



Jefferson College Historical Society

MEMORIAL DAY was first celebrated in 1867, when women of the South laid flowers on the graves of the Confederate dead. The custom spread North and legislation was passed to make May 30, 1868, a memorial day.

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NEXT MEETING

Wednesday, 8 p.m., May 17 will be the next meeting of the Jefferson College Historical Society. The speaker will be Alice Balliard of the Peters Creek Historical Society. Her topic will be "Mingo Creek - Local Environment". The meeting will be held on the second floor of the Canonsburg Municipal Building.

170th BIRTHDAY DISPLAY

Our thanks to Joseph Solobay, Mildred Ralston and Jack Rodd for their very interesting display in the window of the Anthony Colaizzo Agency. The event commemorated was Canonsburg Borough's 170th Anniversary. The old photos and printed materials attracted a great amount of attention and much favorable comment.

Their next project will be a historical display for Memorial Day. If you have, or know of, any photographs or memorabilia that would be appropriate for a Memorial Day theme please call Mrs. Ralston or Mrses. Solobay or Rodd.

GIFT TO SOCIETY

Dr. and Mrs. William B. Donaldson have presented several boxes of historical materials pertaining to Canonsburg and Jefferson College. The Society's collection will be greatly enriched by these materials which were given in memory of Margaret Dickson Donaldson.

A PRODIGIOUS PHENOMENON

Perplexed by the pertinacity of the patient plodding platoon that persists in pursuing the Philo and Franklin project, we can but ponder o'er the peculiar providences that prevent other people from participating. Yes! They still work every Tuesday evening!

The work on the meeting room and library is on the downhill slope. Very soon, help will be needed to finish the rooms. Skilled artisans are not needed, just somebody who can slop paint or do odd jobs.

July Meeting - July 19, 1972

A visit to an historical site in Washington County. Details later.

THE REMARKABLE GILMORE GIRLS

May, 1863, found Private Samuel McBride, a member of Company G, 140th Pennsylvania Voluntary Infantry Regiment, in the vicinity of Chancellorsville, Virginia. This company was formed in Canonsburg by Captain John Fraser, Professor of Mathematics and Astronomy at Jefferson College, and was mustered into service on August 22, 1862.

On the sultry Sunday morning of May 3, the Union Army was suffering at the hands of the Army of Northern Virginia, commanded by General Robert E. Lee. While all other divisions were being pulled back from the area of the Chancellor House, the 140th Regiment was ordered to go forward to support an artillery battery.

This battery was wiped out by Confederate gunnery, losing all its officers, and most of its men and horses. Company G was ordered to help move the battery back to a safer area.

After the skirmishes of the morning, defensive works were set up to the rear in a very densely wooded area. R. L. Stewart, in his account of the battle, states, "So dense was the underbrush in the wilderness section below us that we could hear the approach of the enemy's skirmish line before we could see them."

The men on sentry duty had to stay alert. However, after a hard day's work, the men were tired. One officer in command of a picket line is quoted as saying, "My God! What shall I do! Nearly every man along this line is asleep."

During one of the minor engagements that night, Private McBride was on picket duty in front of the Union position. During an exchange of musket fire, McBride was felled by a Minie Ball through his forehead directly above the bridge of his nose. To the surprise of those around him, he rose again after a brief period of unconsciousness and staggered back to the Union lines.

An officer, thinking him to be deserting his post, halted him with revolver drawn. Only then did he notice the musket ball partially embedded in McBride's forehead. The spent missile had penetrated the skin, but was stopped by bone, leaving a dent in the forehead, but not causing a mortal wound.

After his discharge on a Surgeon's Certificate, Samuel McBride attended Xenia Seminary and served for the remainder of his life as a United Presbyterian minister.

Joseph A. Solcbay

Ref.: History of the 140th Reg. Penna. Vol., R.L. Stewart D.D., 1912

THE REMARKABLE GILMORE GIRLS

There were many women, classed by the army as camp followers, who served in the capacity of nurses, cooks, and wash-women. Generally, their names and types of service are unrecorded and lost to history-- but not so for Elizabeth Gilmore, whose name appears in the Pennsylvania Archives as receiving pay from the State of Pennsylvania for services as a private in the Continental Army.

The feats of Molly Pitcher and Molly Corbin, cannonneers in two of the hottest actions in the Revolution, have become common knowledge, but the history of the Gilmore sisters is little known.

Elizabeth and Ann Gilmore, while still in their teens, emigrated from Northern Ireland. Aboard the same ship was John Berry, a young Scotch Irishman bound for America to enlist in the Continental Army. John enlisted and the Gilmore girls followed the army as nurses.

During the terrible winter of 1777-78, the Gilmore sisters were with General Washington's troops at Valley Forge, as was John Berry and another young soldier named Hugh Boyle.

John Berry and Elizabeth Gilmore were married in 1780 while still in the Army and Elizabeth's younger sister, Ann, married Hugh Boyle.

After the war, John and Elizabeth Berry settled in Colerain Township, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. In the spring of 1794, John came west to Washington County and worked on the farm of the Reverend John McMillan in North Strabane Township. He returned to Lancaster County that fall and the following summer came back to Washington County with his wife, Elizabeth, and their children. They purchased 251 Acres of land in Mt. Pleasant Township, near the present town of McDonald. This land was part of the original 2800 Acres granted to George Washington by the colony of Virginia. On this tract, the Berrys erected a log house where they lived the remainder of their lives.

John Berry died in 1809 at the age of 56. Elizabeth remained on the farm until her death in 1823. They are buried in the old Robinson Run Churchyard.

