

## HIGHER EDUCATION AT MOUNT PLEASANT<sup>1</sup>

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THE TOWN of Mount Pleasant in Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania, was called for the township of Mount Pleasant, an earlier municipality of colonial days. The county of Cumberland did not subdivide the slice of Indian domain, lying west of the Laurel Hill, which was added to it by the Treaty of Fort Stanwix, as promulgated on November 5, 1768. When the new county of Bedford was erected out of Cumberland on March 9, 1771, the provincial court at Bedford, in one of its first decrees, divided the vast territory west of the Laurel Hill into the following seven townships: Armstrong, Fairfield, Hempfield, Mount Pleasant, Pitt, Rostraver, and Springhill. When Westmoreland County was erected two years later, Mount Pleasant Township retained the same boundaries, with Hempfield, and a new township, Huntingdon, carved out of Hempfield, bounding it on the west. The historic Forbes Road in 1758 was cut through what was later Mount Pleasant Township, from the crest of Chestnut Ridge to Crabtree Bottoms, and the famed Braddock Road of 1755 formed the boundary line between Mount Pleasant and Huntingdon.

Between the years 1769 and 1810, education took such form in western Pennsylvania, and in Mount Pleasant Township in particular, as came through the medium of the early preachers and priests who entered the region to minister to the settlers in a spiritual way. In some cases these

<sup>1</sup> Presented at a meeting of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania on March 30, 1937, under the fuller title "Higher Education at Mount Pleasant: The Story of the Western Pennsylvania Classical and Scientific Institute at Mount Pleasant, and Its Recent Merger with Bucknell University at Lewisburg, Pennsylvania." The author, a prominent Greensburg attorney, is an alumnus of Bucknell University, class of 1896; the state historian of the Pennsylvania Society, Sons of the American Revolution; and a prolific writer and speaker on historical subjects. *Ed.*

men conducted classes in their churches, or built "log colleges" in which some measure of systematic education was given, or otherwise took the lead in establishing schools and colleges. There were no common schools until about a century ago, and high schools were not thought of. The movement to establish academies and colleges is proof that the people were determined that young people should have the advantages of a higher education, if their ambitions and circumstances warranted it. Among the many academies and colleges established in western Pennsylvania under Protestant auspices by the middle of the nineteenth century were the Pittsburgh Academy, forerunner of the University of Pittsburgh, incorporated in 1787; Washington and Canonsburg academies, forerunners of Washington and Jefferson College, incorporated in 1787 and 1794, respectively; Greensburg Academy in Beaver County, established in 1806; Meadville Academy, later Allegheny College, 1807; Union Academy, Uniontown, later Madison College, 1808; Greene County (Carmichaels) and Greensburg academies, 1810; Butler and Mercer academies, 1811; Indiana Academy, 1814; Kittanning Academy, 1821; Brookville Academy, 1838; Geneva College, 1848; and Waynesburg College, 1850. Moreover, the establishment of St. Francis College at Loretto in 1845 and of St. Vincent College at Latrobe in 1846 may be cited to show the great desire among Roman Catholics, also, for higher education.

The town of Mount Pleasant on the Glade Road, which crossed the line of the Braddock Road diagonally at this point, was laid out in 1797. It had some thirty-four log houses in it in 1810, and it was incorporated as a municipality on February 8, 1828. It has been and still remains the only incorporated town in Mount Pleasant Township. It drew to its confines those citizens who earlier had sat at the feet of the various ministers of the gospel and received their desire for a higher education from them and through the instruction given by godly mothers in the home.

The larger Mount Pleasant community, which extended even over Jacob's Creek into Fayette County, had within its borders Baptists, German Lutherans, German Reformed, and Presbyterians who were pioneers in the region. Some forty or fifty years later a large church group,

called by the name of "United Brethren in Christ," came from the eastern part of Pennsylvania under the leadership of Bishop Otterbein, and settling close to Mount Pleasant they became a substantial part of the community. The Baptists established the oldest religious congregation west of the Laurel Hill at Beesontown, now Uniontown, in 1770, composed of pioneers from Virginia, with a few additions from Philadelphia. The coming of the Reverend John Corbley from Virginia in 1773, and the formation of the Baptist churches at Goshen (Whitely), North Ten Mile, and Peters Creek (Library) in that year, resulted in the organization of the Redstone Baptist Association in 1776. The Presbyterians followed in 1772 with churches at Long Run and, in succeeding years, at Laurel Hill, Mount Pleasant (Middle Church), Unity, Sewickley, Rehoboth, and other places; in 1782 Redstone Presbytery was formed. The Westmoreland Classis of the Reformed Church, to which reference will be made later, was formed about the year 1842, but members of the Reformed Church and the Lutherans established many early churches, a few as early as 1772, worshipping alternately in the same meeting house, in several places. The old Redstone Baptist Association was later broken up into three parts, and the original territory embraced in it is now served in comity and missionary effort by means of the Pittsburgh Baptist Association, the Monongahela Baptist Association, and the Ten Mile Baptist Association.

