A Local Survey of Early Schools

A LOCAL SURVEY OF EARLY SCHOOLS
[Author and date unknown?, see end notes page 11]

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It is not known when the first school was established here. Monroe County history has many pages devoted to the records of the town of Sweden and of this village, but while these include a very full and complete account of Brockport Collegiate Institute, there is nothing said, except incidentally, about elementary schools. These incidental references are rather mystifying, too.

The Methodists were the first religious society here and for a year or two before their church was built, on Market Street in 1828, they held their meetings at "the Academy, corner of Main and Holley Streets." The Presbyterians and Baptists did the same, only they called the building "the old brick schoolhouse." In 1830 the latter society built themselves a church on the same lot with the schoolhouse, in the rear of it and on the crest of a ridge or small hill which was leveled when their second church was built. Our oldest residents have no recollection of this old school and it must have been torn down at a rather early date.

Now, there was another very old brick schoolhouse here, a little building occupying a large lot on the southeast corner of Erie and Perry Streets. There is at present a house on the corner of the lot and the schoolhouse itself was torn down only a few summers ago--after standing all these years! It looked as though it dated from the earliest days of settlement, being different in appearance from all other little old schoolhouses of this vicinity. Do not some of our members recall it?

In true New England fashion it presented its long eaves side to the road, while the roof swept down until it almost touched the top of the low door sagging open. It had been used as a dwelling house for many years after being abandoned as a school but had been standing vacant a long time before it was wrecked, and the small panes of the windows were mostly broken or missing.

A rank growth of hollyhocks and weeds obstructed the path to the door and a story was told of how someone had almost fallen through the floor into a cistern beneath it. It did indeed look spooky with its uncurtained windows and half open door revealing only darkness within, and such considerations as these kept the curious from entering the house to see how it looked inside--now it is too late.

Strange that there should have been two schoolhouses here when the village was still in its infancy. But we know that the one on Erie Street was an elementary school while the other was called an academy. In 1828 and 1830 references were made, as existing documents show, to the village school. (The italics are ours). Although the one on Erie Street was not centrally located, it is recalled by some of the older generation as a little public school and there is one white-haired lady who remembers attending it as a pupil.

Miss Nancy Pixley whose home was in Hillsdale, Columbia County, and who had studied at Hudson Academy, had an uncle here, Pelatiah Rogers, who wrote her early in the spring of 1829 as follows: "You can have the school in this village this season at a price not less than twenty-two shillings per week. We should wish to have it commence by the middle of April. Please write me on the receipt of this."

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There was nothing said about "boarding round" for Nancy to eke out the proffered salary of a little more than ten dollars a month. But one could get excellent board in those days for $1.25 per week. And Nancy came and taught the school and she probably made her home at her uncle's. We have no particulars, but it is certain she taught "reading, 'riting, and reckoning," set copies, used the switch when necessary, and conducted spelling bees which were an exciting and pleasurable feature of the early school's curriculum. Nancy, who married William H. [?]. Seymour in 1835, was a very capable young woman.

As to the Main Street schoolhouse, early settlers told how a bear was treed on the corner where it was said to be located, and to some this old "academy" seems as much of a myth as the bear. However, it is a fact that there was a perfect rage for academies about this time. Large academies were built and small ones too; some had spacious grounds, others no grounds worth mentioning--there were many and all kinds of them. So it seems a reasonable conjecture that this was a small, impromptu academy which was rented out to a popular instructor very soon after its erection.

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Nancy Pixley was at her home in Columbia County in the month of February, 1832, when her cousin, Harriet Rogers, wrote her a letter in which occurred remarks worth noting.

"Five of us," said Harriet, referring to her brothers and sisters--she had only nine of them!--"Attend Mr. Caverno's school. Miss Elizabeth Balch attends the school and spends part of her time instructing the small scholars."

Now, it may have been this school mentioned by Harriet which occupied the old school building on Main Street. Its instructor was Sullivan Caverno, so we had in Brockport a person who, later, was quite influential in educational matters in New York State. He was a graduate of Dartmouth College and in 1832, the same year that Harriet wrote Nancy, he took charge of an academy at Lewiston on the Niagara frontier which was considered "the pride and wonder of its day." But the succeeding year he removed to Lockport and began the practice of law. It is said of him that he gave much thought to educational matters and evolved the famous Union School System introduced in Lockport in 1848. *

Harriet also spoke in her letter of a Mr. Lawson's school which a young widow Nancy knew attended. No, they didn't lack for schools here in the early days!

Few have probably heard that the Methodists came very near establishing a seminary in Brockport. And it was due entirely to their own short-sightedness that they stayed away, according to the caustic comment in a Brockport newspaper published in 1830.

