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THE OLD COLLEGE LOT

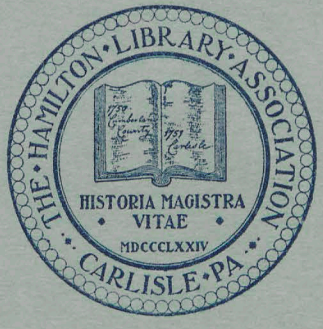
"Notable as the birthplace and home of Carlisle's colonial Grammar School, as the seat of Dickinson College for twenty years, as the spot where probably without interruption youth have been educated since 1773."

Address

By

Edward W. Biddle

Read before the Hamilton Library (Historical) Association, Carlisle, Pa. on Friday Evening, September 17, 1920



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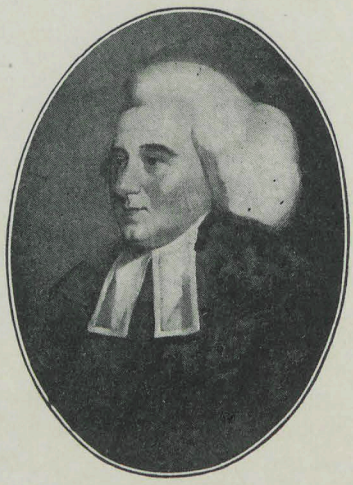

REV. CHARLES NISBET, D.D.

FIRST PRESIDENT OF DICKINSON COLLEGE

1785-1804

PORTRAIT IN THE COLLEGE CHAPEL PAINTED
IN SCOTLAND ABOUT 1776

THE OLD COLLEGE LOT

"Notable as the birthplace and home of Carlisle's colonial Grammar School, as the seat of Dickinson College for twenty years, as the spot where probably without interruption youth have been educated since 1773."

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The early history of the Old College Lot, as it is known even unto this day, has been shrouded in darkness that seemed to be impenetrable. Officially the lot is No. 219 in the original plan of the town, 60 feet in width by 240 feet in depth, situated sixty feet west of Bedford street and extending from Pomfret street to Liberty alley. We have taken considerable pains to gather from many sources and to put into connected form some long-forgotten facts in relation to this subject, hoping that their presentation here will awaken public interest and thereby rescue the lot's really memorable history from an undeserved oblivion.

On March 3, 1773, the property was conveyed by Thomas Penn and John Penn to nine prominent citizens of Carlisle in trust that they "shall and will from time to time and at all times forever hereafter permit and suffer the same to be applied to the use and purpose of keeping and maintaining a Grammar School, to be taught and kept in one or more proper houses or buildings on the same lot of ground to be erected." The deed has been preserved and is in possession of the school directors of

Carlisle, but it was not until February 14, 1893, that its custodians saw fit to have it recorded in the courthouse where its contents are now open to inspection. Further investigation reveals that title to the property was withdrawn from the body of citizens and was given to Dickinson College on October 3, 1788, by an act of assembly which has escaped the attention of previous writers. Its discovery is important in connection with this evening's paper—not only as establishing that Dickinson College at one time owned the lot, but because its elaborate preamble contains some important historical data. After mentioning the above-recited condition that was inserted in the deed of 1773, the act sets forth that the trustees named in said deed had erected upon the premises a house in which a grammar schoool was kept and taught for several years.

It also sets forth that a number of the surviving trustees and other inhabitants of Carlisle had presented a petition to the assembly stating that "the trustees of Dickinson College have at a considerable expense erected buildings on the said lot for the said college, in which it hath been kept since the establishment thereof," and that "the petitioners conceive that the good intentions of the late proprietaries are fully answered by the establishment of the said college in Carlisle, as there is annexed to it a very respectable grammar school, which is under the direction of the principal and under the immediate care of a professor of languages and assistant tutors," wherefore they prayed for the passage of a law that would vest the premises in the trustees of Dickinson College. The prayer was granted, and the college by legislative act was given a fee simple title to the land with all its improvements.

Dickinson College was incorporated on September 9, 1783. The minutes of the trustees show that at their first meeting held in Carlisle in the month of April, 1784, three preliminary meetings having taken place in Philadelphia, the Rev. Dr. Charles Nisbet, a learned Presbyterian divine of Montrose, Scotland, was elected principal of the college, and James Ross professor of languages; and that later in the same day "Mr. James Ross appeared before the board and having consented to accept the place of professor of the Latin and Greek languages, to which he was elected, he was qualified according to the law."

