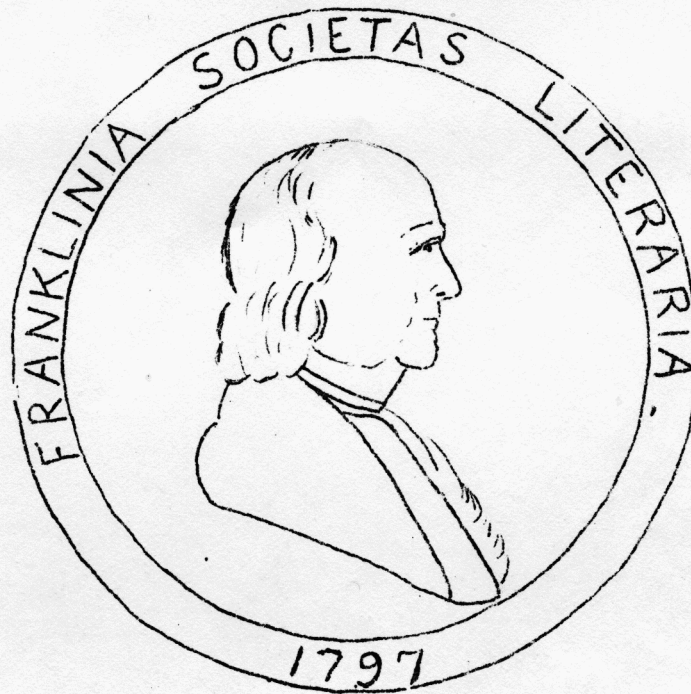


Jefferson College Historical Society

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Historical Exhibit

Joseph Solobay's exhibit of contemporary papers and photos concerned with the Opera House Disaster received much favorable comment. Joe prepared the materials and exhibited them in the window of the Colaizzo Insurance Agency giving credit to our historical society. Congratulations on a fine display, Joseph.

Literary Society History

The following pages are not intended to be a justification for the role played by Canonsburg and the Jefferson Alumni in the College dispute; but are intended to give the historical background which preceded our decision to restore and recreate the library and Literary Society rooms.

The year was 1797; George Washington had retired to Mt. Vernon, John Adams was inaugurated as President and Thomas Jefferson as Vice President of the United States, and in a small village on the western frontier two literary societies were formed at the infant Canonsburg Academy.

The Philo Literary Society was founded, 174 years ago this month; followed three months later by the Franklin Society.

1797 The minutes and records of the societies are mostly complete and are in the Historical Collections of Washington and Jefferson College.

The Philo Society gave as their object "...the cultivation and promotion of science and literature, and of friendship and morality among its members". In the early years, the Society met weekly; on Friday evening, in the old stone Academy building. They occupied their talents in "...speaking select orations, debating, and reading compositions". The contests between the Philo and Franklin Societies began in 1799.

The Philo history records that, in the early days, having no library of any account, they did not venture to debate subjects that required much research, preferring such as had a practical nature or were being discussed in the community, such as:

Is it right to inoculate for small pox?

Is the farmer or student more happy?

Is it naturally immoral to have more than one wife?

Is it right for a student to marry while at learning?

Would the state of Pennsylvania be better without lawyers?

Have we any good reason to say that a black skin, flat nose, and curly hair are uglier than the color, noses, and hair we have?

Is it right to drink whiskey in a tavern?

Should a married couple continue to cohabit when they become odious to each other, and desire to separate?

Does marriage weaken the powers of the mind?

The last question was debated by two single students appointed on the affirmative and two married students on the negative. The latter having the advantage of experience found little difficulty in sustaining the negative.

The records of the Franklin Society closely parallel those of the Philos. One of the first resolutions passed, in 1797, was that the members be required to keep the Society's business a profound secret. Subsequently, when leakage of vital information supposedly secret was found in certain quarters, married students were no longer eligible to membership. The by-laws were later (1810) changed to again admit the married students.

Some of the questions debated within the Franklin Society in 1798 were:

Would it be politic in the Southern States to abolish slavery? This question was decided in the affirmative.