"Methodist Seminary" was the caption of the paragraph which read: "The Methodist Conference have located this establishment at Lima, Livingston County. The citizens of this village and vicinity are entitled to much credit for their spirited exertions and liberal subscriptions to obtain its location; but the Conference conceived that eleven thousand subscribed at Lima was preferable to seventeen thousand here."

*Who is right? They claim in Chautauqua County that Union Schools originated there - Sullivan Caverno is mentioned in an old Brockport ledger dated 1835.

A few years after Brockport was turned down by the Methodists, the Baptists who were also shopping round decided to build a college here. Hiel Brockway had offered them six acres of land and the sum of three thousand dollars while there were other liberal subscriptions. This was in 1833. The work was begun the year following and by 1835 or '36 the building was enclosed and a portion completed. A school was then opened in a collegiate course with Professor Morse as principal, but times were hard and the association, failing to meet the mortgage due, lost the building through a foreclosure sale.

The property fell into the hands of Philemon Allen, a contractor, who also soon failed. There was a financial panic throughout the country and since it could no longer be maintained, the school was closed.

Brockport's college had become "a harbor for beasts,"-- that was the mournful way people had of referring to the situation; but the beasts were not wild and dangerous--there was only a livery stable in the basement.

Times grew better and in August, 1841, a meeting of the citizens of Brockport was held to consider the feasibility of purchasing the building and grounds, which were offered for the low price of $3,800, and of carrying out the original design of establishing a collegiate institute at this place.

The project was favorably decided on and action soon taken. After the amount needed had been raised, by issuing shares of stock at $25.00 each, which made every shareholder a part owner of the property, some buying as many as eight shares, another subscription was taken to meet the expense of completing the building and starting the school.

All the official history of Brockport Collegiate Institute is given in the large history of Monroe County compiled in 1886, but the Secretary of its Board of Trustees kept a record of their meetings in a book which came to light only a few years ago, and this old ledger contains what you might call "the inside story" of running an academy. Of course, "Collegiate Institute" was only another name for "Academy," and one of our older residents claims that "Academy" was the name our Institute went by except on formal occasions.

Schools called academies were popular in England in the

eighteenth century and by the beginning of the nineteenth had begun to multiply in this country. They filled a need of the times, for tax supported schools for higher education were then out of the question. They have been called a very flexible type of school for they could usually be adapted to local conditions. Sometimes they were endowed--sometimes not--but in all of them a tuition fee was charged tho at the same time they were not money--making institutions; no profits of a financial nature were expected.

Academies were usually founded by a group of public spirited citizens who ran them independently or with some assistance from the State. They were always described as "flourishing institutions" though it sometimes had to be admitted that their "flourishing" had subsided and belonged only to the past. For, as time went on, there were too many of them and competition pushed the weaker ones to the wall.

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There were already several academies in Monroe County when the Collegiate Institute here was opened. Most of them were small local affairs, but, in regard to this subject of founding academies, a few facts might be mentioned.

The first academy in all this region was of Canandaigua--which was for awhile the "jumping off place" where "civilization" ended--was that founded at Middlebury, Wyoming County, in 1817. At least that was the first incorporated academy. But there was another school of academic grade built nearly two years earlier, on the south side of the green, in Moscow, Livingston County. And this Moscow school "in the first few years of its existence drew pupils from as great a distance as Canandaigua and (also) Buffalo."

In 1824 a large brick academy was built at Lewiston on the Niagara frontier, and in all sincerity, no doubt, the claim was made that this was the first in Western New York.

There were no statistics available in the early days. There seem to be none now. But as the results of "Digging" in various county histories, we find mention of another academy in the "far West" which was incorporated by an act of the State Legislature in 1824 and opened to pupils nearly two years later. This was in Fredonia, the oldest settlement in Chautauqua County.

Those earliest classical schools appeared in rather unlikely places, but in the late fall of 1826 Monroe Academy in the village of Henrietta began its flourishing career. It was conducted on the monitorial plan which had a great vogue at that time. In the succeeding year Rochester, Buffalo, Geneseo, Batavia, the hamlet of Gaines on the Ridge Road - which was then an importand [sic] place, - and many other new settlements, were building academies and "pulling wires" for their incorporation, to receive financial assistance from the State. The academic belfry or cupola became a familiar sight in every prosperous community.

We had great difficulty in obtaining the facts which follow about the old academy a mile north of us. Several people remember it as a school of high reputation but it is completely overlooked in all the county histories.

