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EARLY EDUCATION IN TALLAHASSEE AND THE  
WEST FLORIDA SEMINARY, NOW FLORIDA  
STATE UNIVERSITY  
*by* WILLIAM G. DODD

PART I

The school problems of early Tallahassee, after a long process of trial and error, were finally solved by the establishment, on January 1, 1857, of the West Florida Seminary. Though the Seminary was nominally a State institution, actually for many years nearly all of its students were from Tallahassee and vicinity, and it was to all intents and purposes a Tallahassee school. With its location in the town, citizens were at last assured of a permanent means of educating their sons, and a little later, their daughters also. Until this fortunate event, Tallahassee, like the other towns of the Territory and the young State, was left to her own resources, never too abundant, in meeting this essential civic obligation.

For twenty-five years a succession of private schools and two chartered academies furnished the boys and girls of the community with their only opportunity for schooling, unless parents could afford and preferred the instruction of a tutor or a governess for their children. The private schools were, with hardly an exception, short-lived. The academies were intended to be permanent, but only one of them fulfilled its intention. Nevertheless, as they were the only educational institutions which could make any claim to being sponsored by the community, our interest in Tallahassee schools of the early period finds its center mainly in the two academies.

The education provided for the children of Tallahassee differed in no essential from that of the South in general. The separation of the sexes through all the grades, the public examination at the close of each term, the fixed curriculum, the requisite charge for tuition, - all were typical and obtained, with the necessary changes in individual cases, in all schools, private and corporate, until the middle of the century.

The course of study comprised the primary and intermediate subjects, as well as an advanced or so-called collegiate course covering some of our high-school curriculum and a good deal in addition to it. Current parlance designated the pre-collegiate subjects as the "common" or "English" branches, and that part of the pupil's education as a "common school" or, more often, as an "English," education. Up to this point, the program of study was identical for boys and girls.

The four-year advanced course for boys was built around mathematics and the classics. In fully equipped schools, the elementary biological and physical sciences, under the names respectively of "natural history" and "natural philosophy," were also regarded as core material. The curriculum was filled out with general history; sometimes with modern language, and always with English, including rhetoric, composition, declamation, and literature or "belles lettres ;" with "mental science," "moral science" and logic.

In the higher course of the female school, for mathematics and Greek were substituted subjects thought to be more suitable for girls. Modern language, usually French, was studied instead of Greek. Music, that is to say, piano, was taught and "taken" regularly; but there is no record of instruction in voice and singing, either solo or choral. The customary description of a desirable female education was "the useful and polite." Included in the latter were drawing, painting, needle-work, wax-work, guitar, and other "ornamental branches."

A complete curriculum was offered to girls first in Leon Female Academy in 1844, and to boys about ten years later in Florida Institute, the immediate predecessor of the West Florida Seminary. Needless to say, private schools could not, and did not, pretend to teach all the subjects of a fully developed curriculum.

The average tuition in boys' schools for a five months' term scaled upward from \$12.50 for the primary branches to about \$22.50 for the advanced course. In girls' schools, the range was from \$11.50 to \$17.50. The

higher fee points to the fact that few schools for girls were concerned with offerings beyond an English education. Frequently, however, special subjects which, like French, were considered a necessary part of a girl's "polite" education, and regularly the special subjects, such as music, painting, and drawing, were charged extra by the subject.

### *Leon Academy*

Very soon after Tallahassee began its corporate existence, interested citizens were making plans for a boys' school. Their concern led to the establishment, early in 1827, of the Leon Academy. Not until seventeen years later did public-spirited men meet the long growing need of a similar school for girls by founding the Leon Female Academy. The fortunes of the two institutions were notably different. From the very first, Leon Academy had to struggle to maintain itself, and in the end it succumbed to financial distress, and about 1840 ceased to exist. On the other hand, Leon Female Academy, once it was launched, continued its career with reasonable success until, in 1858, it was absorbed in the West Florida Seminary.

The first public notice of Leon Academy was the advertisement in the *Pensacola Gazette* of March 9, 1827, which stated that the Academy was "under the superintendence" of Rev. Henry M. White, A. M.<sup>1</sup> Rev. Mr. White was a Presbyterian minister who through some portion of 1826 had been endeavoring to persuade the people of Tallahassee of their need not only of "the Gospel" but also a "seminary of learning." As of late December 1826, his success in promoting the school had been quite negligible. Associated with him in the enterprise were William Wyatt and a few other zealous townsmen. And we are to understand that the founding of the

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1. J. O. Knauss, "Education in Early Florida, 1821-1829," *Florida Historical Quarterly* April, 1925, p. 26.

Academy in time to open in March 1827 was due to the efforts of this group.<sup>2</sup>

The Academy building, erected not later than 1828 and possibly earlier, was built originally as a school and a "house of worship." Appropriately, it was made possible by subscriptions from interested individuals as well as from the municipality itself.<sup>3</sup> We need not think of the structure as in any way imposing. It was later spoken of as having an "upper room."<sup>4</sup> It, therefore, had two stories or, at, least, a story and a half. The lower floor may have been large enough to seat 40 to 50 pupils, with extra space for additional chairs, if needed, on Sunday. The appointments were, no doubt, the simplest and plainest possible.<sup>5</sup>

At the beginning of 1831, Leon Academy was certainly under the control of the Tallahassee City Council, and it is not improbable that the supervision of the school had been committed to the Council from the beginning. If so, from its inception, the Academy was looked upon as the village school. The city government was thus authorized to appoint trustees who were to see to all such matters as "would tend to the interest and good govern-

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2. The facts stated are in a letter from Rev. Mr. White to Col. H. D. Stone, dated December 27, 1826. Col. Stone was president of the Legislative Council of 1827, and at the time Rev. Mr. White was chaplain. The letter is in the Florida State Library.

