

Heralding the new president, 1908

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## Paul Barringer

*This write-up appeared in the "Alumni Number" in January, 1908, the "Bulletin of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute (State Agricultural and Mechanical College) to announce the appointment of the new president of the college to replace Dr. John McBryde, who retired after 16 years of service.*

### Our New President

By Professor R. H. Hudnall

The Alumni of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute, who are scattered broadcast over many states of the Union—and even in other countries—have their eyes centered upon the new president of their Alma Mater. They will be interested particularly in learning something of his life and his special fitness for the position of honor and responsibility he now holds.

### Biographical Sketch

Paul Barringer

The accompanying picture and the following biographical facts will serve, in a measure, to give to our readers a sort of personal introduction to Dr. Barringer. Paul Brandon Barringer is descended from a distinguished ancestry. He was born at Concord, N. C., February 13, 1857—the son of General Rufus Barringer of Confederate fame, and the grandson of General Paul Barringer, a conspicuous leader in the War of 1812. On the maternal side, he is descended from Joseph Graham, one of the Revolutionary heroes of North Carolina. His mother was a sister of the widow of "Stonewall" Jackson.

His early education was received principally at the well known Bingham School, near Asheville, N. C., and at the Kenmore University School, Amherst Courthouse, Va. He became a student of the University of Virginia in 1875, and two years later received from there the degree of M. D. The following year the University of the City of New York conferred upon him the same degree. For some time after this he practiced medicine with great success at Dallas, N. C. A desire further to perfect himself in his profession induced him to visit Europe, where for two years he studied under some of the noted specialists of France, Germany, and Austria. After his return to the United States, he settled upon his large plantation near Charlotte, N. C., interesting himself in agriculture and engaging at the same time in the practice of his profession. In 1882, he was married to Miss Nannie Hannah of Charlotte County, Virginia; they have now a family of ten

children. For four years Dr. Barringer was connected with Davidson College, North Carolina, where he conducted a preparatory school for medical students. In 1889, the University of North Carolina sought his services by electing him to the Chair of Anatomy; this position he declined, and in the same year accepted the Chair of Physiology at the University of Virginia. From 1895 to 1903 he was Chairman of the Faculty there, the highest executive office then within the gift of the University. On May 30, 1907, the Board of Visitors unanimously elected him President of Virginia Polytechnic Institute. He tendered his resignation as Professor of Therapeutics and Pharmacology at the University of Virginia, and entered upon his official duties at the V. P. I. September 1st.

## **An Experienced Executive Officer**

With these interesting facts of his life before them, the Alumni and other friends of the Institute will naturally enquire further as to Dr. Barringer's qualifications for effective leadership. To be at the head of a great institution of learning, with weighty responsibilities upon him, is no new experience for Dr. Barringer. For eight years, as already noted, he was Chairman of the Faculty of the University of Virginia. This period just after the disastrous fire\* was a critical one in the history of the University. In the capacity of Chairman, Dr. Barringer served with great success. As his term of office expired, the Board of Visitors repeatedly chose him to succeed himself—a fact which attested his popularity and efficiency as a presiding officer. During the period of his chairmanship, the number of students increased from 518 to 682; the finances of the University were wisely administered; the most cordial relations prevailed between the Faculty and students; and the general growth and progress of the University in all its lines of work were very marked.

Dr. Barringer comes to the V. P. I. with the highest recommendations from various sources, and especially from those who knew him best at the University. Prof. Lile, of the Law Department, says of him, "He possesses executive ability amounting almost to a genius along this line." Prof. Francis H. Smith, in a communication to the Board, pays him a fine tribute in the following language: "But the responsible position in question demands above all things the ability to manage men, and especially young men, and to evoke from his coadjutors their best work and feelings. This ability Dr. Barringer has proven himself to possess by the success as Chairman of the Faculty (equivalent to the Presidency) at this place. No one who has held that position here during my official life has had more influence with the students than he, and no one has more agreeably and fairly presided over the deliberations of our professional body. Should he be your choice, I shall look for a result highly satisfactory to the State in the harmony of your teachers and pupils, and the sustained efficacy of your college work; and last, but not least, in the high tone encouraged in all the lines of your activity." Prof. S. C. Mitchell, of Richmond College, one of the foremost teachers and educators of the South, speaks in glowing terms of him: "The two supreme questions in Virginia as regards material progress are how to better the farms, and how to quicken the growth of industries. Dr. Barringer, as the executive of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute, his hands upon the throttles of both these engines of power—agriculture and manufactures. By reason of his wide experience as an educator and strength of his personality and sympathy with the true aims of our people, he will advance both the Institute and the great interests which that noble institution fosters. I am sure that this great school will reveal new energy under the leadership of President Barringer."

The V. P. I. Board of Visitors did not act hastily in the matter of securing a new president, but proceeded slowly and cautiously. Happily did the choice fall upon "a man of proved executive ability"—thus fulfilling the desire expressed in the resolutions of the V. P. I. Alumni Association. Dr. Barringer had not been in the president's chair at Blacksburg very long before it was evident that the hand of a master was at the helm, steering wisely and well.

### **Educator and Man of Affairs**

To administrative power and ability must be added learning and culture, if the college president will attain to the highest success. In the biographical sketch above, attention was directed to the superior educational advantages which Dr. Barringer has enjoyed, not only in this country but in Europe as well. Two great universities of America conferred upon him the degree of M. D., and two other well-known institutions of learning have honored him with the degree of LL. D.—Davidson College, N. C., in 1900, and the University of South Carolina, in 1904.