Clarkson Academy was built about 1830. It was of timber construction and stood a little east of the present school building. In the year 1837 it had as many as one hundred and twenty-seven pupils, and that was a time of "depression" such as we have just been passing through. A catalogue for that year gives a list of the "fifty-one ladies" who attended and the "seventy-six gentlemen". Most of them lived in Clarkson or near by, but some came from long distances. There were two boys, -excuse me, "gentlemen", who registered from Fort Ramsey, Northwest Territory, and another from New York City, the Nation's metropolis. These out-of-town students were boarded in the various homes of the village, so it was all a sort of community enterprise. Besides this, the Hon. Henry R. Selden conducted a law school in Clarkson which was one of the best of its kind to be found anywhere. Though only a small place, this village was notable for the talent and learning within its borders.

On a December night in 1852, the old school building burned down. Its great beams crashing to the ground so moved one of the onlookers,- a boy who had received his education under this roof, - that he wrote a long poem on Clarkson Academy which is still treasured by his descendants. But that was not the end of this flourishing school. It was soon rebuilt in brick and still is standing there - we have all seen it many times, - fraternizing with the D.A.R. monument.

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The Co-eds of the eighteen-fifties. Shall we pause to take a glance at them? There has come to light an 1853 copy of a school paper called The Magnolia, of which Miss Mary Jewett, who lived in the picture-book house with the ornamental fence, now owned and occupied by the Lowry's was "editress". "The Magnolia" was made up of several sheets of translucent note paper stitched together, and closely covered on both sides with the most exquisite handwriting imaginable. It contained "offerings" by several fair contributers and a sprightly editorial in which the rival school paper, edited by the young gentlemen, was taken to task for some ungallant utterances.

A circular dated 1855 calls the attention of parents to the advantages of sending their childred [sic] to this rural school, "located in a quiet and pleasant village apart from those temptations peculiar to larger places."- Was this a fling at Brockport and its Collegiate Institute? -

Yes, they still came from afar to this "Hall of Learning" whose curriculum "was thought to be equal to that of Yale or old Union". But it was in the fifties that the stages were taken off the Ridge Road, because they could not compete with the "Rail Road" a mile away southward. It was in the latter fifties too, that Henry R. Selden moved to Rochester and his law school in Clarkson was given up. Other eminent citizens retired or moved away, and after the Civil War broke out we hear no more of Clarkson Academy. The building is still in use however, as a local school.

The original cost of the Collegiate Institute of Brockport was said to be $25,000, a very large sum in those days. It was built of sandstone of reddish hue, brought on the canal from Medina or Albion--at both places there were quarries--and was five stories high including the basement. Above it rose an imposing cupola with a dome, but the old woodcuts show what it looked like better than any description. It really went far ahead of any other school building in Monroe County, excepting perhaps the Rochester High School of 1827. The latter was not a free school but an academy like the rest.

Our school obtained its charter and was to be governed by a large board of trustees chosen by the stockholders, who would meet at different places in the village. Here is the list of them, surnames omitted: Backus, Gould, Holmes, Davis, Canson, Root, Efner, Latta, Downs, Roby, Seymour, Nichols, Williams, Cary, Allen, Brewster, Barry, Brockway, Joslyn, T. Roby, Fitch, Skidmore, Sutphen, Starke.

A sum of nearly $2,000 had been raised to complete the building and put it in repair, and while this work was going forward, members of the Board were getting under way the work of organizing the school.

The Principal of Gaines Academy, Julius Bates, was called into consultation and gave his advice regarding the interior arrangements of the building. This gentleman then submitted to the Board a proposal to rent the entire premises and, with the aid of an expected appropriation from the State, take complete charge of the academy himself.

But this offer was not accepted at the time. Everybody likes to run things occasionally, and the chance to run a large academy looked quite too inviting, perhaps, to be put aside before it had been tried out. However, Mr. Bates was invited to become principal at a salary of $800 a year and he accepted.

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Statements made in the secretary's book regarding finishing the building and putting it into a condition to use are interesting. Although the school was opened early in November, work on the building was going on all through the winter months.

Every academy had to have a library. A few suitable books were bought of Mr. Bates while one of the trustees, Ahira Fitch, sold them a "Terrestial [sic] Globe" and a "Celestial Globe", each priced at $10.00. Then, with State aid, they purchased more books and an "Apparatus" which all the academies had or aspired to have. It was called, when its whole name was given, a "Philosophical and Chemical Apparatus". (Can you imagine what the thing looked like?) All residents of the village who made a yearly donation of $2.00 were entitled to draw books from the library.

The building had on the first floor two large schoolrooms and apartments for the principal and his family; on the second floor were recitation rooms, while the third was to be used for dormitories. Perhaps there were also dormitories on he second floor. A large room on the fourth floor, 55 feet by 26, was for a chapel, "exhibition" room, and "weekly declamations". The culinary

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department was in the basement, so recently the "habitation of beasts," and Mrs [sic] Julius Bates had charge of it.

There were three terms in the school year and there seem to have been short vacations between them with a "long vacation" of a month or six weeks in the summer. Students were expected to complete the course in three years.

