140 Years Ago The Enemy Advanced and The Normal Boys Took Arms; The School Closed

By James A. Jolly

In the summer of 1863, General Lee's Confederate army moved into vulnerable Pennsylvania. An invasion of the Keystone State might demoralize the North, bolster Peace Democrats, encourage British and French support for the Confederacy, and provide provisions from Pennsylvania's rich farmlands. The goal was to proceed through the Cumberland Valley and capture Harrisburg, the state capital. This would effectively cut off communication with and intimidate Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington, D.C. General Ewell's Second Corps, C.S.A., was composed of three divisions. Two divisions would prepare an assault on Harrisburg, serviced by bridges. Meanwhile, General Early's division was to conquer York, proceed to the Columbia-Wrightsville Bridge, cross into Lancaster County, and isolate Harrisburg from the rear. The Union Army's Department of the Susquehanna, under the command of General Darius Couch, had to defend the area.

Tall, thirty-eight year old Colonel Jacob Frick of Pottsville was in charge of about 1,500 defenders at Wrightsville-Columbia. He was a veteran of the Mexican War, and in 1892 was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for valor at Fredericksburg (1862) and Chancellorsville (1863).

The Columbia-Wrightsville Bridge, the second at that location, was made of oak and pine and cost $128,726.50. Built in 1834, the second bridge was partly constructed from remnants of the first bridge (1814-1832). At 5,620 feet long, it was the longest covered bridge in the world. The twenty-eight span structure required twenty-seven stone piers; twenty-five of the piers still exist.

By June, 1863, several former Normal School students had participated in the war, including the battles of Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville. Andrew R. Byerly, professor of ancient languages, entered into service August 12, 1862 and was discharged May 15, 1863.

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Public nonchalance evaporated as enemy forces neared and the immediate threat became very real. Professor James Pyle Wickersham, the principal of Millersville Normal School, organized a militia company from the school in response to the call for volunteers. Captain William A. Atlee’s company included students from Franklin and Marshall College. Wickersham was captain of the Normal School Guards. William A. Wilson, professor of ancient languages, was first lieutenant and Peter Stockley, a student from Cashtown, served as second lieutenant. Stockley had military experience, and had lost an arm in the Carolinas. John G. Weinberger, assistant professor of mathematics, was first sergeant. Other sergeants included the following students: Joseph H. Martin, Dennis Meyers, John H. Martin, Charles H. Harding (who returned the following year as an assistant professor of mathematics), William Scholfield, and Adam D. Wenrich. Corporals included: Daniel W. March, Harry S. Trout, Josiah Lineaweaver, William G. Lehman, Elias Hollinger, and William P. Roberts. Those from Lancaster County included Wickersham, Wilson, Hollinger, Joseph Martin, and John Martin. Wickersham, Stockley, Weinberger, March, Trout, Lineaweaver, Scholfield, Lehman, Hollinger, and Roberts, after Gettysburg, served at least short-term enlistments. James P. Wickersham was elected colonel of the Forty-seventh Regiment, which mustered in July 9, 1863 and was discharged August 14, 1863. Within Company H of the 47th Regiment, Peter Stockley was a captain and John Martin and John G. Weinberger were lieutenants.

The privates in the Normal Guard militia were:

Privates from Lancaster County included:

Several of these young men had previously served in the military:

The men in future service during the war included:
Bell, Bechtel, Bare, Fry, Geis, Hollinger, Heintzelman, Howden, T. J. Hauck, Kennedy, Levergood, Livingston, Mateer, Morrow, Molz, Prideaux, W. F. Roberts, Small, Sollenberger, Stover, Terry Wentz, Windle and Zook.

The company left Millersville near noon on Wednesday, June 17, 1863, arriving footsore in Wrightsville that evening. Refreshments were amply provided to the company, which camped in a meadow in Columbia. The next day the students were more adaptable at practicing arms than were their teachers. They had been supplied with heavy muskets before leaving
Millersville. The Normal Guards militia company was relieved by the Twenty-seventh Pennsylvania Volunteers on June 25, and the Normal boys returned to Lancaster the next day to stack arms in Center Square.