3. *Florida Advocate*, January 3, 1829. Financial statement of Tallahassee for 1828, including a number of items for 1827. This lists the payment of \$208.00 to John W. Levinus, the builder, for the city's subscription "for the erection of Leon Academy and house of worship." Throughout its subsequent history, it was frequently used for Sunday Schools and for "divine services" on Sunday. At least once, it served as an art museum, when the itinerant artist P. Copman, displayed his "Gallery of Paintings" in the "old Academy Buildings" (*Floridian*, October 21, 1839).

4. *Florida Sentinel*, November 28, 1843.

5. Of lesser importance is the exact location of the Academy. From our sources of information this cannot be ascertained. It can be said with much certainty, however, that the site of the school was in the northwest part of the town as originally plotted, within the area bounded at present on the north and south by Park and College avenues, and on the east and west by Duval and Boulevard streets. (Leon Co. Deed Book A, pp. 191-192; Isham G. Searcy's Map of Early Tallahassee, a fascimile of which is in the Florida State Library).

ment of the institution." <sup>6</sup> As Leon Academy was incorporated by an act of the Legislative Council of February 12, 1831, the ordinance of February 8, which charged the trustees with their duties, must have been passed with the sympathy and understanding of the trustees named in the act of incorporation. They were David B. McComb, James McMullin, Robert Butler, Turbott Betton, John P. Duval, John V. Gary, and Leslie A. Thompson. <sup>7</sup>

The administrative record of the school was a sorry one. In the nine years from its opening in March 1827 to the summer of 1836, six men are known to have had charge of the Academy as principals. This continual turn-over could not have been wholly due to inefficiency; for at least one of the six, James H. Cox, a graduate of Hampden-Sidney College and principal of the Academy from 1832 to 1834, is shown by his record to have been a highly competent and resourceful administrator. The lack of financial resources defeated all his plans, as it probably did those of the other principals. In September 1836, John M. Brook, a Virginian, announced that on October 3 he would open Leon Academy as a "private Seminary for boys." <sup>8</sup> These words can mean only that the trustees had ceased to operate the Academy, though no doubt they continued to control and manage its property. The school itself as a going concern had "folded."

When the activities of the Academy had thus been suspended for about four years, the trustees made one final desperate effort to keep the old school from dying on their hands. To this end, they addressed to the Legislative Council of 1840 a petition which is significant for two things: the clear picture it gives of the deplorable school conditions in the town, and the means of correct-

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6. *Floridian and Advocate*, March 24, 1831. City ordinance of February 8, 1831.

7. *Florida (Ter.) Acts 1831*, p. 86.

8. *Floridian*, September 17, 1836.

ing them which the petitioners proposed and which they asked the Council to sanction.<sup>9</sup>

The petition recited that although the population of Tallahassee was growing rapidly and its prosperity was increasing daily, the town had almost no school facilities, there being at the time only one school for girls and none for boys. This sad state of affairs existed simply because no money was available to provide suitable and necessary buildings. The petitioners adroitly assured the Council that they were asking for no appropriation from the Territorial treasury, already overburdened by the expenses of the Indian War. But they did desire to direct the Council's attention to the fact that in the older states, large sums of money were being raised for schools and education by lotteries. And they appealed to the "enlightened generosity" of the Council to authorize them to raise by like means of lotteries enough money to erect two school buildings, one for girls and one for boys.

The trustees must have conveyed their flattering appeal to the Council with tongue in cheek ; and they could not have been greatly surprised when the Council very promptly turned it down. The only immediate help the legislators could, or would, offer was to pass on March 2 an "Act in Relation to the Trustees of Leon Academy,"<sup>10</sup> whereby certain school funds in the custody of the Treasurer of the Territory were to be paid to the trustees "to assist said trustees in building an Academy."<sup>11</sup>

How much the provisions of the act netted the petitioners, we do not know. One thing is certain : no new buildings were erected. The school officials, nevertheless, continued their efforts, and on March 4, 1840, they an-

9. The manuscript of the petition, which is in the vault of the Secretary of State, is undated; but its contents as well as the action of the Council show clearly it was addressed to the Legislative Council of 1840. It was signed by T. R. Betton, J. P. Duval, Francis Eppes, Thomas Brown, R. Y. Welford, A. F. Duval, and A. M. Gatlin, the first five by the proxy of A. M. Gatlin, Secretary of the Board.

10. Florida (Ter.) House of Representatives *Journal* 1840, pp. 40 ff.

11. Florida (Ter.) *Acts* 1840, p. 63.

nounced that they had established a male school which would open on March 9 "in the old Methodist Meeting House,"<sup>12</sup> and that they had engaged Mr. Sheftall and Dr. Moore to take charge of it. At the same time, they made their final appeal to the public: "In this new attempt to establish Academies in the City, the trustees earnestly appeal to the pride and invoke the aid of their fellow-citizens : they trust that while flourishing Academies are liberally supported elsewhere around them, the inhabitants of the Capital of the Territory will henceforward manifest a more devoted interest in cherishing their own City institutions."

Sad to relate, the pride to which they appealed did not exist, or at least was dormant. There is no record that their manly solicitation brought any marked or unusual response. The Academy, it seems, "petered out" for good and all. The only thing that remained was the old building, which continued to serve various purposes for some years. Of its final fate, nothing is known.

The opinion or "belief" is sometimes expressed<sup>13</sup> that Leon Academy was the forerunner from which developed the West Florida Seminary and later the Florida State College for Women. This has no basis in fact. Leon Academy died of inanition in 1840. The Seminary was founded seventeen years later. The only connection between the two is in the fact that some of the leading citizens of Tallahassee were interested in both institutions.

As we have seen, the trustees, in attempting to prolong the life of Leon Academy, envisaged the erection of both a male and a female Academy building. So far as the boys' education was concerned, these men were able to accept the total failure of their plan, if not with complacency, at least with resignation. The younger boys were at least no worse off than they had been, as they could still have private teachers. And parents who so desired and who possessed the means could send their older sons to northern schools to complete their education, as some of them had already been doing.