The personal attendance of the latter indicates that he was employed at the time as a teacher in the grammar school under the old regime, and this conclusion is fortified by the fact that his name appears in the tax list of 1782 and his occupation is given there as "Latin master". In order to provide for increased demands on the institution, the trustees in September, 1784, directed one of their number to have repairs made to an apartment on the upper floor of the schoolhouse "for the purpose of a mathematical school." The structure referred to was located on the aforesaid lot, facing Liberty alley, and was of brick two stories high with one room on each floor. In October, 1785, it was resolved that an addition to the building be constructed; and a report having been received in May, 1786, that the cellar of the additional building was dug and walled, an order was drawn on the treasurer for 100 pounds toward defraying the expense, which ultimately amounted to $583.62. Pending its completion, a committee was authorized to procure the temporary use of rooms in the courthouse for the teaching of such classes as the faculty should judge necessary.

The labors of Professor Ross seem to have been crowned with success from the beginning, for at a meeting of the college trustees in June, 1785, it was reported that thirty-five young men were enrolled in the Latin School. The professor presented a petition to the board stating that the tuition and entrance fees had been adequate to pay his salary, and requesting that an addition to the salary be granted to correspond with the increased accession of students, in response to which at a meeting in August his annual compensation was increased from 130 to 150 pounds. There can be no question that his classes were taught in the lower room of the Old College, which suddenly became the seat of a much more flourishing school than would have been possible under ordinary circumstances.

Before bidding farewell to Dickinson's pioneer teacher it should be stated that in 1792 his connection with the college was severed, and that afterwards he filled the chair of ancient languages successively in Chambersburg, Lancaster and Philadelphia. He was the author in 1798 of a Latin grammar published in Chambersburg, which passed through several editions, and subsequently of a Greek grammar, and was the edi-

tor of various Latin books for students. But the lure of Carlisle never forsook him. If one enters the old graveyard through the gate on South street and glances to the right, he will see about forty feet distant an upright gravestone on which is cut in large letters, "In memory of James Ross L. L. D. who departed this life in Philadelphia July 6th, A. D. 1827, aged 84 years." Beneath the green sod that is capped by said stone, within a few hundred yards of the scene of his early struggles and triumphs, lie the remains of the scholarly gentleman who for more than eight years was the presiding genius of the grammar school. An adjacent gravestone records the death of his faithful wife Catharine on December 1st, 1846, aged 82 years. Peace to their ashes!

Anyone who desires to understand conditions at the lot after 1786 may do so by visiting the premises and making an inspection from Liberty alley. Forty-one feet back from it and occupying the full width of the lot is a two story brick building containing four rooms, with a centre hall on each floor running north and south. It stands on the site of the Old College, like it facing the alley and taking up the full width of the lot, and is planned on similar lines, but is twelve feet deeper and perhaps somewhat higher. The original structure was burned down on Saturday, April 28, 1860, as appears from an item in a local newspaper of Wednesday, May 2, 1860, which we partially copy:

> "An alarm of fire about half past three o'clock on Saturday morning led us to that old landmark on Liberty alley, known 'time whereof the memory of man runneth not to the contrary' as the Old College. It was evidently set on fire by some evil disposed person in a spirit of mere wanton mischief. The fire appeared to have been kindled on the stairway of the first story, and before it could be subdued the roof and upper part of the building were entirely destroyed. The building was owned by the board of schoool directors, and was occupied by four of the public schools....In attempting to trace back the history of the Old College, we have been unable to obtain any definite information. Dickinson College was chartered by the legislature of Pennsylvania in 1783....It must have been about this period that the Old College building was erected, and it may have been subsequently enlarged as the one end is of stone and the other of brick. It is not known certainly that the building was erected by the trus-

tees of Dickinson College, but it is presumed so, as the college was organized in 1784 under the Rev. Dr. Nisbet as president; the house being divided into four large apartments suitable for recitation rooms and used as such until the close of the last century."

The late C. P. Humrich, Esq., who was a school director in Carlisle from 1857 to 1897, and therefore held that office at the date of the fire, wrote a letter that was published in the Carlisle Daily Herald of February 6, 1896, which states:

"The original building was erected on the alley end of the lot. It was a two story structure, with a hall running north and south through the middle, and having two rooms on each floor or four in all. According to my recollection the one half or east end was built of stone, and the other half or west end of brick; and it is probable that they were built at different times, the first to accommodate the 'Latin School,' and the addition when the college was opened. As soon as the school directors obtained possession they fitted it up to contain four schools, and it was so used until the building was partially destroyed by an incendiary fire on the morning of Saturday, April 28, 1860. The board then determined to take down the old building and erect a new one on the same site, but of larger dimensions."