By Sunday, June 28, the 2,500 men of the Confederate brigade, under the command of General John B. Gordon (of Georgia), approached Wrightsville on the west shore of the Susquehanna River (York County) and began firing at 6:57 p.m. The defenders had no artillery and withdrew to Columbia on the east shore. To delay the Confederate advance, the bridge span between the fourth and fifth piers (from the Wrightsville side) was weakened by saws and its sides and roof were removed. Holes were bored into the arches and filled with black blasting powder. Four men ignited the charges but the span only shuddered and did not collapse. Then they torched a span nearer the middle. The fire spread quickly in both directions, fanned by a northwest wind. The light from the conflagration could be seen for miles; the smoke was visible at Millersville. A York newspaper compared the flames, ignited floating timbers, and moonlit scene to Hades. After five hours of burning, the flames died out at 1:00 a.m.

At Chambersburg, Lee was aware that a large number of Federal troops were close at hand, and he ordered his men back from the shore. The battle of Gettysburg (July 1-3) resulted. The Wrightsville casualties were one death (a black volunteer working in the trenches) and no more than fifteen wounded. One Confederate was wounded. The bridge, valued at $150,000, was owned by Columbia Bank. The Bank was not reimbursed by the government. The same piers were used for a second covered bridge (1868-1896) owned by the Pennsylvania Railroad. General Early, C. S. A., later observed that had he been able to secure the bridge, he would have been provisioning his troops in Lancaster City the next morning. General Couch had ordered Colonel Frick to prevent the Confederates from crossing the Susquehanna, and Frick resented the critics who claimed that burning the bridge was unnecessary.

The Normal School academic calendar at the time consisted of a winter term from October to March, a three-week spring vacation, a summer term from April to September, and a five-week fall vacation. Because of the circumstances of the war, the school closed before the end of the summer term and there was no September graduating class. A special notice in the catalog from 1862-1863 states “the term of the School which would have ended on September 4th, was suddenly interrupted by the rebel invasion of the State; and after the approach of the enemy to the Susquehanna, and the burning of the Columbia Bridge, it was found impossible to keep the School together and the largest number of students ever assembled at the Normal School scattered—some to seek the security of home, and others to aid in driving back the ruthless invaders of our soil. The Principal of the School raised a regiment, the 47th P.V. M., in which were two Professors of the Institution, and a large number of its Students. The Regiment having accomplished the work assigned, mustered out of the service on the 13th of August. THE NORMAL SCHOOL WILL THEREFORE RE-OPEN AS USUAL ON THE SECOND MONDAY IN OCTOBER.”

Wickersham had established, at Millersville, Pennsylvania’s first State Normal School; he served as State Superintendent of Public Instruction (1866-1880), U.S. Minister to Denmark (1882), and a founder of the Pennsylvania State Teachers’ Association, and the National Education Association. The degree of L.L. D. was conferred on him by Lafayette College in 1870. Wickersham died in Lancaster on March 25, 1891. General John B. Gordon, C. S. A., was to serve as a U.S. Senator and Governor of Georgia. E. B. Weaver, professor of natural science at the Normal School, went to Gettysburg to care for the wounded. Disease was prevalent; he was stricken and died.

In 1867, only two years after the war, an obelisk monument on campus was dedicated “In Memory of the Brave Loyal Normal Boys Who Were of the Three Hundred Thousand that Perished in the Fearful Struggle to Crush the Rebellion, 1861-1865.” The war brought disruption, absences, and death to thousands of Americans. And, in the summer of 1863, the threat of invasion and the call to arms suddenly became very real to the students at Millersville, leaving a lasting memory of a moment during the American Iliad.

The major sources:


Ronald C. Young, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania in the Civil War. Apollo, PA: Ronald C. Young, 2002.

History compiled by Centennial Historical Committee: Civil War, Columbia.

Normal School Catalogues: Academic Years, 1862-63, 1863-64.

Lancaster New Era: April 2, 1910, July 1, 1913; April 7, 1988.


The material and staff of Special Collections, Ganser Library, and the Lancaster County Historical Society were very helpful.

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Use of Archives & Special Collections

During Spring semester, 2003, over 160 students from four sections of English 110, and one section each of Educational Foundations 312, History 273, History 406, and Women’s Studies 488 made use of Archives & Special Collections for information and research.

