

**FIFTY YEARS OF HISTORY  
OF THE OHIO WESLEYAN  
UNIVERSITY, DELAWARE,  
OHIO; 1844-1894; PP.1-110**

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Fifty Years of History of the Ohio Wesleyan University, Delaware, Ohio; 1844-1894; pp.1-110 by  
W. G. Williams

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## THE OHIO WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY,

1844—1894.

BY PROFESSOR WILLIAM G. WILLIAMS.

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The Ohio Wesleyan University was founded in 1844. It owes its location, if not its establishment at that particular date, to the famous White Sulphur Spring in Delaware. This spring had early attracted the attention of tourists and seekers after health. In order to accommodate these, and to encourage further patronage, two enterprising citizens, Judge Thomas W. Powell and Columbus W. Kent, erected in the year 1833, on a spacious lot, embracing the spring, a fine hotel, which soon became known to the citizens as the Mansion House. The waters were salubrious, and the locality healthful; and for some years the Mansion House was kept in successful operation. But the town of Delaware was not very widely known, and was not easily accessible; and it was, perhaps, too early in the history of the State to hope for large returns from a business enterprise of this kind; and, at last, in the Summer of 1841, Judge Powell, who had become the sole proprietor, concluded to abandon the attempt to establish a Western watering-place.

The spring property being thus brought into the market, it was suggested by the Rev. Adam Poe, the Methodist pastor in Delaware, that the citizens should purchase it, and offer it to the Ohio and the North Ohio Conferences, jointly, as a site for a Methodist college. Mr. Poe's suggestion met with

a cordial approval, both from the citizens of Delaware, and from the members of the two Conferences.

The circumstances of Ohio Methodism at that time made the suggestion especially opportune. As early as 1821, the Ohio Conference, in connection with the Kentucky Conference, had established at Augusta, in Kentucky, the first Methodist institution in the world vested with collegiate functions. For many years it was the only Methodist college in the Church; it had able scholars in its Faculty, and it educated many distinguished men. Among them, our own adopted sons, our honored Randolph S. Foster and William T. McClintick are illustrious instances. But Augusta College was unfortunately located. It was in an obscure village in Kentucky; it was almost inaccessible; the "plant," as we say in business enterprises, was insignificant; but, especially, it was on the wrong side of the river to suit the growing anti-slavery sentiment of the people in Ohio; and it was at length manifest that the institution could never command their patronage or their contributions. After an experiment of twenty years, the college was a pronounced failure, and was eventually discontinued.

The failure of Augusta College to meet the wants of Ohio Methodism left this largest Protestant denomination in Ohio without any denominational school of a higher grade than an academy. Naturally, the thoughtful men of Methodism were solicitous in regard to the educational future of their Church in Ohio; but, as yet, their thoughts and counsels had not crystallized into action.

As early as September, 1840, Dr. Edward Thomson, then Principal of Norwalk Seminary, in a long report to the North Ohio Conference, from the Committee on Education, said: "There is no Methodist college in Ohio. We blush to think that it contains no institution to which our youth can

resort for collegiate instruction, without imbibing ideas at variance with the religion of their fathers, and the Church of their adoption. There is no State in the country in which the Methodist Church is more in need of a college than Ohio." This, so far as we know, was the first public, or at least published, expression of the need of a Methodist college in Ohio. Yet Dr. Thomson did not, in this paper, go so far as to recommend the immediate establishment of a college. But Dr. Elliott, in an editorial in the *Western Christian Advocate*, December 3rd, 1841, in alluding to the Delaware movement, said: "For several years past there has been much conversation among the Methodists of Ohio, respecting the establishment of a college, or university, of the first order, in a central part of the State." Evidently the condition of things in Ohio Methodism was ripe for such a movement; it only wanted a leader.