The desire for an institution of higher education at Mount Pleasant seems first to have arisen in the councils of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ. Action looking to the establishing of a college was first taken at the sessions of the Allegheny Conference of that denomination in 1849. On August 17, 1849, David Keister and others, trustees of the new college, purchased two acres from Joseph Lippincott upon which to erect their first buildings,<sup>2</sup> and the school held its opening sessions in Mount Pleasant in 1850. By the second section of an act of the legislature, approved April 28, 1851, it was provided:

That there be and hereby is established at Mount Pleasant, in the county of Westmoreland of this Commonwealth, a college for the education of the

<sup>2</sup> Westmoreland County Archives, Deed Book 13, p. 136.

youth in the various branches of science, literature, and the arts, by the name and style of the 'Mount Pleasant College,' in the State of Pennsylvania—to be under the control of the Allegheny conference of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, and other conferences of said church which may be hereafter added thereto for the purposes set forth in this enactment.<sup>3</sup>

The act provided for the election of trustees by the conference, and the following well-known and substantial residents of the community were first chosen: Isaiah Potter, S. S. Snider, J. B. Resler, David Keister, Jacob Erle, William R. Griffith, Samuel Zuck, Cyrus Jeffries, William Beighel, U. S. Johnston, J. L. Homes, David S. Cherry, Joseph Gross, John Clair, Jacob Ritter, Abraham Pershing, Christian Ebersole, and Solomon Keister.

The United Brethren had difficulty with this initial college enterprise, and as early as 1855 a resolution was passed at their general conference to merge the institution with Otterbein College at Westerville, Ohio. The institution and its faculty became a part of Otterbein soon afterwards, and the physical property at Mount Pleasant remained to be disposed of. A group of undenominational people then undertook to establish and maintain a new institution. Their intentions are best evidenced by the provisions of a legislative act of 1858:

WHEREAS, the trustees of Mount Pleasant college, incorporated the twenty-eighth day of April, one thousand eight hundred and fifty-one, are desirous of disposing of their college property, and of ceasing and determining their corporate existence; therefore,

SECTION 1. *Be it enacted* . . . That there be and hereby is erected and established at Mount Pleasant, in the county of Westmoreland, in this commonwealth, a college for the education of persons in the various branches of science, literature, and the ancient and modern languages, by the name, style and title of the Mount Pleasant Union college.<sup>4</sup>

It was not stipulated that the trustees of this new college should belong to any specified church, and on the first board were Edward Braden, one of the United Brethren; Edgar Cowan, afterwards a United States Senator; Dr. J. H. Clark, a Baptist; Thomas Hurst, a Presbyterian; and James Warden, a United Presbyterian. This undenominational

<sup>3</sup> Pennsylvania, *Laws*, 1851, p. 728.

<sup>4</sup> Pennsylvania, *Laws*, 1858, p. 140.

group did not seem to get very far with its enterprise, either, for, by a supplement to the act of 1858 passed on April 8, 1861, Mount Pleasant Union College was authorized to sell the physical property to any purchaser, and upon execution of a deed the act of 1858 was to be repealed.<sup>5</sup>

The next group to tackle the enterprise of establishing a college at Mount Pleasant and to seek incorporation gave its new institution the name of "Westmoreland College." It was incorporated by an act of March 12, 1862:

WHEREAS, The trustees of Mount Pleasant Union college, in pursuance of an act of assembly, passed the eighth day of April, Anno Domini one thousand eight hundred and sixty-one, sold and conveyed to the proper officer of the Westmoreland Classis of the German Reformed church, certain real estate, situate at Mount Pleasant, in the county of Westmoreland:

*And whereas,* The said classis has founded a college at the same place, under the name of Westmoreland college, and is desirous of having the same incorporated and formed into a body politic in law; therefore,