12. *Floridian*, March 7, 1840.

13. For example, Dr. Knauss, *op. cit.* p. 26, refers to this "belief."

*Female Academy of Leon*

The education of girls was another matter. In a society whose chivalric ideals gave a cardinal position to the protection of womanhood, parents preferred to keep their daughters within the purview of the home until their education was complete. The transitory private schools had never served this desirable end, even reasonably well. But for want of anything better, the parents had continued to depend on them until at length the uncertainty and inadequacy of their daughters' education forced them to recognize the necessity of a permanent community school. This tardy realization was the occasion of the new era in female education which began in the fall of 1843 with the arrival in Tallahassee of the Misses Bates.

Miss Mary Bates and her two younger sisters came from South Carolina where for six years they had been successful teachers. The immediate reason for their removal was their delicate health and the hope that the climate of Florida would be beneficial to them.<sup>14</sup> Their reputation as teachers preceded their coming and their advent was hailed as a most fortunate occurrence for the town. Twelve men, important in civic affairs and in the State government, gave their names as references.<sup>15</sup> And the enthusiastic editor of the *Sentinel* declared that "so favorable an opportunity for the establishment of a permanent and well-conducted literary institution" had never before been offered to the community.<sup>16</sup>

The Misses Bates opened their school on Monday, November 20, 1843, "in the upper room of the Academy." This arrangement was in no way satisfactory, and the school operated "under great disadvantages." However, these inconveniences could be endured, for the ladies obligated themselves to their patrons for only one term

14. *Florida Sentinel*, October 22, 1844.

15. They were B. F. Whitner, Richard Hayward, John P. Duval, S. S. Sibley, Thomas Brown, Rev. Joshua Phelps, Francis Eppes, David C. Wilson, Thomas Baltzell, Robert J. Hackley, James E. Broome, James D. Westcott, Jr. (*Florida Sentinel*, November 28, 1843.)

16. *Ibid.*

of five months, pending the result of their trial of the Florida climate.<sup>17</sup> Fortunately, at the end of the session, the experiment was regarded as satisfactory. The ladies' health was better, and the patrons were well pleased with their school. The three teachers, therefore, made their plans to remain in Florida.

The outcome of this decision is made clear in an advertisement which appeared in the *Sentinel* of September 21, 1844. It was headed "Female Academy of Leon" and was signed by the trustees B. F. Whitner, Richard Hayward, David C. Wilson, and Thomas Baltzell. It announced the opening of "this institution" on November 4, under the direction of the, Misses Bates, and stated further, "through the generosity of the public, we are enabled to prepare suitable buildings in an admirable situation, and to procure the necessary school apparatus." Certain other events help us to make this statement more explicit.

On September 18, 1844, Anderson Peeler and Mary Jane Peeler, for a consideration of \$100.00, deeded to the trustees of the Female Academy of Leon lot 216, North Addition, fronting 85 feet on Bronough Street and 170 feet deep, "for the purpose of erecting thereon a Female Academy with other suitable improvements."<sup>18</sup> This was the "admirable situation" of the new school.

From the words "preparation of suitable buildings" we are to understand that the trustees considered the six weeks between the date of the deed and November 4 when the school was to open, to be long enough to erect the necessary building, even though it may not have been complete in all details. Just how the trustees financed the total project, we are not told; but the expression "the generosity of the public" suggests that, in addition to the gift of the lot by the Peelers, a considerable contribution for the building and equipment was made by in-

17. *Ibid.* October 22, 1844.

18. Leon Co. Deed Book G, 623. At some subsequent date, the Trustees acquired lot 217, adjoining lot 216 on the north. As late as 1911, a building on the site in question was used for school purposes and was popularly referred to as the Female Academy.

terested citizens, including no doubt the trustees themselves.

The final step of placing the school on a firm legal basis was taken the following spring. By the act of the Legislative Council of March 11, 1845, seven citizens of Tallahassee were incorporated as the Trustees of Leon Female Academy. The seven were those who had signed the advertisement of September 21, 1844 with the addition of George W. Call, George S. C. Johnson, and James E. Broome.

The acclaim with which the Bates sisters were greeted on their arrival in Tallahassee proved to be well deserved. They organized and administered a course of study which met completely the contemporary standard of a "useful and polite education" and whose intrinsic value was no less than that of the curriculum offered to boys thirteen years later in the West Florida Seminary. The Misses Bates are known to have directed the school through the summer of 1845.<sup>19</sup> After that season, there is no further mention of them in the local papers; but it seems likely that they continued in charge of the Academy until the spring of 1846. At this point, it is appropriate to give a brief account of Tallahassee's private schools, with one of which the subsequent history of Leon Female Academy was directly connected.

#### *Private Schools at Statehood*

The private schools were, for the most part, one-teacher affairs, set up in rented quarters. Some of them were conducted by citizens of the town. But by far the greater number of private teachers, both men and women, came from places farther north, attracted by what seemed the need in Tallahassee of their particular form of public service. It was a pathetic and unwholesome feature of some of these ventures that the health of the newcomers was seriously impaired, and that they came to Florida to escape the rigors of northern winters. And too frequently the common scourge of tuberculosis cut

19. *Star of Florida*, May 16, 1845.

short their careers not long after their arrival in Tallahassee.

All the early schools depended for their existence on the tuition received. The master of a private school and the principal appointed by the trustees of one of the academies alike operated their schools at their own risk and made out of them what they could, if anything. Competition, the fickleness of patrons, and still worse, the facile indifference of some of them about paying their children's tuition fees, were some of the adverse conditions which made the "business of teaching" an exceedingly precarious one. And it is hardly surprising that the story of the private schools is an almost unbroken account of their financial failure and early death.

