

Jefferson College Historical Society



March 1971

Vol. IV No. 1

The next meeting of the Jefferson College Historical Society will be held in the Canonsburg Municipal Building at 8:00 P.M., Wednesday evening, March 17, 1971 .

Robert Hamilton, a well versed antiquarian and a member of our Society, will be the speaker. Mr. Hamilton's subject will be " American Glass ". Whether you admire Stiegel, Steuben or Depression Glass, you will find the speaker's presentation interesting and informative.

Come and bring a friend.

Election of officers will take place at the business meeting preceding the program.

PROFESSOR JOHN FRASER OF JEFFERSON COLLEGE

John Fraser was born and educated in Scotland. As a bachelor in his early thirties he came to Canonsburg to accept the chair of Professor of Mathematics and Astronomy at Jefferson College in 1855.

Dr. Wightman, a student under Fraser, wrote fifty years later, "The common verdict of his students was that Professor Fraser was the most brilliant man they had ever known, and as a teacher his ability was magnificent" .

John Fraser was instrumental in securing the purchase of the equatorial mounted Clark refracting telescope that was installed in the college observatory. The small frame building erected in 1859 for an observatory was located east of what is now the intersection of Belmont Avenue and Hawthorne Street. The oldest available catalogues of the college list Astronomy as a required course and over the years it was generally taught by the Professor of Mathematics.

Professor Fraser remained in Canonsburg for seven years. He is described as being much loved by his students and the townspeople, an exceptional teacher, a gentleman abounding in knowledge and having an inexhaustible fund of wit and humor.

Feeling a deep sense of loyalty to his adopted country, in 1862, he resigned his professorship and raised Company G of the 140 th Regiment , Pennsylvania Volunteers. This company was composed of his students and other young men of the area - 101 in all.

Dr. John R. Paxton related:

One day in June 1862, our Professor of Mathematics and Astronomy locked up the observatory saying, "Gentlemen, what the stars are now up to is of no interest to us. We will leave Mars to his own business in the sky and become Sons of Mars. Permit me to introduce to you Captain Fraser, and to announce that the chair of mathematics in this college is vacant". Three cheers for Captain Fraser and we rushed out to the recruiting office.

The Washington Reporter (8/21/62) states, "The Canonsburg Brown Infantry, commanded by Captain John Fraser, Professor of Mathematics in Jefferson College, is ready to march. The Professor commenced recruiting on Monday the 11th. and before the same week was ended, he reports his command ready for marching. This is unprecedented in the recruiting line, especially if we take into consideration that this is the third company recruited from Canonsburg and the country around, for three year service, and that 16 families in this area have sent 47 sons to the Union Army." (Three classes in Jefferson College furnished 95 men for volunteer companies.)

Captain Fraser's war record reads like fiction. He came out of the Battle of Gettysburg as ranking officer of the survivors in his regiment and was commissioned as its Colonel. He was in many major engagements, wounded twice, and in September 1864, captured and sent to Libby Prison and later to the prison at Charleston, South Carolina. One writer records that his lectures on literature and philosophy delivered to his fellow prisoners will never be forgotten by those who heard him. He stood bare-headed and bare-foot on a pile of ashes with no clothing but a ragged shirt and torn pantaloons.

The War Department finally accomplished his release through prisoner exchange, and in 1865 he was mustered out with his Regiment with the rank of Brevet Brigadier-General. The 140th Pa. Volunteers was one of the most illustrious regiments in the Union service. In proportion to its enrollment, it lost more men in action than any other Pennsylvania regiment.

Joseph A. Selby, Ch.
Memoranda Committee

General Fraser did not return to Jefferson College but accepted the Professorship of Mathematics and Military Tactics at the Pennsylvania State College, where he served as President of the college from 1866 to 1868. He was elected Chancellor of the University of Kansas (1868-1874) and then State Superintendent of Schools of Kansas (1874-1876). In 1876, he accepted a Professorship at what is now the University of Pittsburgh and returned to Western Pennsylvania.