SECTION 1. Be it enacted . . . That there be and hereby is erected and established at Mount Pleasant, in the county of Westmoreland, in this commonwealth, a college for the education of persons in the various branches of the arts, sciences, literature, and the ancient and modern languages, male and female, by the name, style and title of the Westmoreland college.<sup>6</sup>

Through the provisions of this same act, these members of the German Reformed congregation put their religious impress on the property, when it was required that two-thirds of the trustees should be members of the German Reformed Church. Some of the remaining trustees were Baptists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and United Presbyterians. This group tried for almost ten years to make their enterprise go, but were finally compelled to abandon it. In the catalogues of 1863 and 1864 there is the following interesting information:

Westmoreland College is located near the foot of Chestnut Ridge, in one of the finest and most fertile valleys of Pennsylvania. It is twelve miles Southeast of Greensburg, on the Pennsylvania-Central Railroad and has daily stage connections with that point, as well as with Johnstown, Somerset and Cumberland.

A primary object in the establishment of this institution has been to furnish conveniently first class means for a liberal Christian Education to the youth of

<sup>5</sup> Pennsylvania, *Laws*, 1861, p. 252.

<sup>6</sup> Pennsylvania, *Laws*, 1862, p. 119.

both sexes, in the flourishing and prosperous valley in which it is located, and in counties and sections of the country adjacent. The want clearly exists and is widely felt. Westmoreland College seeks to supply it.

Gentlemen can get good boarding and rooms at an average of \$2.00 per week, washing \$1.00 per month.

Tuition per year—\$20.00.<sup>7</sup>

In 1871, still another group, the Baptists of southwestern Pennsylvania, took over the property and established the Western Pennsylvania Classical and Scientific Institute, more familiarly known as Mount Pleasant Institute. While the new sponsors had established many ancient churches, their educational work did not crystallize into an institution of learning until after a century. Rather had they been content to make of their associational meetings the heated ecclesiastical crucibles that they so often became. The very democracy of Baptist polity permitted of this, and the able and militant Baptist preachers of that day were often pitted against each other in divisive movements. Out of the historic Redstone Baptist Association came two decidedly important movements. It was at the old Redstone Church, at Smock, Fayette County, during an associational meeting, that the Reverend Alexander Campbell got into a heated controversy with his brethren, led half the congregation out of the building, mounted a large rock, and preached to his followers the new doctrines that led to the formation of the present large Christian denomination. The Reverend Alexander Campbell was clerk of the Redstone Baptist Association for a few years, and he and his father, the Reverend Thomas Campbell, were moderators at various times. The Reverend Sidney Rigdon was pastor of the First Baptist Church of Pittsburgh in 1822 and 1823 and took part in the discussions of the Redstone Baptist Association. His alliance with and aid to Joseph Smith, the Prophet, led him into the great Mormon movement and later resulted in his flight from Nauvoo, Illinois, at the time of the murder of Joseph and Hyrum Smith. Into this Baptist crucible was thrown also the stable influence of such courageous and intellectual preachers as William Brownfield, John

<sup>7</sup> Byron M. Loar, *A Memoir of Western Pennsylvania Classical and Scientific Institute*, 9 (Mount Pleasant, Pa., 1932).

Corbley, James Estep, and David Phillips. Out of this intellectual and controversial situation came also in later years two decidedly outstanding Baptist characters: Dr. William Shadrach and Dr. Leroy Stephens, both of whom meant much to Bucknell University and to Mount Pleasant Institute during their active lives.

Dr. William Shadrach came down from the mountain top at old Beula, Cambria County, to Two Lick, Indiana County, where he was ordained to the ministry, and he was ordained as the first pastor of the First Baptist Church of Mount Pleasant, long before the citizens of the town thought of establishing colleges. He was a stabilizing force in the old Redstone Association and in the later deliberations of the Monongahela and Pittsburgh associations. After a pastorate in Philadelphia, he became the first financial agent of the University at Lewisburg in the raising of its endowment. He became one of the first trustees and incorporators of Mount Pleasant Institute.

Dr. Leroy Stephens was a product of Greene County, which is largely the jurisdictional territory of the Ten Mile Baptist Association. He was a descendant of the famed Reverend John Corbley, whose wife and children were murdered by Indians on their way to church services in Revolutionary days. He possessed that rugged individuality and poise produced by the hill country, and he was destined to become an outstanding Baptist educator. Dr. Stephens became principal of Mount Pleasant Institute eleven years after its founding.

