeper, Mr. Thomas Greenleaf, in the junior class play, *Bird in Hand*, in November 1932. He is seated on the far right. 1933 *Acropolis*.

The role required Richard to speak with an English accent and to “walk with a shuffle” typical of a worn-out man in his sixties. He also needed to break down in a flood of real tears on the Poet Theatre stage. Albert Upton helped his protégé to convincingly learn and master each of these histrionic techniques. The *Quaker Campus* extolled *Bird in Hand* as “the finest dramatic performance yet witnessed at Whittier College” and recognized Richard Nixon for a “finesse seldom displayed by amateurs.”³⁴

Nixon performed in one other play during his junior year. *The Price of Coal* (1923) was a one-act play written by Harold Brighouse. The *Acropolis* described this work as “a serious study of the mining country in

³⁴ Ibid., 21; “First Offering in New Poet Theater Is Distinct Success” *Quaker Campus* 19, no. 10 (November 18, 1932): 1.

Scotland.” Richard and Ola Florence had roles in a production that was judged as, “good . . . [T]he Scottish accents were deemed to be fairly authentic and the whole tone of the play was consistent.”³⁵

Student Body President Richard Nixon was very active on campus during his senior year but he also appeared in two theatrical productions. The Associated Women Students sponsored a production of *Philip Goes Forth* (1931) by George Kelly. The story takes place in a sitting room in Upstate New York. C. Richard Harris ('34) played the role of the title character, a young man who rejects his father's wishes by refusing to join the family business in favor of a career in theater. Nixon played the role of the father. The *Acropolis* noted that the topic was “interesting” for the average college student and “was particularly well cast, and the acting was above average.”³⁶

The Class of 1934 presented their “Senior Play” in June 1934 in the Poet Theatre. *The Tavern* (1920), by George M. Cohan, was their selection. The two-act comedy was set in the nineteenth century and the locale was a “tavern on a lonely road on a stormy night.” Richard Nixon played the lead role of the “Vagabond.” The governor and his entourage had been robbed on the roadway. All of the occupants of the tavern were under suspicion of the crime and humorous mix-ups occurred during the investigation. A mysterious Vagabond helped to narrow down the possible suspects. The Vagabond turned out to be an escapee from an asylum and was eventually tracked down by his keepers before any further trouble happened.³⁷ Nixon's growth as an actor and his contributions on the stage in his four years at Whittier College helped to spark a resurgence of interest in Poet Theatre productions.³⁸ His prodigious memory, mastery of histrionics, and self-confidence were a skill set that emerged from his stage success.

35 1933 *Acropolis*, 74.

36 1934 *Acropolis*, 157.

37 “Senior Class Casts Graduates in George Cohan's *The Tavern*,” *Quaker Campus* 20, no. 29 (May 17, 1934): 1.

38 1934 *Acropolis*, 156–57.

Whittier College Athletics

Richard Nixon wistfully recalled his days as a member of the Poet freshman football team: “My happiest memories of those college days involve sports. As a 150-pound seventeen-year-old freshman I hardly cut a formidable figure on the field, but I loved the game—the spirit, the teamwork, the friendship.” Football had been Richard’s favorite sport since he played on the freshman team at Fullerton Union High School. But he had to withdraw from high school football after Harold Nixon was stricken with tuberculosis in April 1927, as his family needed his help at the family store.³⁹

Nixon resumed playing football and other sports in his freshman year at Whittier College. Only eleven eligible players were available to suit up for the freshman team, known on campus as the “Iron Men.” Nixon started on the offensive line and played in every game, despite his slight build and poor coordination. The “Iron Men” won six games and Richard earned a “numeral” to sew onto his school sweater. (“Letters” were awarded only for varsity sports.) For the rest of his college years, Nixon would only play in the last few minutes of football games “that were already safely won or hopelessly lost.” He was destined to become a “tackling dummy” and “bench warmer.”⁴⁰

Richard played on the “Poetlings” freshman basketball team, coached by Wallace Newman. The team lost all nine of their games. They improved slightly over the course of the season, losing their last several games by narrower margins. Nixon suffered a painful injury during a basketball game against La Verne College. He went up for a rebound against an opposing forward and was elbowed in the mouth so hard, “that it broke my top front teeth right in half.” A porcelain dental bridge was his only “trophy” from that losing season. Richard also joined the “Wildcat” track team in the spring 1931 semester.⁴¹

Wallace Newman was the head coach of the varsity football team. While Nixon understood that he lacked the athletic ability to be a good football player, he was still determined to join the Whittier varsity squad in his sophomore year. He succeeded, and played on the team

39 Ibid., 19; James Grieses, *Young Nixon*, 100.

40 1931 *Acropolis*, 5; Nixon, *Memoirs*, 19.

41 1931 *Acropolis*, 133, 143; Nixon, *Memoirs*, 19.



Members of the Poet varsity football team, fall 1931. Richard Nixon, #12, in his sophomore year. He did not play much but helped boost the team spirit with his enthusiasm. 1932 *Acropolis*.

through the 1931–33 seasons. Richard was slow, lacked agility, and was considerably undersized. Head coach Newman noted that Dick, as he was often known, was an “awkward kid” and “we used Nixon as a punching bag. If he’d had the physical ability, he would have been a terror.” Physical shortcomings notwithstanding, Richard Nixon found a way to contribute to the team. He never lettered in any team sport at Whittier College, but playing varsity football proved to be a challenging, yet gratifying experience. Nixon drew inspiration from Coach Newman, of whom he later wrote:

College football at Whittier gave me a chance to get to know the coach, Wallace “Chief” Newman. I think that I admired him more and learned more from him than any man I have ever known aside from my father.⁴²

Wallace Newman was nicknamed “Chief” because of his mixed heritage that included indigenous forbears. (He was a member of the “Luisēños”—a Spanish term signifying the native people of California’s San Luis Rey River Basin.) Newman coached Whittier College’s varsity football, freshman basketball, and the baseball teams. His coaching philosophy centered on the importance of fundamentals, discipline, and a determination to win. “Show me a good loser,” Newman would tell his players, “and I’ll show you a loser.” Richard Nixon emphasized that Chief Newman had no tolerance for the view that “how you play the game counts more than whether you win or lose.” Nixon believed that Newman was a fine coach, but more importantly, an even more talented builder of character. “He inspired in us the idea that if we worked hard enough and played hard enough, we could beat anybody.”⁴³

Historian Roger Morris presented an evocative portrait of college football Saturdays in Richard Nixon’s Quaker hometown:

As many as 6,000 fans streamed on to the bleached wooden stands at Hadley Field to watch the purple and gold Poets play other small colleges. Played in light shoulder pads, thin canvas pants, and stiff leather helmets, it was a bruising, often bloody game fought against bare shins and unprotected arms . . . When Whittier won, students jumped on jalopies and tore

⁴² Wallace J. Newman, first interview, August 5, 1971, 2, RNOHP; Nixon, *Memoirs*, 19; Aiken, *Nixon: A Life*, 33; Morris, *Richard Milhous Nixon*, 133; Ambrose, *Nixon*, 65; *The Chief: A Tribute to Wallace J. Newman* (Whittier College Office of Development, 1980): 14.

⁴³ Ambrose, *Nixon*, 26; Nixon, *Memoirs*, 19–20.