The younger sister, Ann, after marrying her war-time sweetheart, Hugh Boyle, also came west and settled where the town of Oakdale now stands. Ann and Hugh Boyle are buried in the Hill Church Cemetery at Noblestown.

The Boyles and the Berrys both have many descendants still living in Washington County, who have the unique distinction of having both a grandsire and a grandam who served in the Revolutionary War.

J.T.H.

References: Forrest's History of Washington County, 1926
Beer's Biographical Record of Washington County, 1893.

REGARDING THE LIBRARIES

The Literary Societies of Jefferson College, Franklin and Philo, were highly competitive. Animosity was not infrequent, in one case almost causing an end to their annual debates.

One of the chief sources of pride of a literary society was its library. It was also the object of competition. In 1832, soon after moving to new quarters in the recently finished Providence Hall, the Eparch (President) of the Philo Literary Society wrote, "Our rivals are making an effort to furnish their library with books, which is well worthy of emulation; a spirit of liberality has gone forth among them; and unless the same generous impulse shall actuate us, we will not long be able to recommend our institution on the score of its library. I would suggest the propriety of some other plan for increasing our library than in donation in books. The mere manner of presenting books has its influence; and through that influence our shelves have been and will be burdened with productions that are absolutely a disgrace instead of an ornament to the library." W.R. Hemphill, Eparch.

Some years later, in 1837, the Philo Library was in a better competitive position. However, the Eparch at this time also warned about the quality of the literature.

"There is one subject to which to call the special attention of Society, namely, the selection of books. Never, perhaps, have the members displayed more taste, and wisdom, than this session. Most every former selection has been disgraced with too great a proportion of fictitious and trifling books, so much so, indeed, that our shelves are crowded with books that are not worthy of our persual; we hope that is but the commencement of a new era in the history of our Library, and that from this time forward we shall always purchase such books, as will not only please, but inform, and edify the mind-- Let every

member acquire a taste for solid and substantial kind of reading, then such books will always be proposed-- And here permit us to advise the younger members of Society, to abstain entirely from reading novels, because few are fully aware of the deleterious effects of novel reading until it be too late. No student should indulge himself in reading novels, until he be a Junior half advanced, or a Senior, and very seldom then."

The author of this purple prose was Owen Griffith, born in Wales in 1810. It comes as no surprise that after graduating from Jefferson College, he was ordained a Presbyterian minister in 1840. He was the author of at least three books. A sample of his pious literary bent can be seen in the closing paragraph of his Memorial as Eparch.

"The conduct of the members generally has been worthy of the highest approbation, but there have been a few exceptions. Some of the members are rather inclined to use vulgar, and vicious: and sometimes profane language. Now this should not be, and we are certain that a moment of sober reflection, would correct everyone in this respect. Let it never be said of any Philo, that he makes use of vulgar language, or takes the name of his Maker in vain."

Griffith Owen
Eparch

JTHJr.

STUDENT REVOLT

For the past few years, the news has been inundated with reports of campus turmoil, student revolts, and even petitions demanding the resignation of college presidents. In some cases, the presidents actually resigned. Often, the students have received no punishment for their behavior.

Does this portend an end to the educational system as we know it? Will the schools of the future be run by the students? In actuality, it has all happened before.

The MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF JEFFERSON COLLEGE records the following:

"Tuesday, August the 13th, 1822 After Prayer, the Faculty laid before the Board the following charges against a number of students, viz: Public fame charges Mesrs. Morrow, Bushnell, Brown, Lyons, Frazer, Cox, and Martin, as being the authors and promoters of mutiny, sedition and rebellion, in College, and as being the venters and circulators of calumny and slander against

the character and reputation of the Principal of this College and that at different times, and upon different occasions, they also read the testimony which was taken before the faculty in support of the above charges, by which it appeared that Mr. Morrow had called a meeting of the students and proposed resolutions to prefer a petition to the Trustees praying for the removal of the principal,... The Board, after hearing both parties and deliberating thereon, on motion, Resolved that the charges... were not sustained. ... The decision of the Board being read upon the subjects of the charges, preferred against the students above named: Mr. McMillan publicly declared his resignation as Principal of Jefferson College: and on the question, will his resignation be accepted by the Board? It was agreed to. And on motion it was resolved that Mr. Smith, now professor of languages, be appointed to take charge of the College in the room of Mr. McMillan, until the next meeting of the Board,..."

"September the 25th, 1822 The Board proceeded to the choice of a principal of the colleges; whereupon the Rev^d Matthew Brown was duly elected: and the Board agreed to give him a salary of eight hundred dollars per annum.

Mr. Brown declared his acceptance of the office, and took the usual oath."

The Principal forced to resign, William McMillan, was a nephew of John McMillan and a member of the first graduating class of Jefferson College in 1802. Unfortunately, as the Principal of the College, he was the wrong man for the times. Aloof and inflexible, he did not have the respect of the students and could not understand their viewpoints.

The man who replaced him, Matthew Brown, had the qualities McMillan lacked. His leadership was decisive, but he understood compromise. Above all, he commanded the respect of the students. During his twenty-three years as head of Jefferson College, the institution grew and prospered.

Complex and closely timed events brought this former President of Washington College to Canonsburg. Students had forced the vacation of the principalship of Jefferson College. Intra-church friction had caused Brown to resign his pulpit in Washington. He was in Canonsburg to see old friends before going to Kentucky. One of these friends, Samuel Ralston, for a long time the president of the Board of Trustees of Jefferson College, found in Matthew Brown the answer to their probl

The night before Commencement, he was asked to become Principal of the College. The next day he was installed as Principal and gave an impromptu address to the graduating seniors.

The multiplicity of "what if's" is staggering.