

# OLD FRANKLIN COLLEGE.

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In our investigations into the beginning of the literary and social life of Lancaster county, the early days of old Franklin College should not be forgotten. That an institution of advanced grade should have been founded in Lancaster one hundred and eleven years ago was in itself a remarkable event; but the fact that, through a long period of gloom and depression, it was never entirely suffered to fall renders it worthy of especial commemoration. On the occasion of the Centennial Celebration of Franklin and Marshall College it was my privilege to prepare a monograph on "The Founding of Franklin College." in which I entered somewhat minutely into the history of that ancient institution, which is regarded as one of the constituent elements of the present college. Since that time certain additional information has come into my possession, and I propose to present an account of the origin and purpose of the "Frankliniana," as it was often called by its founders, limiting myself as much as possible to its brief season of hope and vigor, and passing lightly over the extended period of depression and disappointment.

As early as the middle of the last century the education of the Germans of Pennsylvania had become a burning question. More than two hundred thousand Germans—according to Theodore Poesche's estimate—had come to Pennsylvania before the Revolution, and had occupied the greater part of its most fertile counties. That they were excellent citizens was never denied, and no doubt the great majority

of them were thoroughly satisfied with their condition. They were not an ignorant people by any means—it is an acknowledged fact that by far the greater number of books published and sold in the Middle Colonies were in the German language. The worst that can be said against them is that they did not fully appreciate the duty which they owed to their descendants. Sincerely attached to their ancestral language, it never occurred to them that without higher education it must become debased and broken; and that, in the process of degeneration, the social life which they so highly valued must also disappear. They were not opposed to education, and, indeed, they esteemed it so highly that they practically considered it a part of their religion. In the earliest days of their settlements they never founded a church without building a school house at its side. As time passed, it, however, became evident that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to provide teachers for the parochial schools. There was no poorer trade than that of schoolmaster, and, before long, most of the teachers were either worn out or worthless. It was evident that unless something was speedily done the coming generation would grow up in utter ignorance, except that here and there parents, who had been unusually well instructed, might convey to their children the rudiments of knowledge. When the Rev. Michael Schlatter went to Europe, in 1751, to plead the cause of the churches of Pennsylvania, he felt that the chief question of the times was that of education. In his "Appeal" he even said that if the children were left without instruction for several generations they might become like the aborigines. It was an unfortunate expression, which was misrepresented, and rendered its author unpopular. Though it was mainly through his in-

fluence that a fund of £12,000 was collected in Holland for churches and parochial schools, and £20,000 more in England for the establishment of schools in Pennsylvania, the man who should have been hailed as a benefactor became the mark of detraction and obloquy, until he finally retired from the work in despair, and the "Charity Schools," which he had founded, proved an utter failure.

During the brief period in which Schlatter served as the first Superintendent of Schools in Pennsylvania he founded "Charity Schools" in Reading, York, Lancaster, New Hanover and Skippack. The trustees, however, soon withdrew their support from these schools, and several of them ceased to exist within a year of their organization. The school at Lancaster is supposed to have been more prosperous than the others, as it was still in existence in 1760, and was then attended by 65 scholars. Rupp says, in his "History of Lancaster County," that a classical school, which may have grown up on the earlier foundation, "suggested the application to the Legislature for the incorporation of Franklin College." This, however, appears to be a mere guess, for which there appears to be no historic foundation. There is an inconvenient interval, which it leaves unexplained.

The Germans have been greatly blamed for refusing to accept the benefits which it was proposed to confer upon them through the medium of the "Charity Schools," and perhaps it would have been better for them if they had been more humble; but it may be well to take into consideration the manner in which the gift was offered. The British can be generous on occasions, but they rarely grant a favor without assuming an appearance of superiority, which deprives it of half its value. The very name, "Charity

Schools," contained a suggestion of pauperism which it was hard to endure. Whenever a "Charity School" was founded the people were expected to contribute liberally, but they were practically deprived of any share in their management. The funds were in the hands of Trustees, who, with few exceptions, represented the official classes, who did not hesitate to assert that the schools were intended to anglicize the people. On their tours of inspection they appeared with coach and four, making no secret of their contempt for the people whom they pretended to assist. It is easy to see that schools established in such a fashion could not possibly commend themselves to the affections of the German community.

