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Abstract

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[*excerpt*]

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No Small Influence . . . on the Intellect, the Morals, and the Temporal Prosperity of Our Town: Gettysburg College and Its Community

By Charles H. Glatfelter

The following is the text of the address which Director Emeritus Dr. Charles H. Glatfelter delivered during the monthly meeting of the society on April 3, 2007. Held in the College Union on the campus, this meeting was the contribution of the historical society to the 175th anniversary of the founding of Gettysburg College.

This coming Saturday – April 7, 2007 – will mark the 175th anniversary of the day in 1832 on which Governor George Wolf signed 19 bills recently approved by the Pennsylvania legislature. One of those measures, known as Act 142, provided that “the Gettysburg Gymnasium [located in Gettysburg, Adams county, in this commonwealth] be, and hereby is erected into a College, for the education of youth in the learned languages, the arts sciences and useful literature.” It was the tenth college founded in Pennsylvania.

It took little time and effort to transform the Gettysburg Gymnasium, which was an already functioning school, into a degree-granting institution, which was named Pennsylvania College of Gettysburg. It was formally organized three months later, on July 4. Instruction began four months later, on November 7, 1832. The classroom doors which opened on that day have remained open ever since. This cannot be said of every similar institution. Gettysburg is one of the fifty oldest colleges in this country today.

We may not know why the founders chose July 4 for the formal organization, but we do know that the orator of the day, Judge Calvin Blythe, who was president of the board of trustees, began his address by declaring that “the day on which we are assembled, makes it not only proper, but indispensable that we should recur to the scenes of the revolution.” In a wide-ranging address Blythe expressed his high regard for the leaders of the struggle for independence, placing them among “the most illustrious of the human family”, but he insisted “it must always be remembered that to the great body of the people, are we indebted for our revolution.” Now that it has been won, “the success of our free institutions, which all so much value,...depend upon the general intelligence of the people – an intelligence, that will enable them to judge of both men and measures.....To them belongs as well the right to decide, as the consequences of decision, on questions of the last importance.”

Having gained their independence, as Blythe realized, Americans found themselves possessed of a rarity in the world; an established and working republican society. Not surprisingly, one of the legacies of the revolution was the urge to provide more educational opportunities for more people, not simply because it was desirable, but because it was seen as indispensable. In his first annual message to Congress in January 1790, which was brief and contained few recommendations, George Washington declared that nothing merited the support of Congress more than what he called “the promotion of science and literature.” Knowledge is nowhere more important, he declared, than in a country such as ours, where “the measures of government receive their impressions so

immediately from the sense of the community.” He left it to the Congress to determine whether “this desirable object” was best promoted by aiding existing institutions of learning, establishing a national university, or pursuing some other course.

Benjamin Rush (1745-1813), a Philadelphia physician and one of our founding fathers, was also convinced of the indispensable role of education in a successful republic. In 1787 he published an essay in which he proposed public support of elementary education in the state, establishment of four colleges in its settled parts, and having a university in Philadelphia, where among other things law, medicine, and theology could be studied. Five years earlier, he took the lead in founding one of those colleges west of the Susquehanna river, in Carlisle, where he hoped it would attract young men from the Scotch-Irish Presbyterian families which had been among the bulwarks of the revolution. The legislature chartered Dickinson College in 1783, the second in the state. It opened its doors three years later.

Rush hoped the political and religious leaders of the many Germans in Pennsylvania would actively support Dickinson College. This explains why there were four leading German pastors and four well-known German laymen, from different parts of the state, among its first trustees.

When it became evident that any support from them would be at best minimal, in a long letter published in Philadelphia newspapers in 1785, Rush urged the Germans to establish their own college. This they attempted to do. In 1787 the legislature chartered Franklin College. It was organized with considerable fanfare in Lancaster in that year. Lacking the financial resources similar to those Rush and others were attracting to Dickinson, Franklin College never granted a baccalaureate degree and within two or three years ceased to offer a college-level program.

Measured by the number of congregations, the two largest churches in Pennsylvania in 1800 were the German Lutheran and Reformed. Each had about 190 congregations. The oldest had been in existence since the 1720s. Both churches were committed to having a learned clergy, to pastors trained in the liberal arts and sciences, and then in theology. Many of the pastors who served these congregations in the colonial period were trained and ordained in Europe. Many were not, and each passing year the commitment to a learned clergy was increasingly put to a severe test. Had Franklin College succeeded, it would have been able to offer a significant part of accepted learning for a native learned German clergy in the American republic.

The chief founder of Lutheran theological education in the United States was Samuel Simon Schmucker (1799-1873). Born in Hagerstown in 1799, he moved to York when his father became Lutheran pastor in 1809. Young Samuel entered the York County Academy and then the University of Pennsylvania. When at last – it took a while – he decided upon the ministry as a career, he enrolled in the Presbyterian Theological Seminary at Princeton.

