

CARRIER SEMINARY

A Short-Lived Methodist Educational Venture

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IN July of 1865 the Erie Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church met in Jamestown, New York, for its annual meeting. In addition to the regular business to be transacted by the delegates, attention was focused on the selection of an appropriate means to observe the centennial of Methodism in America. The report of the Conference Education Committee apprised the delegates of several such means: endow a professorship or principalship at a Methodist seminary; provide an existing seminary with science facilities; or sponsor two more seminaries, one in western New York and one in the south-eastern portion of the Conference.¹ The Conference chose the last of these alternatives, establishing seminaries at Randolph, New York, and Clarion, Pennsylvania. This paper deals with the seminary established at Clarion.

In accordance with the Conference suggestion and with the convictions of the people that such an institution was greatly needed in the Clarion District, the Rev. R. H. Hurlburt, the Presiding Elder, called together the preachers and laymen of the District on March 13, 1866, for a convention at Clarion to initiate the establishment of a seminary within its bounds. It was decided to seek Conference approval of Clarion as the site. The Rev. R. M. Bear was engaged to act as financial agent for the purpose of soliciting subscriptions to erect a building. In July of the same year at the annual session of the Erie Conference the Education Committee reported that subscriptions already totaled eleven thousand dollars. The Conference agreed to accept the seminary under its patronage and control when the subscriptions totaled thirty thousand dollars.²

On March 18, 1867, the contributors met to organize a board of trustees which consisted of George W. Arnold, Samuel Wilson, Jacob

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1 *Minutes of the Erie Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1865* (hereafter cited as *Minutes*), XXX, 19-20.

2 *Minutes, 1866*, XXXI, 28.

Black, John Keatly, James Ross, Hiram Carrier, Nathan Carrier, Jr., David Lawson, William Young, James Knox, Hurchman Torrance, John Coaz, Nathan Myers, Martin Kearney and John Strattan. Before the Conference held its annual meeting in July, a building committee had been chosen, a contract let for construction of the buildings,³ and a corporate charter secured.⁴

The institution began operation September 10, 1867, as the Carrier Seminary of Western Pennsylvania. It was named in honor of the Carrier family for their contributions of money, six thousand dollars, and lumber.⁵

Lacking any facilities of its own, classes were held in the old academy building. The seminary was a coeducational institution with the Rev. James G. Townsend as principal and Miss A. E. Rinehart as preceptress. Its calendar called for three thirteen-week terms with tuition as follows: common English branches — six dollars, higher English branches — seven dollars, and languages — eight dollars.⁶

The Rev. Mr. Townsend was a somewhat vacillating Methodist minister who seemingly set the pattern for short tenure of office. He was born in Pittsburgh in 1839 and served in the Civil War, receiving a wound which left his arm permanently crippled. Townsend, the sometime principal of the Union School at New Falls, Ohio, also served two parish charges before coming to Carrier. Prior to the War he attended Oberlin College and afterward completed his education at Allegheny College. The trustees recommended that he be reappointed at the close of the first year's operation but the Conference demurred. Instead he was given a church in Edinboro, Pennsylvania.

After leaving Carrier, Townsend's religious career was somewhat checkered. He bolted from the church in 1874 to serve the Congregational Church and returned to the fold two years later. Again in 1884 he left the church, founding the Independent Congregational Church at Jamestown, New York, teaching what he called the "New Theology." Still later he founded the First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh.⁷

In the spring of 1868 subscriptions reached twenty-four thousand

³ *Minutes, 1867, XXXII, 36.*

⁴ Clarion County, Leases and Agreements Book, I, 81-82 (June 10, 1867), Courthouse, Clarion.

⁵ Aaron J. Davis, ed., *History of Clarion County Pennsylvania* (Syracuse: D. Mason and Company, 1887), 488; Vera Carrier to the author, August 8, 1967.