“The Passing Poets,” Whittier College varsity football team, fall 1933. Richard Nixon (#23) looks relaxed and confident among the other seniors on the 1933 Poet varsity team. 1934 *Acropolis*.

through town with horns squawking. Local movie theaters let the team in without tickets, and drugstore counters fed some players free for the week.⁴⁴

Richard Nixon played third-string guard on the 33-man Poet varsity team. He relished the camaraderie and fellowship of his teammates and felt a sense of prestige in being a member of the team. Football practices were held from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. every weekday during the season, but usually lasted longer. Richard suited up for all of the Saturday home games but was not eligible to join the team for away games. Clinton O. Harris ('34) was a tough defensive tackle for the Poets and stood 6'4" and weighed 211 pounds. During football practices, the first-team defense scrimmaged against the third-string offense. Nixon would attempt to block one of the most dominant defensive players in the league, his

⁴⁴ Morris, *Richard Milhous Nixon*, 134.

good friend Clint Harris. “Let’s get fired up,” Nixon would yell, right before getting “pancaked” play after play. Harris recalled years later, “The harder you hit him the more he came back at you.”⁴⁵

Coach Newman marveled at Richard Nixon’s perseverance. “He had plenty of guts when it came to taking a beating, getting up off the floor, and coming back fighting.” Although Nixon rarely played, he fulfilled an important leadership role for the team. At the half, he greeted his teammates with enthusiasm as they ran off the field and told them what a “great job they were doing!” The coaches regularly invited him to give inspirational pep talks in the locker room at half-time during Poet games.⁴⁶

Richard’s resilience on the practice field served as a strong example for his Poet teammates and boosted their spirit. His toughness in absorbing and enduring punishment at practice earned their respect. Years later, Nixon reflected on the importance of his coach’s inspiration:

There is no way I can adequately describe Chief Newman’s influence on me. He drilled into me a competitive spirit and the determination to come back after you have been knocked down or after you lose. He also gave me an acute understanding that what really matters is not a man’s background, his color, his race, or his religion, but only his character.⁴⁷

After Richard’s final season concluded, Frank and Hannah Nixon invited the entire varsity team over and served a delicious chicken dinner to the group. A teammate recalled that Dick played the piano after dinner while everyone sang along and enjoyed themselves. The “banquet” served as a fitting end for an “uncommon” athletic career. His contributions to the Poet football squad did not occur on the gridiron, but in terms of promoting spirit and team unity. Although playing varsity football was a difficult physical challenge for Richard Nixon, his involvement with the team proved to be among the most enduring and meaningful experiences of his entire life.⁴⁸

45 Wallace J. Newman, third interview, October 14, 1971, 1, RNOHP; Clinton O. Harris, second and third interviews, respectively August 17, 1971, 17, and February 9, 1973, 1–2, RNOHP; Ambrose, *Nixon*, 65; Morris, *Richard Milhous Nixon*, 133.

46 Charles Elliott, *Whittier College: The First Century on the Poet Campus* (Redondo Beach, CA: Legends Press, 1986), 151; Ambrose, *Nixon*, 65–66.

47 Gardner, *Fighting Quaker*, 74.

48 Morris, *Richard Milhous Nixon*, 135.

Debate

Richard Nixon attained his greatest success in college on the debate floor. His mastery of public speaking developed from his meticulous research skills and diligent preparation for the contest. His talent in debate dated back to elementary school and progressed through his high school years. His prominence in oratory, aided by a remarkable memory, presaged a potential career in the legal field—or in politics.

Richard transferred to East Whittier Elementary School in fall 1922 following the family's departure from Yorba Linda. He entered the fifth grade there. His classmates and teachers regarded him as a shy but studious child. Nixon excelled in the classroom and was elected class president in the eighth grade. He also earned distinction as the valedictorian of his graduating class in June 1926.⁴⁹

Richard's first debate appearance occurred as a seventh grader in 1924. He represented the affirmative side of the proposition, "Resolved, it is more economical to rent a house than it is to buy one." He was well-prepared and handily won the debate.⁵⁰ Nixon was in the eighth grade at the time of his second debate. "Resolved, that insects are more beneficial than harmful," was the challenging topic. As usual, he performed careful research in preparation.⁵¹

An East Whittier Elementary classmate who attended the second debate recalled that Richard already had a commanding stage presence at the age of thirteen. "He really gained the confidence of his audience." He also had a flair for the dramatic: "He emphasized his points with the pounding of his fist if he was really excited." Nixon's team easily won the debate.⁵²

Richard transferred to Whittier Union High School at the start of his junior year, in fall 1928. He was quickly embraced as a student leader by the Whittier High community. Curiously, he was ill-at-ease making "small talk" with individuals and in small groups. Historian Stephen Ambrose described him as "nearly petrified among girls, with

49 Esther Williams, second interview, August 16, 1972, 1, RNOHP.

50 Ambrose, *Nixon*, 39.

51 Philip H. Timberlake and Elizabeth T. Paldanius, interview, October 27, 1971, 8, RNOHP.

52 Harriet L. Hudspeth, interview, November 2, 1971, 32, RNOHP.



The Constitutional Orators of Whittier Union High School in 1929. Junior Richard Nixon is standing in the back row, second from right. Mrs. D. Vincent, first row center, served as the debate advisor. 1929 *Cardinal and White*. Courtesy of Whittier High School.

whom he managed to be simultaneously awkward and aggressive.”⁵³ However, on the debate floor, he exuded confidence. A family friend described Richard’s personality: “Of course, he had the bulldog tenacity that his father had . . . but I always thought of him as a Milhous.” Frank Nixon approved of his son’s aggressive attack style in debates. Mrs. D. Vincent, Richard’s Whittier High debate coach, recalled that she was bothered that he could take any side of an argument and dissect it with such ‘surgical’ skill.”⁵⁴

⁵³ Ambrose, *Nixon*, 53.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Morris, *Richard Milhous Nixon*, 102.

Richard entered the 1929 “*Los Angeles Times* Oratorical Contest” in his junior year. Seventeen students took part in the elimination contest that year. Nixon’s entry, “Our Privileges under the Constitution,” won the top prize and the essay was reprinted in its entirety in the 1929 *Cardinal and White* yearbook. The Kiwanis Club awarded him a \$10 prize for his effort. Mrs. Vincent provided grammatical and spelling help. In the piece, Dick warned against the abuses of constitutional privileges and urged setting limits on potential excesses. The sixteen-year-old questioned, “Should the morals of the nation be offended and polluted in the name of freedom of speech or freedom of the press?”⁵⁵ These thoughts foreshadowed a similar sense of distrust and resentment that President Nixon would display towards the news media years later.

Richard participated in the 1930 “*Los Angeles Times* Oratorical Contest” in his senior year. More than sixty Whittier Union High School students entered the event. Richard’s essay, “America’s Progress—Its Dependence upon the Constitution,” won first prize and was reprinted in the 1930 edition of the yearbook. The Whittier Kiwanis Club awarded him \$10 for the second year in a row for his winning entry. The *Los Angeles Times* presented him with an additional \$20 award.⁵⁶

Whittier College

By the time he entered Whittier College in the fall of 1930, Nixon was an accomplished debater. He later observed, “College debating in those days was a serious pursuit and a highly developed art, and to me it provided not only experience with techniques of argument, but also an intensive introduction to the substance of some issues I would deal with in later years.”⁵⁷

Richard made a stunning oratorical debut on the Whittier campus during his first semester. He teamed with Franklin Society member Kenny Ball (’34) in the inter-class debate. Nixon and Ball defeated

⁵⁵ Richard M. Nixon, “Our Privileges under the Constitution,” 1929 *Cardinal and White* (Associated Students of Whittier Union High School, 1929), 95–96.

⁵⁶ Richard M. Nixon, “America’s Progress—Its Dependence upon the Constitution,” 1930 *Cardinal and White*, 154–55.

