HISTORICAL SOCIETY DOCUMENTS AND NOTES

FOOTNOTE TO WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA HISTORY

Not many examples of the teen-age literary formulas or mannerisms of the mid-nineteenth century survive today, but this letter* from Matthew Brown Riddle, written in 1850 from Jefferson College, where he was a fourteen-year-old sophomore, to his close friend Joseph Albree, is an exception. Presented to The Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania by Dr. Riddle's nephew, the Rev. Henry A. Riddle, as an amusing specimen of his youthful sophistication and verve, it is not greatly at variance with those characteristics of our own times. The author grew up to be a great American theologian, preacher, teacher and philosophic commentator of the years between 1870 and 1916. He was a chaplain in the Union Army in the Civil War and died only a few months before the United States entered World War I.

Canonsburg Wednesday Jan 23, 1850

Dear Joe

I received your letter on Monday last. In your last letter you asked me to tell you how I passed my time. In the first place I get up and get dressed and go down to breakfast and then I carry up some coal and then I go over and get a book out of the library and then go to prayers at a ¼ before 9 and I then go into a recitation room and recite Latin. At ten I recite in Mathematics, at eleven I recite in Greek. At twelve I am done for the day. I then go and get my dinner and then I can do as I please for the rest of the day. You wished me to draw you a picture of Canonsburg but I think I can get you one without me drawing it. I am not homesick at all: I have heard that our baby Henry has been very sick. How are all your people. I would not be very much out of humor if some of my books would be lost and I would get some money for them. I got that life of Joe Barker and am very much obliged to you for it. I burnt that fool stuff you sent in your letter about “This is to certify etc. etc.” I wish you would come over here next term and room with me. If you can read this letter you are smarter than some people. Good bye I have no more paper.

M. B. Riddle

* The letter will be filed with the other Joseph Albree papers. See WPHM, XLIX, Albree, Joseph.