Mr. Bates with several male assistants taught the boys, or rather, the "young gentlemen," while a "preceptress" or lady principal had charge of the female department, and she had assistants too. The trustees appear to have given Mr. Bates a free hand in selecting his staff of teachers and arranging the courses of study, and he apparently was well worthy of the responsibility.

He was able to obtain the services of some teachers who were quite above the average. Our first preceptress was Miss Mary Mortimer, a person important enough to have her biography written. Born in England, Mary was brought to this country when a child. She was educated at a female seminary in Geneva where the advanced branches, seldom introduced in young ladies' schools, were sneaked in somehow and taught by Miss Clarissa Thurston who was one of the learned ladies of her time. Mary exhibited such a thirst for knowledge that Miss Thurston took a special interest in her and it was through her influence that Mary's first post as teacher was this important one at Brockport. But, unfortunately, her health began to suffer under such new and unusual responsibilities and Miss Thurston, fearing she might break down, promptly came to the rescue. Taking over the post of preceptress at the beginning of the fall term of 1842, she made it possible for Miss Mortimer to stay and continue to teach some of the advanced classes.

The benevolent and kindly Miss Thurston was an authoress whose books and magazine and newspaper articles were published though they did not win for her a place in American literature. Her home was in Elmira. After teaching here nearly two years, she returned there and soon afterwards she established Elmira Female Seminary of which Elmire [sic] College is said to be the direct outgrowth.

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Miss Mortimer was not only a considerably younger woman than Miss Thurston but she had a more modern type of mind. She taught three years here and then resigned because her health again failed. Making the acquaintance of Miss Catherine Beecher, an older sister of Harriet Beecher Stowe, she was induced by the latter to join her in her great work of organizing and launching seminaries and colleges for women in the West. After much personal association with Miss Beecher, she became a founder of one of the earliest colleges for women in the country, that of Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

As for the course of study at the Institute, it seems to have been quite liberal for the period. This was not a strictly classical school as so many academies then were, drilling their students in the dead languages and mathematics, and not much else. We knew it was not, because our Board of Trustees paid Julius Bates a very nice little compliment which they had their secretary copy in the book and which reads as follows: "We take great pleasure in saying that in all the departments of <u>science</u>" (the italics are ours) "taught in this Institution, much pains has evidently been taken to make the students thoroughly acquainted with elementary principles, to make the instruction thorough and practical, to inform both the intellect and the heart." To this was shrewdly added: "It is therefore with much gratification that we commend the above named Institute to the confidence and patronage of all who wish their children to enjoy a course of academical instruction." As for the <u>sciences</u> taught in the Institute, its early catalogues tell what they were so we do not need to guess at them. The list is quite complete and need not to be quoted here except to say that some of the titles, such as, "Watts On The Mind", sound rather old fashioned. But "Bookkeeping," the last one mentioned, strikes quite a mondern [sic] note.

The B. C. I. became almost at once a popular and flourishing school. Oh, it really did flourish under Julius Bates and his corps of able teachers!--and the following spring the boarding department was launched.

The young gentlemen and young ladies were to be lodged under the same roof, but the plan of the building was such that the two departments were entirely separate. And we do not doubt that the young ladies were well chaperoned by Miss Thurston and her assistant teachers while the young gentlemen were equally well supervised. Indeed, the latter, as an early catalogue of the Institute carefully stated, were not even permitted "to enter" the portion of the building assigned exclusively to females."

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Going to the boarding school or college often means, in these days, something of a lark, but the young people who attended academies nearly a century ago were never allowed to forget that life is a serious business. Discipline was strict, and in all the schools of that period provisions for the comfort of the students was very limited indeed.

The B. C. I., it is said, did as well by its pupils as any other academy and a good deal better than some, but the world has been changing rapidly and some of the items jotted down in the old secretary's book afford us glimpses into the lives people lived before the pace began to quicken.

According to Mr. Bates, the building could accommodate nearly seventy boarding pupils. They were to sleep two in a room, and the rooms must have been small and without closets, judging from the number of them and the fact that bedroom closets were considered an unnecessary luxury a hundred years ago. The

secretary recorded an order for "strips of wood, about three inches wide," to be "nailed to the walls of the bedrooms"; and what purpose could these serve other than to provide rows of pegs on which the students could hang their wearing apparel? Another order given out was "to whitewash all the walls." We suppose the floors were painted and they might have been "yellow or marble-color" as in another academy built and fitted out about this time.

We know without any guessing that every room was supplied with a washbowl, pitcher, and pail, the latter for carrying water back and forth from the pump in the yard; and above each washstand, we suppose, hung a looking-glass. Candlesticks or lamps were other necessities of the times, so there must have been tables to put these on and to hold the school books. Of course there were chairs, but we doubt if they were rocking chairs.

