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DICKINSON COLLEGE: An Historical Sketch.
By Wm. H. Allen.

April 6, 1875
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Rev. Fathers and Brethren, Members of the Philadelphia Conference Historical Society:

At the outset of the brief sketch of the history of Dickinson College, which I have been requested to read before this society, I wish to record my obligation to Dr. McCauley, President of the college, for the valuable documents, records and manuscripts which he has kindly sent me for use in the preparation of this paper.

I have also to express my regret that Dr. McCauley was not appointed instead of me for this honorable service.

One word more. In the long list of Presidents of Dickinson College, fourteen in number, every one was a Doctor of Divinity. To avoid the frequent repetition of this title, I have in most instances omitted it in naming those gentlemen. Benjamin Franklin thought it would save time to say grace over the whole meat barrel at once. I desire to save time by giving these men the prefix and affix to their names, all at once.

Soon after the close of the war for Independence the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania chartered a college to be erected and established in the borough of Carlisle to be forever called and known by the name of Dickinson College. The act recites that the honor of this name was conferred on Governor John Dickinson in memory of his great and important services to his country, and in commemoration of his very liberal donation to the institution. In 1783 the country had been exhausted by a long and destructive war; there were

few wealthy men, and the property of these few was small in comparison with that of the class called "rich men" in 1875. The donation of ten thousand dollars at that time was very liberal-as liberal in public estimation as the donation of ten times that sum in our day of large figures.

The original charter of the college contained some wise provisions and a few otherwise. The Principal-as the President is called in the charter-was declared incapable of holding the office of trustee. This cut off from the board the man who of all others best knew the interests and necessities of the college. Another clause was construed to give the students the right of appeal to the board against the decisions of the faculty in cases of discipline. This was the seed of bitter fruit as the sequel will show.

In 1784, Charles Nisbet, an eminent clergyman of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, was elected president of the college. He was a man of vast and varied learning, tenacious memory, subtle and ready wit, remarkable conversational power and exemplary piety. He had been an outspoken friend of the American colonies in their struggle for independence, and this fact added to his great reputation as a scholar made his appointment exceedingly popular in this country. The most flattering representations and promises were held out to him by leading members of the board of trustees to induce him to accept the presidency to which he had been unanimously elected. These were doubtless made in good faith, but without adequate knowledge of the endowment which was needed to support a first class institution of learning. Nisbet hesitated long to leave his native country, the cultivated society of which he was an ornament, the church and congregation of which he was the beloved pastor, and at the age of fifty years to engage in untried duties, on a new arena, among people whose habits and modes of thought were different from his own.

He finally yielded to the urgent solicitations of the trustees and arrived in Philadelphia with his family in June 1785. For three weeks he was the guest of Dr. Benjamin Rush, who entertained him with elegant hospitality, and introduced to his acquaintance the prominent citizens of Philadelphia. His first letter to his friends in Scotland proved that his impressions of America and Americans were very favorable; but subsequent letters indicate that the roseate hues of metropolitan society no longer gladdened his vision when he came to encounter the realities of his new office.

He arrived in Carlisle on the Fourth of July and was received with enthusiasm. He entered that ancient borough in charge of a committee of citizens with an escort of cavalry in time to observe the celebration of the anniversary of independence by noisy republicans.

He was installed in office the next day and commenced the organization of an institution which he had been led to believe was to be the foremost college in America. During nineteen years he labored as few men could have labored, performing an amount of work that was truly prodigious, in the midst of discouragements under which most men would have succumbed. His efforts to obtain a high grade of scholarship were thwarted, his advice too frequently unheeded, and his recommendations unnoticed or rejected by the board. His cherished hopes were disappointed, his salary was reduced below the sum required for the comfortable support of his family, and even the reduced salary was unpaid; and this profound scholar and Christian gentleman went down to his grave under a sense of injustice and defeat, but with the serene consciousness that he had done his best for sound scholarship in Dickinson College, and in the firm belief that the seed which he had planted would spring up and bear fruit under more genial suns and skies.

During the whole time of his presidency Nisbet strove to elevate the grade of scholarship required for graduation, but a majority of the trustees dissented from his educational views, believing them impracticable in the existing condition of the country, and the minority acquiesced in the views of those who hoped to increase the revenue of the college by attracting that class of students who desire to obtain academic honors with the least possible outlay of time and labor.