Dr. Barbara Stengel’s class investigated why women are not better represented in Millersville’s Athletic Hall of Fame. Students gathered information and photographs for powerpoint presentations about women athletes in Millersville’s history who have been overlooked.

Dr. Jill Craven’s English 110 class focused on the development of a website that celebrates Millersville’s 150th anniversary. Groups investigated changes in buildings and grounds, academic life, student organizations, athletics, and art and culture on campus. Dr. Carla Rineer’s three sections of English 110 worked from individual manuscript letters or documents and connected them to larger events or experiences of the time.

Dr. Dennis Downey’s Senior Seminar in History focused on the use of primary resources in historical research. Dr. Darla Williams’ Senior Seminar in Women’s Studies discovered background information on women MU undergraduate students for oral history interviews from four decades: 1940s, 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Dr. Bob Sayre’s African-American History class investigated the photographs in the Van Vechten collection, as well as African American sheet music and audiotapes of African American blues music.

Scanning requests continue to increase. During spring semester 2003, our area filled requests for over 200 scanned images from students and faculty on campus carrying out research related to the history of Millersville, including a special presentation made by Barbara Hunsberger and Dr. George Stine for the Friends of the Library Spring Banquet. In addition, a student assistant completed a special scanning project of 94 images for an Alumni Exhibit (28 images from the class of 1928, 26 images from the class of 1953, and 40 images from the class of 1978). Another project involved scanning swan cartoons (1981-1982) from the Snapper for All Kinds Blintzes Press.

Annual Book Sale

The Friends of Ganser Library will sponsor its 26th annual Used Book Sale from March 14-17, 2004. The preview sale will be Sunday, March 14 from 7:00 until 8:30 p.m. The book sale is scheduled to open to the public on Monday, March 15 (10:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m.), Tuesday, March 16 (10:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m.) and Wednesday, March 17 (10:00 - 6:00 p.m.) in the art gallery and lobby of Ganser Library. This three-day sale will feature a great selection of quality used books.

Regular books will be $2.00 each during the pre-sale and on Monday, will be reduced to $1.00 each on Tuesday, and 50 cents each on Wednesday from 10:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. After 3:00 p.m. on Wednesday, regular books will be two for 25 cents. Better books will be sold for the marked price during the pre-sale and Monday, and they will be half the marked price Tuesday and Wednesday. The proceeds from the sale are used to purchase material for the special collections area of the library. The total income from the past 25 years of sales is $90,406.00.

We are always interested in receiving gifts of books for the sale. There is always a special need for juvenile, art, music, and collectible books. Please check your shelves for possible donations. Gifts may be dropped off during the hours the library is open or you may contact Leo Shelley at 872-3610 or Dr. Zubatsky’s office at 872-3608 to arrange for them to be picked up.

Spring Banquet

The Spring Banquet and Lecture was held April 1, 2003, in Bolger Conference Center. Over 50 people enjoyed dinner and the opportunity to hear retired Prof. Barbara Hunsberger and Dr. George Stine present an anecdotal history of Millersville, based on their experiences as children.
Growing up on campus. Both the powerpoint and video of the presentation are available in Special Collections. English 110 students Kyle Brenerman, Johanna Holm, and Laurie Hixson received awards from the Friends of Ganser Library for use of historical materials in English 110 essays.

Fall Lecture

Dr. Diane Zimmerman Umble gave a presentation at the Friends Fall Lecture (September 23, 2003, 7 pm, Old Main Room, Conference Center) titled: “Amish and Mennonite Women’s Journeys: Religious Identity in a Changing World”

Dr. Diane Zimmerman Umble

Diane Zimmerman Umble presented selections from Strangers at Home: Amish and Mennonite Women in History, a collection of essays focused on the diverse and often misunderstood lives of Amish and Mennonite women from the 16th to the 20th century. Dr. Umble explored the challenges and changing roles of Anabaptist women over time and across communities in Europe, North and South America and discussed the power of religion to shape identity and social practice.

Umble is Acting Associate Dean of School of Humanities and Social Sciences and Professor of Communication at Millersville University.

Historic Materials and Memorabila

In preparation for the 150th anniversary celebration of Millersville’s founding, we are actively collecting historic materials and memorabilia from Millersville’s history. If you have something you would like to donate to Archives & Special Collections, please contact Marilyn Parrish at (717) 872-3624 or marilyn.parrish@millersville.edu.