The only real luxury these B. C. I. Students had in their rooms was heat, for in those days icy cold bedrooms in winter were the usual thing. If the outer walls of the building hadn't been of stone, the trustees, in this particular instance, might not have been so magnanimous. But the building was heated by stoves, and each student's room had its own with a woodbox beside it. What ramifications of stovepipe there must have been! The young folks had to fetch their own wood as well as their water supply. There was no troop of servants to wait on them in this or in any other American school. This meant a good many trips up and down three flights of stairs. And the rooms must be swept daily and walls and ceilings scrubbed as often as required. So, even though "wrestling and athletic games" were "not allowed in the building," the students did get some exercise.

Students boarding in academies were usually required to rise at six A.M., summer and winter alike, and gather in the chapel to begin the day with devotional exercises. The day was pretty well filled out with study hours and recitation periods, and there were also study hours from seven to ten P.M. Think of it! The students had to spend the whole evening poring over the next day's lessons in their rooms. One wonders if the boys, who were not allowed to wrestle indoors, were not granted time during the daylight hours for ball playing or other active sports in the open.

You can be sure Miss Mortimer was one who would believe in plenty of outdoor activity for her charges, but like the Principal, Mr. Bates, she was hampered in many ways by tradition. And one of the things the Preceptress of the Female Department was expected to do was to marshal out her young ladies every fair afternoon to promenade around the village streets. Two abreast they tripped along, in a long cavalcade headed by lady teachers, sometimes with other lady teachers bringing up the rear. Of course, it was a decidedly conventional way to take an airing, but it was a favorable ad for the school, and how "fetching" the damsels must have looked in their close-fitting bodices and spreading skirts, their poke bonnets and reticules; the younger girls wore shorter skirts with pantalets.

A characteristic feature of life in the old academies were the Public Examinations or "Exhibitions" which were held in the large hall or chapel of the building at the close of every term. These lasted here three days and consisted chiefly of an examination of the pupils in their studies, conducted by leading citizens and the clergymen of the village. Harriet Beecher Stowe in "Oldtown Folks" told of how parsing contests enlivened the examinations in one New England academy, and the scholars who took part in them began preparing for them weeks and weeks

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beforehand. There may have been "parsing bees" here under Mr. Bates; we cannot say as to that, but we know there were declamations and speeches and musical selections. It was a showing off time for the young ladies and gentlemen! Some of them enjoyed it immensely but for timid souls what an ordeal it must have been!

There was no doubt about the popularity of these events with the townspeople. Although there were long flights of stairs to climb to reach the chilly fourth-story chapel, there was always a crowd on hand and on all the three Exhibition evenings a door fee was charged.

After Julius Bates had been teaching here one year, and in that short time had made our academy rank high among the institutions of its kind, the trustees decided to accept his offer, made when he first took the post, and turn the entire management of the Institute over to him. If we consider what his cares and responsibilities were from the beginning, and how they were added to by this new arrangement, we might wonder why he consented to do it as the financial returns could not have been much larger than when he had a fixed salary. And speaking of finances, the debit and credit side of running an academy, taken by itself with nothing else to do, would be enough to wreck a sturdy constitution.

In the fall of 1845, when the Brockport Collegiate Institute was riding on the crest of the wave, known for miles around as a popular and high class school, death came suddenly to the beloved Principal. We [sic] was stricken in the prime of life, and his widow was left almost penniless with small children to care for. There was gloom throughout the school and the whole community. But the crisis had to be met, and two committees were formed, one to confer with Mrs. Bates about her continuing the boarding establishment, and the other to see what Oliver Moorehouse, one of the teachers, could do about serving as temporary principal. Both accepted their opportunity to continue service here.

One of the things which made running an academy such a complicated affair was the way the boarding department had to be managed. Resident students had the privilege of boarding themselves if they wished, but many chose to pay for board since they were allowed to furnish from one-fourth to one-half of what they must pay in provisions at market prices. Our out-of-town students were not drawn from cities but from rural districts.

And so, Mrs. Bates, who wanted to start anew with a clean slate, was embarrassed in her calculations by having on her hands a mountain of fire wood, 21 cords!--that also was received in payment; 70 bushels of potatoes; 30 of beets; 400 pounds of butter; 3 barrels of soft soap; one of pickles; "a lot of squashes,"--the sum total of squashes was not given; and literally heaps of other things. Why it was thought expedient to do it, we cannot say, but the trustees purchased all these articles of Mrs. Bates and then immediately sold them back to her.

And after they had settled all the bills relative to Mr. Bates' illness and death, for poor Mrs. Bates was unable to do it, the trustees began to look about for a new principal.