Is not the use of spiritous liquors more injurious than beneficial to a country? Decided in favor of spiritous liquors.

Is female modesty natural or artificial? Decided by acclamation to be natural.

Each member, in turn, in the early years furnished candles, brought water, and kept the door guarded against spies or intruders when a meeting was being conducted.

The jurisdiction of the Societies was not confined to Meeting times. The minutes contain records of members being tried for profanity, card playing, and intoxication. Upon conviction, the member was fined, suspended or expelled from the Society according to the offense. All deviations from the Society rules by members, both in and out of meetings, were dealt with.

As early as 1813, the members of each Society imposed upon
1813 themselves the payment of a sum each term towards the purchase of useful books and the increase of the Society's library.

The Literary Societies were the most popular extra-curricular activities in the Academy. When the Academy was chartered in 1802 as Jefferson College, the prestige and also the rivalry of the Societies increased. The annual contests between Franklin and Philo became renowned events. Printed invitations and programs were sent out and the town of Canonsburg was filled with visitors for the celebrated occasion. The programs and contests were held in the College and included musical selections by a brass band, addresses by the College President and members of the Board of Trustees, the main address by an invited dignitary and finally the much publicized debates and literary contests.

The erection of an additional college building in 1832, Providence Hall, brought about a new era in the history of the Societies. The college made available a large meeting hall and library room on the top floor of Providence Hall for each of the Societies.

W. A. Passavant wrote as follows: The enthusiasm of the Society members was raised to the highest pitch. To furnish and adorn the new Hall in a style worthy of the object to which it was devoted, was the great ambition of the members.....It was resolved that the floor be covered with the best imported carpets; that the room be furnished with settees and sociables; that the walls be painted a light blue with an appropriate border; that the name of the society be inscribed, in gilt letters, above the door; that the windows together with the rostrum be hung with handsome draperies; and the Hall and Library rooms be heated by suitable stoves.

On the 22nd of June, 1832, the new Literary Society Halls were dedicated. The minutes record the event: The Literary Societies of the College convened on the banks of the Chartiers, and accompanied by the Faculty and a few Honorary members, walked in procession, to excellent music, through the streets of Canonsburg, and entered their respective Halls for the dedicatory ceremonies.

The next thirty years saw a continuing growth of the societies in both membership and a widening sphere of their activities.

The Triennial Catalogue of the Franklin Literary Society, published in 1856, lists the following: present members 121, regular members 1,649, honorary members 264, and the number of volumes in the library 3,679.

The Philo Literary Society Catalogue of 1852 lists: present members 82, regular members 1,408, honorary members 229, and volumes in the library 3,800.

The Societies continued to maintain separate libraries in which they justifiably took much pride. The Franklin Society, in 1862, published a one hundred page catalogue of the books in their library.

The annual contests became more elaborate and the rivalry keener, but this was soon to be overshadowed by national events. The climate of Jefferson College and the Societies became tense in the years immediately prior to the Civil War. The questions of states' rights and slavery created an ever increasing conflict among the students. There were no new enrollments from the South and an enlarging number of the Southern students chose not to return from vacations.

The Civil War sounded the death knell for Jefferson College and the Literary Societies. Financial difficulties of both
1865 Jefferson and Washington Colleges could be solved only by uniting the two rival schools. This union was effected in 1865 under very difficult circumstances. The union was unacceptable to many of the Jefferson alumni and to the people of Canonsburg, when it was learned that the combined colleges would be located in Washington. The next four years were ones of constant turmoil and litigation. Charges and counter-charges were published by both factions in the dispute. Bitterness and ill will toward Washington College and the townspeople of Washington were the expressed feelings of the Jefferson adherents.

The litigation at long last ended when the Supreme Court
1869 denied the appeal of the Jefferson adherents to nullify the union. The union was finally consummated in 1869 with the location of Washington and Jefferson College in Washington.