From the President

There is no more appropriate way to begin this letter than by extending our thanks to Janet Dotterer for her guidance as President of the Friends during the past year. Her oversight helped to make the celebration of Ganser Library’s 35th anniversary a successful one.

This year the Friends of Ganser Library has reached a milestone that also deserves recognition. In 1973, 30 years ago, at the 50th reunion of the Class of 1923 (Millersville State Normal School), Esther Risser Whitley, in cooperation with Robert Coley, Archivist, initiated the effort to organize the Friends group with members of the class of ’23. An exhibit commemorating this event is located on the first level of Ganser Library near the Reference Department.

Friends of Ganser Library remains an active involved group with a yearly Book sale as one of its projects. The proceeds from the sale go toward purchase of items for the Special Collections area. This year, 2003, marks the 25th anniversary of the annual Book sale. We should say, “Well done,” to Leo Shelley, Chairman, and to the many volunteers who work to make this project a success. In 2004, the Book sale is scheduled for March 14-17. Be sure to mark your calendar!

We look forward to our Fall Lecture, scheduled for September 23, 2003, at 7:00 pm, in the Old Main Room of Gordinier Hall. Diane Umble, Acting Associate Dean of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences and Professor of Communication at Millersville University will speak on “Amish and Mennonite Women’s Journeys: Religious Identity in a Changing World.” The talk is free and open to members of the community.

The Spring of 2004 promises to be exciting with both the annual dinner/lecture and the bus trip. Both are now in the planning stage. Watch for details.

As always we appreciate the interest, involvement, and support of all Friends, and look forward to the opportunity of meeting you at all our events.

Marie N. Zubatsky, President

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Manuscript Collection

The Manuscript Collection consists of historically significant nineteenth and twentieth-century business records, personal papers and other items produced by individuals and organizations located in the south central Pennsylvania region. Recent additions to the collection include the William Reese papers, chronicling the career (1805-1835) of Reese’s business as a flour miller and merchant in Berks county, and an early survey of a Lancaster County township drafted by William McCreary in 1842. McCreary was a well-known surveyor in Lancaster during the mid-nineteenth century.

Joseph Walker was the father of former U.S. Representative Robert Walker and a faculty member at Millersville. The generous donation from the Walker family of the remainder of Joseph Walker’s papers completes the Joseph Walker collection (MS 151).

Two additions extend our knowledge of women professors from Millersville’s early history. The first is an autograph book belonging to Sallie Bolton. Sallie Eva Bolton was a student and then teacher of Reading, Geography, and Math at the Normal School in Millersville from 1855 to 1858. The autograph book contains comments and signatures from faculty members and students at Millersville. On March 2, 1857, J. P. Wickersham wrote the following on the first page of Miss Bolton’s book: “I admire fine talent, I love unflinching courage, but, I almost worship a true and faithful heart.”

Another addition came to our collection as a result of a search into the changing names of Millersville over its history. We located the papers of Sarah Gilbert, a faculty member at Millersville from 1881 to 1920, at the Bucks County Historical Society. We now have photocopies of her papers, including the draft of a speech given at Millersville in 1927 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the graduating class of 1877, and notes on her trip around the world in 1907.

Rare Books

Special Collections collects several different categories of Rare Books, including miniature books, autographed editions, first editions, limited editions, private press publications and books with unique bindings. The Pennsylvania Imprint Collection, contains books published in Pennsylvania prior to 1850. The Wickersham Pedagogical Collection began as the private library of James P. Wickersham, who was the second principal of the Normal School and one of the founders of Millersville University. Books on education published before 1900 continue to be added to the collection.

Botany for young people and common schools: how plants grow, a simple introduction to structural botany, with a popular flora, or an arrangement and description of common plants, both wild and cultivated: illustrated by 500 wood engravings, by Asa Gray (American Book Company, 1858. Sp. Coll. Wick. QK47.G7x 1858c), provides a glimpse of the approach used to teach botany during the mid-nineteenth century. This small volume by the well-known botanist Asa Gray, is filled with detailed drawings of representative specimens of plant families.