The first two educational institutions founded by Baptists in western Pennsylvania, Monongahela College, at Jefferson, and Mount Pleasant Institute, were both incorporated in 1871. The establishment of Monongahela College had been agitated in the Ten Mile Baptist Association since 1867.<sup>8</sup> Its trustees were chosen from West Virginia, Ohio, and Pennsylvania.

When the German Reformed Church failed to make a success of Westmoreland College, it secured authority to sell the property to William B. Neel, and he, in turn, sold it to the new Western Pennsylvania

<sup>8</sup> Pennsylvania, *Laws*, 1871, p. 342.

Classical and Scientific Institute, which had been incorporated in 1871, two months before. Just when negotiations were begun by the Baptists to establish this fourth Mount Pleasant institution and to purchase the college property, is not exactly known, but it can well be assumed that Dr. J. H. Clark, prominent Baptist layman at Mount Pleasant, and a member of the previous college boards, had joined with the other Baptists in town to keep the college spirit alive there.

It is interesting to compare the charter of the University at Lewisburg, the name of which has since been changed to Bucknell University, with that of the institution whose establishment was proposed twenty-five years later at Mount Pleasant, and to observe thereby the similarity of purpose of these two institutions. The act incorporating Bucknell provides:

WHEREAS, The Baptists of Pennsylvania, as a denomination, are not now engaged for the maintenance of any particular college or university in this state:

*And whereas*, The chartering of a university, to be placed under their patronage, supervision and direction, would be a measure well adapted to call forth, from all parts of this commonwealth, concentrate, increase, and render effective in the cultivation of sound learning, the efforts of said denomination, and thereby promote the general interests of science, literature and good morals; therefore,

SECTION 1. *Be it enacted* . . . That there be and hereby is erected and established, at or near the borough of Lewisburg, in the county of Union, in this commonwealth, a university, to consist of a primary school and academy, a college, and such other departments appropriate to a university, as the patrons and managers of said institution shall find themselves able to maintain.

The act incorporating the Western Pennsylvania Classical and Scientific Institute at Mount Pleasant provides:

WHEREAS, The Baptist denomination in Western Pennsylvania, feeling their need of increased educational facilities:

*And whereas*, The chartering of an institution of learning, to be placed under their patronage, supervision and direction, would be a measure well adapted to call forth, concentrate, increase and render effective, in the cultivation of sound learning, the efforts of said denomination, and thereby promote the general interests of science, literature and good morals; therefore,



SECTION 1. *Be it enacted* . . . That there be and hereby is erected and established, at or near the borough of Mount Pleasant, in the county of Westmoreland, in this commonwealth, an institution of learning, of such character as the patrons and managers of said institution shall find themselves able to maintain.<sup>9</sup>

While the "Baptists of Pennsylvania, as a denomination" had chartered a "university" at Lewisburg in 1846, the "Baptist denomination in Western Pennsylvania" chartered "an institution of learning" in 1871, which they called a "Classical and Scientific Institute." Both were to "concentrate, increase and render effective, in the cultivation of sound learning, the efforts of said denomination." They were as nearly similar in purpose as any two educational institutions could be, and were unquestionably impressed with a Baptist trust. When Dr. William Shadrach raised the first endowment for Bucknell, he secured it largely from the Baptists, and when Dr. Leroy Stephens raised his substantial endowment for Mount Pleasant Institute, he likewise secured it largely from Baptists, in western Pennsylvania. Some of the substantial citizens of Mount Pleasant raised a special fund of ten thousand dollars, with the proviso that if the institute were ever discontinued as an institution of learning, this fund should be returned to them. The fund, with some accrued interest, was returned to them in 1936, before the merger of the two institutions was decreed by the court, so that the real property and invested funds that both institutions contributed to the new merged institution still remained Baptist real and personal property. A merger with an institution having any other denominational impress than "Baptist" would have been illegal and voidable in any court of equity.

The Western Pennsylvania Classical and Scientific Institute at Mount Pleasant was incorporated on March 15, 1871, and its doors were opened for students about the fall of 1872. According to the best records obtainable, the Reverend Adie Kyle Bell, D.D., one of the incorporators, and one-time pastor of the Sandusky Street Baptist Church in Pittsburgh, was the first principal. His successors in the principalship were Jonathan Jones, A.M., 1876; the Reverend Leroy Stephens, D.D., 1882; Henry

<sup>9</sup> Pennsylvania, *Laws*, 1846, p. 32; 1871, p. 392.

