

Dickinson College Archives & Special Collections

<http://archives.dickinson.edu/>

Civil War Resources

Title: Carlisle Sentinel, "Theodore M. Johnson Tells of Civil War Days in Carlisle"

Date: June 1924

Location: I-Original-1924-2

Contact:

Archives & Special Collections
Waidner-Spahr Library
Dickinson College
P.O. Box 1773
Carlisle, PA 17013

717-245-1399

archives@dickinson.edu

MEMBER OF CLASS OF
'73 HERE ON A VISIT

Theodore M. Johnson Tells of Civil
War Days in Carlisle

One of the interested, and interesting, visitors in Carlisle this week for the Dickinson College commencement was Theo. M. Johnson, of Pittston. He is the son of Dr. Herman M. Johnson, who was President of the College from 1860 to 1868. His sister, Mrs. Mary Johnson Dillon, now deceased, was the author of "In Old Bellaire." The scene of this book was laid in Carlisle, and particularly in the fourth section of East College, which was the home of President Johnson. At that time the rules of the college required that the President live in the dormitories.

Speaking to a Sentinel reporter, Mr. Johnson told of some of his recollections of Civil War days. He said:

"I was a boy of about nine years when the Confederates visited Carlisle and shelled the town. I have a vivid recollection of some of the events. For instance, I remember that I was sitting on the steps in front of my home in East College with my chum Conway Wing Hillman when the first shell suddenly went over the town. We immediately retired indoors. In a few moments came another shell, which struck the East College building. I believe I can point out the very spot, for it struck the casement of the window on the second floor, the sixth from the East side. The place should be suitably marked. I remember also that another shell struck a cherry tree in our back garden and split it in half. That shell must have landed near where the gymnasium now is. It was a dud evidently, for there was no explosion.

"At the time I lived in East College there was a porch not only over the doorway as at present, but on the front of our section and around the side. We had an extensive flower garden, and grew many flowers for the commencement season. The present mound of earth in front of East College was one of the gardens. It had a circular walk around it. The one or two peony bushes now here may have been some of those my mother cultivated, for the walk was lined with peonies. A fence surrounded our gardens both front and back. In the backyard were vegetables and fruit trees.

"A few days before the shelling of the town, the Confederate cavalry arrived from the West. They stopped at the campus. Father went out to meet the commander, and gave him the Masonic sign, which was returned. The commander threw a guard around our home and around all the college buildings, and although the rebel soldiers camped on the campus, not a thing of our's was destroyed, nor was the least bit of damage done to college property. The colonel sent in word that he and his staff would take their meals with us. Mother informed them that she was unable to cook for them, and that all the servants had been scared away. But nevertheless they came, and used their own cooks. We all ate together at the table. A number of the Southern troops had been students at the College, and of course had a fondness for it. More than half the patronage of the institution was from the South in those days. My father had a most difficult administration during the war, but he managed to keep the college going all the time. It was a heavy burden, but he saved it.

"When the Southern troops came in to this part of the state they expected to find aid from the Copperheads, as they were called, but were disappointed. Similarly the Copperheads expected protection for their property, but they too were disappointed."

Mr. Johnson visited the rooms in East in which he lived. He pointed out his father's office on the second floor rear, and his lecture room in front. He was a member of the Class of '73, fifty years ago, but found none of his classmates here. He did not graduate here, but took up medicine and is a practicing physician. Some years ago the College gave him an honorary degree.

While here Mr. Johnson visited the Old Graveyard where his father lies buried. He called on a number of friends, one of them Dr. Horn, the druggist, who knew him at once. The Horn drug store was then, sixty years ago, located where it is now. He visited the Sentinel office to inquire for Mr. David R. Thompson, who was a boyhood friend, not knowing that he had died a year ago. He also knew the Conlyns and Joseph McKeehan and others.

From Sentinel, June 1924