At the distance of a century, the sites of these old schools, as announced, have a quaint sound. Designations like "the house lately occupied by Mr. Bronough," or "the building in the rear of the Episcopal Church," or "the house opposite the Post Office" mean nothing to modern ears except something vaguely remote. But in the village, they served their purpose as well as a street name and a house number. On the other hand, a number of locations, frequently used for school purposes, can still be identified. Such, for example, were the Leon Academy, the lower floor of the Masonic Hall, the Methodist Church with its adjacent parsonage, and the basement of the Court House.<sup>20</sup>

The physical equipment of the private schools was no doubt extremely simple. Ordinarily, one fairly large room with desks for pupils, a table and chair for the teacher, a blackboard and perhaps some maps, would meet practically all the needs. But the meagre fittings in no way hindered their enjoyment of high-sounding names. A few were content to be called simply "school" or "select school" but many adopted the more imposing title of seminary or institute or academy. In the familiar

20. The Masonic Hall, which was located near the Leon Academy, was a two-story building, the upper floor being used for lodge purposes and the lower as a school-room (Mary L. Davis, "Tallahassee through Territorial Days," *Apalachee* 1944, p. 53).

manner of a small town, the terms were used interchangeably and without any consistency.

The first school for girls was opened on October 12, 1829, by Mrs. Jane Gray.<sup>21</sup> Others followed fast. In the succeeding twelve years, as many girls' schools announced their offerings in the town papers. Competition was keen, and in some seasons as many as three schools were going at the same time. About one-half of the twelve were boarding-schools which their mistresses conducted in their own homes; and of these some were primary and elementary schools for girls under twelve years of age.

In few, if any, of those which operated outside the home and which professed to offer a suitable education for girls, did the course of study comprise anything above the English branches. But they all showed a strong predilection for the "ornamental branches" from which a substantial portion of the school income was derived. The establishment of the Female Academy in 1844 did away with the need of separate girls' schools, and practically, if not entirely, eliminated them.<sup>22</sup>

With the final collapse of Leon Academy in 1840, the field of boys' education was turned over to the private teachers. For ten years, boys' schools came and went almost with the regularity of the seasons. We may not assume that all of them were advertised; some, apparently, were not. But of the teachers who did announce their designs to the public, there was a long procession. Each year until late in the decade, a boy in the small town

21. *Florida Advocate*, October 6, 1829. About the same time, Thomas Esten Randolph announced his intention of starting a "Boarding School for Young Ladies" at his home eleven miles northeast of Tallahassee (*Ibid.* September 22, 1829). It is not known whether this project ever materialized.

22. Only two of the female schools of the thirties are worthy of more than passing mention. In 1834, Mrs. Mary E. Brown, of Columbus, Georgia, opened a school in the basement of the Methodist parsonage, and with the support of prominent citizens was able to keep it going for almost two years. From June 1834 to June 1835 Rev. James H. Tyng, an Episcopal minister who came from the diocese of Pennsylvania as missionary to Tallahassee, as a part of his Christian ministry conducted a select school for girls which he advertised as a Female Seminary.

had two schools to choose from, and in some years, three. The field of male education was a veritable waste land.

A few of the masters of these schools reveal in their announcements personalities which, in a more extended account, it would be interesting to dwell upon. But most of them are to us of today only names. Of them all, there was but one whose character, training, and experience enabled and entitled him to hold a place of historical importance in the development of Tallahassee schools.

Rev. William Neil was a native of North Carolina, a graduate of the College of New Jersey, and a student of divinity at the Princeton Theological Seminary. While at Princeton, he met Eliza A. Bogart, who later became his wife and also his efficient assistant in educational work.

On November 3, 1845, he opened his Male Academy in the south basement of the Court House. At the time he was forty-five years old, and had been a teacher for fifteen years. And although he was trained primarily for the ministry, it was his fixed purpose to continue teaching as a complementary vocation.<sup>23</sup> He had left his work in Petersburg, Virginia, on the assurance of prospective patrons that Tallahassee needed and desired a permanent school of a high order. And it is pleasant to note that the worth of both Mr. and Mrs. Neil was recognized by enough citizens of the right kind to induce them to remain in Tallahassee for eight years. After they had been in Florida a little less than a year they became identified with the Leon Female Academy, the account of which is now resumed.

When, in the spring of 1846, the Misses Bates, as it seems, severed their connection with the Female Academy, the trustees turned to William Neil and his wife to take charge of the school. Neil's announcement in the fall of 1846 called it the Leon Male and Female Academy,

23. *Florida Sentinel*, November 11, 1845 ; E. C. Scott, *Ministerial Directory of the Presbyterian Church, U. S., 1861-1941* (Austin, Texas, 1942), p. 534. Neil was received as a member of the Presbytery of Florida in June, 1846. He was not at any time the pastor of the Tallahassee Presbyterian Church, but throughout his stay in Florida was stated supply at Iamonia Church (*ibid.*).

and Mrs. Eliza Neil was named as principal of the female department. From this we are permitted to infer that the trustees agreed for Mr. Neil to move his male school from the Court House to the premises of the Academy. He was thus conveniently situated, with his wife's help, to direct both schools.

The arrangement thus effected continued until the summer of 1850. Of the internal affairs of the Academy through those years, we know almost nothing. But we do know that the Neils were highly regarded as citizens and teachers. To hold the confidence of the Tallahassee public for five years was no mean achievement. And it was a notable testimonial to their ability and trustworthiness that in 1850 Mr. Neil was called to administer the newly established Free School, while Mrs. Neil was left in charge of the Female Academy.

The decade of the fifties brought about highly important developments in Tallahassee school affairs. The continuity of the Female Academy, which had been in uninterrupted operation for five years, was unbroken for another eight. Out of the chaos of the forties in boys' education grew plans which culminated in the town's securing the West Florida Seminary. Eighteen months later, the fortunes of the Academy and the Seminary were joined in a school system whose stability enabled it to last out the century. These significant events are to be related, in some detail, in succeeding paragraphs.