Theological seminaries were then new educational institutions, only recently developed in the United States for the training of ministers. While Schmucker was a student at Princeton during 1818-1820, there were fewer than twenty of these new institutions in existence. The Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Roman Catholics, and Congregationalists were among those having one or more.

Years later Schmucker stated that upon leaving Princeton he had three goals in mind: translate a German theological work into English, found a theological seminary, and found a college.

Properly ordained, Schmucker took charge of four congregations in western Virginia. Here he soon began preparing several young men for the ministry and also began urging several young ministerial colleagues in the area to join him in an effort to establish a Lutheran theological seminary. To achieve this, they needed some time and a synodical organization which would assume responsibility for the new school. In 1825 the Evangelical Lutheran General Synod, in the United States of North America voted to move to "the immediate organization of a theological seminary" and named a committee to locate it at the place which offered "the greatest advantages."

Significantly, neither Philadelphia, Reading, nor Lancaster was a candidate. The three sites the committee considered were Carlisle, Gettysburg, and Hagerstown, all within the field in which Schmucker and his colleagues had been working. On the second ballot the committee decided that Gettysburg has made the best offer: the gift of \$7,000 in cash plus free use of the publicly owned Adams County Academy building, which was not then being used, until the seminary could build its own building.

The seminary was formally organized and received its first students in September 1826. It may seem strange to us that a seminary came first, to be followed by a college, but this was the order in Schmucker's plan, as well as in that of the Lutherans' sister German church, the Reformed. The German Reformed seminary began operating in 1825 under an agreement with Dickinson College and on its campus. A similar arrangement was made available to the Lutherans, but they chose not to accept it.

When the seminary opened in Gettysburg in 1826, Benjamin Rush's dream of a system of public education in Pennsylvania extending from the elementary school to the university remained just that. There were few if any public schools at any level. The supporters of American theological education assumed that students entering their seminaries had satisfactorily completed all or most of a college-level curriculum. Several of Schmucker's earliest students were graduates of Dickinson or Jefferson College, but it took him and the seminary board less than a year to decide that, in order to meet the standards he shared with other American seminary educators, he needed to make immediately available a program of preparatory work.

In June 1827 the Gettysburg Classical School opened, with one instructor, David Jacobs (1805-1830), and with the announced purpose of preparing young men for admission to college or of simply offering them what was called "the higher branches of an English and Scientific Education." Two years later, in 1829, a second instructor, Michael Jacobs (1808-1871), was engaged to teach mathematics and science. The Gettysburg Classical School had become the Gettysburg Gymnasium. It began offering most of the then-standard college curriculum.

The new school quickly succeeded in attracting students, some preparing for the ministry and some for other lines of work. By 1831 Schmucker was ready to reach for his third goal, which he decided would be obtained by converting the Gymnasium into a four-year college. First, he needed to obtain a charter of incorporation from the legislature. Five years earlier, it took a committee to choose the site of the proposed seminary. Now there was no doubt. The site of the college was going to be Gettysburg.

Ever since 1826 Schmucker had been asking Lutheran pastors and laymen to help him support the seminary. Now, as its new building on the west end of town was being constructed – its cornerstone was laid on May 26, 1831 – once again he was asking the same people for help.

When it came to a college, he needed to turn somewhere else. Thirty years later, using the third person to refer to himself, he wrote that late in 1831 "he called a meeting of a half-dozen of the principal citizens of different denominations at the Bank in town, and invited their co-operation in the effort to obtain a charter from the Legislature for a college."

Nowhere in his account were the "principal citizens" identified by name, but they were almost certainly the six local men who were later among the early college trustees: two merchants, one newspaper editor, one bank cashier, one tanner, and General Thomas C. Miller, who was a member of Fairfield's founding family, former county sheriff, and long-time militia officer.

At this time the legislature usually met about four months each year, from December through early April. Schmucker asked his friends in all parts of the state to obtain signatures on a petition urging the lawmakers to grant a charter. He and General Miller went to Harrisburg to present their case in person.

Once in the capital, Schmucker learned that he was expected to prepare a draft of the bill which would, if passed, be the college charter. Securing copies of some of those the legislature had already approved, he lifted sentences and paragraphs which served his purpose. His final draft demonstrates fully that he understood the differences between a theological seminary and a college. The word Lutheran does not appear in the document. What does appear is a clear statement of purpose. The college, it read, "promises to exert a salutary influence in advancing the cause of liberal education, particularly among the German portion of our fellow citizens." And by liberal education he meant "the education of youth in the learned languages, the arts, sciences, and useful literature."

My use of the sources over half a century or more has convinced me that, while the many Lutheran pastors and laymen who supported Schmucker for a decade before 1832 were opposed to slavery, they were not abolitionists. Recently the claim has been made that they were. If ever credible and pertinent sources demonstrate otherwise, of course old conclusions can be expected to change.