After the failure of the "Charity Schools," the Lutheran and Reformed ministers began to urge the establishment of a school of advanced grades, under the patronage of the Germans themselves. It was felt that the plan of establishing a complete system of popular instruction had been at least premature. "Of what use was it," they inquired, "to establish schools for the German people, so long as it was impossible to secure the services of competent teachers?" There was also a great lack of educated ministers, and the general prospect was gloomy in the extreme.

In the correspondence with Europe, both on the part of the Lutheran and Reformed Churches, there are frequent references to the necessity of establishing a gymnasium (or college), but there was no response nor encouragement from the other side. In 1773, Dr. John C. Kunze, of the Lutheran Church, founded a classical school in Philadelphia, but it was soon discontinued, in consequence of the War of the Revolution. When the University of Pennsylvania was organized, in 1779, Dr.

Kunze was chosen German Professor of Philology, and in the succeeding year he opened the German Department of the University. Four years later Dr. Kunze was called to Columbia College, N. Y., and Dr. Helmuth succeeded to his chair in Philadelphia, which he occupied until 1810. The German Department, which was in his charge, flourished until 1787 or '88, when it began to decline and was soon discontinued. There is no doubt, I think, that it was from the German Department of the University that the idea of establishing a college in Lancaster was derived. Dr. Helmuth must have seen that it would be impossible to maintain two departments in the University—one must increase and the other decrease. What was more natural then than that he should conceive the idea that an institution for higher education among the Germans would be more likely to succeed if founded in a German county than if suffered to maintain a sickly existence as an annex to a larger English institution.

In the absence of positive proof, it is, of course, impossible to affirm that it was Dr. Helmuth who first suggested the founding of a college in Lancaster, but he was certainly the most prominent of a little company of ministers who deserve to be entitled the founders of old Franklin College.

Of course, it may be said, in a general way, that the whole movement sprang from Benjamin Franklin's efforts to anglicize and educate the Pennsylvania Germans, and that the infant institution was therefore properly named.

It seemed at this time as though the time had come for the establishment of an institution which might be held to represent all those classes of the German people which appreciated the importance of higher education. The Lutheran and Reformed Churches had

approached each other more closely than at any previous period in their history. There were especially four eminent ministers—two of each denomination—who were intimate friends, and who, so far as we can discover from their writings, were as nearly as possible agreed in doctrine and sentiments. These men were the Rev. Drs. Helmuth, Weiberg, Hendel and H. E. Muhlenberg. Helmuth and Weiberg were at that time respectively pastors of the Lutheran and Reformed Churches of Philadelphia, and Muhlenberg and Hendel of those of Lancaster. Helmuth and Weiberg were bosom friends, and when the latter died, during the yellow fever epidemic, Helmuth preached his funeral sermon and composed in his memory a beautiful poem, which is still preserved. Hendel and Muhlenberg were less demonstrative in their affection, but in disposition they were very much alike, prudent, dignified and gentle, so that it is hardly possible to imagine that there could have been any disagreement between them. There can be little doubt that the four pastors whose names we have mentioned were, in their day, the foremost representatives of the German element in Pennsylvania. They had been educated at the best European universities, and were intimately acquainted with the foremost men of our State and Nation. In this way they were enabled to enlist the enthusiastic co-operation of such men as Benjamin Franklin, Benjamin Rush, Thomas Mifflin, Thomas MacKean, and many others, whose names will live forever in the annals of the State and Nation.

Benjamin Franklin was, in 1787, the President of the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania. He had been prominent in many philanthropic enterprises, and, though he was now too old to take an active part in the work of establishing a new institution, it

was hoped that it might become in some degree a partaker of his brilliant reputation. That Franklin was deeply interested in the work is not to be doubted. He had been for many years engaged in publishing German books—which proved extremely profitable—and had claimed to be in a special sense the patron and defender of the German people. Once, indeed, at a time of political excitement, he had called them “German boors”—for which he had never been entirely forgiven—and it may have been, to some extent, compunction of conscience that moved him to take a prominent part in the organization of the new institution. At any rate he headed the subscription list with a handsome contribution of £200, and allowed himself to be regarded as its founder and patron.