⁶ *Minutes, 1867, XXXII, 75.*

⁷ J. N. Fradenburgh, *History of the Erie Conference* (Oil City: Derrick Publishing Company, 1907), II, 485; *Minutes, 1868, XXXIII, 25.*

dollars and the trustees authorized the building program to begin. Accordingly, on June 16, 1868, the cornerstone of Seminary Hall, a massive three-storied brick structure sixty by one hundred and ten, was laid. Additional funds for the construction were secured through the issue of bonds authorized by the State Legislature in early 1869.⁸ The building lingered long in construction, being completed in the fall of 1871. The total cost including furniture was seventy-five thousand dollars. In addition, a two-story wooden structure was erected for the boarding department.⁹ The buildings were erected on a plot of land seven acres and fifteen perches in area, the land having been purchased for seven hundred dollars from George W. Arnold, local banker and philanthropist. At the same time the Corporation purchased about two acres from the Samuel Sloan family for two hundred dollars.¹⁰

Townsend was succeeded in office by the Rev. Stephen S. Stuntz. The Rev. Mr. Stuntz, born March 26, 1828, in Albion, Pennsylvania, like his predecessor was educated at Allegheny College. He served as pastor of the Clarion Methodist Episcopal Church and principal of the Seminary concurrently. In April 1870, he was stricken with dropsy and left Clarion. The disease resulted in his death in October.¹¹

Literary societies, long a fixture of pre-twentieth century secondary and collegiate institutions, were organized during the principalship of the Rev. Stephen Stuntz. The Clonian Society was the first such society with the Zetagetean Society being founded at a later date.¹²

In the fall of 1870, Miss E. J. Haldeman became principal, remaining in that position one year. She was later preceptress for the institution. Miss Haldeman was succeeded by Prof. Judson J. Steadman who served as principal for two years (1871-1873).¹³ During Steadman's term the first portent of things to come may be observed. In 1872 some professional and businessmen of Clarion started a movement to secure a state normal school for the town. In 1874 the State Legislature created a new normal school district in the Clarion area.¹⁴ Later that year the trustees of the Seminary petitioned the

⁸ Act 88 of the General Assembly, February 5, 1869.

⁹ *Minutes, 1868*, XXXIII, 25; Davis, *History of Clarion County Pennsylvania*, 488.

¹⁰ Clarion County, Deed Book, XIV, 306-307 (June 23, 1869), Courthouse, Clarion.

¹¹ Fradenburgh, *History of the Erie Conference*, II, 293-294.

¹² *The Clarion Democrat* (hereafter cited as *Democrat*), December 25, 1869; *The Clarion Republican*, January 1, 1878.

¹³ Davis, *History of Clarion County Pennsylvania*, 488.

¹⁴ Act 120 of the General Assembly, May 8, 1874.

Clarion Common Pleas Court to change its name to the Carrier State Normal School.¹⁵ Nothing came of these endeavors because the efforts of the trustees were rebuffed by both the Conference and James Wickersham, State Superintendent of Public Instruction. Nevertheless, a seed had been sown which in 1887 would blossom into Clarion State Normal School.

Enrollment during Steadman's term seems to have been substantial since the faculty included ten academic instructors plus two music instructors. Courses of study embraced ancient and modern classics, mathematics, natural science, commercial calculation, painting, drawing, penmanship, music, and normal science. Carrier was described in an advertisement as "The only Normal College for the perfection of teachers under the supervision of the M. E. Church."¹⁶

Professor Steadman was succeeded in office by Professor J. S. Milliken who served one year. The report of the trustees to the Conference at the conclusion of Milliken's term indicated an indebtedness of twenty thousand dollars,¹⁷ a sizeable one for that day and age. This was another foreboding of things to come.