⁵⁷ Nixon, *Memoirs*, 17.

members of the varsity debate squad. This victory and Dick's high school oratorical prowess helped pave the way for an invitation to join the varsity debate team as a freshman.⁵⁸

Nixon described his approach to debating in his *Memoirs*: "To be a good debater you've got to be able to get mad on your feet without losing your head." He participated on the varsity debate team for four years at Whittier College. Ola Florence observed that he would often appear nervous prior to a debate appearance and needed encouragement, but when Dick arose to speak he would appear calm.⁵⁹

Eugene Knox, the Instructor of Public Speaking and Expression at the college, served as the faculty advisor and debate team coach. His influence contributed significantly to Richard's growth as an orator. The debate contests stimulated Dick's competitive zeal. One historian observed that Nixon's debate experience, rather than the classroom or serving as a student leader, was where he got his "real education."⁶⁰

Organized debates were serious contests and surprisingly popular with spectators on college and university campuses in the 1930s. National topics were assigned to forensics teams across the country by Pi Kappa Delta, the national debate fraternity. Each team prepared to argue both sides of a question. Nixon observed, "This sort of exercise turned out to be a healthy antidote to certainty, and a good lesson in seeing the other person's point-of-view." He became adept at speaking without notes, a practice that continued for the rest of his life.⁶¹

A 1931 *Acropolis* feature described the 1930–31 debate season as the "busiest ever." The Pi Kappa Delta panel posed the following national topic: "Resolved, that all nations should adopt a policy of free trade." An *Acropolis* article reported optimistically that the entire debate team would return intact the following year and "the college would be looking forward to winning even greater honors."⁶²

Professor Knox helped Dick Nixon refine his debating skills by emphasizing focused research and solid preparation. He believed that

58 Kenneth L. Ball, second interview, October 20, 1971, 12–13, RNOHP.

59 Nixon, *Memoirs*, 17; Ola Florence Jobe and Gail M. Jobe, interview, February 20, 1972, 19, RNOHP.

60 Ambrose, *Nixon*, 68.

61 Nixon, *Memoirs*, 17.

62 1931 *Acropolis*, 91.

content was all important, with “delivery a poor second.” Knox asserted that “research must be followed by more research.” Biographer Jonathan Aitken explained how Nixon developed a methodology for approaching a topic “without being inhibited by preconceived notions, digging deeply into both sides of the subject, making detailed notes of facts, quotes, and pros and cons on a yellow legal pad as he went along, and then finally reaching a conclusion.” This technique of evaluating an issue, accompanied by the familiar, yellow-lined legal pad, stayed with Richard Nixon through his political career and into retirement.⁶³

Pi Kappa Delta announced the national debate topic in Nixon’s sophomore year: “Resolved, that congress should enact legislation providing for the central control of industry.” The Whittier College varsity debate team completed a 3,500-mile winter road trip through the Pacific Northwest in seventeen days, starting in late January 1932. Frank Nixon loaned his eight-year-old, seven-passenger Packard for the trip. The college provided the team with \$50 for gas money to make the trip.⁶⁴

On the way north, the team stopped in San Francisco, which was a “wide-open town” during the Prohibition Era, which ended in 1933. None of the team members had been in a speakeasy before except Joe Sweeney. He gained their admission to a secret back room that was accessed through a pharmacy. There, Richard Nixon, a dutiful Quaker boy, enjoyed his first alcoholic beverage, a Tom Collins cocktail. Nixon recalled the moment fondly, “It was a lark just to sit there watching the people, listening to their conversation, and admiring the barmaid who served our drinks.”⁶⁵

The *Quaker Campus* reported on the team’s journey to the Pacific Northwest in its weekly issues. The squad made stops at nine colleges and universities. The team’s alternate member Bob Watson (’35) described Dick Nixon’s debating style:

He was a serious-minded lad and was not one to crack jokes or tell stories . . . but Dick played it pretty straight and stuck to the facts and tried to

63 Aitken, *Nixon: A Life*, 39.

64 “Debate Squad Takes Part in Tournament Today and Tomorrow,” *Quaker Campus* 18, no. 11 (December 4, 1931): 1; Nixon, *Memoirs*, 18; Robert B. Watson, interview, September 22, 1972, 4, RNOHP.

65 Nixon, *Memoirs*, 18.

do it on the basis of logic. He was excellent in his command of words and never seemed to be at a loss for the right word.⁶⁶

The debate team stayed at a fraternity house in Corvallis during their visit to the Oregon State University campus. Dick jammed on the piano with a swinging band at a frat-house dance party that also featured Bob Watson on the saxophone. Playing live music with a local band was an enriching collegiate experience for church pianist Dick Nixon. Although their main purpose was to compete, the Poet debaters enjoyed all aspects of their winter excursion. Watson recalled that he only spent \$10 of his own money on the trip, due to the free room and board provided and with Whittier College covering the cost of gasoline.⁶⁷

There were other notable accomplishments for the debate team during their 1931–32 season: they participated in over fifty debates during the school year, which was the largest number of contests ever scheduled. Their seventeen-day road trip to the Pacific Northwest was a tremendous success and established an encouraging precedent for future trips. After their return in February 1932, the Poet team took part in the conference championship tournament held at Occidental College in Los Angeles. Richard Nixon and Ed Miller defeated the defending national debate champions from Redlands in a major upset. The team tied the California Christian College squad with a 7–3 tournament record and triumphantly took home the Allison Speech Trophy for the league debating championship. The *Acropolis* acknowledged Ed Miller, as team manager, and faculty advisor Eugene Knox for “much of the team’s success.”⁶⁸

Richard Nixon’s third season on the debate squad in his junior year, 1932–33, seemed promising. Pi Kappa Delta released a new national debate topic: “Resolved, that the United States should agree to the cancellation of the inter-allied war debts.”⁶⁹

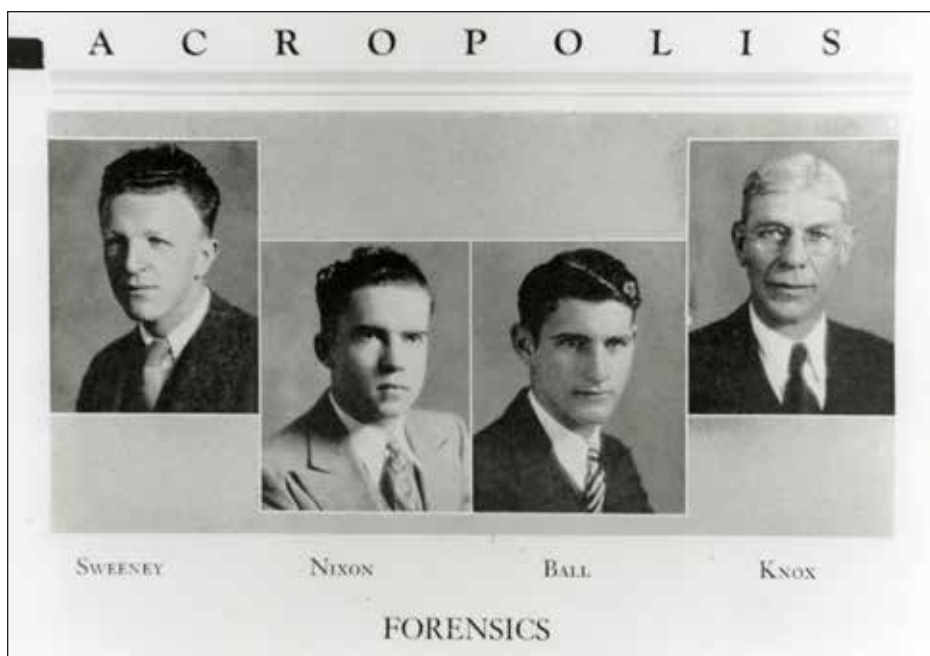
Debate team manager Kenny Ball shared an insightful observation about Nixon, who was habitually late for debate contests. Ball remarked

66 “Debaters to Start Tour This Week,” *Quaker Campus* 18, no. 16 (January 22, 1932): 1; Morris, *Richard Milhous Nixon*, 130; Watson, 5.

67 *Ibid.*, 6.

68 1932 *Acropolis*, 97.

69 1933 *Acropolis*, 80.



Members of the Whittier College debate team, 1932–33. They were league champions in the previous year. Pictured are Kenny Ball as team manager, Richard Nixon, Joe Sweeney, and advisor Eugene Knox. 1933 *Acropolis*.

that he “had a lot of trouble getting him to be on time. He was never very good at punctuality . . . But once on the speaker’s platform, he displayed a sense of timing that was amazing.” Ball surmised that Nixon’s lateness was part of a debate strategy to psych out opponents.⁷⁰

A traveling team consisting of Joe Sweeney and Richard Nixon, with alternate debater Emmett Ingrum serving as chauffeur, headed out for another extensive winter trip in January 1933. They were scheduled to compete against eight schools in four western states. Unlike the previous “road trip,” the Whittier team encountered an unfortunate number of mishaps this time. Severe weather, scheduling foul-ups, and “hard-headed” judges marred their plans.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Ambrose, *Nixon*, 62.

⁷¹ 1933 *Acropolis*, 81.