They found him in Mr. Jacob C. Tooker, A. M. We do not know where he came from or who recommended him, but we notice a change in the tone of the secretary's records after Mr. Tooker took the helm. There is dissatisfaction expressed, not merely with smokey chimneys or the difficulty of raising money, or other such familiar plaints, but with situations wherein personalities figure.

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Valued teachers resign, and the time-stained records indicate that for some reason the Professor is "after the scalp" of Mrs. Bates. He has tried to get the lady ousted from her post but the trustees, after appointing a committee to investigate her "boarding establishment", decide to keep her. Then Mr. Tooker let it be known that he is weary of "the business of providing scholars with lights, wood, washing, etc.," and would like to transfer this burden from his own to the plump shoulders of Mrs. Maria Bates.

But the trustees have regard for the technicalities of the situation. If Mrs. Bates is to do it, then she must be asked to rent the building and grounds and be the proprietor instead of the principal. They choose to give the lady a chance to strengthen her position which she promptly accepts.

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Does it look as though the Professor is getting the worst of it? Apparently, [sic] so and that may explain why his zeal for reforming everybody's ways but his own suddenly took a new direction.

In the Principal's room at the Institute on a Saturday morning in February, a special meeting of the Board of Trustees has been called, the object of the meeting being to bring that august body face to face with certain scholars whom Mr. Tooker has discovered were guilty of "grave misdemeanors." He has the culprits summoned and they listen to a solemn warning which is issued to all the students as a result of this meeting, for the Board resolves:
"That any member of the Brockport Collegiate Institute who shall be convicted of playing cards or having playing cards in his possession hereafter in said Institute, shall be publicly expelled therefrom forever," and, "That all similar institutions in Western New York will be notified of such expulsion and furnish with [sic] names of individuals so expelled."

A devastating blow to strike at "Flaming Youth"! What next, Professor Tooker?

At succeeding meetings of the Board, the Tooker-Bates controversy fills all the minutes. The boarding department is investigated anew, but the sole result seems to be that Mrs. Bates is given a donation party. And this lady, now proprietor of the establishment lays down some rules for her former boss. "Mr. Tooker may not give music lessons on the piano in the parlor" she declares, and "He must Keep the Gate Shut;" otherwise he cannot have the use of a portion of the grounds or the use of the barn.

A new committee waits on Mr. Tooker to hear him recite his grievances while another small group confers with Mrs. Bates. But it's of no use for harmony cannot be restored. And since a good cook is of more value than a poor principal, they decided to notify Mr. Tooker that a change in his department would be acceptable.

Teaching in an academy was an occupation which made great demands on the constitution of the teacher. This may have accounted for the fact that they changed about pretty often; for, with so many academies--in 1850 there were 6,085 of them in the United States--the competition for teachers as well as pupils was brisk.

Following Mr. Tooker as Principal here was Professor J. G. K. Truair who had been head of the academy at Norwich, Chenango County, before he accepted this more important post. We know that the B. C. I. prospered under his management. The preceptress, or head of the female department at this time was Miss Caroline

Manning, and associated with her were other ladies who taught the "ornamental branches," such as, "fine penmanship," music, both piano-forte and vocal, drawing, painting, French. The age-old prejudice against learning for women had abated in the eighteen forties and eighteen fifties to a gratifying extent, but there was quite enough of it left, and most parents liked to have their daughters "take a course in art" instead of puckering their brows over Latin and higher mathematics.

The prospectus of the Institute for 1853 announced that Mr. Truair, the Principal, would leave at the close of the term because of impaired health. He gave up teaching when he left here and went into the newspaper business. You wouldn't think that publishing a large daily newspaper would be relaxation from teaching, but he undoubtedly was one of the Truairs who owned and edited the Syracuse Daily Journal for a number of years. And in the Centennial History of Onondaga County you can see a full page portrait of a benign and pleasant looking elderly gentleman whose name was J. G. K. Truair.

The next Principal here was Mr. N. P. Stanton of Buffalo. He was well equipped in training and experience for the post and we suspect that he was a hustler. The school catalogue stated that "Mrs. Stanton, as Matron of the Institute, will give such special care to young lads and misses from a distance as parents may desire." There was enough for this lady to do, as the school was growing rapidly, without encroaching on the sphere of Mrs. Bates.

The top floor had been cut up into many new rooms for boarding pupils, while, by putting "sliding sashes and panels" between two of the recitation rooms so they could, on occasion, be thrown together, they accommodated chapel exercises on the first floor.

Tuition without "extras" remained about $5.00 a term, but the

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price of board had to be raised to keep up with the "mounting cost of living"—yes, it was raised to $1.50 per week! Even at these prices some could only afford to send their children to academies for a single year or even less, and remarkable improvement within a short space of time was anxiously looked for by many of the school's patrons. What wonder that instructors and pupils alike were animated by a great desire to make the public exhibitions a success! It was "up to them" and they knew it.

