A TOM THUMB HISTORY OF CLARION STATE COLLEGE

S A M U E L  A. F A R M E R I E

A L T H O U G H Clarion County and Clarion Borough were not organized as geo-political entities until 1840 and 1841 respectively,\(^1\) the first school in the area had been opened as early as 1803.\(^2\) From this beginning an extensive but loosely knit common school system began to develop within the county.

In 1854 the State Legislature created the county school superintendency\(^3\) and that same year the Rev. Robert W. Orr was elected Clarion County's first superintendent at a salary of $300 *per annum.*

In his 1855 report Mr. Orr mentioned a number of obstacles militating against progress in the schools, one of these being a lack of well-qualified teachers. In December of 1855, in an effort to alleviate the condition, Mr. Orr called a two-day institute to train teachers for the county's schools.\(^4\) This pattern of teacher training was to prevail in the county and the Commonwealth for many years.

—Editor

---

1 Act 197 of the Pennsylvania General Assembly, March 11, 1839, created the county as of September 1, 1840, and Act 78 of the Pennsylvania General Assembly, April 6, 1841, created the borough (hereafter legislative enactments are cited as Act, with number and date).


3 Act 610, Article XI, Section 46, May 8, 1854.

4 *History of Clarion County Pennsylvania, 413-414.*
Meanwhile, in Harrisburg, another act in the dramatic struggle for an adequate educational system for Pennsylvania's children was occurring. After many years of proposals and deliberation on the need for and control of a formal system of teacher training, the issue was resolved through the passage of the Normal School Act of 1857.5 As a result, a number of state-endorsed but privately-controlled normal schools developed throughout Pennsylvania.

The first direct mention of a normal school for Clarion came in January of 1858 during a county teachers' institute in session at Callensburg. The Hon. R. Laughlin proposed a resolution to call "... a county convention of teachers, directors, friends and enemies of the common school system to take into consideration the necessity and utility of establishing a county normal school." 6 This was the apparent fountainhead of the normal school movement within Clarion County which came to fruition in April 1887. During the three intervening decades progress was slow, painstaking and at times virtually non-existent.

In July of 1865 the Erie Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church held its annual meeting in Jamestown, New York. An item on its agenda was the selection of a suitable means to observe the centenary of American Methodism. The Conference chose to commemorate the event by sponsoring two additional seminaries. These were subsequently founded at Randolph, New York, and Clarion, Pennsylvania.7

By 1867 subscriptions for the support of the seminary at Clarion totaled $22,000 and approval to open the institution was granted. The new seminary, chartered as the Carrier Seminary of Western Pennsylvania, opened its doors September 10, 1867. The Seminary was named in honor of its primary benefactors, the Carrier family.8 It is to this event that Clarion State College traces its origin.

Lacking any facilities of its own, classes were held in the old academy building. The Seminary was co-educational in nature. Its calendar called for three terms, each being thirteen weeks in duration. Tuition was as follows: common English branches — $6, higher English branches — $7, and languages — $8. The Rev. James G.

5 Act 619, May 20, 1857.
6 History of Clarion County Pennsylvania, 415.
7 Minutes of the Erie Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1865 (hereafter cited as Minutes with year), XXX, 19-20.
8 Minutes, 1867, XXXII, 26 and 75; History of Clarion County Pennsylvania, 488.
Townsend was its first principal and Miss A. E. Rinehart its preceptress.9

On June 16, 1868, the cornerstone of the Seminary's main building, a massive three-storied brick structure, was laid. The edifice, completed in 1871 at a cost of $75,000 including the furniture,10 was known to many student generations as Seminary Hall. It was in constant service until its razing in the spring of 1968.

When Carrier Seminary began using its new building in 1871, a normal course for the training of teachers was included in the curriculum. However, this program did not prepare enough teachers to meet the needs of the community. As a result of this and other factors, the idea for a public normal school was revived. In 1872 some business and professional men, including leading stockholders in the Seminary, started a movement to secure a state normal school for the town. In 1874 at the behest of the county's State Senator, David McClay, the State Legislature created a new normal school district in the Clarion area.11 Later that year the trustees of the Seminary petitioned the Clarion Common Pleas Court to change its name to the Carrier State Normal School.12 Nothing came of these efforts because both the Erie Conference and James P. Wickersham, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, were opposed to the plan. Nevertheless, an essential link had been forged in the chain of events leading to the creation of Clarion State Normal School.