Richard Nixon's fourth and final year on the Poet debate team, 1933–34, was disappointing. The season started late, and the team lost the only two tournaments that they participated in. Nixon, as student-body president with many other commitments, was unavailable during part of the debate season and his absence was strongly felt by the team.⁷²

Reader's Digest sponsored the "Southern California Intercollegiate Public Speaking Contest" in November 1933. The event took place on the Whittier College campus. Nixon represented the college and was perfectly suited as an entrant because of his remarkable memory. Participants were advised to carefully read the three previous monthly issues of *Reader's Digest*. Each contestant would be assigned a randomly selected article from one of these issues moments before they would be asked to extemporaneously summarize the piece. Nixon won the contest by a unanimous vote from the judges for most accurately rephrasing the content of the article, "Youth of 1933."⁷³

Debate team manager Kenny Ball, a member of the upscale Franklin Society, considered himself a fairly close acquaintance of Richard Nixon during their college days. He and his future wife, Dolores Lautrup ('33), remained loyal and life-long friends with him. However, Kenny considered Nixon an enigmatic fellow and wondered if he had any "real" friends during those days. Ball shared insights about his classmate with biographer Jonathan Aitken:

[H]e was a guy with many sides to him. Insecure in one-on-one conversations but totally sure of himself when debating in front of an audience. Complicated but pretending to be ordinary. I liked him, spent a lot of time with him, but couldn't get to know him. He buried a lot of himself below the surface. It wasn't difficult to see that he had hidden depths.

Kenny Ball's comments about Richard Nixon's aloofness as a Whittier undergraduate appear heartfelt but may reflect a hint of Franklin bias. Hubert Perry (also a member of the Franklin Society) was another extremely loyal and life-long friend of Nixon, but shared a similar sentiment with biographer Evan Thomas. "I don't think he had anybody that you would call a close friend." Clint Harris, who played football with

⁷² 1934 *Acropolis*, 166–67.

⁷³ Ambrose, *Nixon*, 69; Ball, 17.

Nixon for four years, was a fellow member of the Orthogonian Society. He felt that Richard was “easy to talk to and communicate with,” and noted that all of the Whittier football players shared a special bond. “He was one of the fellows, a team man, doing everything he could to help.” These Whittier classmates offered honest but contrasting opinions about a perplexing personality who was undoubtedly difficult to comprehend.⁷⁴

College debate may be described as the pinnacle of Richard Nixon’s educational experience at Whittier College. Advisor Eugene Knox ingrained a demanding work ethic. He learned to carefully examine both sides of an argument to reach a clearer understanding of an issue. Richard’s oratorical excellence emerged from a solid grasp of politics that was informed by his remarkable recall and understanding of social and cultural undercurrents. Timing was a key aspect of Nixon’s public speaking delivery and was refined from his stage experience. Although he missed out on the chance to attend an Ivy League college, he benefited from enrolling at a small school near home where he could truly shine. Richard Nixon was driven to succeed and felt the need to continually prove himself every time he approached the podium.

Harold Nixon, 1909–1933

Richard Nixon suffered deep personal losses early in life. They reached their worst point in 1933 with the death of his older brother, Harold, during Richard’s junior year at Whittier College. Once again, he compensated for set-backs by exerting himself in other endeavors.

Richard had always idolized Harold and wished that he could emulate his older brother’s engaging personality. They were a study in contrasts. “Harold Nixon was tall, blond, and handsome. The girls ‘swooned over him.’ He was fun-loving and mischievous, and outgoing and popular.” He had been a sickly child and suffered from frequent coughs and colds during his elementary school years. In 1922, when he was in the seventh grade, the family doctor diagnosed Harold with “early-stage” tuberculosis (TB). His TB was in remission in fall 1926 when Frank and

⁷⁴ Ola Florence Welch was Richard Nixon’s closest friend throughout his undergraduate years. Kenny Ball and Hubert Perry were referring to the lack of a male best friend, or “buddy.” Aitken, *Nixon: A Life*, 44–45; Thomas, *Being Nixon*, 14; Harris, third interview, February 9, 1973, 12.

Hannah decided to send him to the evangelical Mount Hermon School for Boys, in Gill, Massachusetts. Its Spartan discipline contributed to Harold's decline. He returned home in April 1927 with a "full-blown" case of tuberculosis.⁷⁵

Tuberculosis is a debilitating bacterial infection that primarily targets the lungs but may also infect other vital organs. The deadly disease was not curable until antibiotics became readily available towards the end of World War II. Frank Nixon stubbornly refused to place Harold into a local public TB facility in 1927. "My father refused to let him go to the county tuberculosis hospital, one of the best in the country, on the ground that going there would be taking charity," Richard recalled. The family first placed Harold in private sanitoriums, but the cost placed a ruinous financial burden upon the family.⁷⁶

In spring 1928, Hannah Nixon brought Harold to the dryer climate and higher elevation (5,367 feet above sea level) found in Prescott, Arizona, reputed to be a curative climate. Unable to afford private sanatorium care there, Hannah rented a cabin where she cared for Harold and took in three other TB victims to help cover the \$25.00 monthly rent payments. Richard described his mother's caregiving as her "finest hour":

She loved and cared for each of those three patients as if they were her own sons . . . My mother alone, with no help whatever, took care of them all in that little house she had rented. She did the cooking, did the cleaning, took them trays, took care of their laundry, gave them their bed baths, carried their bedpans, gave them their alcohol rubs—everything that in those days a nurse would do for a patient, she did by herself . . . and they all died.⁷⁷

Every member of the family made sacrifices during this time of separation. Frank ran the family store and took over the baking duties. Richard and Don chipped in at the market when they were not in class. Frank Nixon drove Richard and Don to Prescott every four to six weeks to see Hannah and Harold. The one-way 400-mile journey took about fifteen hours. Richard also stayed with Hannah, Harold, and the lodgers at the Arizona cabin during the summers of 1928 and 1929. He took

⁷⁵ Thomas, *Being Nixon*, 7; E. Nixon and K. Olsen, *The Nixons*, 34; Aitken, *Nixon: A Life*, 23.

⁷⁶ E. Nixon and K. Olsen, *The Nixons*, 35.

⁷⁷ E. Nixon & K. Olsen, *The Nixons*, 35–36; Aitken, *Nixon: A Life*, 50.



Richard, Harold, and Donald Nixon with
their mother, Hannah, c. 1926.

whatever odd jobs he could find to help out: janitor, chicken plucker, or carnival barker, for instance.⁷⁸

Hannah Nixon was stunned to learn in October 1929 that she was expecting a baby. She would not be able to stay around TB sufferers during the pregnancy and returned home before Christmas. Her fifth son, Edward Calvert Nixon, was born at the Murphy Memorial Hospital in Whittier in May 1930. Hannah was forty-five years old at the time, and Frank was fifty-one. Harold remained in Arizona under the care of one of the neighbors after Hannah departed. Richard remembered that Harold was especially miserable after she left:

He was terribly unhappy and homesick in Prescott, so it was finally decided to let him come home, hoping that the familiar surroundings would compensate for the damper climate. He had a desperate will to live and refused to comply with the doctor's orders that he stay in bed. It was especially painful for us all because Harold was still full of hope and had so much life in him.

Harold returned home from Arizona in September 1930, thin and weak, showing little improvement during his two-year rehabilitation stay in Prescott.⁷⁹ Once home, Harold strove to live life as fully as he could. He died on his mother's birthday, in March 1933, at the age of twenty-three.⁸⁰

Hannah recalled that Richard sank into a "deep and impenetrable silence" when Harold died, a response very similar to his reaction following Arthur's death eight years earlier:

From that time on, it seemed that Richard was trying to be three sons in one, striving even harder than before to make up to his father and me for our loss. With the death of Harold his determination to make us proud of him seemed greatly intensified. Unconsciously too, I think that Richard may have felt a sense of guilt that Harold and Arthur were dead and that he was alive.

When Harold died, Richard buried the joyous side of his personality that his deceased brothers had always brought out.⁸¹

⁷⁸ E. Nixon & K. Olsen, *The Nixons*, 42; Nixon, *Memoirs*, 11; Marshall Clow Jr., interview, February 18, 1972, 10, RNOHP; Aitken, *Nixon: A Life*, 51.