#### A "Free School"

For a small town, Tallahassee was fortunate in having a large number of forward-looking citizens. Such men, we may well understand, were not content merely to accept the low state to which the education of their boys had sunk. In their plans to do something about the situation, they were encouraged, or at least influenced, by the agitation through the decade of the forties in favor of a State system of public schools, ultimately provided for in the Act of January 10, 1849. As public education must be based on taxation, it is not unlikely that

the discussions and plans of the state legislature strengthened the belief of many Tallahassee citizens that in taxation must be found the solution of their own school problem. At any rate, for some time before the close of the decade, there had been growing in the town a sentiment for trying out a new plan of free education.

The sentiment crystallized on December 26, 1849 in a public meeting of "citizens friendly to the establishment of a Common School." The meeting was held in the court house, and was presided over by Captain R. A. Shine, a contractor and builder whose name appears frequently in the records of the city government and of various city schools. The resolution which the citizens adopted unanimously marked the very beginning of Tallahassee's Free School project. By it, the intendant was requested to instruct the inspectors in the city election of January 7, 1850, to poll the voters *viva voce* on the question: "Are you, or not, in favor of the establishment by the City Government of a Public School?"<sup>24</sup>

The exact result of the poll, unfortunately, is lost; but it is certain that a large majority voted "yes."<sup>25</sup> Accordingly, on March 26, 1850, the City Council passed an ordinance "to establish a Free School for the City of Tallahassee." By its provisions the Council, acting as a Board of Trustees, was to have general direction of the school. The first session was to begin on April 1, 1850 and to conclude on August 13. A teacher was to be engaged for six months, and to be paid from the city treasury at the rate of \$800.00 a year. Male children not under seven years of age, residing within the corporate limits of Tallahassee, were to be admitted free; and those residing beyond these limits could be admitted on such terms as the Council-determined. It was hoped to make the school coeducational later, if the finances of the city warranted it, but at the time no provision was made for an increase in taxes.<sup>26</sup>

24. *Floridian and Journal*, December 29, 1849.

25. *Ibid.*, February 21, 1859. Article by "Philo Coleman."

26. *Ibid.*, March 30, 1860.

In the meantime, the Council had advertised for a teacher to take charge of the "free male school" at a salary of \$800.00 a year.<sup>27</sup> They thus secured Jesse P. Smith, a graduate of the University of North Carolina and, for the preceding five years, principal of the male school at Fayetteville in that state.<sup>28</sup> On the appointed day, April 1, the Free School opened in the lower story of the old Masonic Hall. The use of this room was said to be "for the present," from which, in view of later developments, we may understand that the City Council hoped in time to have its own school building.

As by the terms of the ordinance of March 26 Smith was engaged for only six months, his contract ended on September 30, and he was not reengaged. This short tenure might indicate that the relations between Smith and the Council were not satisfactory. It is just as likely, however, that the Council had already selected William Neil as the permanent principal on the understanding that he could finish the school year at the Female Academy, and that Smith was engaged for the interim only.<sup>29</sup>

On October 1 the "Public School" reopened with Neil in charge and with A. Warner Clisby as his assistant.<sup>30</sup> The two were reengaged to conduct the "City Common School" for the year 1851-1852,<sup>31</sup> and they continued in charge until the school ceased to operate in March 1853.<sup>32</sup>

The details of Tallahassee's cautious venture in free education are impossible to determine. In April 1851 the editor of the *Floridian*, with the intendant (mayor) visit-

27. *Florida Sentinel*, March 5, 1850.

28. *Floridian and Journal*, March 30, 1850.

29. On October 7, Smith opened his own school for boys which he called the Tallahassee High School. During the same fall and winter three other private schools were being operated: one for boys; by J. B. Galbraith, and two for girls, one each by a Miss Smith and by Miss Elizabeth C. Clayton of Charleston, South Carolina. The Free School had plenty of competition!

30. *Florida Sentinel*, September 24, 1850.

31. *Ibid.*, September 23, 1851

32. The Neils left Tallahassee for Virginia in the summer of 1853. Mrs. Neil died in 1872. Mr. Neil died in Texas in 1881, aged 81 years. (E. C. Scott, *Ministerial Directory of the Presbyterian Church, U. S.*, 1861-1941 (Austin, Texas, 1942), p. 534.

ed the school and was "gratified at the attendance" and at the progress the pupils seemed to be making; but this tepid cliché tells us nothing about the school. Except for some meager details in the financial reports of the City for 1850 and 1853, our remaining information is limited to the fact that the City Council for 1853, at their first meeting on January 10, decided to discontinue the school at the close of the term on March 31.<sup>33</sup>

The Free School's short career of three years does not necessarily indicate that it was a failure while it lasted, nor that it might not have developed into a satisfactory means of educating the children of the town, had enough patrons so desired. The project, however, did not receive the proper patronage; and marked disagreements in the town as to its wisdom, or even its feasibility, are plainly indicated.

Even before the school opened, one of city's editors was raising the question whether the action of the Council was not premature, seeing that the city possessed neither the building nor the appointments without which no school could prosper. And he reminded the authorities that precipitate action would endanger, if it did not defeat, their long term plans.<sup>34</sup> Back of such public comment must have been wide discussion, *pro* and *con*, of the city's attempt to support a free school.

At the end of the year 1851 two opposing parties were taking steps to get control of the city government. In the election of January 8, 1852, voters were confronted with two lists of candidates, the "School Ticket" and the "Corporation Ticket." The difference between the two parties, apparently, was something relating to schools, but what the specific issue was we are not told. It may have had something to do with the free school; or, since the city was soon to face the question of building a new school-house, something pertaining to this may have entered the issue.

33. *Floridian and Journal*, January 15, 1853. The financial statements referred to show that the Council was paying, in round numbers, \$1,400.00 a year for teachers and that at the closing of the school on March 31, 1853, the sum of \$345.00 was still due the instructors.