In a communication to Dr. Nisbet prepared by the board of trustees in September, 1784, it was said, "At present the grammar school is kept in a commodious brick building, the property of the gentlemen of the town, which also affords conveniency for a mathematical school," and mention is made in an early financial exhibit of the college that the addition of 1786 was constructed of stone; therefore the above supposition that the stone end was the older was a mistake. The following brief description of the building is taken from an advertisement of the college dated December 19, 1786, that appeared in the Philadelphia newspapers:

"The house in which the classes are taught at present is situated in a pleasant part of the town, and is sixty feet long and twenty-three broad. Three large rooms are finished for the purpose of teaching; there is also a library room and an apartment for the philosophical apparatus."

Surprising progress had been made in the acquisition of books and scientific instruments, nearly all of which had to be imported. In regard to these essential adjuncts of college work the advertisement said:

> "The library already consists of two thousand seven hundred and six volumes, Hebrew, Greek, Latin, English, German, Low Dutch and Italian languages, the donations of gentlemen in England, Scotland and Philadelphia. The philosophical apparatus contains a complete electrical machine, a camera obscura of a new construction, a prism, a telescope, a solar microscope, a barometer and thermometer upon one scale, and a large and elegant set of globes."

Two other allusions to the structure as it was in the 18th century are available. One was by John Penn who came to Carlisle on April 11, 1788, and on that day made an entry in his journal, "The present college or schoolhouse is a small patched-up building of about sixty by fifteen feet." The term *patched-up* apparently was suggested by the fact that the house was of brick with a stone addition, but from living witnesses we learn that this blemish was afterwards completely concealed by a coat of plaster applied to the outer walls. The second allusion was by Chief Justice Taney, a member of the class of 1795, who stated in his autobiography written fifty-nine years after graduation, "The building was a small and shabby one fronting on a dirty alley, but with a large open lot in the rear where we often amused ourselves with playing bandy." That the alley should be described as being *dirty* is not surprising, for that was the ordinary condition of the alleys and streeets in all of the municipalities of the country, particularly in the small ones.

The real length (width) of the building was not 60 feet as stated in the advertisement, because the lot at the alley end was only 58 feet wide, as was discovered at the time measurements were made for a new building after the fire. At a meeting of the school directors on May 23, 1860, three propositions were considered: 1st, That the old building be repaired, which was lost by a vote of four to two. 2d, That a house be erected on the centre of the lot large enough to accommodate six schoools, which was lost by a similar vote. 3rd, That the old building be taken down and a new one placed on the same site four feet or more wider (deeper) than the old one and

to accommodate four schools; this was approved by a vote of four to two, and on May 28 the dimensions were definitely fixed at 58 by 35 feet. Damages to the old building, which was insured, had been duly assessed at $1,016, and a contract was awarded for the present structure on July 2, 1860, for $2,150.

What an almost priceless possession would be ours if the schoool directors on May 23 had adopted the first proposition submitted at the meeting, and had determined to repair the old house and thus preserve it. Two of the six actually voted in favor of this course, and no doubt all would have done so if they had heard such a plea for the building's restoration as the Hamilton Library Association would submit today. It is likely that the sentimental and historical viewpoint which we would urge was not presented at all, and that the decision was controlled entirely by principles of utility. This is not meant to imply that the directors were blamable—no, for they acted conscientiously according to the light that was given them. But a different and more mellow spirit pervades the country now, kept aglow by the systematic instilling of a feeling of reverence for structures and places that are associated with important events.

The preceding information supports several conclusions: 1st, The Old College was planned on the same design as the present schoolhouse, having on each floor two large rooms which were separated by hallways running north and south, except that one of the four rooms was divided into two. 2nd, It occupied exactly the same position on the lot. 3rd, It faced the alley and extended across the entire width of the lot. 4th, Its depth was only 23 feet, as compared with the 35 foot depth of the present building. 5th, The west and east halves were built at different times, the former of brick and the latter of stone, and at a subsequent date both were covered with a coat of plaster which gave them a uniform appearance. 6th, The west end was erected in 1773 by the grantees named in the Penn deed, and the east end in 1786 by the trustees of Dickinson College. 7th, The west end was used as a grammar school under the management of the said grantees until 1784, when it was taken over by the college for the same purpose, and beginning in 1785 was used also for college work. 8th, Under the limitation

in the deed of March 3, 1773, the property would have reverted to the Penn heirs if it had ceased to be occupied as a grammar schoool. 9th, By the act of assembly of October 3, 1788, an absolute title was vested in the college without condition or trust of any kind.