It was this peculiar conjunction of circumstances that led Dr. Poe to his thought. With him, to think was to act; and in this matter the Church followed his lead. It is needless now to inquire whether the whole movement was not precipitate. No doubt, had the Conferences invited competition, they could have had much larger offers than the one from Delaware.

The property thus proposed for a college site comprised about ten acres of ground, lying in the suburbs of Delaware, towards the southeast quarter of the town, and separated from the rest of the town by the insignificant "Delaware Run." The town has since grown quite beyond the college campus. Of this ground, a part, on which the Mansion House stood, was held in fee simple; and the remainder, including the spring, was held by a perpetual lease without rent, from the corporation of Delaware. The investment in the grounds and buildings was about \$25,000; but the owner



offered to convey his interests in the entire property for \$10,000. This sum, it was thought, could be raised by a subscription among the citizens of the town and county; and, accordingly, a delegation was appointed to wait on the Conference, and ascertain whether they would accept the property, if conveyed to them as proposed.

The North Ohio Conference met August 11th, 1841, at Wooster. To this body the delegation first applied. The Conference considered the matter favorably, and appointed a committee of five to confer with a like committee to be appointed by the Ohio Conference. August 25th, the delegation appeared before the Ohio Conference, at Urbana. On the following day, Drs. C. Elliott, J. M. Trimble and W. P. Strickland were deputed by the Conference to visit Delaware and examine the premises. They carried back a favorable report, and many long remembered the Irish enthusiasm with which Dr. Elliott advocated the establishment of a Methodist college, and the acceptance of this property. The Conference was ready for the measure, and voted that it was expedient to establish a Methodist college in Ohio; that the two Conferences (embracing the western two-thirds of the State) should unite in the enterprise; and that, if the Sulphur Spring property were conveyed to the Church, on the terms proposed, Delaware should be selected as the seat of the college. A committee of five was appointed to act with the committee from the Northern Conference.

The joint committee thus constituted met at Delaware, September 1st, 1841. The committee consisted of Revs. John H. Power, Adam Poe, Edward Thomson, James Brewster and William S. Morrow, from the North Ohio Conference, and Revs. Jacob Young, James B. Finley, Charles Elliott, Edmund W. Schon and Joseph M. Trimble, from the Ohio Conference. Of these distinguished men, to whom



REV. JOSEPH M. TRIMBLE, D. D.

was committed this weighty responsibility, Dr. Joseph M. Trimble was for many years the last survivor, and died May 6th, 1891. The committee voted to accept the property if the citizens should perfect their offer, and if the title should be made satisfactory to the Conferences.

The way being thus prepared, a subscription was opened by the citizens and was signed by one hundred and seventy-two persons.\* No subscription exceeded \$500, and the aggregate amounted to but \$9,000. That the movement might not fail, certain parties, trusting to future local subscriptions, obligated themselves for the deficit. But no further subscriptions were obtained, and some years afterward, \$500 were raised by voluntary contributions among the ministers in the North Ohio Conference, to relieve the Rev. Adam Poe from the payment of a note given on this account. Such was the difficulty, at that time, of raising even this small sum for an enterprise, which, as the citizens said in the preamble to their subscription, "would greatly add to the value of property in the town and county, and be of great public utility and benefit."

But the town was small; at the United States census the year before, 1840, the population was but 893; there was not much business, and there was little accumulated wealth in the community. The inducement they offered to secure the location of a college, destined to be the central institution of a great Church, was absurdly small. But the amount

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\* A striking illustration of the advance in newspaper enterprise since that day is shown in the fact that the Delaware papers of 1841 made not the slightest mention, editorial or "local," of this movement, the most important that has ever affected the interests of the town. The only reference to the matter during the whole progress of the negotiation is found in the following notice, given in the advertising columns of *The Orlantery Gazette*.

"METHODIST EPISCOPAL COLLEGE.

A general meeting of the subscribers will be held at the Exchange Hotel, this Saturday evening, October 23rd, 1841. It is important that all be there."