The examinations at the end of the first winter the Stantons were here were "highly gratifying" to the Board of Trustees. On the final evening, Professor Raymond, who taught elocution in the new Rochester University, and the Honorable Mr. Houghton of Buffalo were here assisting the usual committee of gentlemen of the village in awarding the prizes.

There were declamations and speeches. The golden age of academies coincided with the golden age of oratory. Prize essays were read, sentimental ballads were sung, and there must have been hearty applause for: "While we desire to make no disparaging comparisons," the secretary wrote down, "we do sincerely express the belief that rarely has any exhibition of this kind been so universally Approved and Admired by the Audience." There may have been something contagious about rhetorical flourishes for so much fine language was used in describing this event that it spreads over a page and a half of the old ledger.

The next entry is dated a month later. Like a blow in the face, it has a stinging brevity--"The building of the B. C. I. was destroyed by fire April 2, 1854, at 11 A. M." !!!

There are those still residing in Brockport who, though only small children when the tragic event occurred, still remember it vividly.

The day happened to be Sunday. Indeed, if it hadn't been the Lord's Day there wouldn't have been such an awful crime committed. One of the boarding pupils, whether a boy or girl we cannot say, but oblivion is merciful, disobeyed the rule that everyone must go to church, and on that Sabbath morning stayed in his or her room to make candy!

It must have been molasses taffy, for chocolate fudge was unknown at that date, and it boiled over before it was noticed, and articles in the room caught fire. There was a sheet of zinc under each stove, but there must have been great carelessness; and the fire spread!

While all the good people were sitting quietly in church, there was a sudden great uproar outside. Alarm caused a general exodus. And the panic stricken citizens, as they poured into the streets, saw the Collegiate Institute, their proudest possession, going up in flames!

One of our residents who was only a very small lad when he viewed the lurid spectacle was a afraid the whole earth was going to burn up. His mother reassured him on that point but took occasion to drive home a moral. "Those who practice deceit," said she, "and break the Sabbath, are likely to bring down some terrible punishment from Above."

Almost immediately after the fire the trustees passed a resolution to rebuild. It appeared a rash undertaking in view of the financial difficulties certain to be expected, and a few dissented and dropped out. But their places on the Board were promptly filled by others. It seemed as though the townspeople could not face the prospect of doing without their Collegiate Institute.

Of course, the students all scattered. Those who lived in the Brockport were able to continue their education here, for there were small schools in the village where the higher branches were taught. "It's an ill wind that blows nobody good." Those small teacher-owner schools had a great chance when they did not have to meet the competition of the Collegiate Institute.

We have tried to give a history of the latter in considerable detail--the source material being available--for this school was typical of thousands of others that flourished at that time. You remember, they always "flourished." The old academy of Victorian days was a grand institution in spite of its defects, and has an aura of romance.

But in regard to the contemporary lesser schools of the village, we need to say and are able to say very little. We can hardly do more than give a few sidelights on the subject.

In the year 1843, the "deputy Superintendent of Common

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Schools of the County of Orleans," issued to Miss Christiana Thoms a small but beautifully engraved certificate which licensed her to "teach Common Schools in any Town and District of the said County." A teacher's certificate of that date in Monroe County would

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probably show the same wording. The public schools were then called "common" schools, either because they were common to all or taught only the common branches. But they were not free schools for the rate bills persisted in this State until after the Civil War.

We have spoken of the little village schoolhouse out on Erie Street that belonged to the days of long ago. It was still in use as a school at the middle of the last century, but there was also another small village or "common" school on the east side of the village. One of our older residents remembers it, but it was torn down, we suppose, about 1850. For that was the year when land was bought adjoining this older school, on the corner of Park Avenue and Union Street, for the erection of a larger and finer district school building which is standing there today.

On Fayette Street a North District School, now transformed into a dwelling house, was built. Then, on the corner of Holley and Utica Streets, where the modern Grammar School now stands, was erected a West District School. It is supposed that these three schools were all built about the same time.

When the large union or grammar school, just referred to, was projected in 1915, it was at first designed to have it on the east side of the village, but the discovery was made that if the land on which the West District School then stood was to be used for other purposes, it would revert to the Brockway heirs. So it was decided, very naturally, to build the Grammar School right there.

The old East District School building is all that remains of our former District system, and when its shabbiness is overlooked and only its architectural lines considered, it is a good-looking edifice. As it was to a limited extent a grade school, for it had two schoolrooms and two teachers, a few data regarding it may be of interest.

One of its earliest teachers was Mr. Allis. Others were Nathaniel Palmer, Mr. Merrill and Mr. Thorp.

