SOME NOTES ON EARLY LOCAL SCHOOLS

JOHN NEWELL CROMBIE

In the early days of Pittsburgh and vicinity there were many small private and church schools. These types of schools persisted years after the establishment of the public school system. Most are long forgotten, leaving little or no trace of their efforts although their influence lasted many years.

Illustrative of some of these are notices and advertisements in the Allegheny Daily Enterprise, a newspaper published in Old Allegheny for about two years. It began August 28, 1855. Within a short time appear advertisements or notices of the following schools:


English and Classical Academy. L. Caton, principal. At Fourth Street and Liberty.

Duff's Commercial College. Third and Market Streets.


Young Ladies Seminary. Mr. and Mrs. N. W. Metcalf. Federal Street and Allegheny.


Westminster College. Lacock and Sandusky Streets.


Records of these, as well as other early private schools, are available only in rare instances in libraries or in private hands. Many were church schools which frequently underwent various tribulations.²

Mr. Crombie, a member of The Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania and a previous contributor to our magazine, has endeavored in this article to assemble information on early schools of Pittsburgh as requested by many of our history-minded older citizens.—Editor

1 The Library of The Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania and Allegheny Regional Branch of Carnegie Library.

"The close relationship existing between Christianity and education is nowhere better exemplified than in the combined religious and educational activities of the Scotch-Irish minister of Pennsylvania. No other racial group in the province contributed nearly so much as they to the establishment of classical schools and academies in the colonial era." 3

WESTMINSTER COLLEGE 4

Westminster College 5 was one of these church schools. It was begun by the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America, changing to a private school affiliated with the church and finally to a private school disassociated from the church. It was begun mainly by the efforts of Hugh Boyd and James Kelly of Wilkinsburg. 6 Hugh Boyd’s diary contains various notations concerning the early beginning in October to December 1848. 7

Mr. James Kelly, who owned a large portion of Wilkinsburg, offered the Pittsburgh Presbytery of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America a site for an institution of learning on October 4, 1848. 8 The offer was accepted 9 by the Presbytery November 23, 1848, the school to be called Westminster College and Westminster Female Seminary.

A board for managing the school was chosen and a committee appointed to consult with the board so that the designs of the Presbytery would be carried out. The Presbytery had the entire control of all literary affairs of the institution, the choosing of teachers and prescribing the course of study. Students were not to be confined to members of the Reformed Presbyterian Church. "The Presbytery [to] exercise control over the literary matters of the institution on the basis of Christian principles. Our design is to advance the interests of society in a literary, moral and religious respect. We declare not only our willingness but our earnest desire to receive the cooperation of our fellow men in our endeavor to build up the institutions for the public good."

4 This school had no connection with Westminster College at New Wilmington.
7 Loc. cit.
8 The Covenanter, Dec. 1848, IV, 152.
9 Reformed Presbyterian and Covenanter, Jan. 1849, XII, 350.
The committee determined to "exclude from the literary course every book that is of immoral tendency — of the kind that are used in most colleges." The standard of literature was to be improved; languages, natural and moral sciences to be taught with special attention given to Hebrew and Greek, the original languages of the sacred scriptures.\textsuperscript{10}

The Reverend M. Roney accepted the appointment as principal at the October 4, 1849, meeting of the Presbytery and the school opened November 12, 1849.\textsuperscript{11} In two weeks there were thirty-nine male and twenty-eight female pupils.\textsuperscript{12}

The records of the Pittsburg Presbytery, as recorded in the Reformed Presbyterian and Covenanter, give the bare bones of circumstance and do not reveal any reasons for various actions taken. Now occurs one of those changes, the reason for which is lost. The location of the schools was changed from Wilkinsburg to Allegheny "For reasons of which the Presbytery approved."\textsuperscript{13} It was reported the building was being erected at the corner of Leacock\textsuperscript{14} and Sandusky Streets in August of 1850 and by November was nearly complete. There were seven rooms and a large hall. The debt was given as thirteen hundred dollars.

This property was at the site of the Reformed Presbyterian Church which erected a church at this corner in 1836 as recorded in the Quarter Centennial of Pittsburgh Reformed Presbyterian Church 1866-1891 (page 76 in the Darlington Memorial Library, University of Pittsburgh).