34. *Florida Sentinel*, March 5, 1850.

The candidates on the school ticket were, with one exception, the same as had composed the City Council for 1851, and in the January election, this group was returned to office with David S. Walker as the new intendant. Whatever plans the corporation group may have had were therefore put aside for the time being. But in January 1853 a Council was elected which discontinued the free school and gave their support to the plans already in progress for erecting a new school building. The disolution of the free school, therefore, was in no sense an abandonment of the free school policy. It represented simply a change in the city's plans for maintaining such a school. The modified plan and the new building enterprise were the results of certain actions of the state legislature of 1850.

#### *Florida Institute or Tallahassee Seminary*

On January 24, 1851, an act establishing seminaries east and west of the Suwannee river was approved by the State Legislature, but the location of the two schools was left for the future. However, as an initial step toward selecting the locations, the same legislature had already passed two highly important resolutions. The first was that city and county authorities as well as individuals be requested to report to the Governor, to be laid by him before the General Assembly of 1852, a statement of the amount these authorities and individuals would contribute, in lands, buildings, and money, for the purpose of establishing a Seminary of Learning. The second was that each seminary should be awarded to the county which, in the opinion of the next General Assembly, presented the greatest inducement for the location of the seminary.<sup>35</sup>

Naturally, Tallahassee was eager to respond to this request. Before she did so, however, she had another matter to consider. There existed in the town neither a building nor equipment adequate to the education of her boys. A new school building would be one of the greatest

<sup>35</sup> Florida Senate, *Journal*, 1850, p. 170.

inducements she could offer for locating the Seminary in Tallahassee. But, even if this was hot enough to secure the coveted award, the town badly needed such a building in any case. How to get it was the problem which engaged the attention of the city authorities.

The new City Council of 1852 went to work on the problem immediately. They had for consideration the alternative of buying a building and remodeling it, or of erecting an entirely new structure. At one time, they were actually negotiating for the purchase of a building, but were unable to complete the deal for lack of money. At the very time, the Fire Fund had an unappropriated balance of about \$1,500.00. The Council, therefore, through the intendant, D. S. Walker, petitioned the Circuit Court, J. Wayles Baker, judge, to order this balance to be paid to the City Council, to be used by them for school purposes. The Court granted the prayer by ordering the Master in Chancery in charge of the Fund to pay over to the City Council the sum of \$1,500.00, "exclusively for the use and benefit of a free school or free schools in the City of Tallahassee."<sup>36</sup>

36. City of Tallahassee vs. J. B. Bull, *et. al.* (Leon County Chancery Case File No. 1327) : D. S. Walker's Petition to the Circuit Court, filed April 1, 1852.

The Fire Fund was the popular name of the money which benevolent corporations and individuals of many southern towns and cities contributed for the relief of sufferers in the disastrous fire of May 25, 1843. After the City Council had met the needs of all who were willing to accept help, the Fund amounted to about \$2,750.00.

Among the vicissitudes which materially reduced the value of the Fund was a lively and costly litigation over its final disposal. The upshot of this contest was that the Master in Chancery, Benjamin F. Whitner, by order of the Court, took charge of the balance and lent it out at 8 percent, spending the interest on the education of indigent children in Tallahassee.

By Whitner's report of March 25, 1851, the Fund amounted to \$2,092.50. Of this, \$1,500.00 was represented by the note of R. A. Shine, and \$592.50 was in cash. In April of the same year, in response to a petition of the Trustees of Leon Female Academy through their president, M. A. Long, the Court granted them \$600.00 for the use of the Female Academy. The remainder of about \$1,500.00 was the sum which D. S. Walker, in his petition, asked the Court to transfer to the city government.

The facts relating to the Fire Fund, here greatly abridged, are recited at length in Walker's petition. This petition seems to be the ground for the erroneous statement, frequently made, that the Free School was established in 1852, through the efforts of D. S. Walker.

By the beginning of 1853 plans were well advanced for building a "City School House" of brick, and "of such dimensions that it shall be an ornament to the city." A subscription list was being circulated in the town; and at the same meeting at which they decided to discontinue the Free School, the City Council subscribed \$1,400.00 toward the new building.<sup>37</sup>

Fortunately, or unfortunately as some citizens thought, the city owned a block of four lots, amounting to about ten acres, on which the structure could be placed. These lots, designated as 34, 35, 40 and 41 in the north half of the county quarter,<sup>38</sup> were located between Park avenue and Jefferson street on the southeast corner of the present campus of Florida State University. And this was the site chosen by the city authorities for the proposed building.<sup>39</sup>

The selection was not accepted without a good deal of outspoken dissent by citizens. Objections were raised that the location was not central enough, and repeated suggestions were made that some other site, preferably on the present Park avenue, be purchased. For some time past, the plot containing the four lots, had enjoyed the popular appellation of "Gallows Hill." A jester who signed himself "CIT" wrote the local paper that he objected to locating any school in such unsavory surroundings. Furthermore, the school would be inaccessible, as in wet weather, the low ground between the proposed site and the town was impassable. But CIT'S main objection was that the site chosen was too "near in." The building, he thought, ought to be placed at Bel Air or Lake Bradford, or at some other point far enough away to prevent parents from boarding their boys at home. To all the serious objections, the editor sensibly replied that to spend money, as yet insufficient for the building, for the purchase of a new site, would likely be to destroy the enterprise altogether.<sup>40</sup>

37. *Floridian and Journal*, January 15, 1853.

38. Leon County Deed Book L, 517.

39. *Floridian and Journal*, February 18, 1854.