There is cause for grave doubt whether Nisbet, with all his learning and ability, was the right man at the head of an American college. At the age of fifty his habits of thought and life were so confirmed that he could not easily conform to new social and political opinions and usages. Reared and educated in an aristocratic community, he was transplanted to democratic soil, which did not yield his accustomed nutriment. Familiar with society of the highest culture in which rank and birth were regarded as things of value, he found himself among people every one of whom considered himself as good as any other and a little better. Honest and unreserved in censure of what he did not approve he gave utterance to sentiments which the multitude declared unsuited to their longitude.

He had not the reserve, or if you please, the reticence, which discreet policy would have dictated to a foreigner sojourning among people of large self-esteem and impatient of rebuke. He was intensely anti-French and anti-Jefferson, when Frenchmen and Jefferson were popular, and he launched the shafts of his wit unsparingly at both. He had not that peculiar tact by which men govern others without letting them know it, or at least without wounding their "amour propre." Dr. Fisk formerly president of the Wesleyan University, is reported to have said that the president of a college ought to be able to rule his students, his faculty and his board of trustees without seeming to rule them. This power, so far at least as his board was concerned, Nisbet did not possess. A late president of Dickinson College, with much less learning than Nisbet, had this power, and his administration was a success.

Other causes contributed to depress the college during the first two decades. It had been organized before the country needed it. The College of New Jersey at Princeton and the University of Pennsylvania were adequate to supply all the demand for collegiate education in this section of the country at that time.

But local interests or private jealousies prevailed then, as they have many times since over the dictates of prudence and foresight. It is an American weakness to build half a dozen moribund colleges with no endowment but debt, with only the patronage necessary for one, and with half a dozen poorly paid faculties to the work of one, and to do it very imperfectly. It strongly resembles our sectarian weakness, which induces us to waste the Lord's money in building four or five churches in every little town which has no more population and wealth than are sufficient for the support of one, and placing in the pulpits as many starvling preachers, who supply the half filled pews with spiritual food of about the same quality as the physical food which their sparse and sleepy congregations dole out to them.

Dickinson College was a premature birth, and with the most careful nurture its vital force in early life was necessarily feeble. The proverb says "money is the sinews of war," and it is equally true that money is the brains of a college, for without money brains will not come, or if they come, will not stay. Dickinson College had not a sufficient endowment to make it independent of tuition fees. The fact had then, as it always will have, a demoralizing effect on discipline. When students know that the faculty depend on them for daily bread, and that their

withdrawal or expulsion will close the doors of the institution, they have a firm conviction that they are masters of the situation. Dickinson College was in this precarious condition for nearly half a century. When it sought subscriptions from individuals, it was met with the charge of sectarianism; when it solicited donations from the state it was accused of political heresies and exposed to investigating committees; and when the number of students diminished and the board could neither beg nor borrow, they reduced the salaries of the faculty and lowered the requirements for graduation. This policy caused Nisbet to say that the people in this country seemed to know no difference between a college and a primary school for children.

In 1803 the college was consumed by fire and a larger and more commodious edifice was erected in 1804, but Nisbet did not live to occupy it. This building is now called West College.

After the decease of Nisbet, Robert Davidson, pastor of the Presbyterian church in Carlisle served as president pro tempore for five years. In 1809, Jeremiah Atwater was elected and held the office six years. After his resignation John McKnight was president pro tem one year. During these twelve years the history of the college shows no improvement. It had a constant struggle with poverty. There were dissensions and frequent resignations, in both the Board and Faculty until in 1816 it suspended operations and closed its doors. With no president, no professors, no students, no money, it lived only in its board of trustees. Its grey walls stood silent and empty in the solitude of the campus five years.

In Feb. 1821 by an act of the Legislature the sum of six thousand dollars cash and an annuity of two thousand dollars for five years were granted to the college, in exchange for certain lands, the property of the corporation. By this means the institution was resuscitated and John Mitchell Mason, a distinguished clergyman of New York was elected president. A new faculty was organized consisting of Henry Vethake, Professor of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy, Alexander McClelland, Professor of Rhetoric and Metaphysics and Joseph Spencer, Professor of Latin and Greek. Instruction in Moral Philosophy was given by the president. This was a strong faculty though few in number, and the college soon felt the infusion of new blood. Unfortunately the failing health of Mason compelled him to resign in 1824, and he was succeeded by Wm. Neill of Philadelphia. The same

professors remained in their chairs. The history of Neill's administrations was a series of dissensions between the trustees and faculty, dissensions between members of the board, dissensions between members of the faculty.