In the Allegheny Daily Enterprise\textsuperscript{15} there appears as an advertisement September 6 and 9 under Westminster College: "The opening of this Institution is deferred till the second Monday 9th Day of September on account of the building not being entirely finished. The college is located on the corner of Lacock and Sandusky Streets Allegheny."

The editorial page of September 10 has a notation: "Westminster College rapidly nearing completion and will be finished in about three weeks. It will be under the jurisdiction of the Old Side Covenanter Church of this city." The same notice appears in other issues until

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 367.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., Nov. 1849, XIII, 273.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., Dec. 1849, XIII, 312.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., May 1850, XIV, 93, 194, 284.
\textsuperscript{14} Leacock is spelled two ways — Leacock and Lacock in various old maps and records. Spelling used as in reference.
\textsuperscript{15} Loc. cit.
October 23 when more details are given. By this time Westminster College was in successful operation with the faculty consisting of the Reverend M. Roney, president, Professor R. Grierson, D. McKee (Greek) and R. Hamilton. Here one reads:

The objects of this institution are to impart full and thorough knowledge of all branches of literature at our best colleges, and to bring a moral and Christian influence to bear upon the minds of the pupils during the whole course of studies; so as to blend some literary instruction with moral and religious training.

It is the design of the institution to exclude all objectionable class books of immoral tendency, particularly in the ordinary course of Classical studies, and others of approved moral character substituted in their room.

There is, in separate apartments, a Female Seminary under the same superintendents with the college in which the usual branches of a solid and useful female education are thoroughly taught. Also a Preparatory school for boys and young men who wish to study the English branches, or prepare for entering the Collegiate department.

There was a committee appointed by the Presbytery to prepare a course of instruction as well as to consider the practicality of compiling from Christian authors or publishing books to be substituted in the classical course for those that were considered objectionable. How unfortunate it is that a listing of these books has not come down to us!

The Allegheny Daily Enterprise in its issue of March 13, 1851, devoted a column to Westminster College wherein it stated the collegiate tuition was fifteen dollars per semester, the female ten dollars and the preparatory eight dollars. Latin, Greek, Hebrew literature, mathematics, natural and moral sciences, intellectual philosophy, belles-lettres, and evidence of Christianity were taught.

The Presbytery made sure the school was performing its teaching function as it appointed committees to attend the semi-annual examinations of the students, reporting back to the Presbytery that the proficiency of the students and the diligence of the faculty were favorable.

Throughout the records there is a continuous series of reports on efforts to place the school on a sound financial basis through support of the various church organizations, but it is also clear that the congregations seemed unable to contribute the needed funds.

In 1853 the Reverend Mr. Roney resigned as principal on account of health. The Reverend John Newell was appointed principal and James Newell an assistant professor. The committee appointed to

16 R. P. & C., Jan. 1851, XIV, 348; May 1851, XV, 90.
17 Ibid., June 1852, XVI, 120, 280, 308; May 1853, XVII, 86; April 1854, XVIII, 87, 190-1.
18 Ibid., Nov. 1851, XV, 274; May 1852, XVI, 87; 1852, 308; 1853, XVII, 276; Dec. 1854, XVIII, 87; June 1855, XVIII, 351; Oct. 1855, XIX, 288.
19 Ibid., Nov. 4, 1853, XVII, 276-7.
examine the scholars reported there were fifty students and the committee was highly satisfied. It also stated that a complimentary notice appeared in a city paper (June 29, 1854) on the day following the examination.\(^{20}\)

The ups and downs of this school are evidenced by the Presbytery reports in 1855 and 1856.\(^{21}\) The committee for annual examination June 28-29, 1855, reported the Collegiate Department had ten students, five connected with the Reformed Presbyterian Church. From November 1854 till May 1855 the attendance had increased to twenty, half within the Church. Six were pursuing studies preparatory to the ministry. The English Department had an average attendance of thirty-six. Here we have the first small detail of the studies. In the classical, the first class was examined in Demosthenes' *De Corona,* Cicero's *De Officia,* the second class in Homer's *Iliad* and *Troy,* the third class, Greek Testament and Cicero's *Orations* while the fourth class was examined in Greek Testament and Caesar's *Commentaries.* In science the first class examination was on Legendre's *Geometry Book* 2, 4 and 5; the second class on Legendre's *Geometry Books* 1 and 2. The first class also had Hackley Algebra (quadratic equations) and Young's Trigonometry.