In 1875 Prof. Aaron J. Davis, who was to play the key role in the founding of the normal school, was elected Clarion County Superintendent of Schools. In spite of the defeat of the earlier attempt to secure a normal school for Clarion, Prof. Davis remained a staunch advocate of the normal school idea. While serving his three terms as county superintendent he kept this goal in mind while waiting for a more opportune time to renew the struggle.

Davis and Prof. Rosswell G. Yingling, the other key personage in the endeavor, began working in earnest for a normal school during the early 1880's. Under their leadership a number of summer normal courses were offered at the Seminary. In 1883 Davis accepted a staff appointment with the Department of Public Instruction. Subsequently, as he had anticipated, Davis found himself in a position to influence

---

9 Minutes, 1867, 75.
10 History of Clarion County Pennsylvania, 488.
11 Act 120, May 8, 1874.
12 Clarion County, Leases and Agreements Book, III, 160 (December 29, 1874), Courthouse, Clarion.
State Superintendent E. E. Higbee and gain approval for the envisioned normal school at Clarion. The approval was granted in 1885.13

Meanwhile, conditions were degenerating at Carrier Seminary. The student body declined in numbers, the building was deteriorating, and a substantial debt had been accumulated. The Seminary facilities were the key to Davis' hopes. If the facilities were available for purchase, the normal school could be located in Clarion. If not, a more populous site would probably be given preference. In the summer of 1886 the Clarion State Normal School Association was formed for the purpose of establishing and operating a normal school. Following an enthusiastic subscription campaign, the Association purchased the heavily mortgaged Seminary facilities from the Erie Conference on September 10, 1886, for the sum of $25,000.14

Throughout Carrier's nineteen years of operation ten principals came and went. The institution experienced good times as well as bad, but it never really recovered from the panic and depression of 1873. Thereafter, with few exceptions, the institution was characterized by declining enrollment and increasing financial difficulties. The closing of its doors was not unexpected and was further evidence of an increasing trend throughout the United States following the Kalamazoo Case,15 a trend characterized by the rise of the public high school and the decline of the private academy and seminary. The significance of this case, which established the legal precedent for using taxes to operate public secondary schools, is indicated in the following assessment: "Together with the Massachusetts Law of 1827 [this case] helped ... to give encouragement and sanction to more aspiring high schools than any other bit of Jurisprudence to come out of nineteenth century America." 16

The purchase of the facilities was followed by a period of frenzied activity at the old Seminary. During the fall and winter of 1886-1887, in an effort to qualify for state approval, two dormitories were erected

13 Aaron J. Davis, The Beginning of Clarion State Normal School (Clarion, written in 1920 but not copyrighted until 1937), 2-4, in the library of Clarion State College.
14 Ibid., 7; Minutes, 1886, L, 33; Clarion County, Deed Book, CIV, 427 (December 28, 1886), Courthouse, Clarion. For a more detailed treatment of the Seminary's history see Samuel A. Farmerie, "Carrier Seminary: A Short Lived Methodist Educational Venture," Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine, Vol. 52 (April 1969), 129-139.
and Seminary Hall was renovated. A committee chaired by State Superintendent Higbee gave its sanction to the proposed normal school on February 15, 1887. Clarion State Normal School became a reality when classes began on April 12, 1887.\(^\text{17}\)

Clarion, as was the case with the other Pennsylvania normal schools of the time, was in reality a two-year secondary school. As per state prescription, the fledgling normal school offered two distinct courses of instruction, the elementary and scientific courses. The former was designed to prepare elementary school teachers and the latter secondary teachers. In addition, a college preparatory program and some music courses were offered.\(^\text{18}\)

Prof. Davis presided over the birth of the normal school and guided it during the springtime of its life. The era of his principalship, 1887-1902, was one of growth, expansion, and development. Enrollment rose from 140 in 1887 to 509 in 1902.\(^\text{19}\) An extracurricular program was developed and several new buildings were added. In 1902 the curriculum was revised with a three-year program being inaugurated.