40. *Ibid.*

At the beginning of 1854, the City Council could count on as a building fund about \$1,500.00 which citizens had subscribed; R. A. Shine's note for \$1,500.00 which he had borrowed from the Fire Fund ; and the Council's own previous subscription of \$1,400.00. The total of \$4,440.00 was a long way from being enough to erect such a building as was desirable and needful. But the Council had their own plans for obtaining the necessary additional money ; and on February 1, 1854, the city clerk advertised for bids. Detailed specifications were included in the advertisement ; and it was stipulated that separate bids must be offered for the brick-work and the wood-work. The bids were opened on March 27 at a meeting of the intendant, W. R. Hayward, and the Council. Four bids had been submitted, but the contracts were awarded to R. A. Shine for the brick-work and plastering at \$3,335.00, and to I. R. Bowen for the wood-work and painting at \$2,837.00. The total contract price was \$6,172.00.<sup>41</sup>

The Council's manner of meeting this obligation is indicated in the financial statement of the city for the year ending December 31, 1854.<sup>42</sup> The statement lists among the assets three pertinent items: (1) Borrowed on city bonds for one, two, three, four, five years at 8 per cent \$3,300.00; (2) note of R. A. Shine, \$1,500.00; (3) other money, not specified, from the Fire Fund \$327.26 - a total of \$5,127.26. We are to understand that the Council's former subscription of \$1,400.00 was written off. The \$1,500.00 subscribed by citizens, added to the listed assets, made the total available funds \$6,627.26. The City thus had above the contract price of the building the sum of \$455.26, together with the debt of \$3,300.00. The surplus of \$455.26 would come in handy a little later when furniture and equipment for the school had to be bought.

The builders carried out their part of the contract with no unnecessary delay, and the following November,

41. *Ibid.*

42. *Ibid.*, January 6, 1855.

in his memorial to the Legislature, the intendant, W. R. Hayward, could refer to the building as "nearing completion."<sup>43</sup> Four months later, it was ready for occupancy. Tallahassee's public school building was at last a reality.

The editor's prediction<sup>44</sup> that when completed the edifice would be the handsomest in the city was not an overstatement. The "New School" stood well in front of the present Westcott building of Florida State University. The main body of the structure, 60 feet long by 40 feet wide and two stories high, was surmounted by a wooden shingle roof with gutters and down-spouts of copper. The heavy brick walls were covered with cream-tinted stucco, and the Ionic cornice and entablature, as well as all other exterior wooden surfaces except the roof, were painted white. The porch or portico, with its massive brick pillars, also stuccoed, was approached by a set of wooden steps five feet high, extending the full length of the porch.

In the interior, the ceilings were twelve feet high. Each floor had a "school-room" and two smaller recitation rooms, with the necessary passages and openings for stairs. Leading from the first to the second floor were two stairways, with cherry banisters and newels. All windows were fitted with Venetian blinds. The interior wood-work, excepting the banisters and newels, was painted white, and the walls and ceilings were finished in white-coat.<sup>45</sup>

It was the original design to enclose the portion of the grounds on which the building stood with a circular drive, beginning at the east entrance of the campus and issuing on the Quincy road in the west. On both sides of the driveway shade trees were to be planted, thus making it "a delightful promenade."<sup>46</sup>

The new institution had no official name, and for nearly a year after its completion, in official announce-

43. Florida Senate, *Journal*, 1854, p. 205.

44. *Floridian and Journal*, April 1, 1854.

45. *Ibid.*, February 18, 1854.

46. *Ibid.*, April 1, 1854.

ments, news items, and editorial comments, it was referred to variously as the City School, the Tallahassee Seminary, the City Seminary, the Tallahassee Institute, and the Tallahassee Male Seminary. But W. Y. Peyton, the first president, in his advertisements and announcements, regularly called it the Florida Institute, and this seems to have become its accepted title.

In his advertisement of the opening of the school, headed "Tallahassee Seminary," Thomas Hayward, intendant for 1955, stated that the Board of Trustees would comprise the City Council as well as the following gentlemen: Dr. Charles G. English, J. Wayles Baker, James Kirksey, Rev. D. McNeil Turner, Francis Eppes, Arvah Hopkins, Dr. Miles Nash, and Norman Butler. With the eight members of the Council and the intendant, the Board would thus have seventeen members.<sup>47</sup>

This cumbersome arrangement was not intended to be permanent. The gentlemen named were all prominent citizens and all were vitally concerned with the city's educational interests. In inaugurating the activities of the school, the Council evidently intended by the announcement to give public recognition to the efforts and achievements of these men in bringing to completion the plans for the new school.

Whatever may have been their part in the deliberations of the Board at first, the arrangement terminated, maybe at the desire of these men themselves, with the passage of the city ordinance of June 26, 1855 "for the permanent and more effective Organization of the City Seminary." Sections 1 and 2 of the ordinance provided that the intendant and the City Council are constituted a Board of Trustees of the "Tallahassee Seminary," but the said Trustees "may seek the cooperation and advice of a suitable number of citizens."<sup>48</sup>

On April 30, 1855, the long contemplated city school opened. To start it, the trustees had engaged Dr. H. W. P.

47. *Ibid.*, April 28, 1855.

48. *Ibid.*, June 30, 1855. The other sections of the ordinance are concerned with the relation of the president of the school to the trustees and with his privileges and duties as the head of the institution.

Junius and as his assistant D. P. Clayton, both from South Carolina. Nothing is known of them except that Dr. Junius was recommended by Dr. Bachman of Charleston and by Dr. Henry of Columbia College, and that Mr. Clayton had received his education at "the South Carolina College."<sup>49</sup>

The subjects offered were the customary English branches and the advanced studies in classics, mathematics, and science. French, German, and Italian were available for all pupils whose parents desired such a course of study. For the English branches, the tuition was \$12.00 a year; for the higher studies, \$30.00 annually. The Florida Institute was by no means a "free school;" yet it is to be noted that the charges, especially for the common branches, were extremely reasonable in comparison with those of the ordinary private school. We are not told how many pupils were enrolled in the spring of 1855.