The donation of Dr. Lee Boyer’s 19th century math book collection (22 volumes) by his daughter, Romaine Boyer Macht, is a valuable addition to the Rare Book and Wickersham collections. Dr. Boyer taught Mathematics at Millersville from 1934 to 1957, and collected historical mathematics texts, many of which were authored by Millersville faculty members.

Several new rare books chronicle women’s history, adding perspectives related to the role of women in social movements, education, and war.

The biography Agnes E. Slack: Two Hundred Thousand Miles Travel for Temperance in Four Continents by Aelfrida Tillyard (Heffer & Sons, 1916. Sp.Coll. Rare Bk. 5447.S52T55x 1926) chronicles the life and work of Agnes Slack, a reformer who traveled world-wide for the temperance movement.
Lifting the Curtain: The State and national woman suffrage campaigns in Pennsylvania as I saw them, by Caroline Katzenstein. Dorrance (Dorrance & Co., 1955. Sp. Coll. Rare Bk. JK1911.P4K3) contains the account of both the state and national woman suffrage campaigns in Pennsylvania. Katzenstein served as the Executive Secretary of the Pennsylvania Woman Suffrage Association. In addition to her overview of the development of suffrage campaigns at the state and national levels, Katzenstein describes President Woodrow Wilson's opposition to women's suffrage and mistreatment of movement activists who were imprisoned during his administration.

What Eight Million Women Want, by Rheta Childe Dorr (Small, Maynard & Co., 1910. Sp.Coll. Rare Bk. HQ1426.D8), became the basis for the pamphlet used nationwide by suffrage movement activists. Dorr describes the work of women's clubs, working conditions for women, the challenging life situations of prostitutes and domestic servants, and the suffrage movement. In response to the challenge that "woman's place is in the home," Dorr replies that she hopes for "a community where men and women divide the work of governing and administering, each according to his special capacities and natural abilities" (p. 327-8).

In education, The Valedictory address to the graduating class of the Female Medical College of Pennsylvania at the eleventh annual commencement, March 14, 1863, by Emeline H. Cleveland (Crissy & Markey, 1863. Sp.Coll. Rare Bk. R747.P7575x 1863), provides an interesting look at the world available to women in the field of medicine during the 1860s. Emeline Cleveland (1892-1878) served as Professor of Obstetrics and Diseases of Women and Children at the Female Medical College in Philadelphia. Cleveland states the "general hospitals of our country are still closed, except in one or two instances, to the medical inspection of women" (p. 5), but that in private practice, women make significant contributions to their communities. Cleveland performed the first recorded surgery by a woman doctor in 1875.

Another title, Reminiscences of 30 years in Baltimore, by Lillian Welsh (Norman, Remington, 1925. Mac Fac W465r), describes the life and work of a former faculty member at Millersville. Lillian Welsh graduated from the Normal School at Millersville in 1875. She earned a medical degree at the Women’s Medical College in Philadelphia in 1889 and five years later began a thirty-year tenure at Goucher College in Baltimore. Welsh was a lifelong activist for women’s rights, and participated in protest marches, including one in Washington, D.C., the day before Wilson’s first inauguration.


Electronic Resources

The Map Collector Library Series Antique Map Reference CD-ROMS, Lancaster County, PA, was published in 2002 by the Heritage Map Museum, Lititz, PA (GA195.L3H47x 2000) and is available for use in the A & SC Reading Room.

Another new resource of interest to researchers is American County Histories to 1900 (Pennsylvania: Central counties). This resource offers full-text versions of county histories of 19 central Pennsylvania counties (including Lancaster, Dauphin, and York). These histories were published in the nineteenth century, and chronicle the history of each county beginning with the earliest inhabitants. Access is available through the Library catalog: http://www.accessible.com/search/search.asp
Planned Giving Opportunities

Consider including Millersville University in your estate planning. For more information on planned giving opportunities, including Ganser Library, Friends of the Library, or student scholarships, contact the Millersville University Development Office at (717) 872-3820.

Becoming a Friend

People become Friends of Ganser Library when they make a donation to Millersville University and request mailings from the Friends. Encourage your friends to become Friends of the Library through their support of Millersville University. For more information, contact the Millersville University Development Office at (717) 872-3820.