It may occur to some persons that the legislative transfer of the lot to Dickinson College was a rather high-handed proceeding, because in a summary way it changed the title and thereby cancelled the contingent right of the donors. The obvious justification was that an act of assembly had been passed on November 27, 1779, which vested in the commonwealth all of the lands of the late proprietaries, except their private estates and their manors of which surveys had been returned to the land office on or before July 4, 1776; and as a consideration granted to their heirs 130,000 pounds sterling payable in annual instalments, the first payment to be made at the expiration of a year after the termination of the war. In due time these instalments were paid to the proper parties, and taking into consideration the circumstances of the case there is no reason to apprehend that injustice was done. In striking contrast to this was the action of Delaware, which confiscated the Penn lands in that state without making any reparation.

In order to realize the significance of the original grant of the premises for the purpose of keeping and maintaining a grammar school, it is necessary to know what was meant by that term and what was the nature of such a school. The Century Dictionary defines it, "A school for teaching grammar; originally a school for teaching Latin, which was begun by committing the grammar to memory....Latin and Greek were the chief subjects of instruction, and the schools became places of preparation for universities." In Great Britain schools of that character were an integral part of the educational system, and in many of the cities and principal towns were largely sustained by endowments, hence it was natural that the English proprietaries of Pennsylvania should have deemed their establishment in the colony to be very desirable.

The Rev. Dr. Charles Nisbet, who was inaugurated as the first principal (president) of Dickinson College on July 5, 1785, was prepared at the grammar schoool of

Haddington, Scotland, to enter the University of Edinburgh. At the same institution John Knox had been a pupil in the early part of the 16th century; and there two centuries later John Witherspoon was trained, who was president of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University) from 1768 until his death in 1794, and was the only clergyman that appended his name to the Declaration of Independence. It was also in Haddington that the captivating Jane Baillie Welsh, since famous under the married name of Jane Welsh Carlyle, received systematic instruction in the classics and other branches of study at the hands of a private tutor. That her mental culture should have been provided for to an extent so unusual for girls of that period was owing, we may assume, to the atmosphere of learning which enveloped the vicinity of the grammar school. Great possibilities loomed up for the fledgling institution at Carlisle.

The structure on Liberty alley was not at any time satisfactory to the college authorities. Not only were its surroundings unattractive, but it was not commodious enough to provide for an increasing body of students divided into numerous classes. Dr. Nisbet said in his report to the trustees on November 13, 1786, "No proper place has yet been provided for teaching, so that if a great number of scholars had come up, they would have been obliged to go home again for want of accommodation, and the knowledge of this must have driven many to other places and seminarys;" and he then animadverted on the mean appearance and small dimensions of the building even after a proposed enlargement should be completed. In order to avoid embarrassment in that respect a petition had been presented to congress on behalf of the trustees as early as January, 1785, asking for a lease of the government buildings that then stood on the property now utilized as a United States medical field service school; constant efforts also were made for several years to purchase the premises, or a portion of them. Because of its bearing on that subject, interest attaches to the following excerpt from a letter dated October 21, 1786, written to the board of trustees by Dr. Benjamin Rush of Philadelphia, one of its members:

> 'I beg leave in the first place to renew my testimony against repairing or occupying the public works in the neighborhood of the town for a college. From the fullest infor-

mation of the nature of the titles to those buildings, and the price which would be demanded for them if a title could be made, I am persuaded that an attempt to procure or improve them for a college would end in the total annihilation of our funds. A more convenient and elegant building may be erected a few years hence at the west end of the town, and for one-half of the money that it would take to repair the public works. The credit of our college will not be impaired by our professors teaching for a few years in the schoolhouse which is at present occupied by them. The foundation of the reputation of the college of Princeton was laid in a private room at Newark by that great man of God, Mr. Burr."

Subsequent developments changed the attitude of Dr. Rush and he became an ardent advocate of the plan, which never came to fruition, to acquire for the college at least a section of the government property. Protracted efforts to that end having proved fruitless, John and Richard Penn on July 25, 1799, for a consideration of $151.50, conveyed to Dickinson College a tract of land in the western part of Carlisle containing 7 acres and 92 perches. Upon that ground, which has ever since been owned and occupied by the college, the erection of a suitable building was at once begun. As funds were scarce the work progressed slowly, and the structure was still uncompleted when on the morning of February 3, 1803, it was destroyed by fire communicated from a pile of hot ashes. From a letter written on the next day by Col. John Montgomery, a trustee living in Carlisle, we learn that three of the "twelve large apartments" were finished and had been used by the students for four or five weeks.

In the meantime the Old College Lot had been sold at public vendue to Charles McClure for $533 in anticipation of its approaching abandonment; but the precious library and philosophical apparatus had not been removed, and happily the whole property was restored to its former owner and the operations of the college went on without a break. Exercises were resumed forthwith at Liberty alley and were continued there until about the close of 1805, at which time another building was ready for occupancy on the location of the one that had been consumed by fire. Into this second structure, which is the imposing "Old West" that now graces the campus, the classes were transferred, and the connection of Dickinson College with the Old College Lot ceased forever.

The deeds on record in the courthouse show the subsequent changes of ownership. On July 1, 1811, the executors of Charles McClure conveyed the lot to Joseph Knox for $1000, reciting that it was known as the Old College. On November 20, 1837, the year after the opening of the public schools, Joseph Knox conveyed it to the school directors of Carlisle for $1,133.33, designating it as the Old College Lot. It was the first property acquired by the school directors, and from the time of purchase four schoools were conducted there until it was destroyed by the incendiary fire of April 28, 1860. The present schoolhouse on Liberty alley was immediately erected on its site and was put into service in September of the same year, but in 1913 its use for school purposes was discontinued because it faced on an alley, and was not resumed until last fall. Since then a primary school for colored children has occupied the west room on the upper floor. The Pomfret street end of the lot apparently remained vacant until about 1845, when two one story frame houses were erected thereon that were utilized for schools until they were demolished in 1868 to make way for the present Hamilton School which covers the full frontage. It is much to be regretted that the architecture of this building is of an ornate and nondescript variety, typical of the prevalent taste of the day, instead of being in a simple colonial style that would have been both more appropriate and more beautiful.

In his letter to the Carlisle Herald of February 6, 1896, Mr. Humrich said that he believed the Old College was used for private schoools from the time it was given up by Dickinson College in 1805 until it was acquired by the school directors in 1837. There was good basis for that belief. The interior being composed of large rooms and wide halls, without either kitchen or dining room, could not have been adapted to housekeeping without expensive alterations, and the location of the building on an alley would have made it most objectionable as a residence. It was planned and arranged solely for the purpose to which it had been applied, and for these reasons there is a strong probability that it was occupied by schools during the whole of the intermediate period referred to, although occasionally one of the rooms was leased for other purposes. Corroboration of this view is found in an advertisement signed by John B. Murray and Gad Day, two established school-teachers of the town, which

was inserted in several issues of the American Volunteer, beginning on March 31, 1825:

> "The subscribers, having united their interests in their professional avocations, and rented the Old College in this borough, most respectfully inform their friends and the public that they will open therein on the fourth day of April next a Classical and English Academy. In the classical department will be taught the Latin, Greek and French languages, embracing a course of studies that will qualify the student for admisssion into Dickinson or any other college in the Union. In the English department will be taught reading, writing, arithmetick, English grammar, geography with the use of the maps and globes, history, mathematicks, and all the branches which constitute a polite and useful English education. The rooms designed for the two departments are separate, and the classes will have no communication with each other except when brought together for exercise under the immediate inspection of the teachers..."

Mr. Day continued to conduct a flourishing school at that place until the spring of 1836, when he removed to "spacious and elegant" rooms in Irvine's Row. Accepting as a fact the reasonable inference that private schools were conducted in the Old College until it was purchased by the school directors, the lot is unique in that it has been devoted continuously to the cause of education for 147 years. A decade prior to the incorporation of Dickinson College it was donated by the proprietaries as the seat of a grammar school, primarily to serve the inhabitants who had settled west of the Susquehanna river. The presence of such an institution, as is pointed out in another paper, was the principal factor in starting the movement which brought about the founding of a college in Carlisle. That it also helped materially to sustain the college is disclosed by the opening sentence of a report by Dr. Nisbet to the board of trustees on November 13, 1786, "The grammar school, which was the foundation of this seminary and contained always the greatest numbers, consists at present of forty-one boys divided into eight classes and under the care of one master."

According to the evidence, the downstairs room of the small house in which the school was carried on became the home of the grammar school of Dickinson College in the spring of 1784. In the fall of that year the

upper room likewise was prepared for occupancy, and in 1786 the capacity of the building was doubled by the attachment of an addition to its eastern end. For twenty years succeeding the arrival of Dr. Nisbet, from 1785 to 1805, it furnished joint quarters for the college and the grammar school, both being under the direction of the college trustees and closely affiliated. This association continued and the grammar school survived until 1869, when for financial reasons it was abolished. In 1878, however, it was re-established under the name of Preparatory School and was started afresh on a career of usefulness that lasted for thirty-nine years. A spacious building named Conway Hall was erected for its accommodation and dedicated in 1905, and there the school was maintained with varying success until the exigencies of war brought its long and honorable existence to a close in 1917. After a thorough renovation, Conway Hall was reopened yesterday as a dormitory for the incoming freshman class of the college.

Let us pause for a moment to consider what an important function the Old College performed. To the ambitious it offered a sure foundation for advanced mental training. It was like a burning torch flashing out amidst the shadows of ignorance, furnishing a place in the county where boys might be rescued from the dull materialism that permeated society, and might obtain an inspiring glimpse of what lies beyond the circle of the senses. There they were given opportunity to learn that man is not doomed to live by bread alone, but that his highest happiness is to be found in an ethereal sphere which only the educated may enter; where the brilliant fancies of the poet and the romancer, the annals of the patient historian, the profound speculations of the philosopher and the mystic, are inscribed in a great open book; where distinctions arising from wealth and social position are unknown, and the lowliest individuals may freely commune with the master spirits of the race—an asylum from sorrow, a genuine paradise on this side of the grave replete with purest happiness. The conventional branches of study necessarily brought the students into contact with the immortal writers of Greece and Rome, with the history and literature of those empires, with the customs that prevailed when they were at the zenith of their glory. It is a matter of common experience that education serves to nourish and strengthen our la-

tent intellectual powers, which otherwise must lie dormant, and that persistent cultivation is required to bring those powers to complete development. This is well illustrated in the beautiful lines of Longfellow:

"The heights by great men reached and kept
Were not attained by sudden flight,
But they, while their companions slept,
Were toiling upward in the night."

A new aspect of life and of its possibilities was thus presented, one that was directly at war with the harshness and provincialism of the age. The students went forth from what may literally be called the "classic halls" of the house on Liberty alley, prepared as leaders of men to spread broadcast the enlightened views they had obtained while there. In 1795 a diploma was conferred upon a talented lad from Maryland, named Roger B. Taney, who in 1836 became the fifth chief justice of the United States supreme court and retained that exalted office for more than twenty-eight years. He makes the interesting statement in his autobiography that the initial journey to Carlisle from his home in Calvert county consumed nearly a fortnight, and that he was under the unpleasant necessity of carrying in specie enough money to pay his expenses until the next vacation. John Bannister Gibson, David Watts, Charles Huston, George Metzger and others to the number of approximately 300, many of whom afterwards became eminent, also received their collegiate education in the humble little house, and of these 190 were graduated. The foregoing figures do not include the perhaps larger number who failed to advance beyond the grammar school. Some of the pupils came from remote points, as is shown by the following extract from a letter dated Carlisle, February 18, 1790, written by Gen. John Armstrong to Dr. Benjamin Rush of Philadelphia, both of whom were trustees of the college:

"The abilities, assiduity and integrity of the Doctor (Nisbet) is manifest in the discharge of his office, doing great honor to the college and to your primary choice. The young men who are arrived at a good degree of maturity are deeply attached to him, and his lectures which they carry home have spread his fame far thro' the union, insomuch that a gentleman has lately brought his son from Kentucky and gives us expec-

tations of several more in the spring from that distant country."

Similar testimony is found in a letter of August 19, 1791, from Dr. Nisbet to Charles Wallace, a correspondent in Edinburgh:

> "The opportunities that I have of serving the public are indeed few, viz, reading lectures to a few young men on the elements of morals on the week days, and preaching to a thin, lifeless congregation on Sabbath. But my sphere of service may be said to be large in another respect, as our few students are collected from sundry states and some of them from more than eight hundred miles distance."

And to the same effect Judge Thomas Smith, a trustee residing in Carlisle, wrote to Dr. Rush on January 1, 1793, "Poor as our accommodations are, we have students from each of the southern states, including Georgia." At that time the southern states in addition to Georgia were Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and the newly admitted Kentucky, composing a group of six commonwealths that covered an immense territory extending from Pennsylvania almost to the Gulf of Mexico.

It was at the Old College that Dr. Nisbet taught for over eighteen years, until the time of his death on January 18, 1804, ably assisted by the Rev. Dr. Robert Davidson, Professor James Ross and other cultured men. That was the scene of his activities as principal of the college --and there in lectures on moral philosophy, logic, systematic theology, metaphysics, belles lettres and economies, he drew from a fund of learning that probably was without parallel in this country. His words were read from manuscript deliberately and with suitable pauses, and the students were expected to write them in books substantially as they came from the speaker's lips. In regard to this Judge Taney states:

> "His mode of instruction was by lectures written out and read to the class slowly, so that we might write them down, yet it required a pretty good penman and fixed attention to keep up with him; and with all my efforts I was sensible that his idea was not always expressed with perfect accuracy in my copy. But it was always sufficiently full to enable me to recall the substance of what he said when, in order to impress it upon my mind, I read it over. In addition to these

lectures there was a compendium of each science, in the form of question and answer, which each of the class was required to copy."