The board took care that a quorum of its members should be citizens of Carlisle, in order that they might be easily convened. They met frequently, some years almost every week. They not only legislated for the college, which was their proper function, but they also assumed executive duties, listened to the complaints of students, reversed the decisions of the faculty and restored suspended delinquents. What wonder that wholesome discipline was broken down! What wonder that the students assaulted the room of the professor who resided in the college and destroyed his property! What wonder that they drove the steward and his family out of the college building by violence!

It was reported that Dr. Day of Yale meeting Mason inquired, "what is the matter at Dickinson?" Mason replied that the trustees held fifty sessions in one year. "That is enough," said President Day, "that would ruin any college."

In 1826 the Legislature passed an act donating three thousand dollars a year to the college for the term of seven years. The annuity of two thousand had ceased, and this new grant was all that kept the institution alive, except the inconsiderable revenue from tuition. The next year, an attempt was made by persons unfriendly to the college to induce the Legislature to repeal the law by charges of sectarianism and political partisanship. A committee of investigation was appointed, but the charges were not sustained.

Neill resigned in 1829, and was succeeded by Samuel B. How. In 1830 only six students graduated; in 1831, five; in 1832, none. In that year How resigned, the faculty dispersed, and the college again became comatose till 1833 when the first chapter of its history closed.

During the half century of its existence under many vicissitudes of prosperity and adversity, but mostly of adversity, old Dickinson had the honor of educating many distinguished men. Among its 440 alumni one became president of the United States, one Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, one justice of the same court, two district or territorial judges, three justices of state supreme courts, two senators in congress, ten representatives in congress, eleven

presidents of colleges, sixteen professors in colleges, sixty-eight ministers of the gospel, one bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church, and one governor of a state. These statistics prove that young men of brains and resolute purpose do not depend so much on the nurture of wealthy institutions, nor on the wisdom of boards of trustees, nor on the number, learning or harmony of professors, as on their own industry and perseverance. Every one who is educated is self educated. The instructor may point the way, and guide the steps, and smooth the asperities of the ascent, but if he bear the student in his arms up the arduous steeps of liberal learning, that student will never walk alone, or will move with feeble limbs and tottering steps.

Among the presidents and professors of Dickinson College under the old regime were men of rare ability and professional skill. Unfortunately they had to sustain the literary and scientific character of an institution which had no adequate endowment, and which at some periods of its history had not the credit to borrow money nor the reputation to beg. Add to this the embarrassment resulting from a vicious system of government and discipline, which they had no power to correct or control, and we think they deserve commendation because they accomplished so much, rather than censure because they did not accomplish more.

In 1833 the college building, grounds, and library were transferred by the resignation of the old trustees, one by one, the place of each being filled immediately by a new election, until a majority of about three-fourths of the board were members of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The new board elected John P. Durbin president and professor of Moral Philosophy. In 1834 Robert Emory was elected professor of Greek and Latin, and Merritt Caldwell, professor of Mathematics. A preparatory department, called a grammar school was organized, and two college classes, sophomore and freshman were admitted.

In the same year the Legislature enacted a supplement to the charter containing five sections, two of which were of great importance. The first made the president of the college ex-officio president of the board of trustees, with all the rights of any other member of the board. The third declared that the discipline of the college shall be vested in the professors and faculty. They shall have the power of censuring, suspending, dismissing, or expelling disobedient and refractory students and no appeal shall be allowed to the board of trustees unless

in case of expulsion. This change struck at the root of the difficulties which had harassed the college so many years. Since dismission and expulsion were practically equal penalties, the faculty never resorted to expulsion. Dismission was the severest penalty inflicted and from that there was no appeal.

I have been a long time of the opinion that neither public dismission nor expulsion should be resorted to except in very rare cases. A student who persistently transgresses, in contempt of private admonition and reproof had better be removed quietly by requesting his friends to recall him. The college is thus rid of his evil influence, excitement among the students is avoided, the reputation of the young man is not compromised by a public censure, and neither he nor his friends become enemies of the faculty.

Only in the event of his friends declining to recall him, or of his refusing to leave, should the extreme penalty of college law be inflicted.