At nine o'clock every schoolday morning, the head teacher, always a man, in the fifties, rang a bell at the entrance. The older scholars were taught in the south room of this East District School and the smaller ones in the north room. When the tyrant picked up his ruler and drove some boy before him into the front entry, everyone knew what was going to happen. This seems to have been like an early school in Erie County of which it is recorded: "Mr. Sturgeon taught the older children and did the whipping for the whole school."

There were very large sliding doors, perhaps eight feet wide, between the two schoolrooms and these were finished on both sides as blackboards. During "morning exercises" with which the school day began, these were thrown wide open, but at other times they remained closed and the two departments were completely separated. There were also "literary exercises" occasionally in each room, and a movable platform or stage was set up which the children who had to "speak pieces" or read compositions were obliged to mount to do the thing in proper style.

Oddly enough there is a composition still in existence that was written by one of the young hopefuls in the primary department of that school. Its title is, "Description of a Schoolroom," but it doesn't describe the room, it only contains a brief description of the school itself. The youthful writer, after naively moralizing on the value of "Knowledge," said, without any punctuation:

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"There are 42 in Mr. Allis room and in Miss Barnetts room there are 50. We sing sometimes and we have two recesses a day then we play as hard as possible. If we whisper we have to stay in at recesses and that I do not like"----(more moralizing--even the infants took it up)----signed: "Dora."

This "literary effort" was marked "Very Good" by the teacher, and maybe that was why it was tucked away in a drawer of the old secretary where it remained, dusty and forgotten, until now.

We have mentioned the little "select" schools. There were surprising number of them here, but that seems to have been the case in Rochester and perhaps everywhere then. No schools

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being free, the select schools cost only a little more than the others, and teaching was about the only genteel occupation a young lady could engage in. She could gather a few neighborhood children together in her own home and teach them the rudiments, with little more in the way of equipment needed than tact and the ability to make her small charges "toe the mark."

However, one or two of our private schools in the eighteen fifties seem to have been more ambitious. In that of Miss Harriet Skidmore on Main Street, both ancient and modern languages were taught.

This paper has become nearly twice as long as it was intended to be. Of the fine new Collegiate Institute that was slowly rising where the former one had stood we will say little for its history is well known. Although the building was not completed in November 1855, the school was then reopened. It had proved to be impossible to retain Mr. Stanton and David Burbank was the first Principal.

Shortly after the Civil War, Brockport, by turning over the Collegiate Institute building to the State, secured the location here of a State Normal School, but there was an express understanding that the Academic Department was to be continued under the same roof. It is still a school that really "flourished".

Perhaps it should be mentioned that all that is said in these pages about the B. C. I. (with the exception of the last two paragraphs) relates to the first Collegiate Institute which was destroyed in 1854. What is set down here is the result of an intensive study of the old record book of that school and of old documents in the possession of the present Normal School. Other valuable sources of information were the large Monroe County History, published in 1877, a life of Mary Mortimer by Minerva Bruce Norton memories of old residents who received their early education here, and some old newspapers, newsclippings, and letters, which were kindly lent me by their owners. It seems impossible to write of past times understandingly without the aid of source material.

[END]

END NOTES

While it is unknow who wrote this work, we may have some clues.

Author:
Many of the things discussed here can also be found in W. Wayne Dedman's centennial history of the College "Cherishing This Heritage" ©1969 by Meredith Corporation. Acknowledgments in his preface, or end of chapter citations may help solve this puzzle.

Note: Per a phone conversation with Mary E. Smith 2012.07.22, it is believed this was manuscript was authored by Helen Hastings. Mary says her copy has a last page that is signed by Hastings.

Date:
On page 1, paragraph 3 of this BCM document we find: "Now, there was another very **old brick schoolhouse** here, a little building occupying a large lot **on the southeast corner of Erie and Perry Streets**. There is at present a house on the corner of the lot and the schoolhouse itself was **torn down only a few summers ago.**"

On page 12 of the manuscript (BCM pp 8, 9) we find this: ..."The building of the B. C. I. was destroyed by fire April 2, 1854, at 11 A. M." !!! ... There are those still residing in Brockport who, though only small children when the tragic event occurred, still remember it vividly." A small child then would be, say, four years old. If they lived to be 100, that would bring us to 1954.

❖

The manuscript from which this was retyped was provided by Village of Brockport Historian, Jacqueline Morris 2006.12.04. It was a very dark copy, perhaps electrostatic, of typewritten pages (one column per page). In some instances letters were so filled in as to make interpretation difficult, espcially between a lower case e and o.

This document was typeset as it was typewritten (except extra or missing word spaces in the original were adjusted accordingly by Norm Frisch and proofed by Diane Frisch.