In 1911 the State Legislature authorized the purchase of the various normal schools from their respective stockholders.\(^\text{20}\) The Clarion purchase was consummated in December of 1915 with the total cost to the state being $69,653.\(^\text{21}\)

In 1913 the program was again lengthened by one year making the normal school course the same length as that of the typical urban high school. As a result of the curriculum revision and World War I, enrollment dwindled to 287 in 1917-1918.

Dr. Clyde Green became principal in 1918. During his term which lasted until 1926, several significant developments occurred. Student enrollment climbed to over nine hundred and the scope of student extracurricular activities was greatly broadened. In 1920 the curriculum was again lengthened, with Clarion and the other normal schools becoming, in effect, junior colleges. Before Dr. Green resigned the institution was accredited by the American Association of Teachers Colleges. Physical plant improvements during his tenure were many.

\(^\text{17}\) Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (Harrisburg, 1887), 194 (hereafter cited as PRSPI with year).
\(^\text{18}\) Catalog, Clarion State Normal School (1887), 6-12.
\(^\text{19}\) These and subsequently cited enrollment figures were obtained from records in the Registrar's Office, Clarion State College.
\(^\text{20}\) Act 309, May 18, 1911.
During the decade of the 1920's concrete steps were taken to convert the state normal schools into four-year degree-granting institutions. In addition to the curriculum change mentioned above, specific plans were made to develop full-fledged college curriculums in these institutions. In 1923 the State Legislature authorized the granting of degrees by the normal schools on approval of the State Council of Education. Clarion met the requirements of the State Council and became a four-year college in 1929. The state teachers colleges sought and were granted this status for several reasons: (1) to encourage more males to enter the teaching profession, (2) because a four-year college program was deemed necessary for the preparation of secondary school teachers, and (3) to gain status and prestige through the elimination of the much slandered name "normal school." However, as Harvey A. Andress pointed out, Clarion and the other former normal schools were "a college in name [only]." Much remained to be done and many years were to pass before Clarion advanced to the position where it would satisfy Andress' description of "a state teachers college in fact." The metamorphosis, which was slow and evolutionary, was carried on during the bleakest hours of the "Great Depression" and World War II.

The depression had profound effects upon Clarion and the other state teachers colleges. From 1930-1933 the state appropriation for Clarion averaged $181,000 a year. In the succeeding four-year period the comparable figure was $67,000, a reduction of about 63 per cent. As a result, all programs were drastically curtailed and faculty salaries decimated. Enrollment rapidly declined, further reducing available revenue. During this period, Clarion was faced with the plight that had befallen the dodo bird. In 1933 many private citizens as well as a large number of liberal arts colleges advocated the closing of the state teachers colleges to ease the pressure on the state budget. House Bill No. 260 of the 1933 legislative session contained a rider denying appro-

23 Act 206, May 23, 1923.
26 PRSPI, 1930-1937; Clarion State Teachers College, "Minutes of the Board of Trustees," 1930-1937.
pribations to Clarion and several other state teachers colleges. The bill containing the coup de grace was passed by the House but the rider was subsequently stricken from the measure.27

This was the first in a series of confrontations between the state teachers colleges and the liberal arts colleges under the aegis of saving the state from bankruptcy. Although the state treasury was indeed in a precarious financial condition, the liberal arts colleges saw this as a chance to eliminate competition and thus improve their lot. The basic bones of contention were: (1) with the development of their four-year programs the state teachers colleges began to play an active role in preparing teachers to staff the Commonwealth’s secondary schools, an activity traditionally in the province of the liberal arts colleges; and (2) offering liberal arts courses to persons not pursuing the teacher training curriculum. A second attempt to close some of the state teachers colleges occurred in 1945. An act which provided for the closing of some of the teachers colleges was actually passed in the spring of 1945, but the war came to an end before it could be implemented.28 The final overt attempt to close some of these institutions came about through the introduction of Senate Bill No. 337 (1953). This bill, designed to implement the recommendations of the “Chesterman Report,” was subsequently defeated.29 Had rational heads not prevailed the movement to close some of the state teachers colleges could have been fait accompli in any of these instances.

Dr. Paul G. Chandler, who was to serve Clarion twenty-three years, became its president in 1937. At the onset of his administration no pretense of grandeur for Clarion existed in his mind, because the battle for survival was paramount. “The teachers colleges were considered the poor man’s college by the legislature and as such they were given as little as possible.” For example, “. . . the state allocated 21c per person per meal in the college dining hall and 12c of this was to pay wages.”30 Early in his tenure economic conditions improved


30 Interview with Dr. Paul G. Chandler, August 2, 1967.
slightly. Enrollment and state appropriations began to increase but the reprieve was only temporary, because war clouds were already gathering over such distant places as Ethiopia and Manchuria.