Dr. McCormick stated: This result was necessarily an intense disappointment to Canonsburg and the Jefferson alumni. . . . The bitter feeling of regret at Canonsburg, and among the Jefferson Alumni, over the loss of the college, only a little assuaged by the provision at once made to establish an academy in the college buildings, speaks eloquently for the loyalty of that community and of the alumni of their college, and even forbids condemnation of utterances and actions which for some time hindered the progress of the new college.

Jefferson Academy was formed, and from 1869 to 1911 occupied the old Jefferson College buildings. The published aim of the Academy was to prepare young men and women for college, teaching or business.

The old college Literary Society libraries remained reasonably intact through the years of Academy use. An article in the Jefferson Academy Index of March, 1881, states: The Philo and Franklin Halls have been repaired and the storied halls occupied by societies bearing the ancient names. The literary contests were resumed by the Academy students and continued for several years.

When the fortieth reunion of the Class of 1856 of Jefferson College was held in Canonsburg, a committee was appointed to secure and fit up a room to house the relics of old Jefferson College. The committee consisting of Rev. M. A. Parkinson, 1896 Rev. W. F. Brown, and Dr. J. G. Dickson solicited subscriptions "to establish a memorial hall in the college building where could be collected paintings and photographs of the presidents and professors of the college . . . relics and matters of interest relating to the college. . ."

The Franklin Literary Society rooms were made available to this committee, and in 1899, renamed Memorial Hall and turned over to the Jefferson College Alumni with an appropriate dedicatory ceremony.

The Jefferson College Memorial Hall committee became the guardian of the museum, libraries and furnishings. The rooms were opened to the public on special occasions over the years; the last time being in 1952 during Canonsburg's Sesqui-Centennial celebration.

Time and attrition took its toll upon the original committee and their successors. Apathy of a second and third generation replaced the enthusiasm of the alumni of old Jefferson. Vandals and thieves removed many of the more valuable antiquities from the rooms; and finally pigeons took up their abode in the libraries.

Then, in 1964, the Canon-McMillan School District made plans to erect a new Junior High school which necessitated razing the old college building. A committee, somewhat self-appointed, [1964] consisting of A. L. Zeman, Nick Cianelli, and J. T. Herron, met with Dr. Ralph Castefero on several occasions during the next two years seeking a way to preserve the old libraries and furnishings.

This committee, realizing that some type of legally constituted organization would, of necessity, have to be formed to accept ownership of the historical materials, moved to organize a historical society for that purpose. The Jefferson College Historical Society was incorporated in November, 1966, as a result of the guidance and legal efforts of Mr. Zeman.

The purpose of this Society, as given in the articles of incorporation, is to preserve and perpetuate for future generations the libraries of Jefferson College, together with relics and matters of interest relating to the College and the early settlement of this region.

Through the efforts of the committee and the excellent cooperation of Dr. Castefero and the Canon-McMillan District Board of Education, the contents of the libraries and museum, as well as much of the woodwork and fixtures, were removed from the old college building and placed in storage.

The School District agreed to furnish quarters for the Historical Society and libraries, as per a stipulation of the deed by which the property now occupied by the Jr. High School was conveyed to the Canonsburg School District in 1912.

Presently, work is under way in the rooms on the lower level of the Junior High School auditorium building. These rooms, when completed, will be the quarters and meeting place of our Historical Society. We will, as accurately as possible, restore the meeting hall and Literary Society Library in two of the rooms.

Each Tuesday evening since early spring, a small but dedicated group has been working on the project. The floors have been scraped and prepared for new floor covering. A new suspended ceiling has been installed with recessed lighting; and the electrical wiring has been entirely replaced. The work has now progressed to the point that we are ready to install the original woodwork and shelving from the old college rooms.

All this has been accomplished on a cost plus basis - the cost of the materials plus the many hours of free labor furnished by the faithful few.

There remains much to be done, but a few more willing hands would speed up the process appreciably. The wages are terrible - but the fringe benefits are unbelievable.

If you are interested in helping, please contact Alex Warcholak, Bill Taylor, or Jim Herron and offer your services.