The charter of Franklin College was granted by the Legislature of Pennsylvania on the 10th day of March, 1787. It prescribed that the Board of Trustees should consist of fifteen Lutherans, fifteen Reformed, and “the remainder to be chosen from any other society of Christians.” It may be remarked that with regard to the third section—who were generally known as “outsiders”—the charter was rather liberally construed, as some of the eminent men which it included had never identified themselves with any such “society.”

The Board was, however, sufficiently distinguished. It included no less than five Signers of the Declaration of Independence, besides several Generals of the Revolution and other distinguished men.

The privileges granted to the new institution were of the most liberal character. It received authority to confer the degrees and “other meritorious distinctions” which are “granted in other colleges in America or Europe.” The corporation was granted the privilege to receive bequests and contributions;

provided the whole amount "do not exceed Ten Thousand pounds, valuing one Portugal half Johannes, weighing nine pennyweight, at three pounds." The charter contains many interesting features, but it has been frequently printed and may be supposed to be sufficiently well known.

The Legislature did not manifest any extraordinary liberality in its appropriations to the institution in which it officially claimed to take the warmest interest. Ten thousand acres of land, lying within the limit of the present counties of Lycoming, Tioga, Bradford and Venango, were granted to the college, and it was ordered that the expenses of surveying should be paid out of the treasury of the State. By a supplemental act, passed on the 27th day of February, 1788, "the public store-house and two lots of ground in the borough and county of Lancaster" were vested in the trustees of Franklin College for the use of said institution." On the surface this may appear to have been a liberal donation, but it must be remembered that the lands were in those days practically worthless, and that half a century had to pass before it was possible to realize from them the nucleus of a college endowment. The store-house was situated on North Queen street, near James—on the ground now occupied by "Franklin Row"—and two adjacent lots were presented by William Hamilton, Esq. The "store-house" required extensive repairs in order to fit it in any degree for the purpose of a literary institution, so that the earliest contributions were in great measure exhausted before the work was properly begun. Until the repairs were completed the college occupied the "Brew House" in Mifflin street, west of Duke, near Trinity church. Part of the building is still standing, but has long since been divided into dwellings.

It will be seen that in so far as the finances were concerned the founding of Franklin College was to a great extent a matter of faith; but for a while faith was strong and enthusiasm unbounded. It was resolved to use all possible means to attract attention to the new institution. Dr. Weiberg published an "Address to Germans," which was extensively circulated. There is still extant a pretty extensive correspondence, preliminary to the dedication or formal opening of the college, which took place on Wednesday, June 6th, 1787. In some instances it appears that the signatures were attached to a blank sheet which was afterward filled out by some member of the Board. Of this character was the following letter which was written by Dr. Helmuth and addressed to Dr. Muhlenberg:

"Philadelphia, March 19, 1787.

"Dearest Brother in Christ—I must be careful not to exceed the space which has been left for me, for this letter was signed before it was written, and I cannot be expected to address you in the dignified style which one ought to employ when writing in the name of the gentlemen whose names are subscribed. How would it do to fill up the page with an obligation? Just think, three such papers have been committed to my care; you may judge how well my credit must stand with those people. But to business: 1. You or Pastor Hendel must undertake to preach a sermon in German. This sermon must earnestly and effectively impress upon the people of Lancaster the importance of higher education. N. B.—But it must, under no circumstances, be more than twenty-five minutes in length.

"2. If Pastor Hendel should undertake to preach the sermon, you will offer a prayer in German at the altar; and in your prayer you will make special mention of the prosperity of the Germans

and of its increase by means of education.

"3. I send you herewith several copies of the Order of Dedication. When I meet you personally I will give you the reasons why the procession was arranged according to the programme.

"As regards the verses you will have to accept them as composed by men who are overloaded with more work than they can possibly perform.

