

---

# The Shaping of William A. Alcott, M.D. Pioneer Reformer in Physical Education 1798-1859

by  
PAUL R. MILLS  
Marion College

The purpose of this research project was to examine the roots and foundation of William Alcott's spirit of service and productivity. To analyze the major factors that influenced Alcott, the writer chose a book that Alcott wrote entitled, *Tall Oaks from Little Acorns Grow or Sketches of Distinguished Persons of Humble Origin*. This volume of over 350 pages gives insight into the traits upon which Alcott put high priorities. He mirrored the traits of these great personalities in his own productive, service-titled life.

The character sketches were of: *Roger Williams*, preacher, reformer, and social missionary; *Wilbur Fisk*, educator, preacher, and college president; *Mary Lyon*, educator, teacher, and founder of a women's school; *Benjamin West*, artist of Americana; *Thomas Gallaudet*, reformer, educator, and zealot for the suppressed; *Benjamin Franklin*, writer, inventor, scientist, and diplomat; *Frederic the Great*, soldier, politician, and philanthropist; *Lafitte the Banker*, financier and philanthropist. These eight "tall oaks" shared commonalities with which Alcott could identify: the non-conformist attitude, the reform surge, the perseverance to duty, the utilitarian use of time, the faith and devotion to God, the service-directed life, and the self-educative process that continued all through their lives.

Through "Tall Oaks" Alcott's spirit to serve is reiterated. The nourishment provided by each of these lives is clearly evident.