The administration in charge of the school at its opening was not the permanent one contemplated by the trustees, for in the following summer, they engaged W. Y. Peyton as principal. The news was first made public in Tallahassee in an item copied from the *Richmond Enquirer* of August 28 which stated, "W. Y. Peyton of Williamsburg has been elected President of Tallahassee Institute, with a permanent salary of \$1,200.00 a year. Mr. Peyton holds the A.M. and B.L. degrees from William and Mary College."<sup>50</sup> A week later appeared the advertisement of the trustees, signed by Thomas Hayward, intendant and president of the Board of Trustees of the Tallahassee Male Seminary. This announced that the trustees had retained Dr. Junius as teacher of classics and modern languages, and D. B. Clayton as teacher of the common branches, and that they had elected William Y. Peyton as principal. The fine distinction between the titles "principal" and "president" did not exist for the city fathers; but it did for Mr. Peyton who always announced himself as President of Florida Institute.

49. *Ibid.*, April 28, 1855.

50. *Ibid.*, September 8, 1855.

To organize the new school, the trustees could hardly have selected a better man than Peyton. His first two announcements in the spring and fall of 1856 reveal his busy activity through the first year of his presidency. He divided the whole school into the preparatory and collegiate departments. In the former were offered the subjects usually "taught in High Schools and Academies." The organization of this division involved grading the pupils in the common branches and grouping them in classes suitable to their advancement. Students in the Collegiate Department were classified as members of the junior, the middle, or the senior class. This department provided "a full and entire course of Ancient Languages, Mathematics, and the usual English branches taught in southern Colleges."<sup>51</sup>

President Peyton also built up the equipment of the laboratory by the addition of a "new and splendid set of Apparatus, with Charts, Maps, etc."<sup>52</sup> As an extra-curricular activity, he organized and presided over the Philomathean Debating Society. Other student organizations, which doubtless received his encouragement, were the Thespian Corps which on suitable occasions presented dramas before the public, and the Orchestra which assisted the Thespian Corps. And finally, he issued a catalog of the Institute, a publication which it would be highly interesting to see today.

No definite statistics of enrollment are extant; but at one time in the scholastic year 1855-1856, the Institute had about 100 students.<sup>53</sup> In the calendar year 1856, the tuition receipts amounted to \$565.50, and the City Council paid for teachers the sum of \$2,442.00.<sup>54</sup> Clearly, the school was far from paying its own way. But the Council, when they set the tuition fees at only one-half the customary charges, certainly anticipated the resulting deficit and were prepared to make it up. This is further evident from the fact that in the fall of the same

51. *Ibid.*, March 15, 1856.

52. *Ibid.*, March 15 and September 20, 1856.

53. *Ibid.*, October 4, 1856.

54. *Ibid.*, January 3, 1857. Financial statement of Tallahassee for 1856.

year, 1856, the Council offered to the legislature \$2,000.00 annually as part of their inducement to locate the West Florida Seminary in Tallahassee.<sup>55</sup>

When, on October 6, 1856, the Institute reopened after the long vacation, the trustees and President Peyton had good reason to congratulate themselves on the progress of the school. That they did so is seen in their somewhat ambitious plans for the immediate future. One of these was to erect a gymnasium on the campus "for the physical education of the students - a matter grossly neglected in modern systems of training."<sup>56</sup> Further plans were being made by which "friends of the Institution" would petition the coming legislature to constitute Florida Institute the University of Florida, and to grant a charter and State aid for the purpose, with powers to confer degrees and to grant honors.

The editor's reference to the friends of the institution raises the interesting question who these friends were. A good deal of light is thrown on the question by a scholarship report which was published in January 1857 and which gave the names of students who had obtained the highest grade in the last semi-annual examination. The number of students so reported was forty-four. As the total enrollment was approximately 100, nearly one-half the student body were on the honor list. Either the teachers were magnanimous in their grading, or Tallahassee youth were uncommonly bright.

In the preparatory department, exclusive of the primary classes in spelling and reading, eighteen classes were necessary to provide the proper gradation of the pupils: three in English grammar; two in geography; two in history; five in arithmetic; three in Latin grammar; and one each in algebra, ancient geography, and Latin reader. Even if Dr. Junius took the Latin classes, Mr. Clayton's teaching-load appears terrifying.

In the collegiate department, classes were held in higher algebra, geometry, Caesar, Cicero, Livy, Greek

55. Florida House of Representatives, *Journal*, 1856, p. 148.

56. *Floridian and Journal*, October 4, 1856.

grammar, Greek reader, Greek New Testament, Herodotus, English composition and declamation, logic. It is to be supposed that there were also classes in science, but no honor students were reported in these subjects.

The students in attendance give us a fair idea of the class of citizens who were patronizing the school. An incomplete list of pupils in the preparatory department includes the names Baltzell, Broome, Brown, Butler, Croom, Damon, DeMilly, Dyke, Eppes, Lewis, Nash, Perkins, Randolph, Shine - all prominent families in Tallahassee in the fifties. Evidently, "the best people" were supporting the school.

Eight students in the collegiate department are named in the scholarship report: Anderson, Austin, Hayward, Patton, Robertson, Shine, Westcott, Woodward. Of the eight, two may be identified as individuals. Robertson was W. F. Robertson who later was a successful physician in Tallahassee. Westcott was James D. Westcott, Jr., whose name, by his bequests, was permanently linked to West Florida Seminary, to Florida State College for Women, and now to Florida State University. Robertson received the highest grades in the total examination. Westcott was pronounced the best writer in the school.<sup>57</sup>

This glimpse into the class-rooms is the last we are permitted to have. For on January 1, 1857, the Florida Institute, as such, ceased to operate. In its place, the West Florida Seminary came into existence; and Tallahassee was secure in the possession of the prize for which she had planned and worked for almost six years.

*(Part II will be included in the next issue of the Quarterly)*

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57. *Ibid.*, January 10, 1857.