"Mr. Ott sends you the music for the several pieces, so that your Lancaster singers may rehearse them properly. Several of our best singers have already been engaged, and will be in Lancaster at the appointed time to assist in the music. The solos and antistrophes will be sung by the singers from Philadelphia; the echo requires that the singers should stand opposite to each other, and, therefore, the solos and antistrophes might also be sung by these gentlemen from the north side of your church, opposite to the organ. Concerning the German hymn, I have to say that the response is to be sung by the children. This may, in my opinion, be thus arranged: You can have the space before the altar occupied with benches, on which the children may be seated, and there sing their response. It is presumed that this will make a good impression on the parents. Lutheran and Reformed children must sing together.

"Let the choir be pretty large. There are singers enough among the Lutherans and especially among the Reformed.

"I hope the gentlemen of Lancaster will not be displeased, because we are so busy and help to make arrangements sixty-six miles away, especially as one of the Lancaster members is aiding us. Here the majority of the Trustees live near together, and it is at any rate always necessary that some one should take the initiative.

"Lancaster owes much to Dr. Rush, and the University will always find in him an active supporter. Our subscriptions indicate that we shall be able, without doubt, to bring about £2,500 with us to Lancaster. I hope that you will love the contributors and most cheerfully do what they tell you.\*

Our thousand copies of the Order of Exercises are to be printed, which will be distributed on the day of dedication.

"Please provide lodging for my singers—they are four in number, and Mr. Ott will be one of them. The Trustees will pay the expenses of the journey; their board, I presume, they will receive gratuitously.

"Ah! here already are the signatures, and I can, therefore, only add that the following gentlemen are your good friends, and feel confident that you will attend to the above matters and make all necessary preparation:

"CASPARUS WEIBERG,  
"THOS. MACKEAN,  
"P. MUHLENBERG,  
"DAN. HIESTER, JR.,  
"JOS. HIESTER,  
"PHILIP WAGER,  
"WM. SHEAFF,  
"BENJ. RUSH,  
"HEINRICH HELMUTH."

On the 5th day of June, the day before the formal opening, the Board of Trustees met in the Court House at Lancaster and elected the following Faculty for Franklin College:

Rev. G. H. E. Muhlenberg, D. D.,  
President.

Rev. William Hendel, D. D., Vice  
President.

Rev. Frederick W. Melsheimer, Pro-  
fessor of Greek, Latin and German.

William Reichenbach, Professor of  
Mathematics.

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\*This, no doubt, refers to his acceptance of the Presidency of the College.

Rev. Joseph Hutchins, Professor of the English Language and Belles Lettres.

Concerning these men, Dr. Rush says, in an article written in 1787: "A cluster of more learned or better qualified masters, I believe, have not met in any university."

The dedication, on the 6th of June, 1787, was one of the most splendid occasions in the history of Lancaster. The Lutheran Ministerium and the Reformed Coetus were both in session in Lancaster at that time, and their presence added greatly to the eclat of the festival. The officers of every congregation in the city were invited to march in the procession, and, I may here state, that the original invitation addressed to the Moravian Church is in possession of our President, Mr. George Steinman.

In the Lutheran Church, Dr. Muhlenberg preached a German sermon, and Dr. Joseph Hutchins—the newly-elected Professor of English and Belles Lettres—delivered a discourse in which he took occasion to glorify his office. Dr. Muhlenberg's sermon was immediately published in pamphlet form, but that of Dr. Hutchins did not appear until 1806, when it was published by the author. In a preface the author says that at the time of its delivery he was "discouraged by some circumstances from the publication." What these circumstances were may easily be inferred from the discourse. The preacher was no doubt a scholar and a gentleman, but he evidently failed to appreciate the difficulties of the situation and manifested a lamentable lack of prudence. Not to refer to other things that might better have remained unsaid, he remarked: "As the limited capacity of man can very seldom attain excellence in more than one language, the study of English will demand the principal attention of your

