

The Old Log Academy and the Lewisburg Academy

by Mary Belle Lontz

The Old Log Academy was built in 1805 by a joint stock company of citizens for the purpose of having their sons and daughters taught, not only the higher branches of English education, but also the Greek and Latin languages. The log academy, a one-story building about twenty feet square, stood in the English graveyard near the Presbyterian parsonage. A duck pond nearby provided for skating in the winter. Early teachers were Joseph Butterfield, John Rees, John Byers, James Forrest, Joseph Kerr James Aiken, Daniel Ambler, John Dunlap, James McClune and J.D. Wallace.

In 1838 the academy classes moved to a new brick building at Fourth and St. Mary Street.

The Old Log Academy was used by James Moore Jr., to hold planning meetings for the Baptist Church in Lewisburg, preceding the construction of the Lewisburg Academy (now Bucknell University).

The Old Log Academy, also called the English school after the adoption of the School Law by Lewisburg in 1834, continued to be used as a free school. Teachers included Misses Catherine Spyker, Sarah Wilson, M.J. Creamer, and Maria Geddes (who early had a school for girls). Also teaching at the academy was James Aiken (1799-1879) an esteemed poet, orator and social reformer who came to Lewisburg from NY state.

The Common School Law of 1834 had to be voted on by every district in PA, and many were opposed, being used to sending their children to private subscription schools or church schools that taught in their own language (English or German) and that favored social distinctions.

The Lewisburg Academy began in 1836, first in an old building on Front St., then in a new brick building with a classroom for sixty students and two other rooms for studying and equipment. On the trustee and building committee were Wm Nesbit, James F. Linn, James Geddes, Wm Wilson and Col. Jackson McFadden. The new building cost about \$1,300 (30,000 to 300,000 in today's dollars, depending on calculations and variables).

James McClune was an early teacher at the academy. Rev. Hugh Pollock, of Belfast Ireland, took charge in 1840, followed by John Robinson (1843), Samuel Shaeffer, Robert C. Ross (1848) and John Randolph (1849-1864).

The announcement of the academy in 1854 was as follows: "The winter session will commence on Thursday, Oct. 19 and continue twenty weeks. The course of instruction is calculated to prepare youths to enter college or for general business. Composition and declamation receive careful attention. Young ladies are invited to attend. Tuition – for language \$10, higher English \$8 and common branches, including reading, writing, geography, arithmetic, grammar and U.S. History \$6 per session."

According to Mr. Randolph, studies pursued in the academy were the usual English branches, and mathematics including algebra, geometry, surveying, conic sections and analytical geometry, Latin and Greek grammars and readings, Caesars Commentaries, Cicero, Livy and Virgil in Latin and the

Odyssey and Xenophon in Greek. The Academy, also known as Randolph Academy in honor of Mr. Randolph, was used until after the Civil War. It was demolished in the 1970s due to a lack of funds to restore the building.

There is more information on early schools in the book "History of the Schools of Union County" and in other references such as Linn's "Annals of Buffalo Valley," Kalp's "A Town on the Susquehanna," and Snyder's "Union County, A Celebration of History." These and many other references are available at the historical society office in the county courthouse at 103 S. 2nd St., Lewisburg, open M-F 8:30-4:30.



Lewisburg Academy