The meteoric career of John Fraser was soon to end. He died in 1878 of small pox, at the age of fifty-five.

ANNUAL FINANCIAL REPORT :

Balance forward 1/1/70.....	\$ 896.18
Income for 1970.....	406.46
Expenditures.....	37.56
	<u>368.90</u>
Balance forward Dec. 31, 1970.....	\$1,265.08

REPORT OF MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE :

Total dues collected in 1970..... \$404.00 Included in this amount is \$21.00 collected from new members for 1971 dues.

Total membership as of Jan. 1, 1971..... 80
Members who have not paid 1970 dues..... 8

New members who joined in 1970 :

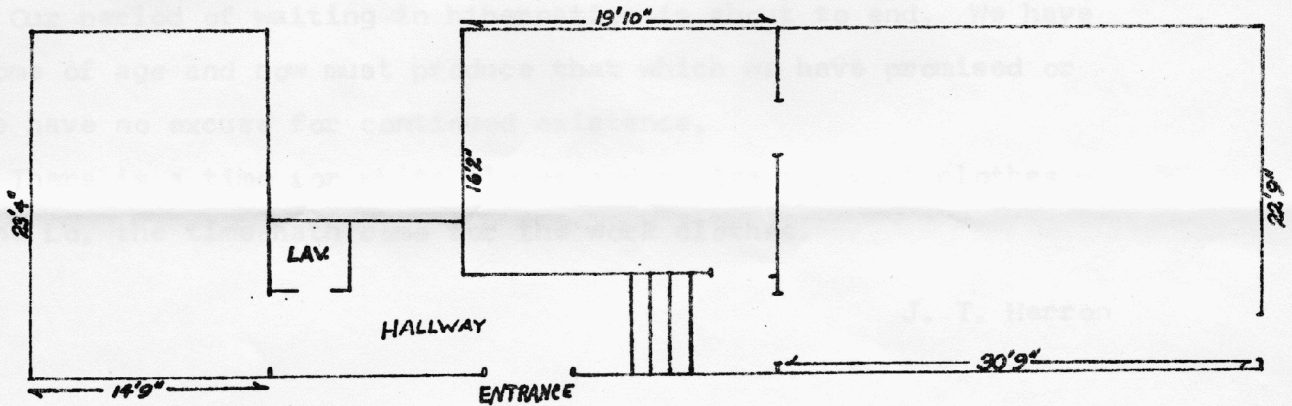
James E. Banner	Jean W. Kuhn
Louis B. Bell	James W. Munnell
Edmond Cononge, Jr.	John Monar
Kathryn Dornon	Robert V. Sulkowski
Paul J. Hanna	Mark J. Solobay
William C. Krueger	

IN MEMORIAM
D. S. Pollock who died November 28, 1970

Joseph A. Solobay, Chr.
Membership Committee

AND LO, THE TIME HATH COME

The Canon-McMillan School System has presented our Society with the keys to the three rooms on the ground floor of the Junior High School Auditorium. This area, comprising about 1500 square feet, will be the home of the Jefferson College Historical Society.



The largest of the three rooms should be adequate to reconstruct one of the Jefferson College Literary Society halls and will serve admirably as our meeting room. One of the smaller rooms could be used to reconstruct the library that adjoined each of the Literary Society rooms. We have the original furnishings and library books from the old college rooms in storage at the present time.

This project will require many devoted volunteer workers, and our limited finances will probably necessitate reproducing one room at a time.

The progress of any historical society is not brought about by the people who just show up for special events. It is much harder to do the unglamorous jobs that may stretch over months than it is to be present for the fanfare when the project is completed.

At the coming meeting, in keeping with our by-laws, we will elect new officers. They will need our whole-hearted support and willing cooperation. We have a tremendous potential in this project for public service in the cause of history if we restore accurately and interpret effectively.

Our period of waiting in hibernation is about to end. We have come of age and now must produce that which we have promised or we have no excuse for continued existence.

There is a time for white gloves and a time for work clothes - and Lo, the time hath come for the work clothes.

J. T. Herron