C. Dixon, M.S., 1901; W. Lawrence Kalp, A.B., 1906; Emil Hanke, 1913; and the Reverend George F. Mitch, A.M., 1916.

There were but three presidents of the board of trustees: Christian S. Overholt, 1871-1907; James S. Braddock, 1907-29; and Dr. Byron M. Loar, 1929-36. James H. Pershing, Esq., was secretary during the earlier years, and John A. Murphy, Esq., from 1893 to 1931. Through the years many prominent western Pennsylvanians have been trustees of the institution: C. S. Overholt, the Reverend N. B. Critchfield, J. L. Shallenberger, Dr. J. H. Clark, B. F. Overholt, Henry Clay Frick, A. O. Tinstman, the Reverend B. F. Woodburn, D.D., H. Kirke Porter, Samuel Warden, and Daniel Shupe. The trustees in office at the date of the merger were Dr. Byron M. Loar, Greensburg, president; William I. King, Esq., Pittsburgh, secretary; Charles F. Stoner, Mount Pleasant, treasurer; Charles E. Clark, Mount Pleasant; Bert Faust, Esq., Greensburg; William E. Lincoln, Pittsburgh; Dr. William A. Marsh, Mount Pleasant; E. R. Miller, Uniontown; Ernest M. Overholt, Scottdale; Judge Edmond H. Reppert, Uniontown; Frank H. Robinson, Pittsburgh; John L. Ruth, Mount Pleasant; John M. Stauffer, Scottdale; A. C. Stickle, Pittsburgh; and Lewis C. Walkinshaw, Esq., Greensburg. One vacancy on the board existed by reason of the recent death of Martin E. Townsend, of Uniontown, a graduate of the school, a former county commissioner of Fayette County, and a prominent Baptist layman.

Aside from the many students who received their higher education at the three earlier colleges established at Mount Pleasant, this fourth institution had 469 graduates. It also gave part-time instruction to as many, and more, so that at least a thousand young people came under its beneficial influence before high-school courses were available. Among its graduates were many who later became preachers, educators, physicians, lawyers, judges, journalists, bankers, dentists, mining men, industrialists, and merchants. It functioned until high schools became available to young people under the public-school system, and then it was forced to close its doors. Efforts were made to establish vocational and foreign-speaking

schools, and even a junior college, consistent with the denominational trust, but to no avail.

Resort was then had to a legal and very simple way of solving the problem, that of merger with the only existing institution of like character in Pennsylvania. In addition to the physical real estate, a trust fund of over one hundred thousand dollars had accumulated, through judicious investments, ten thousand of which belonged to the citizens of Mount Pleasant, once the conduct of an institution there ceased. Negotiations were opened with Bucknell University, and the simple legal plan of merger was agreed upon.

Dr. Leroy Stephens' long tenure of twenty-one years as principal had endeared him to the students, to the great Baptist constituency, not only in western Pennsylvania, but also in the whole state of Pennsylvania, and to the Mount Pleasant community generally. Dr. Stephens was a graduate of the University at Lewisburg, class of 1868, and his alma mater very deservedly bestowed upon him the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity in 1890. He was later secretary of the Pennsylvania Baptist Education Society, a vehicle used by Pennsylvania Baptists to aid ministerial students, and he was thus intimately associated with the outstanding work of Bucknell University until the day of his death. It was quite fitting, in recognition of his long and self-sacrificing educational life, that the funds coming to the merged institutions should have been designated as a memorial to him.

The legal merger of the two institutions of learning took place on October 12, 1936, when the court of common pleas of Union County entered its decree of approval. Bucknell University increased the number of its trustees to permit of the election of two outstanding graduates of Mount Pleasant Institute: Charles B. Franks, class of 1887, representing the Monongahela Baptist Association, and William I. King, Esq., class of 1897, representing the Pittsburgh Baptist Association. Western Pennsylvania Classical and Scientific Institute is not dead. The house in which this institution of learning once functioned no longer resounds with the voices of ambitious youth, but the oncoming generations of

young people from western Pennsylvania will especially profit in that there is available to a worthy number of them the benefits of the trust fund now in Bucknell's hands, just as it was formerly available to them at Mount Pleasant. Western Pennsylvania Classical and Scientific Institute lives in the greater merged institution, housed in the beautiful grounds and buildings on the banks of the Susquehanna, and with an equipment, faculty, and leadership well adapted to call forth, concentrate, increase, and render effective the cultivation of sound learning.