The new college was no more than in operation before its supporters began looking for the funds needed for a much larger structure than the academy building. Since the state had long been making occasional grants to most of its colleges, they decided to make their appeal to the legislature. The appeal to the 1832-1833 session failed at the last minute. When they tried again in the 1833-1834 session, they were joined by another Gettysburg resident, Thaddeus Stevens, who was then beginning his first term representing Adams county in the lower house. Given the state's demonstrated willingness to support colleges at this time, Stevens' powerful address was certainly not decisive in the outcome, but Schmucker called it "a speech of consummate legislative tact and most commanding eloquence."

Before adjourning, the legislature approved grants to Gettysburg and three other colleges and, for good measure, chartered another college and passed Pennsylvania's first public school law. Before the year was out, Stevens began his 34 year tenure as a college trustee, another in a long line of valuable trustees drawn from town and county. Which brings us to the next question. What was the effect of lifting up the Gettysburg Gymnasium, transforming it into a college, and then dropping it down into the middle of the county of Adams?

In 1832 Adams was one of the smaller Pennsylvania counties, with about 22,000

ter: No Small Influence... on the Intellect, the Morals, and the Temporal Prosperity of Our Town: Gettysburg College and Its Community. Residents, about one fifth of its present population. Most of the earliest settlers were Scotch-Irish Presbyterians, with names such as McClellan, McConaughy, McGaughy, McPherson, Scott, and Gettys. During the colonial period these people had contributed more than their share of the political and cultural leadership of the parent county of York.

The earliest German settlers lived in the easternmost parts of the county. By the time Thomas F. Gordon published his gazetteer of Pennsylvania in 1832, the county's ethnic composition had dramatically changed. "The population is principally composed of the descendants of Germans," Gordon wrote, "the prevailing religion of the county is Lutheran, and there are many churches of this denomination throughout the county." By many he meant about 13, scattered throughout the county. Until about 1950 there were more Lutherans in Adams county than members of any other denomination.

In 1832, while the gazetteer identified about 15 towns and villages in Adams county, there was only one borough. It was Gettysburg, founded in 1786, the county seat since 1800, and with a population of about 1,500. In the 1770s a Presbyterian minister named Alexander Dobbin began an academy or classical school in his new house, which is still standing and now within the borough. Together with one in Carlisle begun a few years earlier, it was one of the first two such schools west of the Susquehanna. No attendance records survive, but there is good evidence Dobbin had numerous students. After his death, countians obtained a charter for what was called the Adams County Academy, which began operating in its new building about 1814. Insufficient financial support forced it to close its doors in the mid-1820s. This was the building used to attract the seminary to Gettysburg in 1826. The seminary began operating here in that year, as did the college in 1832. When the court ordered the sheriff to sell the building in 1829 to raise money to pay the academy's debts, Schmucker bought it and called upon his Lutheran friends to help pay for it. This building still stands, is in private hands, and is in excellent shape.

In 1832 Adams county, and especially Gettysburg, was an ideal spot for a college. Its catalogue announced that the town was healthful, its inhabitants moral, and the living cheap. It was located close to the cities of Philadelphia and Baltimore, which was an advantage, but not very close, which was also an advantage. Early college catalogues informed parents that Gettysburg College was actually located a short distance from the village, which until after the Civil War it certainly was. Roads led to and from Gettysburg in all directions. Once the railroad came to town in 1858, the catalogue proudly announced the fact, without making clear that it reached town from only one direction, the east, and did not extend westward from it.

The college began in 1832 with five faculty members, three of whom remained for the long term. Samuel Simon Schmucker was a professor for only one year, but he was an active trustee until he died in 1873. Michael Jacobs taught until ill health led to his retirement in 1866. Henry Lewis Baugher became president in 1850, but continued to teach, and died in office in 1868. Their combined service came to 111 years.

All three men became integral and valued townsmen and countians. They were among the chief founders of Christ Lutheran Church in Gettysburg and often occupied its pulpit. All three died in Gettysburg and were buried in Evergreen Cemetery. Schmucker was often called upon to participate in cornerstone layings, dedications, or anniversaries in county churches. When the college moved to its present campus, he

joined eight other townsmen, including Stevens, in obtaining a charter for the Gettysburg Female Academy, which operated as a high school for girls until after the Civil War.

In a town which long celebrated Washington's birthday, the local militia unit, the Gettysburg Guards called upon him to deliver the oration on February 22, 1839. At the militia's request it was published. From its text we hear echoes of Washington, Rush, and Blythe: "A republic is a beautiful edifice, but it must rest on firm pillars, or it cannot long resist the shocks to which it is exposed. These pillars, in the judgment of the wisest statesmen, are national industry, national intelligence, and national virtue." In this I hear echoes of Abraham Lincoln about the same time.