⁷⁹ Clow, 4; Nixon, *Memoirs*, 12.

⁸⁰ Nixon, *Memoirs*, 12; Aitken, *Nixon: A Life*, 53.

⁸¹ Hannah M. Nixon, "Richard Nixon: A Mother's Story, as told to Flora Rheta Schreiber," *Good Housekeeping* 150 (June 1960): 212; Dmohowski, "From a Common Ground," 228; Morris, *Richard Milhous Nixon*, 147.

Student Government and Service

Richard Nixon transferred into Whittier Union High School in fall 1928, and intended to run for student body president the following spring. His impressive overall performance during his junior year (September 1928 to June 1929) at Whittier Union High School caught everyone's attention. He excelled in his classes and debate and finished first in the 1929 *Los Angeles Times* Oratorical Contest. The customary process for electing a student body president at Whittier High involved a faculty committee's selection of two candidates who faced each other in the general election. All students were eligible to vote for a presidential candidate of their choice along with their own class "tickets." Richard Nixon was the administration's "favorite" and was slated to run against his classmate and friend, W. Roy Newsom ('34).⁸²

Newsom later admitted that he felt politically apathetic in high school. The campaign had been uneventful until a surprise "dark horse" candidate entered the race. Robert Logue, the captain of the Cardinals basketball team, was handsome and very popular. Logue had the backing of fellow athletes and "especially girls." The contest heated up as the surprising new entrant threatened campus tradition. Instead of the usually sedate student campaign, "sandwich boards and all kinds of signs" supporting Bob Logue suddenly appeared around campus. Nixon and Newsom were caught off-guard by the energetic athlete who "worked the crowds" at lunch breaks. Logue's volunteers posted banners and pamphlets with the slogan, "Stop, Think, and Vote for Bob Logue."⁸³

Logue pulled off an upset victory. Roy Newsom reflected on the race:

I think it was more of a popularity contest than anything else, and I think the advantage Bob Logue had was that he was more of an athlete than either of the two of us and that probably tipped the scales . . . because athletics at the time was one of the popular things to be involved in.

82 Dr. Roy Newsom taught chemistry at Whittier College after earning his PhD from USC. He served as the Dean of Faculty and then President of the college, 1975–1979. Aitken, *Nixon: A Life*, 29.

83 W. Roy Newsom, interview, May 10, 1972, 7, RNOHP; Morris, *Richard Milhous Nixon*, 108.

Richard Nixon took the defeat graciously, acknowledging that Robert Logue, “Had something new. He deserved to win and there were no hard feelings.”⁸⁴

The Whittier Union High School administration appointed Richard Nixon “General Manager of the Student Body” as a consolation for the surprising election defeat. His main responsibilities involved overseeing ticket sales at the Cardinals home football games and selling advertising space in the yearbook to local businesses. He applied himself diligently in the General Manager position and made the most out of a reluctant assignment during his last year of high school.⁸⁵

Nixon’s 1929 election loss to Robert Logue etched a deeply painful memory. He stewed over the defeat at length, but mentioned the setback only briefly in his *Memoirs*: “I suffered my first political defeat in my junior year at Whittier High School.” These words downplayed the severity of his disappointment. Jonathan Aitken offered additional details:

Although on the surface Richard took the defeat well, making every effort to pretend he was unaffected, there is no doubt that deep down the election result hurt him. He retired from the fray not just to lick his wounds but to learn from them, making a painstaking analysis of the reasons for the student voting pattern.

Richard learned an extremely valuable lesson from his high school setback, “never underestimate an opponent.”⁸⁶

Freshman Year Campus Politics and Service, 1930–31

Richard Nixon entered Whittier College in September 1930 with a firm focus and determined attitude. From the start, he appeared driven to absorb student life to the utmost. His academic goal of “getting good grades” would be attainable by dedicating long hours to late-night studying. His involvement with extracurricular activities was overzealous, simultaneously including student government, athletics, theater, varsity

84 Newsom, interview, 7; Morris, *Richard Milhous Nixon*, 107.

85 1930 *Cardinal and White*, 24.

86 Nixon, *Memoirs*, 14; Aitken, *Nixon: A Life*, 30.



Whittier College freshman officers, fall 1930. Class president Richard Nixon (*back row, center*) won the election in convincing fashion. 1931 *Acropolis*.

debate, and writing for the school newspaper. Richard's duties at the family store were time consuming and Harold's health issues were a constant concern. Co-founding a new men's society in his first semester undoubtedly left him overextended.

One student recalled her first impression of Richard Nixon on campus: "In today's terms we kids would have called him a 'nerd.' He was so serious. He never sat around talking or laughing like all the rest of us. He was a guy apart, either stuck into his books or rushing across the campus, forever going somewhere."⁸⁷

Richard declared his candidacy for freshman class president at the start of the fall 1930 semester. A victory in this contest would be his first step in establishing a political base at Whittier College. He easily won the election, tallying 90 percent of the freshman class vote. The

87 Aitken, *Nixon: A Life*, 32.



Joint Council of Control 1932–33: Richard Nixon, back row, second from right. Faculty advisor Eugene Knox is standing to the right of Nixon. Ola Florence Welch also served on the council and is seated second from the right. 1933 *Acropolis*.

Quaker Campus provided coverage of the election: “The class of 1934 chose Richard Nixon, the popular Whittier high school graduate, to lead its members through the first semester. Nixon has had considerable experience as an executive and is well known among local students for his oratorical ability.” He was also re-elected in February 1931 for the second semester term of office.⁸⁸

The first social event of the 1930–31 school year was notable for several reasons:

⁸⁸ Morris, *Richard Milhous Nixon*, 117; “Richard Nixon to Lead Frosh Class,” *Quaker Campus* 17, no. 2 (September 19, 1930): 1.

The most successful student body reception in the history of Whittier College officially opened the social season. . . . Wardman Gymnasium was decked out in a Hawaiian motif with palm trees and lanterns. Leis and flowers were handed out as favors.

At the event, Richard Nixon addressed the entire Whittier College student body for the first time. Then, a grand march at the reception broke into an impromptu dance. The very first dance “moves” on the Whittier College campus left the gym floor scarred. Afterwards, trustees and community leaders showered President Walter Dexter with complaints that, “he [Dexter] was leading the students down the road to hell.”⁸⁹

In terms of service, Richard served as a member of the ominously named “Joint Council of Control” during his freshman and junior years (1930–31 and 1932–33). It had been established as a “representative body of faculty and students . . . in the interests of greater cooperation among students, faculty, and community. Through it the democratic ideals of Whittier College are furthered in the effort toward mutually agreeable settlement of campus problems.” One of its most significant priorities was to develop publicity for student recruitment. The council governed social policies, the campus calendar, class dues, and considered whether or not to add new societies. One of its priorities was planning for a new student union.⁹⁰

Sophomore Year Leadership Roles, 1931–32

Richard Nixon’s sophomore year schedule at Whittier College was busy, but considerably less hectic in comparison to his first-year activities. Harold’s health was in decline and his condition was a constant worry for every family member. Dick’s studies and family store responsibilities were still time consuming, but he managed to cut back on the extracurricular involvement. While he was no longer class president or leader of the Orthogonian Society, he continued writing for the *Quaker Campus*. He played on only one athletic team during the school year. However, varsity football games and practices were significant time commitments

89 1931 *Acropolis*, 48, 71.

90 1931 *Acropolis*, 26; 1933 *Acropolis*, 14. The Dexter Student Union wasn’t completed until 1958.

outside of the classroom during the fall 1931 semester. Football continued to be Richard's only "fun" pastime, even though he rarely played in the games and was pounded mercilessly in practice. His debate team activities were scheduled mainly during the spring 1932 semester. Richard's involvement in student government on the Whittier campus increased significantly towards the end of his sophomore year.