With the passage of the various Selective Service Acts in the early 1940's, enrollment and revenue again dwindled. Clarion and the other teachers colleges were in dire straits until the 1941 session of the State Legislature came to the rescue by amending the School Code, thereby granting the right to "... cooperate with municipal, State, Federal or other agencies in the furtherance of national defense programs and activities." 31 As a result, Clarion operated as a training site for Air Force Cadets. The revenues from this program helped stave off disaster.

The aftermath of World War II was characterized by a period of prosperity unprecedented in the annals of American higher education. As a result of the "G.I. Bill" enrollment mushroomed, expanding from 127 in 1944 to 723 in 1949. Added to this number was an average of one hundred freshmen a year who had been farmed out to Clarion to relieve the pressure on the campus of The Pennsylvania State University. In the midst of these growing pains Clarion finally gained its long coveted accreditation by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools (1948), thus satisfying Andress' description of "a state teachers college in fact."

The tidal wave of students ebbed in the early 1950's, but after the Korean conflict a new wave of even greater magnitude swelled college student bodies throughout America. Enrollment at Clarion has increased every year since 1955 with no letup in sight. The anticipated enrollment for the year 1971-1972 is about 4200 with growth projected to reach 7000 by 1980.32

On the eve of Dr. Chandler's retirement in 1960 the General Assembly enacted a measure permitting the state teachers colleges to grant the liberal arts degree and retitle themselves state colleges.33 This enabled Clarion and her sister institutions to expand their programs and become multi-purpose institutions.

Dr. James Gemmell succeeded to the presidency following the retirement of Dr. Chandler. During his presidency public higher edu-

31 Act 234, July 28, 1941.
33 Act 788, January 8, 1960.
cation has been accorded unprecedented support and encouragement by the Commonwealth. This position, a reversal of the previous state concept of financial support for the state colleges, accounts for the dynamic changes at Clarion since 1960. Enrollment has more than doubled since then, climbing to an all-time high of about 3700 (1970-1971). The liberal arts program became operational in 1963 and a master's degree program was inaugurated in 1967. In a four-year span of time (1967-1970) some sixteen additional curriculums — associate, bachelor's, and master's programs — were scheduled to be in operation. To meet the needs of an expanding student body and curriculum some twenty new buildings have been completed or programmed for construction since 1960. Clarion also opened a Venango Campus at Oil City in 1961.

This cursory glance into the past has revealed the uneven but steady transmutation of Clarion State College, but what does the future hold in store? Developments in the past decade and plans on the drawing boards indicate that Clarion could become a university. Attainment of university status would parallel the recorded history of American higher education which reveals that many state normal schools have evolved into excellent state universities.

Indiana State has established the precedent for Pennsylvania. At a public hearing some seven years ago Dr. Gemmell predicted "there will be others [with similar aspirations], my own institution among them." Dr. Gemmell's prediction became a partial reality in 1969 when both Edinboro and West Chester applied for university status. While the General Assembly did not approve the change, the possibility of such a change in the future is not precluded. In explanation of his prediction Dr. Gemmell noted Clarion's recent rapid growth and the Middle States Association acclaim of the academic program that "... refused to compromise quality in education." Moreover, he noted in testimony

Clarion's enrollment is projected to be 7000 in 1980. We do not deem it wise

34 Untitled and unpublished report in the office of James Moore, Dean of Clarion State College.
37 Gemmell, "Role of the Fourteen State Colleges in Providing Public Higher Education."
to pour all those young people through teacher education or liberal arts programs. More diversified professional and technical degree programs will need to be added. University status will be required to serve these needs. . . . Ultimately the most typical public institution of higher education in America will be the state university of moderate size with an excellent liberal arts college, small but substantial graduate and professional schools, and a limited program in research. Such typical state universities are already in embryonic existence in Pennsylvania — they are our fourteen state colleges — and the decisions of this Council will have much to do with the maturation rate of the embryos.38

The ultimate future of Clarion State College lies in the hands of this body and of destiny.

38 Ibid.