More than 700 of the lectures, as taken down by Rev. Samuel Mahon of the class of 1789, are now upon the shelves of this library bound in eight volumes averaging about 750 pages each, a total of 6,000 pages. There were 418 lectures in the department of systematic theology alone, filling four volumes, which are believed to have been the earliest on that subject delivered in the United States; they were begun on December 1, 1788, and continued to January 5, 1791, but were not repeated because of the great length of the course. The manual toil imposed on the students by such a system soon became exceedingly irksome, as might have been anticipated, and class after class rebelled against it. Finally the trustees took official notice of their complaints and in April. 1794, recommended to the faculty "to lighten as much as posssible the labor of writing on the part of the students, without abridging the plan of education or the time of attendance in college for that purpose." Presumably this admonition had the desired effect, for it had become generally known that dread of the task of constant writing had deterred a number of young men from matriculating at Dickinson.

Dr. Nisbet was a remarkable man, and from many sources we learn that he possessed a memory so marvelous that it caused amazement in those who were fortunate enough to have the pleasure of his acquaintance. In a communication sent to him by Dr. Benjamin Rush on June 1, 1784, this glowing outlook was pictured, "Dickinson College, with Dr. Nisbet as its head. bids fair for being the first literary institution in America," a statement that expressed the genuine views of the writer. So varied and seemingly inexhaustible was his storehouse of information that the title "a walking library" was familiarly attached to him before he left his native land. Proof of his high reputation there as a scholar is afforded by a letter addressed to him on May 25, 1767, by the Rev. Dr. John Witherspoon, of Paisley, Scotland, who stated that in deference to the wishes of his wife he had declined a call to the presidency of the College of New Jersey, and added "I then named *you* to him (Dr. Rush) as the person of all my acquaintance the fittest for that office, and said that your

being so much younger than me was in my opinion an advantage instead of a loss. He told me you had been mentioned by his friends at Edinburgh, and that he was sure that any person recommended by me to them would be chosen by the trustees." At that time the recipient of the letter was only thirty-one years old, and but for the fact that Dr. Witherspoon speedily changed his mind and decided to accept the position himself, in all probability Dr. Nisbet would have become permanently domiciled at Princeton instead of at Carlisle.

Although Dr. Davidson was the settled minister at the Presbyterian Church in the town, Dr. Nisbet alternated with him in filling its pulpit and ordinarily preached exactly an hour. For more than a year after his arrival there was only one sermon on Sunday, which shocked his sense of fitness and propriety, and he sought to have the matter corrected in accordance with the habit in churches abroad. Hence he said in a letter on January 10, 1787, "I am endeavoring to get the people to attend public worship, and we hope to have two sermons next Sabbath, which is a great reform." His hope was gratified and the projected reform carried out, yet the increased services in the church did not interfere in any way with his attention to the needs of the college, for the preparation of a sermon gave him no trouble whatever and he always preached without aid from manuscript. Upon this subject his biographer, the Rev. Dr. Samuel Miller, comments as follows, "The truth is his mind was so richly furnished with knowledge, his memory so extraordinary, his imagination so much under his command, and all his powers so prompt and obedient to his will, that it seemed almost as easy for him to preach as to breathe."

A brief quotation from a letter dated September 2, 1790, written by him to a friend, will give an idea of his conscientious application to the important business with which he was intrusted, as well as throw a sidelight on the prevailing indifference of the people to religion:

> "You may suppose that I do not live an idle life when I have been obliged to compose five and often six divinity lectures a week for these two years past; and the three former years I spent in composing my lectures on philosophy, which I had barely finished when I was obliged to begin others. I live alone, and neither pay nor receive visits. I preach every Sabbath, tho' I have no pastoral charge, but preaching is a

very uncomfortable business here where there are so few that read their Bibles, or pray in their families, or know any difference between one doctrine and another. Few people attend any place of worship and most of those who attend seem to do it merely for entertainment, tho' they behave decently except that they are apt to go out and in like children in time of sermon, which is quite common here even with those who profess to be serious."

On August 11, 1785, Dr. Davidson was elected professor of history, geography, chronology, rhetoric and belles lettres; and subsequently at times filled the chairs of moral philosophy, metaphysics, logic, natural philosophy and the ancient languages. During Dr. Nisbet's term he was vice principal, and after the former passed away he remained as superintending head of the institution until the Rev. Dr. Jeremiah Atwater was installed as principal in 1809, whereupon he resigned in order to devote his undivided energies to pastoral work. During all of this period and up to the date of his death in 1812 he likewise was minister of the Presbyterian Church in Carlisle, indicating that he was a man of multifarious duties. One of the text books used in his classroom was a rhyming geography composed by himself that enumerated the countries of the world, their principal rivers, mountains and cities, and had as an introduction an acrostic in verse on his own name. It was a thin 18 mo. volume of sixty pages published in Philadelphia in 1784, and strange to say a copy of this rare book was discovered lately by J. W. Henderson, Esq., vice president of our Association, and is now in his possession. The title page merely discloses that it was composed "By an American", but the acrostic reveals his identity. The opening couplet under the heading "China" is such a gem that we venture to reproduce it:

"'Tis China that's wash'd by the waters Pacific,
Her people and soil are both vastly prolific."

