

WASHINGTON AND JEFFERSON COLLEGES: A MICROCOSM OF THE CIVIL WAR

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THE history of any chosen group of persons may be related in either of two ways to what Sir Walter Scott called "the big pow-wow": from the inside out or from the outside in. Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* offers excellent examples of both methods, but more strikingly demonstrates the former. He considers three families, the Sedleys, the Osbornes, and the Rawleys, making Becky Sharp his connecting link among them. Becky's foil, the apolitical, asocial Amelia Sedley, is as unaware of history as any guileless girl can be. With characteristic imagery that reminds the reader of his panoramic method and omniscient approach, Thackeray says: "when war was raging all over Europe, and empires were being staked; when the *Courier* newspaper had tens of thousands of subscribers; when one day brought you a battle of Vittoria, another a burning of Moscow, or a newsman's horn blowing down Russell Square about dinner-time, announced such a fact as—'Battle of Leipsic—six thousand men engaged—total defeat of the French—two hundred thousand killed,' . . . The fate of Europe was Lieutenant George Osborne" to Amelia Sedley. Still, the destiny of the great world of which the naive Amelia is totally unaware affects *her* destiny: the War of 1812 ruins the fortune of her merchant-shipper father, and this loss of fortune drastically affects her entire life. In a sense, here is history from the outside in, but more strikingly Thackeray takes his characters Becky, her husband Rawley, the ahistorical Amelia, George Osborne, all of the important ones, on a journey from the inside out—from their own little worlds off to the very climax of the Napoleonic Wars: to a ball at Brussels when the alarm of the impending Battle of Waterloo is given, to the preparation for battle, indeed to the battle itself where Amelia's husband George is killed. Here is movement from the microcosm of our central concern to the macrocosm of the world event, and in a sense movement back again

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since Amelia, the character with no world-view at all, experiences the greatest personal loss in a grand moment of history.

A telling illustrator of history from the outside in was Thackeray's contemporary, Anthony Trollope. In *Barchester Towers*, exactly ten years after Thackeray gave the characters of *Vanity Fair* all of the world for a stage, Trollope kept his characters in effect within sight of the spires of Barchester Cathedral, but even their pettiest and most personal tensions within his provincial scene were somehow related to a fight between high church and low church, in turn related to the gradually changing structure of all of English society. Unlike Thackeray, Trollope does not allow his characters to leave his very delimited scene, but ironically in their everyday concerns they may reflect the patterns of history more significantly than those allowed by Thackeray to go off to the great wars or, like Becky Sharp herself, to be in the intimate chambers of the great ones who decide great policy.

A kind of history can be written through close attention to the movement and behavior of persons who make up any microcosm: families, towns, regions, the institutions of church and school upon a given spot. If one were to record the movements of the alumni, the faculty members, the board members of Washington College and of Jefferson College, which were united in 1865 to form Washington and Jefferson, he would have written a vivid history of America from frontier days through the Civil War. The lives of the students, the teachers, the trustees, the markedly interested friends of the two colleges were threads which crossed and recrossed, touched lightly and touched strongly the central patterns of the country's history. For example, when the ill-fated John Brown left Kansas, the scene of his first violent anti-slavery demonstrations, a Jefferson alumnus, John White Geary (Jefferson, 1839), had been appointed governor of the Territory, and when John Brown was sentenced to death in Virginia in 1859, he was refused a reprieve by a governor who was a Washington alumnus, Henry Alexander Wise (Washington, 1825). Ironically, Wise, who denied John Brown his life, had opposed secession because of his strong disagreement with some distinctly Southern views. Geary, who became a brigadier general in the Union Army and served as war-governor of Savannah before he returned to Pennsylvania to become the governor of his home state, no doubt acted more out of a sense of duty and responsibility than from any

strong conviction against the Southern position. To follow the careers of Geary and Wise would reveal the pre-war tensions, the stage of the war itself, and the post-war problems of reconstruction both above and below the Mason and Dixon line.

Wise and Geary were, to be sure, important men in important positions as were an impressive number of Washington College and Jefferson College alumni.¹ But just as vivid history, also from the inside out, can be written through tracing the movements of followers as well as of leaders and through reading accounts of the responses of these less significant men to their own movements. The article by Professor Walter Sanderlin in the second issue of *Topic*, Washington and Jefferson's journal of the liberal arts, utilizes the letters of one Bishop Crumrine, a Jefferson student of the class of 1863, who enlisted in the Pittsburgh Heavy Artillery in 1862 and spent all of the war years assigned to Fort Delaware.² Although he was not in combat and constantly lamented both this fact and the fact that he did not have a commission, his recounting of Army conditions and Army attitudes is dramatic and colorful and perhaps of more value in conveying a feeling for the Civil War period than, say, a biographical account of Geary's military experience or Wise's own autobiography. "The grandest scene I ever saw was at Philadelphia when the dead President was there," young Bishop Crumrine wrote on May 1, 1865, introducing a moving account of Lincoln lying in state.