In 1864, when there was a serious dispute over control of Evergreen Cemetery – should power rest with its stockholders or, as the founding document prescribed, eventually with the lot-holders? – those who wished to take control from the men who had exercised it up to that time searched for a widely respected person to become president and lead in transferring power. Schmucker was elected president in 1864. Two years later, the desired change having occurred, he yielded office to a successor.

For some years the weather records kept by Michael Jacobs were published in a local newspaper. He was one of the chief advocates of using gas for lighting and in 1860 was elected president of the Gettysburg Gas Company. Remaining in his house during the battle, he was a careful observer of what occurred. His Notes on the Rebel Invasion of Maryland and Pennsylvania and the Battle of Gettysburg came out in October 1863 and should be considered the first published history of the battle.

Henry L. Baugher was called upon to deliver the benediction during the dedication of Soldiers' National Cemetery on November 19, 1863. A year later he was elected a vice president of the Gettysburg Battlefield Memorial Association.

These early faculty members and their colleagues could be counted upon to participate in local societies promoting such causes as temperance and opposition to slavery.

The evidence should be sufficient to establish that the activities of these three first college faculty members constitute a pattern for their successors to follow.

The history of the college has been closely linked with the battle of Gettysburg and what followed. President Harvey McKnight was also a member of the Gettysburg Battlefield Memorial Association. The college had a part to play, sometimes a central one, in all six major battle anniversaries, from 1888 to 1988. President Henry W. A. Hanson was one of the chief founders of the Lincoln Fellowship of Pennsylvania in 1938. Faculty members have served as directors and officers ever since.

When the Adams County Historical Society was reorganized in 1939, Robert Fortenbaugh began a record of faculty participation in its direction which persists to this day. Robert L. Bloom prepared the first scholarly history of Adams county, which was completed and published by the society in 1992, after his death.

There have been a number of major town and county anniversaries since the Adams county sesquicentennial in 1950. Robert Fortenbaugh and later faculty members have been involved in all of them.

The interest of Michael Jacobs and his successors in the Gettysburg Gas Company can perhaps be found again in that of Dave Cowan in the Adams County Electric Cooperative.

Likewise, there is a trace of Luther Croll's assistance in surveying Gettysburg's

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new streets long ago in Sam Mudd's time and energy in keeping those streets free of litter
in our day.

A member of the Class of 1877 remembered that in his day it was common for students to join townspeople in frequent walks south on Baltimore street to the national cemetery and then return. Having new students retrace the students' walk to the dedication of Soldiers' National Cemetery on November 19, 1863 is a worthy recent practice, but certainly not something hitherto unknown.

Dean Wilbur E. Tilberg spent a half century of his life, from 1927 until his death in 1977, in Gettysburg. He was one of the chief founders and longtime supporters of the York-Adams Area Boy Scout Council and received national recognition for his work. He was chairman of the committee which organized the Gettysburg Community Chest, now the United Way. His yeoman service to that organization is remembered by the W. E. Tilberg Outstanding Volunteer Award given annually to the person who best represents the spirit of the United Way.

Dean Tilberg can be used to recall the many ways in which college faculty and administrators have entered into the life of the town and the county. We include churches, school boards, service clubs, and task forces. There has never been a faculty member or administrator elected a county commissioner, but the first woman commissioner, chosen in 1979, was the wife of a faculty member.

In a college town such as Gettysburg, residents, faculty, and students over the years have had their own points of view as they have gone about ordering their lives together. Residents may think students do not know how to behave themselves and act as though they own the place. Students may think residents do not know how to treat young people who have their own ideas, to which they are certainly entitled. Faculty may think that no one ever properly respects them.

Over 175 years we could find examples of these and similar views which contributed to tensions in and around Gettysburg. We could also find others which contributed to warmth and friendship. There is much evidence to support the conclusion that the relations between the Gettysburg town and campus have been generally good, to mutual benefit.

In September 1856 Samuel Simon Schmucker wrote an obituary of his old friend and fellow townsman, Samuel H. Buehler, whose drug and bookstore on Chambersburg street was widely patronized for almost a century. The two men had known each other since York days. Buehler came to Gettysburg in 1819.

Buehler "took a prominent part," his friend wrote, "in securing to our borough the location of the Theological Seminary and thus of the College which grew out of it – Institutions which have exerted no small influence for a quarter of a century past on the intelligence, the morals, and temporal prosperity of our town, and to the value of which our citizens generally are not insensible."

Let us give the last word here to the man who wrote the words "salutary influence" into the college charter of 1832. Let us say that Gettysburg College has exerted a salutary influence on the intelligence, morals, and temporal prosperity of the county of Adams for 175 years and that the citizens generally are not unaware of that fact. Let us hope that influence may continue for at least 175 years more.