Nixon served on the A.S.W.C. Executive Committee during his sophomore year. This group, comprised of student body officers and campus leaders, served in a liaison capacity for the students and coordinated an effective operation of clubs and organizations. He also participated in the honorary "Whittier College Knights" service organization for three years. The group originated in spring 1931. Their motto, "Service without Praise or Comment," underscored a disregard for recognition or publicity-seeking. The Knights dealt with a variety of issues on campus: disciplinary cases, the formation of rooting sections at athletic rallies, the campus parking problem, and assistance with coordinating the recruitment visits of high school students. They were also involved with organizing Homecoming activities, the May Day Festival, school picnics, and other social events during the school year. The *Acropolis* lauded the Whittier College Knights "as a valuable addition to the present group of campus organizations."⁹¹

Nixon's campus visibility increased as his speaking engagements and recruitment efforts for the college intensified during the spring semester of his sophomore year. He helped organize a major recruiting event, the "Spring Festival," while working on the Publicity Committee. Six hundred guests, from twenty local high schools, were invited to visit the campus in April 1932. Richard visited many of these schools and extended personal invitations for the event to interested high school students. He also took part in a Leadership Club activity where two hundred visitors were welcomed to the campus in May. This recruiting "open house" was organized as a lawn party and featured campus tours led by the Whittier College Knights.⁹²

91 1932 *Acropolis*, 22, 25; 1933 *Acropolis*, 59.

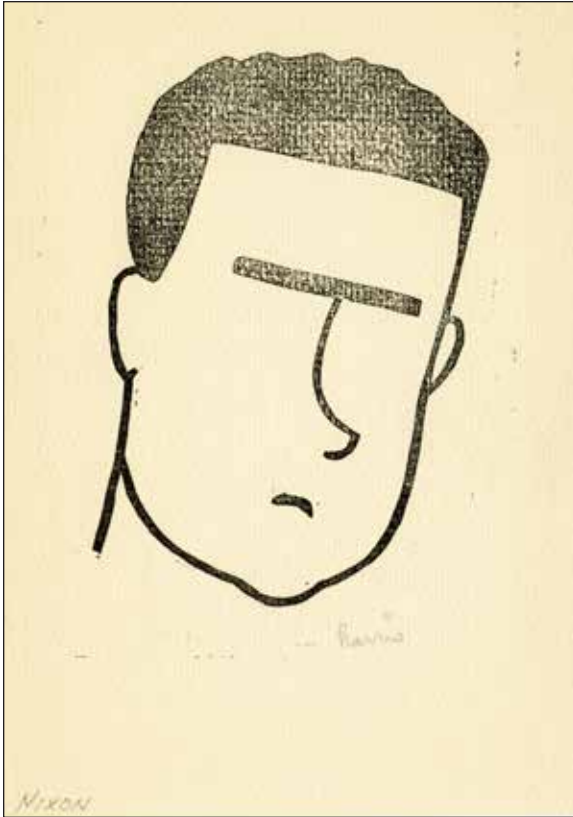
92 "Plans Made for 600 Guests on Campus Today," *Quaker Campus* 18, no. 28 (April 29, 1932): 1.



The Whittier College Knights were a service organization whose members avoided publicizing their accomplishments. Junior Richard Nixon is standing in the back row, center. 1933 *Acropolis*.

Richard ran for Associated Students of Whittier College (A.S.W.C.) vice president in the May 1932 student body election. This contest marked the second significant steppingstone in his political ascent at Whittier College. The *Quaker Campus* posted Nixon's platform: "My policy will be one of impartial cooperation with the president and executive committee in solving student problems." His qualifications included: "President of class, freshman year; member-at-large; two years of varsity debate." The *Quaker Campus* posted the election results: Richard Nixon won a decisive victory over his opponent, 267-73.⁹³

93 "Daugherty Elected by 2-1 Vote, Nixon Wins," *Quaker Campus* 18, no. 29 (May 6, 1932): 1.



"Impressions," by C. Richard Harris (actual size, 5" x 7"). Original linoleum block-print, 1932.

Junior Year Leadership, 1932–33

A.S.W.C. Vice President Nixon was active in drama and played on the offensive line for the Southern California Conference league champion Poets football team in the fall 1932 semester. He continued his role as a "bench warmer" on the varsity team. Nixon kept busy with debate team activities during the spring semester but focused mainly on student government responsibilities. By the spring 1933 semester of his junior year, Richard Nixon had established his reputation and was ready to run for student body president. By this time, he had built a solid reputation as a frontrunner, reflected in his fellow students' impressions at the time and in memories of him later.

C. Richard Harris was a multitalented Poet, notable for drawing the first published caricature of Richard Nixon. The Dick Harris feature,

"Impressions," was the first in a series of *Quaker Campus* profiles that debuted in October 1932. Harris's line drawing of A.S.W.C. Vice President Richard Nixon was instantly recognizable, then and now. The linoleum block-print captured his prominent features: the thick head of hair, heavy eyebrows, and the "ski" nose. Dick Harris even anticipated the famous Nixon jowls in the drawing, although his subject was only nineteen at the time. Harris also provided a biographical sketch of the campus leader:

This gentleman is Richard Nixon, A.S.W.C. vice president and chairman of the executive committee. He is also one of the orators of the championship debate squad. Nixon is a rather quiet chap about campus, but get him on a platform with a pitcher of water and a table to pound and he will orate for hours. Last year he toured the northwest with the debate team leaving a trail blazed with victories and fluttering feminine hearts. He has the lead in Bird in Hand, junior class play and also plays football.⁹⁴

Richard's main duty as A.S.W.C. vice president was chairing the Executive Committee meetings. He advanced the agenda set by student body president Herschel Daugherty ('33). Richard felt solidarity with Daugherty because he was a fellow Orthogonian. One member described Nixon's proficiency as chair of the meetings: "I was impressed by his spontaneity and his ability to think and talk with no notes, and yet excellently paraphrase with correct grammar and a clear flow of verbal ideas." During Daugherty's 1932–33 term in office, the Executive Committee focused on the plans for a new student union and for restructuring financial aid. Ola Florence, who was A.S.W.C. secretary, noted, "When Dick was vice president, he was much more active, it seemed to me, because as vice president you had charge of the executive committee. He had a lot of work in that."⁹⁵

Nixon's main focus during his junior year was to win the election for student body president. The A.S.W.C. election for student body president was scheduled just two months after Harold's death. As the "frontrunner," he would not be deterred. Powerfully motivated by the

94 "Impressions," by C. Richard Harris (actual size, 5' × 7"). Original linoleum block-print, 1933. It appeared in the *Quaker Campus* 19, no. 6 (October 21, 1932), 2.

95 Nixon, *Memoirs*, 18; Paul H. Gardner, *Oral History Interview, RNOHP*, (August 8, 1972), 6; O. Jobe and G. Jobe, 23.

tragic losses of two brothers, a “new Nixon” emerged in March 1933. He was primed to compete more fiercely than ever before.

Years later, he downplayed the significance of the election in his *Memoirs*, “Student politics was necessarily low-keyed in a small school where everyone knew each other.” But the painful memory of his loss to Robert Logue at Whittier Union High School still lingered. Nixon ran as the Orthogonian candidate and represented off-campus students. Richard Thomson (’34) was a late entry as the Franklin candidate for president and lived on campus. In his *Memoirs*, Nixon remarked that Dick Thomson was a good friend and that “neither candidate felt any animosity about running against the other.”⁹⁶

Thomson admitted after the election, “I was no politician in the first place.” He introduced a lackluster platform at the College Chapel four days before voting took place, pledging to devote himself, “for the benefit of the students if they choose to elect me.” Nixon followed Thomson on the dais and introduced a bold campaign platform: “If elected president I shall work for strict economy on the executive committee, *student body dances on the campus*, a more systematic use of the facilities within the student body for publicity in high schools and junior colleges, and better relations between the alumni and the student body.” Richard Nixon’s timing and political savvy were impeccable. Dick Thomson was completely overmatched.⁹⁷

Many Whittier students had never learned to dance because of the college’s prohibition on dancing. Marjorie Hildreth Knighton (’34) explained the situation:

We hadn’t grown up dancing. In high school we didn’t. In college we didn’t until the last year or so. And it was a learning period for everyone. No one was quite easy on the floor, except those who had gone to other towns to dance or had danced at home. But public dancing wasn’t allowed in Whittier, so you get all of these people who had their first year of dancing, and you can’t expect them to be accomplished dancers.⁹⁸

Introducing dancing on the Whittier College campus threatened the

96 Nixon, *Memoirs*, 18.

97 Richard A. Thomson, second interview, October 13, 1971, 8–9, RNOHP; “Nixon, Thomson Nominated for Student Prexy,” *Quaker Campus* 19, no. 28 (May 5, 1933): 1.