1 Comprehensive history from the inside out could be written by following very literally the movements of such men as J. Patton Anderson (Jefferson, 1840), representative in the Confederate Congress and major general in the Confederate Army; John Taylor Moore (Jefferson, 1840), a planter near Fort Gibson, Mississippi; Silas Condit (Washington, 1840), a physician in the Confederate Army from 1861 to 1865; Robert H. Lafferty (Washington, 1840), a teacher and minister in North Carolina and a chaplain with Southern soldiers; David McConaughy (Washington, 1840), lawyer, Pennsylvania state senator, and an aide-de-camp to General Couch of the Union forces; Christopher Parsons Wolcott (Washington, 1840), Judge Advocate for the General Army and finally an assistant Secretary of War in the very midst of the conflict. I mention only a few men who graduated in a particular arbitrarily chosen year, by chance not a year relevant to the most famous alumni of Washington and of Jefferson involved in the Civil War in one way or another. By examining the experiences of the graduates of either or of both of the colleges in any one year from, say, 1840 until the mid-1860's, one could define a network of movements which virtually contain the Civil War, that is, one could approach fruitfully history from the inside out.

2 The letters of Bishop Crumrine are in the Washington and Jefferson College Historical Collection. A selection of these letters has been edited and discussed by Professor Walter Sanderlin for *Topic*, Vol. 1, No. 2, Fall, 1961.

Of more local concern was his mention that a classmate, "Dunc. Cooper," a "Lieut Col of 40th Tennessee," was in the guard house and had tried unsuccessfully to escape by swimming the river (July 10, 1864),³ and even more significant were his derisive comments on the copperheads of the Pittsburgh region (June 10, 1863), following an angry reference to the sympathies of his own father: "... I think Father is an enemy to his Country—or that he is a copperhead—and I tell you I hate them worse than the rebbles" (April 28, 1863). His experiences offer history from the inside out, but his recollections of home and family redirect one's attention from the outside in, and here certainly is the more important concern to the regional historian.

As the war approached, Washington College, in the county seat, was known for its strong abolitionist feeling, and Jefferson College, at Canonsburg seven miles away, was more rampant with what Bishop Crumrine called "copperhead" sentiments than even a border town in Pennsylvania was likely to be. John Scott, the president of Washington from 1852 to 1865, was so outspoken on behalf of abolition, that the local papers and generally the residents of the county attacked him severely. An issue of the Washington *Examiner* reported a rally participated in by Dr. Scott, Dr. Brownson, and others importantly connected with Washington College, but the editorial pages consistently condemned the making of the school into a "political institution."⁴ The county—and this included Canonsburg, the home of Jefferson College — was not so much pro-slavery as traditionally imbued with a sense of states' rights, so much so that its inhabitants often rationalized the pro-slavery position of the South. Jefferson, interestingly enough, always included a noticeable Southern clientele until the increasing tension of the pre-war years discouraged the Southerners from going north of the Mason and Dixon line to college.⁵

3 Duncan Cooper had come to Jefferson from Columbia, Tennessee; he would have graduated with the class of 1863, but his education was interrupted by conspicuous circumstances. By the 1860's few Southerners chose to attend Jefferson or Washington.

4 The Washington *Examiner* in September of 1864 accused President Scott of "shamefully partisan conduct emphasized during the past month in college affairs" by discrimination in favor of "Abolition students" and the barring of Democratic speakers (that is, those in favor of states' rights and, implicitly or directly, of slavery). (See the files in the archives of the Observer Publishing Company, Washington, Pennsylvania.)

5 An estimate, based primarily on material collected for a *Biographical and Historical Catalogue of Washington and Jefferson College . . . 1802-1902*

Acquaintance with Southerners might in part account for the "copperhead" sympathies which Bishop Crumrine lamented in his own family, but hardly so much as a frontier tradition which suspected any strong stand on the part of a central government. Washington County, remember, was the region of the Whiskey Rebellion in its comparatively frontier days, in American history one of the truly significant expressions of rebellion against the giving up of certain rights to attain others. Then to be sure, the town of Washington and Washington Academy had been as vehemently opposed to a strong central government as had the rest of the county and Canonsburg Academy, the predecessor of Jefferson College. But as the town grew into the county seat, in the eyes of countrymen it became somehow the symbol for central law and order and for the commercial and material values as opposed to the freedom of those strange bedfellows, the frontier and the isolated plantation.

For years rivalry between the two colleges had prevented the security or the progress of either, but when union was discussed, neither town was willing to give up its institution to the other. The recurrent cry of the Jefferson board was that the inhabitants of Washington, so involved in being lawyers and merchants, were indifferent "to the Interests of literature in general, and to the demands of the church in particular"⁶ and could therefore not raise money for a school despite the characteristic accumulation for personal profit. But ironically the political strength and wealth of the town of Washington were the very factors that ultimately contributed to union and hence to the removal of Jefferson College from Canonsburg, then largely a college town, to the county seat.