It is remarkable that the proper function of the board as the legislative body, and of the faculty as the judicial and executive department was not perceived at an early day. Since the limits of authority between the two bodies were clearly defined by law there has been no conflict.

In 1836 two professors were added to the faculty, one of whom, John McClintock, subsequently became distinguished as a theologian and biblical scholar. He took the chair of Mathematics, and professor Caldwell was transferred to the chair of Mental Philosophy and Political Economy. The other professorship was that of Natural Philosophy and Chemistry. The members of this faculty were diverse in temperament, personal appearance and mental qualities. It would be difficult to bring together five men more unlike; and still more difficult for five men, so unlike, to act together in perfect harmony for a long series of years. They were young men, and except President Durbin, as yet unknown beyond the circle of their personal friends and acquaintances, with reputations to make, each ambitious to excel in his own department, and each believed his department the most important of all. The slow precision and solidity of Caldwell, the refined and classic culture of Emory, and the lightning like quickness of McClintock formed a triad of mental forces, each of which was the complement of the other two. All worked with a will, and earnestly sought to advance the reputation of the college on which their own reputation depended.

The harmony of the faculty during Durbin's administration was largely due to himself. He was a man of tact; courteous, prudent, cautious, wise. He carried his measures in faculty meetings by a marked respect for his colleagues and deference to their opinions, while he adroitly moulded their opinions to the shape of his own by modest suggestions and a certain recondite influence which was perceived only by its effects. His well known devotion to the interest of the college gave weight to his recommendations to the trustees and they always assented to his propositions.

In the presence of his classes, Durbin did not merely hear recitations-the poorest work of an incompetent teacher-he gave instruction. He placed his own mind in electric communication with the minds of his students, thought struck out thought, inquiry suggested inquiry, and bright flashes of intelligence ran from chair to benches and from benches to chair. In his specialty, the evidences of Christianity, with Butler's Analogy for his base line, he marshalled such an array of explanation and argument that the skepticism so common among cultivated but immature minds gave place to enlightened faith, and the defences within which more pronounced infidelity lurked were demolished by his logical batteries. So ready was he to draw from the resources of a full mind that if a student, apprehensive of being caught unprepared, would propose a question of sufficient moment to open the sluices, a torrent of illustration and speculation would rush forth and flow onward till the hour expired, and the lucky fellow would receive a high mark for the silent eloquence of listening.

As a preacher, Dr. Durbin was remarkable for precision and perspicuity in his statement of truths and principles, and for spontaneous bursts of fiery eloquence which startled his congregation like a peal of thunder from a clear sky, and burned indelible marks on their minds and memories. In those moments of inspiration his breast swelled as if the lungs would burst, his eyes expanded and flashed with almost terrific light, and his voice rose to a full penetrating powerful volume, of which the slow monotone of the opening of his discourse had given no promise. It was good proof of his power in the pulpit that after preaching in Carlisle once every month for twelve years, he filled the house as few others could.

It is not my purpose, in this brief history to pronounce eulogies on the living or the dead. The Athenian law giver said to the wealthiest of kings, that no man can with certainty be called happy so long as he lives. Of that faculty Dr. Durbin

and the present speaker are the only ones, whose happiness, as Solon puts the case, still hangs in doubt. All the others, Caldwell, Emory and McClintock of the college, Roszel and Carey of the Grammar School are no longer subject to error or misfortune. The record of their lives is sealed up secure from blur and blot. They left their work unfinished, but the work they did was nobly done. As one after another they passed over the dark river to the bright shore beyond and rendered the account of their stewardship, we seemed to hear the voice of the Master, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

In 1840 the faculty was still further increased by the election of Thomas Emory Sudler to the chair of Mathematics which he filled for eleven years. He was an amiable, simple-hearted, conscientious, sincere Christian, so truthful and unsuspecting that he knew nothing of "ways that are dark and tricks that are vain," in which some students are adept. An incident will illustrate his honest simplicity. After a senior examination he expressed much gratification that certain students who he thought would fail, had passed the ordeal very creditably. We told him that the young gentlemen had got hold of his questions beforehand. A day or two before the next senior examination he said to the class "I believe that my questions were copied last year, but you will not find them for I keep them in my hat." When the professor went home to dinner he left his hat on the table in his front entry, a senior slipped in, carried away the hat, the questions were copied and the hat replaced on the table before the professor left his dining room.