The author was known to be very vain of this production, and as the students were compelled to memorize the portions that were assigned for recitation and to repeat them word for word, it subjected him to a good deal of ridicule; yet he was a man of extensive knowledge, a versatile thinker and writer, a tireless worker in his chosen fields, and a most useful unit of the community. Unlike Dr. Nisbet he seldom trusted himself to speak ex-

temporaneously, as is attested by twenty manuscript volumes of sermons and lectures which were among his effects when he died. These two earnest and accomplished co-workers are interred in the old graveyard within thirty feet of each other. On the monument erected to Dr. Nisbet is a long inscription in Latin, which his biographer believed was from the pen of the Rev. Dr. John M. Mason, president of Dickinson College from 1821 to 1824; but in Roberts' Memoirs of Chief Justice Gibson it is accredited to that gifted jurist, who was a member of the class of 1798. Over the grave of Dr. Davidson is a heavy marble slab containing an epitaph which begins with the words "A Blessed Peacemaker", in commemoration of his successful effort in 1786 to establish harmony between the Old Side and New Side congregations in Carlisle. Their union brought about the completion in 1787 of the Presbyterian church that still adorns the public square, the foundation for which had been laid in 1769 and which had been occupied in a partially finished state since 1772.

Instructors at various times other than those mentioned were—Robert Tait, department of English; Robert Johnson and James McCormick, departments of mathematics and natural philosophy; Charles Huston, Henry L. Davis and William Thomson, department of the ancient languages. The bright expectations of the founders never were realized, but the failure of the institution to expand as had been expected was chargeable wholly to insufficient financial support, not in any measure to a lack of competent teachers. In Dr. Wing's History of the First Presbyterian Church of Carlisle, published in 1877, the following allusion is made to the beneficent and widespread influence that radiated from the faculty of Dickinson at the period we are now considering:

> "In fact we are informed that many came from a distance and took up their residence here to enjoy the literary and religious privileges of the place. No small number of the ministers and the distinguished professional men of a succeeding generation in this region had their intellectual and moral training here. In proportion to the number of graduates from college and the amount of population, it is remarkable that so large a portion became distinguished in the church, at the bar, and in political life. During the heated conflicts which took place about 1787 not only in this town but in every part of the

land with respect to the new constitution, there were some disturbances, but our principal citizens always put themselves on the side of order and law."

When the noble Petrarch, crowned at Rome as poet laureate and loaded with honors, paid a visit to his native town in Tuscany, a public reception tendered by the officials gave him much gratification; yet the happiest moment came when he was taken to the house where he had been born and was told that the owner often had wished to alter it, but that the citizens had prevented this by rising in protest and demanding that the birthplace of Petrarch should remain unchanged. If the Old College were standing today, it would be one of the most ancient academic buildings in America and as such would be embedded in the hearts of the people. Carefully would they protect it from injury or defacement, and would maintain inviolate its primitive form.

Although an unknown miscreant caused its destruction in 1860, the lot whereon it stood should be cherished as one of the historic localities of the borough—notable as the birthplace and home of Carlisle's colonial Grammar School, as the seat of Dickinson College for twenty years, as the spot where probably without interruption youth have been educated since 1773. Surely these things combined entitle lot No. 219 to distinction, notwithstanding that the original structure is gone. We indulge the hope that the school directors never will sell it, and that they will not permit the removal or remodeling of the building now facing on Liberty alley, which sixty years ago was erected on the site of its venerable predecessor and in the arrangement of rooms and halls is its counterpart.

And finally, in connection with the above—may all concerned never cease to realize that the present generation did not earn this continent, that what we possess has come through the favor of a gracious Providence from our forefathers; they hewed the forests, made roads and other improvements, erected hamlets and towns and cities, battled with many enemies, and passed along the result of all their labors as an unrestricted gift to us In memory of them, of their toils and sacrifices, and in recognition of the deep obligation under which we rest

for what has been effected in our behalf, it should fill our souls with pride to preserve intact every real memorial of the olden times. Particularly should we beware of being puffed up with an exalted estimate of our own achievements, for insignificant in value are they when compared with the abounding riches of our inheritance.

"God of our fathers, known of old,
Lord of our far-flung battle line,
Beneath whose awful hand we hold
Dominion over palm and pine—
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget—lest we forget!"