His wide interest in education and years of experience as chief executive at the University have familiarized him with the problems and policies of our great centers of learning throughout the land. He evinces a deep interest in the great educational revival in Virginia and the South. Especially encouraging is it to know that he recognizes a vital connection between the colleges and the public schools of the State. He is a man who can ably represent the V. P. I. at the great educational conferences, giving to other educators the benefit of his experience and wisdom, and receiving from them suggestion and counsel, and thus advance the interests of both technical and popular education in the State and South at large.

For two decades or more, Dr. Barringer has been an enthusiastic teacher and lecturer, easily winning the devotion of his students by his personal magnetism and interest in young men. During the busy years of his chairmanship at the University, his duties as teacher were continued along with those of the executive office. That his students greatly respected, esteemed, and loved him is shown by the affectionate dedication to him of the University Annual—"Corks and Curls"—of 1904.

As a writer, Dr. Barringer has contributed numerous papers to the periodicals and the scientific societies. The article of some years ago on the "race question" attracted widespread interest in the South and North.

With the characteristics of the educator, Dr. Barringer combines the qualities of the man of practical affairs. In dealing with men he shows tact, and good, sound common sense, discriminating judgment, and business capacity of a high order. He is greatly interested in the social, industrial, and economic problems of modern life. He knows how to bring things to pass. He is aggressive, yet conservative; quick in grasping a new situation, yet calm and deliberate in action.

### **Of Great Versatility—"A Good Mixer"**

Even a brief acquaintance with the new president reveals that he is not only a technical man, but polytechnic as well. His knowledge and experience are not confined to one particular field.

Though a specialist in medicine, he is also versed in other lines of science and of human activity. He is many-sided, his interests being broad and varied. He is somewhat a "multiform specialist." He seems at home among the farmers, with the educators, in the medical fraternity, or on the public rostrum. Soon after his election as President of the V. P. I., he addressed the Farmers' Convention in Roanoke, and a little later the State Educational Conference in the same city. On the latter occasion Dr. Barringer spoke on the influence of the land-grant colleges. His address, delivered with great earnestness, was enthusiastically received, and made a notable impression upon the large audience that heard him. Those who have been in closest touch with him and who know him well, have forcibly called him a "Good Mixer"—a desirable and potential characteristic of a college president. He likes to mingle among people and exchange ideas with them. In less than three weeks after the opening of the session, he was addressing the student body at the Y. M. C. A. Reception, where hearty yells to "Oom Paul"—as he is familiarly called—resounded from all parts of the auditorium. He is frequently before the students in the college chapel, in the halls of the Y. M. C. A. and the literary societies, and even in their class organizations.

He has won the regard and support of the citizens of the town in seeking to identify their interests with those of the college. His resourcefulness, knowledge of human nature, independence, wide interest in current events and in the progress of all phases of human industry, peculiarly fit him for the varied duties devolving upon him at the V. P. I. Dr. Barringer is, in fact, a strong all-round man, and one of striking personality—at all times approachable, natural, courteous, kind, frank and open-hearted. To be versatile and able to "mix well" in this day of complex social conditions is indeed an invaluable accomplishment.

## **A Public Servant**

No nobler purpose can animate a man's life than that of rendering service to his fellow-man. For a number of years Dr. Barringer has been an efficient public servant as President of the Virginia Anatomical Board, and of the Medical Society of Virginia. He is an influential member of the State Board of Health, the Medical Society of North Carolina, the Southern Surgical and Gynecological Society, the Elisha Mitchell Scientific Society, etc. His interests extend far beyond the borders of the State. He is not only a native "Tar Heel," an adopted son of the "Old Dominion," but a generous, whole-souled Southerner, with a broad outlook before him and with the development of the manifold interests of his country upon his heart.

Nothing could more clearly indicate his public spirit and his desire to serve his countrymen than the reason given for his acceptance of the Presidency of the V. P. I.: "I accepted this position of honor," says Dr. Barringer, "because, as I read the signs of a rapidly growing industrial uplift in Virginia, I am convinced that there is no position in the State, no matter how high, that offers equal opportunities of public service."

The Virginia Polytechnic Institute is to be congratulated upon securing one so ably fitted by education and training, experience and personal endowments, to shape its policies and direct its energies. Plans are already maturing for enlarging the work and increasing the efficiency of the Institute, so as to make it a more powerful factor in the development of the industrial South.

Dr. Barringer enters upon his duties as President of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute, just as he passes the half-century mile-post. The index finger points to a field of unmeasured possibilities in the distance. His attainments, his physical strength and mental vigor, bespeak for him a long career of usefulness and influence. Golden opportunities and grave responsibilities lie in his pathway. His own unshared efforts can avail but little; but with the hearty sympathy and earnest cooperation of the alumni, faculty, student, the State, and all friendly to the cause of education, it is not too much to predict that the "vision of the splendid" of the present will vanish before magnificent realities in the future.

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Notes:

Richard Henry Hudnall, M.A., Ph. D., was professor of English.

\*The "disastrous fire" refers to the October 27, 1895, fire that gutted the Rotunda at the University of Virginia, which was designed by Thomas Jefferson. An annex, completed in 1853, had been added onto the north facade of the Rotunda. The fire started there and when it was finally brought under control, the annex, dome and interior of the Rotunda had been destroyed. Only the Rotunda's charred circular brick walls remained. Info from the [history page](#) for the Rotunda. See also "[Arise and Build](#)" for more information about the fire.