On the advent of Prof. Sudler, McClintock was transferred to the chair of Greek and Latin. In 1845 Durbin resigned the presidency having accepted the office of Missionary Secretary, and Robert Emory was elected his successor. Emory died in 1848, beloved and mourned by all, and was succeeded by Jesse T. Peck, who resigned at the end of four years. Peck was a man of commanding presence, had a good voice and was a reputable preacher. But he had not received a collegiate education and his want of acquaintance with what may be termed the unwritten law of colleges subjected him to numerous embarrassments. He was a man of large heart, genial, sincere, friendly and confiding. While he labored earnestly to elevate the moral tone of the students, he was not satisfied with the results. It must be admitted that the right kind of timber for a respectable bishop cannot always be carved into proper shape for

the president of a college, nor is every successful president of a college fit for a bishop.

Charles Collins, President of Emory and Henry College of Virginia, was elected to the presidency in 1852. He had much personal dignity, intellect and learning, large experience as an educator and administrator, and was a disciplinarian of the rigorous school. It was observed that Collins seemed to be in his native element whenever he had a knotty case of discipline on his hands. He resigned his office at the end of eight years, and took charge of a college for young ladies near Memphis, Tennessee. He was succeeded by Herman M. Johnson, president of a college in Missouri. Johnson brought to the service of Dickinson a mind enriched by classical culture, and biblical learning together with fair administrative ability. During a large part of his presidency the college labored under pecuniary embarrassments which were the consequences of war and the withdrawal of southern patronage, but he and his corps of professors, at the cost of privation and self-sacrifice remained steadfast at their post till the return of peace gave promise of renewed prosperity.

The Romans decreed honors to their magistrates who in times of extreme peril had not despaired of the Republic. Let the names of Johnson, Wilson, Hillman, Boswell, Stayman be held in remembrance, for in the dark days of adversity they did not despair of the college.

The contribution for the support of the college in the centennial of Methodism amounted to one hundred thousand dollars. The income from this fund, added to that from previous endowments, amounts to somewhat more than ten thousand dollars a year. Although this sum is insufficient to place the college on the vantage ground which it ought to occupy it has maintained its efficiency as an institution of high grade.

After the decease of Dr. Johnson, Robert L. Dashiell was placed at the helm. He was eloquent in the pulpit, genial on the platform, popular in manners and address. He was a graduate of the class of 1846, and the first alumnus of the college who was raised to its presidency. During his administration all the members of the faculty claimed Dickinson as their Alma Mater. After four years service he was elected Missionary Secretary by the General Conference of 1872, and removed to New York.

The present incumbent, Jas. A. McCauley, an alumnus of the class of 1847, succeeded Dashiell. He has encountered some difficulties and dissensions in the faculty, which had their origin in former administrations, but these have been adjusted or removed, and the college is again moving onward in a hopefully prosperous career. It has a prudent pilot, and fears not "to breast the sea."

Looking over the list of alumni during the last forty years, which are included in the second chapter of the history of Dickinson, we observe that the children of the second marriage far out number their elder brethren, and that their names are found in almost every position of usefulness and honor. In the forum and the field, in the sacred desk and legislative halls, in foreign missions and in bishops' chairs, in science and literature, in the cabinet and on the bench of justice, in manufactures, agriculture and commerce, they are doing manly work for God and men, and conferring new honor on the institution which was the nurse of their youth.

I hesitate to use names in this connection lest I should omit those equally worthy of honorable mention. But among many whom Dickinson honors and who honor her, we may name in the office of bishop, Cummins and Bowman; as pulpit orators, Tiffany and Ridgaway; in the fields of science, Baird and Himes; in literature, Deems, Conway and Crooks; in jurisprudence, Fisher; in politics, Cresswell, Todd, and Albright; in classical and biblical learning, Professor Harman. Add to these no small number of the younger alumni, who emulate the fame of those just named and who will in due time gather laurels as green as theirs. Happy is the mother who has reared such sons.

When the hundredth anniversary of the opening of Dickinson College shall arrive ten years hence, let her living alumni come up from all parts of the country, and from the four quarters of the earth, and gather around her hearth-stone to rejoice together, and to pledge anew their fidelity to culture, patriotism and religion, to one another and to Alma Mater. Let them come with full hearts and hands, and pour into her lap such offerings as shall place her where her founders meant she should stand-in the front rank of American Colleges.