

5-1907

The History of Our School Building

Willam Lennon

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Lennon, Willam, "The History of Our School Building" (1907). *Papers on the History of the College at Brockport*. 38.
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A 1907 History of Brockport Normal by Professor William Lennon

(Documents and introduction June 2013 by the College Archivist.)

The following history of the school ran in the May 1907 issue of the *Normalia*, the predecessor to the *Stylus*. It was written by William Lennon, a science professor and administrator at the school. Today's Lennon Hall is named after him. Below is a brief biography of Lennon and a photograph of him ca1875. Following that is an image of the cover of the original issue, with the actual article, and after that a postcard image of the school from 1907, and a section of a plat map of 1902, depicting the location of the school.

A few historical notes: the buildings Lennon describes stood in approximately the same location as the present day Hartwell Hall. The complex of buildings Lennon knew in 1907 stood for another thirty years and then were torn down and replaced by the building later named Hartwell Hall. Lennon's short history is an especially valuable document because of its focus on the physical plant of this now long vanished building complex, giving many vivid and fascinating details about the spiral staircases in the early building, the individual coal stoves in rooms prior to the installation of central steam heating, the little museum, the sparsely furnished classrooms and so on.



The author, William Lennon, pictured here about 1875, was a science teacher at Brockport, and later the vice-principal (i.e. vice-president) from 1869-1911. A native of Rensselaerville in Albany County, he was born in 1838, went to high school in Binghamton, and attended Genesee College in Lima NY (which later became a part of Syracuse University.)

He was a keen meteorologist and maintained a weather station at the school for many years; thus the meteorology program of today has a long history at Brockport! He had many other scientific interests, and was mentioned in the local paper in 1901 as demonstrating "wireless telegraphy equipment." Lennon was a member of several scientific associations, including the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Today's Lennon Hall is named after him.

He was close to the students; in his obituary from 1913 it noted that "No interested student, no matter how backward, was refused assistance, and no teacher more thoroughly enjoyed the innocent pranks of pupils than did Professor Lennon." He maintained close ties with alumni as well. The beginnings of today's Alumni Association go back to several different groups, for example one that met in the New York City area, and another which was for those in western New York. Lennon was a regular and sought after visitor to the annual meetings of both groups.

Prof. Senmon's History of the Building

Normalia

STATE NORMAL SCHOOL,
BROCKPORT, N. Y.

MAY, 1907

VOL. VII

NO. 8

REPUBLIC PRINT
BROCKPORT, N. Y.

The History of Our School Building.

One who for the first time visits our school and observes its complete and thoroughly modern equipment, cannot realize with what inadequate facilities it was at first provided. And should one of the earlier students return to his Alma Mater, he would be amazed at its marvelous growth. The large and well-equipped laboratories, the museum with its valuable collections, the beautiful library and reading room furnished with every convenience, above all, the broad and well-lighted corridors adorned with pictures and statuary, would be to him a revelation.

To many readers of the Normalia a sketch of the growth and development of our institution may be of interest. In 1832 the Baptist Association of Western New York resolved to establish a college somewhere west of Rochester. By a gift of three thousand dollars and six acres of land, Hiel Brockway secured its location in Brockport on what is now the Normal School Campus.

Additional subscriptions were obtained and a four-story building erected at a cost of about twenty thousand dollars. A school was opened about 1835 with Prof. Morse as principal. In order to complete the building the management was obliged to place a mortgage upon it. This was foreclosed in 1836 and the property passed into the hands of Philemon Allen. Soon after the school was closed. Although two or three attempts were made to maintain a private school, none were successful; and in 1841 it was advertised for sale at the nominal price of \$3800. Some public-spirited citizens formed a stock company and bought the property. After spending about \$2000 in repairs the company reopened the school December 1st, 1841, with Julius Bates as principal. The attendance the first term was one hundred and thirty; the second term, one hundred and ninety. In February, 1842, the school was incorporated as the Brockport Collegiate Institute, and the institution entered upon a period of marked prosperity.

On April 2nd, 1854, the building was burned. The next day the trustees met and voted to rebuild immediately. Additional stock was offered for sale and every effort possible made to se-

cure the necessary funds. Meantime the work of rebuilding was begun and pushed forward so vigorously that the school was reopened in November, 1855, though the building was far from completed.

This structure consisted of a central part, 50x75 ft., four stories high; and two wings, each 40x75 ft., three stories high. It forms a part of the present Normal School—that part in which are located the offices, the reception room and the geographical laboratory. It cost about \$25,000.

In 1866 the legislature authorized the establishment of four normal schools and the village voted to secure one of them. The Collegiate Institute, which was somewhat in debt, was transferred to the village on the condition that the latter should pay the indebtedness.

— Two additional wings were erected, each 50x80 ft., with three stories and a basement. In one of these is now the science department and in the other is the drawing room. The entire cost of the property to the village was \$50,000. When it was given to the state it was valued by the state engineer at \$106,000.