It is a temptation to let the terms of "college-war" and legal "union" in 1865 lead one into a Civil War metaphor without pertinence, but interestingly enough, the schools were in the relative positions of their namesakes: Washington for law and order (and abolition), Jefferson for the rights of separate units (and temperate in its anti-slavery attitude). Washington College and the county seat were, then, to Jefferson College and the county as, in the days of the Whiskey Rebellion, the new government under the leadership of

(Philadelphia: George H. Buchanan and Company, 1902), is that Jefferson had approximately seventy men fighting for the Confederacy and twice that number for the Union, whereas Washington had twenty men in the Southern forces and four times that number in the Union Army.

6 *Minutes of the Jefferson College Board of Trustees*, December 29, 1817, Washington and Jefferson College Historical Collection.

Washington and Hamilton was to Western Pennsylvania. If the town of Washington and the educational institution located therein had changed their political positions, it was because frontier had evolved into society, country into town.

One can trace the opposition of values even further back. In 1784 George Washington made a trip to Chartiers Creek in Washington County to dismiss squatters from a piece of property he had formerly attained. "Being Sunday," he wrote with the sophisticated Easterner's disdain of the provincial frontiersman, "and the People living on my Land, *apparently* very religious, it was thought best to postpone going among them till tomorrow."⁷ The county legend is that on this visit Washington was fined for cursing on Sunday, almost as if the frontiersman considered him as irreligious as he considered them religious.⁸ It has been frequently pointed out that for years the celebration of Washington's birthday got short shrift in Washington County, and one still hears derogatory remarks about the father of the country.⁹

To many of the Canonsburg supporters of Jefferson College, union with Washington College in the county seat was a giving up of personal freedom. A fragment of a Canonsburg historical society even today carries on its war with Washington and Jefferson almost as if the society is celebrating its own centennial of lost causes. Valuable old books are kept locked up and rotting in a former building of Jefferson College, though they legally became the property of Washington and Jefferson after the union of 1865¹⁰; and a portrait of Jefferson, reputedly given to Jefferson College by Jefferson in

7 *The Diaries of George Washington, 1748-1799* (edited by John C. Fitzpatrick), (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1925), II, 294. See also Archer B. Hulbert, *Washington and the West* (New York: The Century Company, 1905), 49.

8 Boyd Crumrine, ed., *History of Washington County, Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: L. H. Everts and Company, 1882), 858, describes the legend of the oath, judges it as "mere fabrication," and gives the story of what actually happened according to the son of a man who was living at the time of Washington's visit.

9 Even present-day residents of Washington County will remind one that the county and town are named after Washington, the young surveyor of western lands and officer in the British Army fighting the French in what is now southwestern Pennsylvania, and *not* after Washington, General of the American Army and first President of the United States.

10 Helen Turnbull Waite Coleman's *Banners in the Wilderness: Early Years of Washington and Jefferson College* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1956) contains in Appendix I, 214-229, the charter of 1865, a legislative act of 1869, and a court decision of 1871, testifying to the legal union of the two colleges and revealing the bitter resistance on the part of those loyal to Jefferson-in-Canonsburg to making the union effective.

1802, disappeared after the union, only to appear in recent years on the walls of Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia, once an adjunct of Jefferson College and evidently to some Washington County residents the only true descendant of the early Jefferson.¹¹

The contest between the colleges is somehow all history from the outside in, from the macrocosm of the fight of states' rights versus central government to the microcosm of the opposition of county and county seat, but it is history, too, that makes the Civil War a microcosm in contrast to larger patterns which precede and which follow it. The dichotomies of old world and new world, of civilized east and frontier west, of centralized government and states' rights, of the industrial north and the pastoral south and west, form a straight line toward, through, and beyond the Civil War, and the history of Western Pennsylvania is an integral part of each of these dichotomies. As they evolved in the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries, Washington and Jefferson Colleges as institutions of learning, and those persons related to these institutions as individuals in a variety of capacities, reflected each of these dichotomies and contributed to each of them. Washington College, trainer of lawyers in the county seat, stronghold of abolitionist sentiment; Jefferson College, proud of its cultural intention, derisive of the practical concern of Washington, nostalgically sympathetic with its departed Southern alumni, traditionally sympathetic with the states' rights position, contested in terms first foreshadowing the war to come and later reflecting the war that had come. Union of town school and county school came finally, but it came hard. The centennial of this academic union, not many years hence, will hardly remind us that the differences ever existed and will thereby properly celebrate the joining of the schools and their development into today's Washington and Jefferson.

¹¹ Jefferson Medical College of Philadelphia was legally a part of Jefferson College of Canonsburg from 1824 to 1838. The portrait referred to is reproduced in Coleman, *op. cit.*, opposite page 65.