The school continued to suffer from lack of financial support as related in Presbytery reports.\(^{22}\) The Permanent Education Fund was $450 while the Current Education Fund 1855 to August was $61.35. President Newell was paid fifty dollars in August 1855 ($2.25 also for book) and twenty-four dollars in April 1856. The Current Fund received by April 1856 since August 1855 was thirty-five dollars.

At a meeting of the Pittsburgh Presbytery at Little Beaver, October 1856,\(^{23}\) the Board of Westminster College was instructed to fit up rooms for accommodation of the Theological Seminary and congregations were called on for $150 to cover this expense. Three were received as students of theology and the Board of Examination was to give certificates equivalent to literary degree of this Presbytery. Regular sessions began November 11, 1856,\(^{24}\) and there were fourteen students in 1857.

The beginning of the Seminary\(^{25}\) brought about the demise of

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\(^{25}\) The present location of the Theological Seminary is in the former home of the Durbin Homes at 7418 Penn Avenue.
Westminster College. Nothing further is found in the old records although it was listed in the *Directory of Pittsburgh for 1857-8* at the corner of Leacock and Sandusky Streets, the Reverend John Newell, Professor. One can be reasonably sure the lack of financial support of this essentially church-supported school caused its final closing. Dr. David M. Carson\(^{26}\) states Westminster College had a life of about ten years and in 1858 its connection with the Church was severed. The property was donated to the Theological Seminary. The institution developed into a private preparatory school of some reputation in the community. Its successor was Allegheny City College.

**Allegheny City College**

This institution chartered under the above title, was in operation in 1858\(^{27}\) with the following faculty:

- The Reverend John Newell, Professor of Language and Moral Science
- The Reverend John Davis, Professor of Mathematics and Natural Science
- Miss Elizabeth Aull, Preceptress in Female Department
- F. L. Apel, Professor of German
- John Lawnitz, Professor of Vocal and Instrumental Music

"The large and commodious building situated at the corner of Sandusky and Lacock Streets, adapted for the separate accommodations of males and females, is found to be the most suitable for the purpose contemplated in obtaining a charter under the title of Allegheny City College." Tuition ranged from fifteen to twenty-five dollars per session.

The Reverend John Newell was principal in 1859\(^{28}\) and the *Report* of the Pittsburgh Presbytery to the Synod states many of "our youths" receive their education at Allegheny City College. In October 1861, a graduate, R. J. Sharp, was taken under care of the Pittsburgh Presbytery as a theological student. In 1860 the Reverend John Newell left for Ireland and was succeeded by James R. Newell who later changed it to Newell Institute in 1863.\(^{29}\)

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28 *The Covenanter*, 1859, XIV, 333.
James R. Newell was also in charge of the Fourth Ward School at Irwin Street near the Allegheny River from October 13, 1855, to August 4, 1863. The Gazette Times\textsuperscript{10} records this school should be the first in chapter order of the Pittsburgh public schools. The article also stated that Professor Newell taught in a night school which was largely attended. He resigned from the Fourth Ward School and opened a school for boys at 267 Penn Avenue and “attracted so many of his former pupils that a class of about fifty [was formed] but six or eight remained in the Fourth Ward.” A department for girls was later established and in 1873 he obtained a charter for the school.

**Newell Institute**

The exact names and date of transfer from Allegheny City College to Newell Institute are obscured. A catalogue\textsuperscript{11} dated 1874 of Newell Institute states it was for the thirteenth year and chartered in 1871. There is also a catalogue of Newell Institute for Young Ladies in the Historical Society library for 1875. An old family scrapbook\textsuperscript{12} contains the Programme of the Closing Exercises in the Third Presbyterian Church, Sixth Avenue, June 26, 1871.