The new south wing was used entirely for normal school work. On the first floor were five class rooms; on the second three and three other rooms, designed respectively for apparatus, a museum and a chemical laboratory. There was, however, practically no apparatus, either chemical or physical, and no collection. The third floor was undivided and was used as a study room, a class room and a chapel. In the corresponding wing on the north, the practice school occupied the basement and first floor; the academic department, the second and third floors.

Few changes were necessary to adapt the old building to the new requirements. An office was fitted up where the Board room now is. Cloak rooms for the lady teachers and for the normal students occupied the space now devoted to the geographical laboratory. A narrow hall was opened through the central portion. The space on the east of this is now used as a reception room and Board room; that on the west was divided into two rooms—

the south one after a time used as a society room by the Gamma Sigmas, the other for the same purpose by the Arethusas. Prof. Wm. J. Milne had rooms where the present offices are; and Prof. Burlingame, the rooms on the opposite side of the hall. Later Prof. McLean and his family occupied all these rooms. All other portions of the building remained unchanged.

The property was turned over to the state March 20th, 1867, and Normal work was begun in the following April.

Originally all the stairways were of the spiral type. Four or five years after the opening of the Normal School these were replaced by straight flights with a landing in the middle.

At first the entire building was heated by coal stoves, of which there were more than one hundred in use. In 1881 these were replaced by steam.

For several years the desirability of a new assembly room and a new practice school had been recognized, but it was not until 1888 that definite plans were adopted and ground broken for a new building adjoining the north wing. This was completed in 1889. It contained an assembly hall, now the gymnasium, the practice school and several class rooms, together with the necessary cloak rooms.

The completion of this building was followed by radical changes. The old chapel was cut up into society and music rooms. A large chemical laboratory was fitted up on the first floor of the south wing, and the Philaetheans were given a society room. The north wing was fitted up as it is to-day. The old cloak rooms were converted into a reading room. All classes except those in science had rooms in the north end of the building.

In 1897 an appropriation was made and plans drawn for a gymnasium to be located south of the science department. This was abandoned and in 1899 the corner stone of the east building was laid and in 1902 the edifice was occupied. This provided ample accommodation for the practice school, together with a play room, a domestic science department and a large assembly hall.

In the meantime the state had ordered the dormitories closed,

leaving a large amount of space, which it was decided to use for a library and other much-needed rooms. In 1903 the library and Gamma Sigma rooms were removed to temporary quarters and a fine corridor constructed extending the whole length of the original building. The offices were enlarged and room obtained for a geographical laboratory.

Two years later the second and third floors were remodeled. The library occupies the entire central part of the building, 50x75 ft., and the height of the second and third stories—the third floor having been removed. South of the library is a large museum; and north of it, a teachers' reading room and a seminar room. Above these are the Gamma Sigma and Philalethean society rooms.

The rooms vacated by the intermediate department when the practice school was removed to its present quarters, are used for manual training, and the rooms under the gymnasium are being fitted up as locker rooms, bath rooms, etc.

It only remains to note a little more specifically the changes which some parts have undergone.

Four rooms have been occupied at different times as a chapel. For a short time after the opening of the Normal School, a room was used a part of which is now the reception room. In September, 1867, the third floor of the south wing was ready for use. It was seated with double desks and the rostrum was at the west end. At Commencement the desks were replaced by wooden settees, some of which may still be seen in the gallery of the gymnasium. This was used for twenty-two years. In June, 1889, the last rhetorical exercises were held here—a special program having been provided for the occasion—and we bid farewell to a place endeared to very many. The Commencement exercises that year were held in the new hall. This was seated with opera chairs and was never used as a study hall. Thirteen years later, on the completion of the present hall, it was converted into a gymnasium.

At first the library was located in a part of the present corri-

dor, just south of the statue of Demosthenes. It contained few but text books. In the early eighties a partition between it and the adjoining room was removed. The enlarged room was provided with new cases, a great improvement on the rude shelving which had been used. At this time several hundred volumes of miscellaneous books were added. This was the beginning of our present library, since which there has been a steady growth until at present we have more than ten thousand well selected volumes.

The museum has had a varied history. In 1869 the collection comprised about a bushel of stones, lying on the floor in one corner of the room said to be designed for a cabinet. Less than a half dozen of these were of any value—the rest were thrown out of the window. By the latter part of the seventies quite a collection had been gathered and a room on the first floor was fitted up for it. Two or three years later this room was wanted for the library and the collection was removed to a room adjoining the science lecture room. This was provided with suitable cases and here it remained for many years, gradually outgrowing its quarters. Last year it was placed in its present commodious room. The collection now contains more than ten thousand specimens accumulated with little expense to the state.

In the early days the class rooms were seated with wooden settees. The teacher's desk, when there was one, was of the most primitive form. The walls were bare. Every available space was utilized for blackboards. There was not a thermometer in the building, nor a picture in any part devoted to school work.

And yet the school was as well equipped as most schools, and much better than those from which a great majority of the students had come,

W. H. L.



State Normal School, Brockport, N. Y. Friday, Sept. 20. 1907.



Howdy Every body. How's this? *Beulah*