William Todd was next to assume the leadership at Carrier, becoming principal in the fall of 1874. Professor Todd, born of English immigrant parents, June 3, 1838, in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, was raised on an Armstrong County farm and educated in the South Buffalo Township School. After several years as a teacher he enlisted in the Union Army. At the cessation of hostilities he was discharged and thereupon entered Allegheny College receiving his degree in 1868. Following his graduation Professor Todd was in turn principal of the Toms River (New Jersey) School, professor of mathematics at Wyoming Seminary (Pennsylvania), principal of the public school at Smithfield (Ohio), and principal of Carrier.¹⁸

When Todd took office the country was in the throes of a depression precipitated by the failure the preceding fall of the banking firm of Jay Cooke and Company. The financial depression caused a decline in the oil and lumbering industries of northwestern Pennsylvania resulting in a decline in enrollment at Carrier.

The only accurate and verifiable enrollment figures for the Seminary are those for the Todd administration, 1874-1877. In fact,

¹⁵ Clarion County, Leases and Agreements Book, III, 160 (December 29, 1874), Courthouse, Clarion.

¹⁶ *Minutes, 1871*, XXXV, 171.

¹⁷ *Minutes, 1874*, XXXVIII, 28.

¹⁸ *History of Beaver County Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: A. Warner and Company, 1888), 727-728; W. E. Clyde Todd (son of William Todd) to the author, September 16, 1967.

these and the *Conference Minutes* are the only known official records of any type that are available for the Seminary. All other records were apparently lost in the sands of time. A count of student names in the handwritten register reveals enrollment in 1874 was 161, in 1875 was 143, and in 1876 was 138. These are cumulative registration figures for each of the three-term academic years.

Many of the students were enrolled for only a portion of the term, for it was Carrier's advertised policy to "receive students at any time and charge them proportionally."¹⁹ Because of this factor the figures reported in the *Conference Minutes* or in issues of the *Clarion* weeklies, *The Clarion Democrat* and *The Clarion Republican*, may be somewhat misleading. On several occasions conflicting sets of data were included in the same set of *Minutes*.

The limited data available would seem to indicate that few students remained at the Seminary long enough to complete their education. Graduates totaled two in 1877, four in 1880, one in 1881 and two in 1882.²⁰

In William Todd's efforts to promote enrollment at Carrier he extolled the virtues of the institution and the community. Part of an advertisement stated:

The present teachers are experienced, thorough and practical educators; persons under whose supervision parents need not fear to place their sons and daughters.

The Music Department, in charge of Miss Mary R. Jenks, a very superior teacher, has been especially successful.

The main building is . . . nicely and comfortably arranged.

The village . . . is distinguished for its healthfulness, quietness and morality.²¹

As the institution entered its second decade, the Rev. A. Baker succeeded Professor Todd who had been elected professor of mathematics and natural science at the Beaver College and Musical Institute, Beaver County. The Rev. Mr. Baker served as principal and teacher while his wife served as governess and teacher. Enrollment declined to twenty-one in 1877.

The Committee of Visitors appointed by the Conference felt that

¹⁹ *The Clarion Republican*, September 10, 1875.

²⁰ *The Clarion Republican*, July 13, 1877; *Democrat*, July 1, 1880, June 23, 1881, May 18, 1882.

²¹ *Minutes 1875*, XXXIX, 86.

Character

Incorporation of the Barriers } Is the Honorable the Judges of the Court of Common Pleas of Chancery County.
of the petition of the Shewings, respectfully, represents; That they are citizens of the
Milford Pennsylvania } Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, associated for literary and scientific purposes

and are desirous to acquire and enjoy the power and immunities of a corporate body
politic in law, under the same and style of the Barriers, Community of Milford Pennsylvania to be situated in the
said County of Chancery; they they have prepared an instrument in writing defining the objects, articles con-
ditions and laws, rules and style, under which they have associated, and hereunto exhibit and present the same to
this Court, they therefore pray the Court to please and examine the said instrument, and of the objects, articles
and conditions therein set forth and contained, shall appear lawful and not injurious to the community, and the
Court will, make such order with regard to the same, as is directed by the Act of Assembly in such case made
and provided; and if no sufficient reason be shown to the contrary, that the Court will decree and declare, that
the petition shall according to the Articles and conditions in said instrument set forth and contained, become and
be a corporation or body politic and have continuance by the same style and title in said instrument provided and
declared And they will ever pray for George W. Arnold, Samuel Nelson, Jacob Black John Kealey, Charles
Lawson, Jas. Ross, Ninian Carrier, Nathan Carrier, William Young, J. P. Taylor, A. Simcoe, J. T. Cox & Meyer
Master, Kearney, John R. Stratton,
Chancery County of

Community appeared before me G. W. Arnold one of the above petitioners, at being duly
sworn according to law doth say that the facts set forth in the above petition are true to the best of his

knowledge and belief
I subscribed before me the 1st day of
1835

G. W. Arnold,

the poor health and almost total disability of the Rev. Mr. Baker during the year was a contributing factor in the decline. In its report to the Conference in 1878 the visitors recommended that the Board of Trustees should employ a more healthful and active principal "to secure more efficiency and give Carrier Seminary the place it deserves, and the hold on the hearts of our people."²²

In accordance with these expressed wishes, Baker was replaced by Professor M. Thrasher on October 31, 1878. Enrollment rocketed upward to 135. Course listings for the year included science, normal, college preparatory and music.²³

The Seminary facilities were used to conduct a Normal Training Session for fifty Clarion County teachers in July of 1879.²⁴ This was the first of a number of such summer institutes conducted at the Seminary and was another link in the chain of events leading to the creation of a state normal school at Clarion. This and subsequent normal sessions were conducted under the leadership or influence of Aaron J. Davis, County Superintendent of Schools and founding father of Clarion State Normal School.

Several incidents during the Thrasher administration indicate that "town and gown" relationships and student behavior have not changed substantially during the intervening years. In March of 1879 a goat was turned loose on the campus. As a Halloween prank the campus gates were carried off by some of the town's hooligans and Professor Thrasher's expensive Morgan mare was stolen and released several miles from town. In November several lumps of coal were thrown into some rising bread dough on the back porch of the dining hall. These incidents were reported in the student gossip column "Seminary Sparks" which appeared irregularly in *The Clarion Democrat* and *The Clarion Republican*.

Next to assume the helm of the unseaworthy vessel of education was the Rev. Levi Beers. Born June 14, 1845, he spent his early life in Ohio and Illinois. After serving in the War of the Rebellion he attended Baldwin-Wallace College earning an A.B. degree and later receiving the degree of A.M. *in cursu*.²⁵

The Rev. Mr. Beers' daughter described the campus during his term as "A very large field with a fence around it, and for a gate, a style. No steps, only a post and on top a loose block to turn. There

²² *Minutes, 1877*, XLI, 28.

²³ *Democrat*, October 31, 1877.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, July 24, 1879.

²⁵ *Minutes, 1919*, LXXXIII, 817-819.

was a horse loose in the lot to eat the grass." 26

When the Rev. Mr. Beers became principal, March 25, 1880, he found the Seminary courting financial disaster. Its indebtedness totaled about thirty thousand dollars and by the next year it had climbed to thirty-five thousand dollars.²⁷ In 1881, divine providence provided a slight reprieve for the financially embarrassed Seminary as large sums of money were made available to lighten the financial burden. The First National Bank of Clarion made a donation of \$17,655.80 and local subscriptions further reduced the debt to fourteen thousand dollars.²⁸ The trustees also received a loan of \$12,400 from the Rev. John M. Edwards, a Carrier Seminary graduate. In return for the loan the institution was leased to the Rev. Mr. Edwards for twenty-five years.²⁹ These moneys were raised through the endeavors of the Rev. Reuben C. Smith, the institutional financial agent.

During the Beers administration the institution was criticized for its alleged attempt to make the students good Republicans and good Methodists. The Rev. Mr. Beers left the institution in 1882 and served a number of charges throughout the Conference before leaving the area to become principal of the Harvey Industrial Academy in Illinois (1892). After serving Harvey several years deafness and somewhat later blindness set in. He succumbed on February 16, 1919.³⁰

The tenth and last principal of the Seminary was its lien holder, the Rev. Mr. Edwards. He was born in 1844 and suffered from chronic ill health. He served two congregations before assuming the reins at Carrier and one after it was sold. Then he withdrew from the ministry and went into semi-retirement as a farmer and merchant until his demise in 1904.³¹

Like many other proprietary educational institutions of the time, the operation of the Seminary was a family endeavor. The Edwards family resided in the portion of Seminary Hall that later became the library. The Rev. Mr. Edwards was principal, teacher, and general factotum. His wife, Margaret, had the responsibility for the board and room for the students who resided on the top floor of the building. Mrs. Edwards and her helper not only did the cleaning and cooking for the family, but also for the students. The baking was

26 M. B. Ozanne to Ernest Aharrah, August 14, 1967.

27 *Minutes, 1880*, XLIV, 19; *Minutes, 1881*, XLV, 28.

28 *Democrat*, October 20, 1881.

29 Clarion County, Leases and Agreements Book, VI, 212 (October 1, 1881); Mortgage Book, V, 54 (October 1, 1881), Courthouse, Clarion.

30 *Minutes, 1919*, *op. cit.*

31 Fradenburgh, *History of the Erie Conference*, II, 622, 703; *Democrat*, November 24, 1904.

done in an oven to the rear of the building.³²

An enrollment of eighty-eight during the 1883-1884 academic year plus the inquiries for the next year must have prompted the Rev. Mr. Edwards to thwart the efforts of Professor E. A. Hayes of Randolph, New York, to obtain control of Carrier Seminary.³³ The Rev. Mr. Edwards and the trustees, apparently highly pleased with prospects for the future, authorized improvements costing five hundred dollars to be made upon the buildings. Their judgment seemed to be vindicated when enrollment reached 130 in 1884-1885.³⁴ Under its new leader Carrier seemed to be on the rebound, but such was not the case. The following year 165 were registered but 126 of these were participants in the spring normal course being supervised by Professor Rosswell G. Yingling who had rented the facilities.³⁵

By the close of the school year (July 1885) the debt had risen to twenty thousand dollars and by the following year to \$21,500.³⁶ Bankruptcy was once again confronting the Seminary. Amid an undertow of maneuvering to purchase the buildings and grounds by a group seeking to establish a state normal school, Professor Yingling, secretary for the institution, announced on June 23, 1886, that the Seminary would not reopen in the fall.³⁷

On September 10, 1886, exactly nineteen years from the day classes first met, the sale of the building and grounds was consummated. The sum of twenty-five thousand dollars was agreed upon during a special meeting of representatives of the M. E. Church and those of the Clarion Normal School Association held in Brookville,³⁸ thus ending the life of Carrier Seminary as a higher institution. The following April, Clarion State Normal School opened its doors in the Seminary facilities which in today's setting would qualify for President Johnson's anti-poverty aid. "The roof was leaky; dormitory rooms were often unfit for habitation, soot lying in heaps on the floor; bedsteads had to be roped together; and the mattresses were

32 Mildred G. McMahan (granddaughter of Rev. Mr. Edwards), to Ernest Aharrah, August 9, 1967.

33 *Democrat*, May 15, 1884; *Minutes*, 1884, XLVIII, 31.

34 *Minutes*, 1885, XLIX, 34.

35 *Minutes*, 1886, L, 23; J. W. F. Wilkinson, *Fifty Years of Recollections and Progress* (Clarion, 1937), 9, in the library of Clarion State College.

36 *Minutes*, 1885, XLIX, 34; *Minutes*, 1886, L, 23.

37 *Democrat*, July 8, 1886.

38 *Minutes*, 1886, L, 33; Clarion County, Deed Book, CIV, 427 (December 28, 1886), Courthouse, Clarion; Aaron J. Davis, *The Beginning of the Clarion State Normal School* (Clarion, written in 1920 but not copyrighted until 1937), 7, in the library of Clarion State College.

rotted out by the constant leaking from above.”³⁹

What caused the demise of a once prospering and promising venture in education? Those inclined to be influenced by the zodiacal signs might simply ascribe the demise of Carrier to kismet. Through a printer's error an advertisement announcing the opening date for the new institution read as follows: “calendar for 1687-8”⁴⁰ instead of 1867-8. However, a realistic analysis of the situation would reveal more substantial reasons for such a short existence. Obviously the financial woes confronting Carrier Seminary were an overbearing factor. It appears that the institution did not receive adequate support from either the Erie Conference of the M. E. Church or its board of trustees.

The reports of the Conference Visitors were replete with statements of the following nature. “The Carrier Seminary . . . has nobly vindicated its claim to a place among the Seminaries of the Conference.” “No pains have been spared . . . to make this a pleasant home for those who desire to obtain an education.” “The buildings and grounds are both elegant and beautiful, and with the careful supervision that the cause of education demands for the Institute, its future will be a power for good.” “The buildings are large, elegant and commodious . . .” “The school has done good work during the past year.” As has been illustrated, evidence of verbal support was plentiful, but words are not the balm of financial life. Careful examination of the *Conference Minutes* for the years from 1867-1886 revealed only meager financial support had been tendered to the Seminary. In the entire twenty-year period less than five hundred dollars was given to support the Seminary.⁴¹ In 1883, Carrier received the paltry sum of \$16.41 in financial aid.⁴²

It also seems unlikely that the board of trustees gave its wholehearted support. As early as 1872 several of the leading stockholders began to focus upon one goal, conversion of the Seminary to a state normal school.

A third factor creating difficulties for the institution was competition for potential students in a county that could not have been termed populous. In 1877, there were seven “higher” institutions, including

39 Rosswell G. Yingling, “Speech Commemorating Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Founding of Clarion State Normal School,” *The Clarion*, I, 13 (August 1912).

40 *Minutes, 1867*, XXXII, 75.

41 *Minutes, 1865-1886*, XXX-L.

42 *Minutes, 1883*, XLVII, 31.

Carrier, operating in the county.⁴³ Also, the demise of Carrier somewhat mirrored the times. This period was characterized by the waxing of the public high school and the waning of the private academy and seminary.

The short career of Carrier Seminary is somewhat reminiscent of a statement by Professor Lindsley of Nashville University who, when speaking of the proliferation of colleges during the early nineteenth century, noted that these institutions “. . . rise up like mushrooms in our luxurious soil. They are duly lauded and puffed for a day, and then sink to be heard no more.”⁴⁴ Such was the fate of Carrier Seminary for recent inquiry revealed that its Methodist affiliation was unknown to the Conference historian. No mention of the institution was found in A. W. Cummings' *The Early Schools of Methodism*, an extensive history and listing of Methodist educational endeavors and institutions in the United States published in 1886. No space was devoted to this forgotten child of the Erie Annual Conference in Fradenburgh's two-volume *History of the Erie Conference*.

POSTSCRIPT

Although Carrier Seminary as a higher institution no longer existed, the name and corporation lingered for many years. As a result of the sale all financial obligations and encumbrances were cancelled and a balance of thirty-five hundred dollars remained. This was eventually turned over to the Clarion District by the Conference, and the Carrier Seminary was operated as an annual summer school similar to the Chautauqua Summer School. This school, operating on the Clarion Assembly Grounds, was in existence as late as 1906. A former Carrier principal, the Rev. Levi Beers, served at least one summer as principal of the institution. In 1908, the remaining moneys were designated for the assistance of students attending Methodist educational institutions.⁴⁵

43 Aaron J. Davis, "Report of the Clarion County Superintendent of Schools," *Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction*, 1877, 168.

44 LeRoy J. Halsey, ed., *The Works of Philip Lindsley* (Philadelphia, 1864), I, 213, cited by Donald G. Tewksbury, *The Founding of American Colleges and Universities Before the Civil War* (Contributions to Education, No. 543, New York: Columbia University Bureau of Publication, 1932), 23.

45 *Minutes, 1887-1908*, LI-LXXII.