Newell Institute had two divisions: the Boys located at 47 Seventh Street, Pittsburgh, and the Young Ladies Division at 255 Penn Avenue which was nearby between 8th and 9th Streets. In 1874, the Boys Division had 114 and the Young Ladies Division 106 students. Considering the time, this was a sizeable school. The tuition was forty dollars per term.

Besides James R. Newell, principal, and Hugh Newell, vice-principal, there were eleven on the faculty. Hugh Newell was professor of chemistry, natural science and drawing. The catalogue lists the courses of study, the textbooks used and the students in each department, as well as other pertinent information. Pittsburghers will recognize names of many old families among the students. Young ladies attending in the years 1874 and 1875 are listed.

The Reverend John Newell returned to Allegheny County from England in 1871, and again taught at Newell Institute. In 1873 James Newell became president of the Mount Auburn Seminary for Young Ladies at Cincinnati, still controlling Newell Institute but died suddenly in 1874. The Reverend John Newell died in 1875. These deaths

\textsuperscript{31} Pennsylvania Room, Carnegie Library, Pittsburgh. 
\textsuperscript{32} Courtesy Mrs. Rebecca Howard Collins, Bayhead, New Jersey.
spelled the demise of Newell Institute.

Although the deaths of the Newell brothers resulted in the final closing of these Covenanter schools, the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Old Allegheny did not entirely discontinue educational efforts. Somewhat later, date not known, the church conducted a school for Chinese adults.\textsuperscript{33} It was operative in 1896 as indicated by Record of the Central Allegheny R. P. Congregation which states, "Chinese Teachers Meeting was held the fourth Monday of each month at 7:30 p.m." \textsuperscript{34}

The Appendix lists the names of students known to have attended Newell Institute.

\textbf{Acknowledgments}

The writer wishes to express appreciation to Dr. S. Bruce Willson, President, Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary, for permission to use the library of the Seminary, and to Dr. David M. Carson, Geneva College, for many references.

\textsuperscript{33} Correspondence among children of Hans Boggs Crombie showed this school was not merely a Sunday School.

\textsuperscript{34} Record dated December 25, 1896.
### APPENDIX

#### GIRLS

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35 Combined listings in Catalogues for 1874-5.
Sterrett, Mary J. Wilkinsburg Watson, Mary A. Pittsburgh
Stewart, Lucy J. Pittsburgh Watson, Tillie Pittsburgh
Swan, Jennie Allegheny Welsh, Beckie E. Allegheny
Thurston, Alice N. Pittsburgh West, Elva E. Lucas
Tibby, Jennie Pittsburgh White, Ollie Allegheny
Totten, Addie M. Allegheny Whiteside, Maggie Pittsburgh
Totten, Jennie M. Allegheny Wills, Annie Wilkinsburg
Van Kirk, Ella B. McKeesport Wilson, Ida F. Montana
Voigt, Minna L. Allegheny Wilson, Jennie M. Dravosburg
Wardrop, Maggie R. Edgeworth Young, Emma S. Allegheny
Warner, Mary Allegheny Young, Hattie B. Allegheny