98 Marjorie Hildreth Knighton, interview, February 8, 1972, 13, RNOHP.

Board of Trustees's control. Dancing was originally banned for religious reasons by the Quaker founders, and the Trustees had no intention of altering the status quo. Nixon admitted later that he "had no personal stake" in the matter, since he could barely dance, even after taking lessons. His campaign promise to allow dancing was strictly pragmatic: "[I]t would be better to have dances on campus where they could be supervised, rather than off campus in some second-rate dance hall."⁹⁹

The Whittier College societies already sponsored off-campus dancing opportunities. The shrewdest move of Richard's campaign strategy had been targeting the "non-organization" students and "independent" (i.e., non-society) women as voting blocs. The tactic worked perfectly, and Nixon won the election. The *Quaker Campus* reported the outcome, "Dick Nixon defeated Dick Thomson for the A.S.W.C. presidency in an unusually quiet election held Monday. Votes were cast by 75 percent of the student body." After his victory, Nixon figured that he would be obligated to dance more often. "Ola Florence, and several other coeds were very patient with me, but I fear that many new pairs of slippers were scuffed as a result of my attempts to lead my partners around the dance floor."¹⁰⁰

Senior Year: Student Body President, 1933–34

Richard Nixon's campaign promise to win approval for dancing on the Whittier College campus would not be resolved simply by his election victory. He needed to follow up on his proposal and convince the administration and the Trustees to abandon the ban that had existed since the college was chartered.

English Professor Herbert E. Harris, then serving as the acting president of Whittier College, agreed to help Nixon persuade the Board to change the policy. The Trustees flatly refused to bend, so he sidestepped the issue. He successfully persuaded them instead to fund off-campus dances during the upcoming school year as an alternative. The Board

⁹⁹ Nixon, *Memoirs*, 18–19.

¹⁰⁰ "Nixon, Bailey to Lead Students for Next Year," *Quaker Campus* 19, no. 29 (May 12, 1933): 1; Nixon, *Memoirs*, 19.

agreed to sponsor eight dances that would be held at the nearby Whittier Women's Club, a facility with a "fine ballroom." The concession worked out well and the Women's Club dances proved to be highly popular. Although Richard could not fully deliver on his campaign promise, he displayed a resourceful acumen in obtaining an equitable accommodation from the Board of Trustees. His practical "tradeoff" was negotiated even before his presidential term of office had officially started and was essential for the success of his forthcoming programming plans.¹⁰¹

Nixon was well-prepared for executive leadership when he assumed office. He was highly organized and a hard worker. His astute planning "clicked" right from the start. His "Official Welcome" to new students appeared in the first issue of the fall 1933 *Quaker Campus*. This notice specifically addressed "the largest group of new students ever to enter" Whittier College:

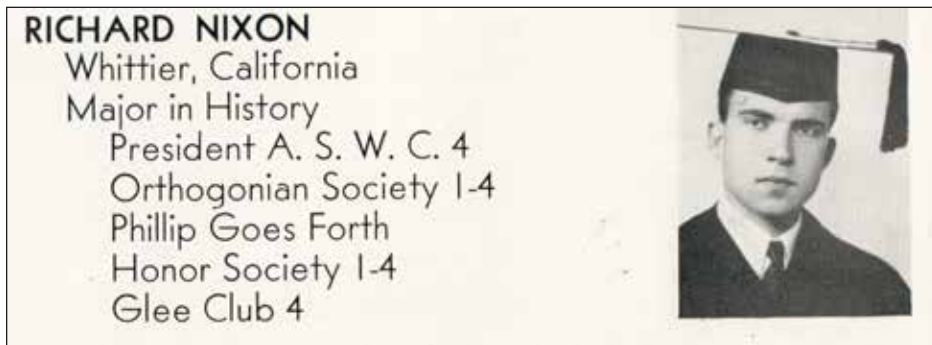
We are looking forward with you to one of the most enjoyable and successful years that the college has ever had. We have a great record to uphold in athletics, forensics, music and dramatics. Only through the combined efforts of the new and old students shall we be able to equal that record. We are going to attempt an entirely new social program, which will require the cooperation of the entire student body for its success.¹⁰²

Richard planned to unify the student body with his ambitious "new social program." The Board of Trustees solidly backed this inclusive plan. Society members, clubs, organizations, and athletic teams would no longer dominate campus event planning. The *Quaker Campus* described the plan:

Nine all-student social events, one each month, have already been scheduled on the calendar. All societies, classes and social organizations have definitely shown their willingness to cooperate with the executive group. In some cases, these smaller groups will cut down the number of social events given for their own members alone, concentrating instead on getting one hundred percent of their members to the all-student affairs. These organizations may be invited to sponsor singly or jointly one of the scheduled monthly affairs.

¹⁰¹ Aitken, *Nixon: Life*, 27; Nixon, *Memoirs*, 19.

¹⁰² "Student President Officially Welcomes Whittier Entrants," *Quaker Campus* 20, no. 1 (September 15, 1933): 1.



Richard Nixon's graduation photo and yearbook entry. 1934 *Acropolis*.

Nixon believed that it was vital for every student to have an opportunity to enjoy free, or very inexpensive, campus event programming. Eight dances were held that year, sponsored by the Board of Trustees, guaranteeing frequent, reasonably priced, if not free, social events. His progressive social program offered diversions for the students during the very lean economic times of the Great Depression, when most students had little spending money. Richard's classmates generally viewed their educational experience at Whittier College as highly positive.¹⁰³

Establishing that he was truly a man of action, Nixon coordinated a special planning committee to create the "All-College Weekend," which was part of his new program. The events debuted in October 1933, and featured an assortment of attractions and entertainment. The *Quaker Campus* "Invite" announced Richard's intentions with the enthusiasm of one of his football peptalks:

One of the foremost aims of the student executive committee this year is to provide for all members of the student body an exceptionally fine social program . . . Let us do our part by helping to mix up the crowd, by displaying that friendly spirit for which Whittier students are famous.

¹⁰³ "Student Body Social Program Is Supported by Board of Trustees," *Quaker Campus* 20, no. 1 (September 15, 1933): 1

Nixon also encouraged Whittier faculty members to get involved with the program to promote campus unity.¹⁰⁴

The goals of the "All-College Weekend" programming were twofold: to motivate the students to remain on campus and to develop school spirit. The organizing committee hired a fourteen-piece dance band to entertain at the Saturday evening dance at the Whittier Women's Club. The committee also supplied picnic lunches on Saturday, staged one-act comedies, and planned carnival games. The "All-Campus Weekend" was an outstanding success. The Executive Committee successfully helped to improve alumni relations during the fall 1933 semester, fulfilling another of Richard's campaign promises.¹⁰⁵

Nixon received highly favorable press coverage during his presidential term. Joanne Brown ('34), the editor of the *Quaker Campus*, praised him, "for literally working his head off lately." She noted that he honored his campaign promises. Brown assessed the positive impact, "The A.S.W.C. are really forging ahead under his admirable leadership to long anticipated accomplishments along social, inter-collegiate and other lines."¹⁰⁶ Richard introduced innovative ideas to improve student governance during his term. For instance, he assembled the newly elected A.S.W.C. officers for orientation and training sessions near the end of the school year before they would take office.¹⁰⁷

Richard Nixon had shown himself to be a model of service as a loyal and trustworthy promoter of Whittier College throughout his time at the school. As student body president, his involvement in an official capacity grew considerably. He regularly extolled the virtues of the "Poet Campus" to local audiences, serving as an unpaid "goodwill ambassador." An entry from the *Quaker Campus* gossip column, "So What," provided a glimpse of Richard's speaking activities in February 1934. "Our Nicky tells me that he put Whittier on the map last week when he spoke before the Women's Civic Club of Los Angeles in Bullock's auditorium. Dick

¹⁰⁴ "The President Invites," by Richard M. Nixon, A.S.W.C. President, *Quaker Campus* 20, no. 5 (October 13, 1933): 1.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Quoted in Gardner, *Fighting Quaker*, 73–74.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

spends half of his life speaking to various organizations on behalf of the school. Let's give him a hand." The next month, he visited the First Methodist Church in Redondo Beach, where he presented a brief talk entitled, "The Place of the Small College in the World."¹⁰⁸

Richard's last official appearance as A.S.W.C. student body president occurred at a May 1934 reception honoring the "Class of 1934" graduates and celebrating former college president Walter F. Dexter's years of service. Richard Nixon and Dr. Dexter were the featured speakers. The eighth and last dance of the school year sponsored by the Board of Trustees was held that evening at the Whittier Women's Club. Although Richard's campaign promise to bring dances to campus did not happen during his term in office, the Board's agreement to offer financial support for entertainment was vital in establishing the new social program.¹⁰⁹

Not all of Nixon's actions as A.S.W.C. president pertained to "official" business. As "Rally Chairman" for Whittier's 1933 "rivalry" football contest against Occidental College scheduled on Armistice Day, he and his crew began gathering wood for the traditional campus bonfire several weeks in advance. Years later, he enjoyed sharing the details of the Rally Committee mission with Aitken. "Up until the year I was Rally Chairman I was informed that they had only two-hole outhouses [in the bonfire]. We all determined that we were going to outdo our predecessors and somehow find a three-holer." Richard and his "Privy Council" team scoured the local communities and found a "four-holer" outhouse on a ranch nearby. They lifted and transported the "privy" to campus and placed it atop the nearly thirty-foot pyre. The rally was truly a "once-in-a-lifetime" campus spectacle for Whittier students, followed by a thrilling homecoming victory for the Poets over the rival Occidental Tigers, 7-6.¹¹⁰

108 "So What," by m.h.h., *Quaker Campus* 20, no. 17 (February 9, 1934): 2; "Dick Nixon Speaks before Church Group," *Quaker Campus* 20, no. 21 (March 16, 1934): 2; "Prexy Nixon Meets Student Presidents on Northern Campus," *Quaker Campus* 20, no. 22 (March 23, 1934): 1.

109 "Reception Will Fete Graduates and Dr. Dexter," *Quaker Campus* 20, no. 28 (May 11, 1934): 1.

110 Aitken, *Nixon: A Life*, 37-38; "Alumni Watch Poets Nose Out Occidental in Annual Tilt," *Quaker Campus* 20, 10 (November 17, 1933): 4; 1934 *Acropolis*, 195.

Nixon displayed a less familiar character trait on occasion during his years at Whittier College: spontaneous generosity. Dr. Paul S. Smith, Richard's faculty advisor, recalled the time he dropped off a five-gallon container of "magnificent" peppermint ice cream for a History Society meeting that he was unable to attend. A fellow "bench warmer" on the Whittier varsity football team shared an illuminating story from their senior year:

I was invited to a formal [dance] and didn't own a tuxedo. It happened that Richard Nixon owned a tuxedo, because he had to have one as a member of the Glee Club. They travelled and sang in tuxedos . . . He had just bought a new tuxedo. He was invited to the same affair, and I knew that he had an old tuxedo, so I asked him if I could borrow his old tux, and he said that I certainly could. And I discovered almost by accident . . . that he was lending me his new one and he was going to wear the old one himself.

Nixon's random acts of kindness were pleasant surprises on the Poet campus.¹¹¹

Richard's senior year as the student body president of Whittier College was a tremendous success. He received high praise in the 1934 *Acropolis*, including the following assessment: "But contrary to precedent and tradition he lived up to his promises." Nixon's inclusive vision invigorated his "new social program." The college yearbook also noted, "Original and novel ideas which caught everyone's fancy soon had the whole student body turning out to all of the social functions." Richard Nixon's methodical, goal-oriented leadership helped brighten the very dark period of the Great Depression by unifying members of the Whittier College student body beyond anyone's expectations.¹¹²

111 Paul S. Smith, *Young Nixon*, 178; Richard H. Spaulding, interview, December 17, 1971, 4–5, RNOHP.

112 1934 *Acropolis*, 37–38.

CONCLUSION

Richard Nixon majored in Constitutional History and finished second in a class of eighty-five Whittier College graduates in June 1934. He spoke glowingly about his classroom experience and noted in his *Memoirs* that he received “a first-rate education” at Whittier. Nixon was an exemplary student and was well-prepared for the rigorous legal program at Duke University Law School, where he finished near the top of his class in 1937.

Richard’s family always provided a supportive foundation. He described his upbringing in Whittier as focusing on “family, church, and school.” Their Quaker faith embraced service as an essential principle. Hannah Nixon’s home care for three tuberculosis victims in Prescott, Arizona, demonstrated this “faith through practice” and the family’s strong work ethic. The deaths of Arthur and Harold shook the Nixon family profoundly. Losing two brothers created Richard’s most severe emotional trauma, but enduring these losses ultimately molded a stronger person.

Nixon was a quiet and shy student in grammar school. Attaining proficiency as a pianist helped him to break out of that “shell.” He gained confidence as an entertainer from playing for Quaker youth groups in East Whittier. Richard overcame his disastrous stage debut as the lead in *Dido and Aeneas* in his senior year at Whittier Union High School. He performed in drama productions each year in college and received generous accolades for his acting ability. These stage successes helped to rejuvenate theater on the Poet campus. Richard’s remarkable memory was a valuable asset for dramatic roles and was equally beneficial with public speaking venues.

Nixon’s favorite memories of his college days involved playing football. He was never a gifted athlete and rarely played in games. Nonetheless, he regarded varsity coach Wallace Newman as a highly significant influence. “Chief” ingrained a fundamental value that Richard wholeheartedly embraced: “never give up.” Underestimating the significance of the lessons absorbed on the Whittier College athletic fields could overlook an essential key for the shaping of Richard Nixon’s character.

Richard’s proficiency in debate and public speaking progressed from an early age. Debate at Whittier College brought out his competitive side along with the dogged pursuit of winning. He pushed himself with

long hours of preparation for debate contests. Richard's success on the Whittier debate team was concurrent with his ascendance as a student leader.

Nixon's term as A.S.W.C. president was a remarkable success. He sought to create an inclusive atmosphere with his "new social program" that aimed to unite the entire student body during the Great Depression. He was a skillful administrator, event planner, and coordinator. Operations ran smoothly during his year in office. Richard's campaign pledge to bring dancing to the Poet campus did not succeed during his term in office, but his compromise with the Trustees did win their support for off-campus dances that were part of an inexpensive entertainment package that members of the student body thoroughly appreciated.

Richard Nixon's crowning achievements at Whittier College included winning every student election that he entered and running an effective and successful student government as A.S.W.C. president. Co-founding the Orthogonian Society (a group that is still active on the Whittier College campus) was an impressive achievement. He drew acclaim as a champion debate star and impressed Poets with a series of successful stage appearances. Richard performed an important public relations service for the college administration with the recruitment of high school students. He organized campus visits for large groups of prospective students that led to consecutive years of record admissions. The one area where he did not excel was athletics. But playing football proved to be highly meaningful for him in terms of his personal growth. It would be a mistake to judge Richard Nixon's participation in athletics as a "failure" in comparison to all of his other fine accomplishments at Whittier College. By applying his intellect, hard work, and determination, *all* of Richard Nixon's "out of the classroom" experiences would contribute to his rise towards the highest level of American politics. This was an extraordinary achievement for a shy Quaker bookworm who grew up in the small town of Whittier, California.

Joseph F. Dmohowski served as an academic librarian at Whittier College from 1985 until his retirement in 2022. He managed the Special Collections Department and College Archives at Wardman College for twenty-three years. Dmohowski's research interests and publications have focused on Richard Nixon's early family life and pre-political career; the writings of Quaker author (and Nixon cousin) Jessamyn West; and screenwriting during the Hollywood Blacklist era.