children." At present this may appear to have been a very innocent utterance; but when we remember that it was addressed to German people, whose main object in the establishment of a college was the preservation of their native language in Pennsylvania, it must be confessed that it was, to say the least, very imprudent. It may indeed be said to have been a foreshadowing of trouble, suggesting the remark of a contemporary writer: "The English and German can never work together. The one says Shibboleth, the other Sibboleth." There was, a few years ago, some discussion of the question whether Benjamin Franklin was personally present at the formal opening of the institution which received his name. On this subject there can be no doubt, though the fact is not explicitly mentioned in the published proceedings. Franklin was at that time a member of the Constitutional Convention, in session at Philadelphia, but the records show that he was absent from the 4th to the 9th of June. Hector St. John Crevecoeur, a French author, who was at that time in America, states in his published book of travels, that in 1787 he accompanied Franklin on a journey to Lancaster "to lay the corner-stone of a college which he had founded there for the Germans." It is not probable that this was literally the laying of a corner-stone, as the college had, as yet, no building of its own, but rather the formal opening to which we have referred. I have been informed—though I have not seen it—that within a few years a letter has been discovered, addressed by Franklin to his sister, in which he refers to his visit to Lancaster on this occasion. The sage was, however, at that time eighty-one years old, so that we may easily see why he took no active part in the proceedings.

It was found necessary in the first

year to divide the college into two sections—German and English. There was no lack of patronage. In 1788 there were, according to Professor Melsheimer's report, one hundred and twenty-five students, of whom about twenty received instruction in the higher branches. The chief difficulty was financial. The rates of tuition were very low, and the receipts were only £111, while the salaries of the professors amounted to £210, though Drs. Muhlenberg and Hendel labored without salary. At the end of the first year the Treasurer, John Hubley, Esq., reported a deficit of £244. At this rate it did not take long to get to the bottom of the purse.

It was found necessary, after the second year, to contract the scope of the institution, so that it became at best a good local academy. Prof. Melsheimer labored until 1798, hoping against hope, but finally accepted a call to Hanover, Pa. There were subsequently a number of eminent teachers, among whom, besides those we have mentioned, were James Ross, author of a celebrated Latin Grammar; Benedict Schippher, co-author, with Dr. Muhlenberg, of a large German dictionary, and W. C. Brownlee, afterwards an eminent minister in New York.

The Lutheran and Reformed Synods on several occasions made small appropriations to Franklin College, but this seems to have been rather to preserve a traditional right than for any more serious purpose. It might be interesting to trace the later history of Franklin College, but this is not our present intention. It may, however, be added that the lands originally granted to the institution gradually increased in value, so as to render it possible to establish an institution of a higher grade. This was finally accomplished by the union with Marshall College,

which was approved by the Legislature in 1850, though not actually consummated until 1853.

It is evident that Franklin College, as originally constituted, did not fulfill the purposes of its founders. For this failure many causes might be assigned, though there were two which, in our opinion, outweighed the rest. The first was that the time had not come for the establishment of an institution in Lancaster on such an extensive scale. A few eminent men appreciated the importance of the work, but it never found its way to the hearts of the people. Another cause of failure must be sought in the fact that the earliest promoters of the enterprise evidently expected too much. They knew of great institutions elsewhere, but they seem to have failed to remember that—unless largely aided by the Government—they were the result of many years of toil, if not suffering. Harvard College, for instance, was, in those days, but a small institution, but it had required 150 years to bring it so far. Such facts the founders of Franklin College appear to have left out of consideration. Their purposes were so pure and exalted that they imagined that they must be immediately supported, and consequently did not consider the day of small things. Accordingly, when trouble came, they lost heart, and failed to manifest the continued self-sacrifice which is the best assurance of the highest success. Nevertheless, to use the words of Dr. F. A. Muhlenberg, one of the professors of Franklin College, "it is a high credit to Lancaster that ever since the adoption of our National Constitution she has never been without a school in which her sons could receive the elements of a classical education."

[The interest in Dr. Dubbs' paper on "Old Franklin College" was greatly enhanced by the exhibition and inspec-

tion of many valuable documents, such as a catalogue of the pupils of Franklin College in 1787, catalogue of the library, letters by distinguished men, relating thereto, and other important manuscripts which he presented in connection therewith.]

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