BOYS36

Aiken, Thomas S. Shady Side Irwin, Charles Allegheny
Aiken, William H. Allegheny Johnson, Willie H. Pittsburgh
Albree, Chester Allegheny King, Hay P. Allegheny
Albree, Joseph Allegheny Knox, Hugh Allegheny
Anderson, George Pittsburgh Kuhn, D. C. East Liberty
Arday, James Pittsburgh Laughlin, A. Bailey Allegheny
Armstrong, Walter Pittsburgh Lewis, Frank C. Allegheny
Ayres, John G. Pittsburgh Liggett, Thomas Pittsburgh
Bailey, Robert East Liberty Love, John C. Wilkinsburg
Bailey, Theodore Allegheny Love, W. C. Wilkinsburg
Barnes, H. W. Allegheny Macfarlane, S. S. Wilkinsburg
Barnes, J. H. Allegheny Maier, William Wilkinsburg
Barrett, Henry Allegheny McCleery, Frank W. Sewickley
Baum, George W. East Liberty McClintock, H. P. Oakland
Bitner, George D. Pittsburgh McCombs, W. F. Pittsburgh
Blazer, George Chartiers McCutcheon, John L. Allegheny
Bracken, Frank East Liberty McDonald, Archie Allegheny
Bracken, S. F. Allegheny McGrew, John J. Pittsburgh
Brennan, J. K. Allegheny McGunnegle, Alexander Pittsburgh
Bruce, Nigel Shady Side McIntosh, John S. Allegheny
Childs, Willie P. Pittsburgh McIntosh, Levi W. Allegheny
Connor, John Pittsburgh McKee, Thomas S. Allegheny
Cook, Thomas R. Mansfield McKelvy, Frank G. Wilkinsburg
Cook, William Dravosburg McNaugher, John Allegheny
Curry, Robert Pittsburgh McNeil, Hugh M. Allegheny
Davis, R. Murray Pittsburgh Meyer, Anthony Pittsburgh
Denny, Frank H. Pittsburgh Meyer, Edward Pittsburgh
Fahnestock, Levi Pittsburgh Miller, B. E. Wilkinsburg
Fitter, F. K. Allegheny Miller, F. C. Pittsburgh
Fundenberg, E. C. Pittsburgh Miller, John F. Port Perry
Funderberg, W. H. Pittsburgh Miller, M. C. Port Perry
Gibson, J. B. Allegheny Newell, J. R. Hawkins
Graham, Frank M. Temperenceville Newell, Will Hawkins
Graham, G. C. Allegheny Noll, George Allegheny
Graver, William Allegheny Oppenheimer, Jacob Pittsburgh
Gray, Louis Allegheny Oxnard, George C. Allegheny
Groetzinger, Adolph Allegheny Patton, Willie J. Allegheny
Geschwender, George Lawrenceville Payne, George B. Coal Valley
Hamilton, George P. Allegheny Peebles, George Hawkins
Henry, John Pittsburgh Pickersgill, Fred Allegheny
Henry, Willie Allegheny Power, W. B. McKeesport
Herwig, Daniel Dravosburg Reymer, Clem Allegheny
Holdship, Fred Allegheny Rhodes, Willie Allegheny
Horne, Joseph O. Allegheny Richardson, H. M. Pittsburgh

36 From 1874 Catalogue, Pennsylvania Room, Carnegie Library.
Richardson, J. Howard  Pittsburgh  Swaney, Andrew  Emsworth
Ricketson, Ollie  Allegheny  Taylor, I. N.  Allegheny
Saint, W. J. F.  Sharpsburg  Torrens, Frank H.  Allegheny
Schmidt, Herman  Shady Side  Voegtly, John  Pittsburgh
Schoyer, Samuel  Pittsburgh  Voegtly, Nicholas  Allegheny
Scott, Albert B.  Pittsburgh  Walker, H. W.  Allegheny
Scott, Maurice  East Liberty  Watt, William H.  Pittsburgh
Shiras, George  Allegheny  William, E. Carleton  Pittsburgh
Shiras, Win. K.  Allegheny  Wills, W. H.  Wilkinsburg
Smyth, R. F.  Mansfield  Wilson, Alexander G.  Coal Valley
Sneathen, Walter  Pittsburgh  Woodside, Samuel  Allegheny
Sproul, Harry  Pittsburgh  Woodwell, W. E.  Pittsburgh
Swan, Robert  Allegheny  Worth, Harry  Allegheny

BOYS IN 1871 CLOSING EXERCISES

Aiken, G. A.  Graham, D. B.  Messler, R. V.
Bateman, H. E.  Graham, J. S.  Myers, G.
Coulter, R. D.  Horne, J. O.  Noble, T.
Dahlinger, C. W.37  Hughart, J. H. P.  Pickersgill, F.
Dauerty, W. M.  King, O. B.  Schmidt, J.
Edmunson, W. P.  Mason, H. D.  Shane, G. P.
Fulton, W. S.  M'Brier, N.  Taylor, M.
Giberson, W.  McClure, W. S.  Wills, W. H.

37 Mr. Dahlinger was the first editor of The Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine.