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GOD BLESS OUR PRESIDENT
COMMANDER IN CHIEF OF THE ARMY AND NAVY OF THE UNITED STATES

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Articles appearing in this journal are annotated and indexed in HISTORICAL ABSTRACTS AND AMERICA: HISTORY AND LIFE.
A COLLEGIATE OUTPOST OF GRADUAL ABOLITION

By ERVING E. BEAUREGARD

Harrison County, Ohio awaited the pioneers. Rugged terrain, rolling hills and valleys displayed endless forest teeming with wondrous timber and game. Nature had bestowed limestone and clay soils radiating plant life to support cattle and sheep. Dairy and wool industries would prosper for the diligent toilers.

The migrants tackled the environment with the energy of giants and, moreover, with the faith of the “Chosen People.” They, particularly the Scotch-Irish, came with a theology inextricably intertwined with a historical memory — a rigid Calvinism riveted to an educated ministry and remembrances of Scotland and Ireland, the Scotland of their covenanting against the monstrous forces of episcopacy and the Ireland where their staunch Presbyterianism sustained them against Beelzebub’s onslaught of economic misery. For themselves freedom of religion and freedom from want had become ingrained. Nevertheless, their absorption in themselves would not become total because of their interpretation of religion and their empathy with victims of want would lead them to a great moral stand which caused a schism resulting ultimately in a healing.

Two enterprising pioneers founded New Athens in southeastern Harrison County. The layman, John McConnell Sr., became a thriving businessman. The other, the Reverend John Walker, died poor but gained immortality. A product of Service Seminary (Pa.), he founded the Associate Presbyterian congregation of Unity on the outskirts of New Athens. In 1818 Walker became the founder of Alma Academy at New Athens which he converted into Alma College in 1825, renamed Franklin College in 1826. Although itself nondenominational according to its charter, Franklin’s trustees, faculty and students hailed mainly from assorted wings of Calvinism—Associate Presbyterian, Associate Reformed, Presbyterian, and Reformed Presbyterian.

Franklin functioned as a liberal arts college to prepare students for the seminary and the professions. However, Walker and the others determined it would not temporize on the grave moral issues of the period. Thus there must be unequivocal condemnation of alcohol, secret societies (particularly Masonic orders), and slavery. The ranthng against the first gained no great support because at this time in a frontier settlement Presbyterians were by no means teetotalers. The indictment of secret societies definitely made headway; no member of the Franklin faculty (until 1894 and only one thereafter until the institution’s demise) was a Freemason; indeed, New Athens has never had a Masonic lodge. The fulmination against slavery had vast appeal at Franklin and in New Athens and vicinity. This influenced John A. Bingham, Class of 1837, who “helped prepare the way” for the Civil War. It might be noted also that in 1837 Franklin graduated Titus Basfield, an ex-slave who thus became the first black to graduate from an institution of higher learning in Ohio.

By late 1837 Walker, member of the board of trustees as well as college vice-president, strongly urged that Franklin faculty and students must campaign for the immediate abolition of slavery. In this advocacy he had the backing of the Reverend Jacob Coon, Jefferson College Class of 1827 and the last theology student of the Reverend Doctor John McMillan from whom Coon derived his stand on slavery. When Coon sought to impose his outlook on slavery on his Crabapple congregation of the Old School Presbyterian Church (a few miles outside of New Athens), the majority refused. Thereupon Coon and the minority seceded to establish the New Athens congregation of the Old School Presbyterian Church. The Walker-Coon camp attempted to win over Franklin’s president, the Reverend Joseph Smith, a Presbyterian minister, but he declined and resigned in 1838. In 1840 this situation reappeared with the case of the next president, the Reverend William Burnett, an Associate Reformed clergyman. Almost at once the Franklin faculty — Professor John Armstrong, Professor Andrew F. Ross and the Reverend Professor William Taggart — resigned for they too would not join the party of immediate abolition. Nevertheless, Franklin survived as Coon became president pro tem and Walker continued as vice president and also trustee.

Now the ever energetic Walker, assisted by his able ally Coon, turned Franklin into a stronghold of uncompromising abolition. In September, 1840 the Reverend Edwin H. Nevin, an Old School Presbyterian minister and ardent abolitionist, became president. Equally fervent abolitionists, Andrew M. Black of the Associate Presbyterian Church and George K. Jenkins of the Society of Friends, took professorships. Thereupon Franklin trumpeted the extreme cause of abolition throughout eastern Ohio.

Now, however, Franklin experienced near extinction. Heavily in debt, she faced suits from creditors in 1841-42. The lamentable upshot was the sale at auction of the college property in August, 1842. Nevertheless, led by the indefatigable Walker, Franklin found temporary quarters and proposed to erect a superior classroom building in New Athens.

At this time, veritably, as a young observer noted: “The abolitionists and colonizationists [advocates of freeing slaves and settling them in Africa] have joined in battle and great is their warfare.” On August 10, 1842, at the New Athens Old School Presbyterian Church the colonizationists met in what they called a “convention” to formulate plans for a rival college. This group consisted of a small minority of the New Athens Old School Presbyterian Church [Nevin’s congregation], a good propor-
tion of the New Athens Methodist Church, and a few adherents of the Associate Reformed Church in New Athens and surrounding areas; the largest representation hailed from Crabapple Old School Presbyterian Church, the very body whose minority, the abolitionists, had seceded in 1838 to form the New Athens Old School Presbyterian Church. All these elements fervently favored the gradualist approach to the problem of slavery, including African colonization of the “Negroes.” The Old School Presbyterians emphasized that the 1818 Grand Assembly of their church “consider the voluntary enslaving of one part of the human race by another, as a gross violation of the most precious and sacred rights of human nature...” but “we, at the same time, exhort others [sic] to forbear harsh censures, and uncharitable reflections on their brethren, who unhappily live among slaves, whom they cannot immediately set free; but who, at the same time, are really using all their freedom, as soon as a door for it can be safely opened.” The Associate Reformed practitioners favored the position of their church’s 1830 Synod calling for the gradual elimination of slavery and the colonization of the freedmen, having no enthusiasm for the 1831 Associate Reformed Synod of the West’s call that its congregations support immediate emancipation. The “convention” appointed a committee to obtain a college charter and selected a board of trustees to run the new institution.

On September 1, 1842, the board of trustees met in the New Athens Methodist Church. It consisted mainly of Old School Presbyterians from Crabapple and other congregations of three Ohioan counties: Belmont, Harrison, and Jefferson. The pious trustees named the institution Providence College. They then elected as board president the Reverend William Taggart, graduate of the Associate Reformed Theological Seminary in New York City, Associate Reformed pastor at Upper Wheeling, Ohio, Professor of the Evidences of Christianity at Franklin 1834-40, and Chairman of the Franklin board of trustees 1837-40; he had resigned his Franklin position because he favored the gradual abolition of slavery. The Providence board chose as its secretary John Campbell, M.D., an Old School Presbyterian, who had attended Alma Academy. The board selected the Reverend Gilbert M. Hair as principal (president) and teacher for a six months’ term and with the power to employ one or more assistant teachers if necessary.

A twenty-seven-year-old Pennsylvanian, Hair obtained his A.B. and A.M. at Washington College in Pennsylvania, the sisterly Presbyterian rival of Jefferson College. Hair had studied theology under the Reverend Henry Hervey, a Jefferson alumnus and an Ohioan Old School Presbyterian who opposed the immediate freeing of slaves. Hair echoed the views of Hervey — immediate emancipation would deliver a mortal blow to the cotton economy of the South; that economy had proved fundamental for the preservation of the Union, the very Union whose existence had grown precarious because of the designs of “perfidious England, licentious France, and papist Spain.” Hair also reflected Hervey’s plea that the slaves had not reached a sufficiently elevated status warranting their release among civilized Americans. Hair had received ordination in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., being at the moment pastor at nearby Nottingham, Ohio.

Providence College opened on November 1, 1842 in the former Franklin classroom building, a two-story brick and stone structure on Main Street. (At the August, 1842 auction, it had been purchased by John Lyle of the Crabapple congregation who acted for himself and others, believers in the gradual abolition of slavery.) Yearly tuition cost $20 or $10 per session. The Ohio legislature chartered the institution on February 9, 1843. The charter recognized a private college of “liberal arts and sciences,” there being no reference to religion. Unlike Franklin the trustees incurred individual responsibility for the payment of the college debts. The twenty-one trustees included three graduates of Jefferson College, one of Franklin College in Ohio, and one of Washington College in Pennsylvania; four trustees were ministers (three of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., and one of the Associate Reformed Church), and three were physicians. One trustee was Governor Wilson Shannon of Ohio, Franklin Class of 1828; he had spent only his senior year at Franklin and had not been close to Walker whose vice-presidency began in 1829. The trustees also included the Reverend Benjamin Mitchell, pastor of the Presbyterian Church at Mt. Pleasant, Ohio and former head of Franklin’s trustees. Not a trustee, but among the supporters of Providence College stood the Reverend Moses Allen, a graduate of Jefferson College and an early student of theology of the Reverend Doctor John McMillan whose youngest daughter he married. Allen had succeeded Coon as pastor of Crabapple Old School Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. and that congregation, the majority of which had opposed Coon in the schism of 1838, gave its backing to Providence College.

Immediately upon the opening of Providence College, Walker and his disciples castigated that institution as the proslavery operation in eastern Ohio, just as Miami University, under the Reverend President George Junkin, an Old School Presbyterian, assisted by Professor John Armstrong (formerly of Franklin), was in southwestern Ohio. However, as followers of the English theologian and utilitarian philosopher, William Paley, the Providence leadership favored the gradual emancipation of the slaves. Indeed, one of the Providence trustees, Mitchell, acted like Walker as a prominent “conductor” in the “Underground Railroad,” his “station”
being his parsonage in Mt. Pleasant. The Providence trustees allowed only the gradualist advocacy on the issue of slavery. One factor in this regard included the heed paid to the opinions of President Hair who double as a trustee. Another reason involved Hair's support from trustees Campbell and Shannon whose gradualist approach to slavery had been molded during the administration of Alma Academy's third principal who was also Franklin's first president and occupant of the chair of moral science, the Reverend William McMillan. The latter, a member of Jefferson College's first class, fourth president of Jefferson, and Presbyterian minister, obtained his training in theology from his uncle, the Reverend Doctor John McMillan, from whom he derived his gradualist outlook.

Prominent as a gradualist, the Reverend Moses Allen labored as an occasional lecturer at Providence, invoking the prestige of the Reverend Doctor John McMillan; Allen stressed that the esteemed John McMillan had not favored the immediate abolition of slaves and, indeed, actually maintained slaves in his own household.

In April, 1843 Hair resigned both the Providence presidency and the Nottingham charge, going as pastor to Wellsburg, (West) Virginia. Then in May, 1843, the Reverend Lemuel Fordham Leake succeeded to the presidency and professorship of moral philosophy at Providence. A fifty-three-year-old New Jerseyan, the recipient of two degrees from Princeton College and an alumnus of Princeton Theological Seminary, he belonged to the ministry of the Old School Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. A man of strong convictions, Leake's outlook mirrored that of Hair and Hervey.

Providence College failed to attract students, quickly lost financial support, and collapsed before the end of 1843. The reasons seem evident. True to his parsimonious nature, Board President Taggart, who owned stock in a St. Clairsville, Ohio bank and whose wife had wealth, would not put any of their money into the college. Actually Dr. John Campbell emerged as the only trustee actively involved in seeking to raise funds and attract students, the other trustees being too preoccupied with their own careers and varied interests, e.g., Governor Shannon. President Hair proved personable and a favorite among young people, but his restlessness led to his quitting within five months. President Leake displayed scholarship but possessed no magnetism. Moreover, he lacked a pastorate which might have served as a forum and for a supplementary salary. Lecturer Allen appeared austere and aging. An attempt to enliven Providence's academic and social life by founding an organization equivalent to the popular Jefferson and Philosophic Literary Societies at Franklin failed. Furthermore, Providence encountered Franklin's tenacious competition.

Franklin College, like the phoenix, arose majestically. Most of the trustees remained loyal and, following the auction of the college property, almost at once gathered funds. Prominent among these trustees was Alexander Hammond, an elder of Walker's Unity congregation of the Associate Presbyterian Church in Belmont County and President of the New Athens Anti-Slavery Society, and the Reverend Thomas Hanna, Associate Presbyterian pastor at Cadiz, Ohio. The enterprising President Nevin and the tireless trustee and Vice President Walker campaigned in their congregations at New Athens and Unity respectively, and in the broader environs of eastern Ohio. The talents of Professors Black, Jenkins, and James P. Mason, the professor of mathematics upon Jenkins' departure to head a classical school, combined both to gain and hold students. Very quickly after the auction in 1842 the trustees, to circumvent the unpaid claims of the creditors, ingeniously erected Franklin College's new impressive two-story brick building on the New Athens Old School Presbyterian Church lot, "thus vesting their title in the Trustees of the Church. Most appropriately and significantly they made it the portal into the Church which they had erected."

Franklin College wholeheartedly based itself on the principle of immediate abolition and President Nevin symbolized this by having engraved on the new college bell (a facsimile of that in Philadelphia's Independence Hall): "Proclaim Liberty Through All the Land." A number of Providence's former advocates eventually moved from belief in gradual abolition to that in immediate abolition and entered into Franklin's support. By 1846 the Reverend William Taggart concluded that the 1831 position of the Associate Reformed Synod of the West allowed no truck with slavery and thereupon he returned to the Franklin board. A few years later the Reverend Benjamin Mitchell moved into Franklin's backing of all-out abolition. Four one-time allies of Providence — William Lee, John McCall, Thomas McCall, and John Whan — joined the Franklin board of trustees in 1844. Walker and Nevin had won them over to the cause of immediate abolition.

Nevertheless, ephemeral though it was, Providence College of New Athens, Ohio, provided an example, perhaps unique, of an institution of higher education which stood firmly for the gradual abolition of slavery and the colonization of the freed persons in Africa. In this regard it demonstrated a particular interpretation of the Christian utopiaschauung. Today all that remains of Providence College is its lone structure.

NOTES

2. Franklin College catalogs; Franklin College Register: Biographical and Historical by the Board of Trustees, New Athens, Ohio (Wheeling: West Virginia Printing Co., 1908), pp. 3ff.


9. The creditors were John McCall, Thomas McCall, William Lee and John Whan, all graduates on the slavery issue. (Whan acted as administrator for the estate of the Rev. McMillan, who died in 1842.) Also creditors were John Armstrong, who obtained his professorial back pay, and Mrs. Rebecca Campbell, seeking to recover the salary owed her late husband, the Reverend Richard Campbell, Franklin’s second president. A final creditor was the Reverend Jacob Coon, desirous of securing his unpaid salary as president pro tem.

10. Reverend John Walker, letter to Mr. Ross Stevenson, September 17, 1842. In possession of Mr. John S. Campbell, Cadiz, Ohio. Stevenson was Franklin Class of 1840.

11. William T. McAdam, letter to Mr. William Shotwell, August 14, 1842. Shotwell Papers, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, Ohio. McAdam was Franklin Class of 1842.

12. Reverend William Taggart, letter to Professor Andrew F. Ross, August 12, 1842. In possession of Dr. John S. Campbell, Cadiz, Ohio. Taggart became the head of Providence’s board. Ross, formerly a Franklin professor, had gone to Bethany College in Virginia (now West Virginia).

13. Document in H. Shelton Smith, Robert T. Handy, and Leffert A. Loetscher, American Christianity: An Historical Interpretation with


14. Taggart, letter to Ross, August 12, 1842.

15. Dr. John Campbell, letter to Professor Andrew F. Ross, September 16, 1842. In possession of Mr. John S. Campbell, Cadiz, Ohio.

16. Reverend Gilbert M. Hair, letter to Mr. Robert C. Rankin, December 10, 1842. In possession of Mr. John S. Campbell, Cadiz, Ohio.

17. Laws of Ohio, Vol. XLI (February 9, 1843), pp. 63-64.

18. An excellent source for Providence College is the Cadiz Republican (Cadiz, Ohio); see, for example, September 22, 1842; October 13, 1842; and May 11, 1843.

19. In 1840, when Junkin became President of Miami University, Armstrong joined him as Professor of Mathematics and Civil Engineering.


24. Mistakenly a number of biographical sketches call Leake “president of Franklin College.” See the Leake file in the alumni records of Princeton University and in Princeton Theological Seminary General Catalogue information form – 1872.

25. Reverend Lemuel Fordham Leake, letter to Mr. Robert Gowan Campbell, September 10, 1857. In possession of Mr. John S. Campbell, Cadiz, Ohio. Robert Gowan Campbell, then a Franklin student, eventually became a president and later a longtime, distinguished vice president, professor, and trustee of Franklin. He served also as a minister of the United Presbyterian Church.


29. Reverend William Taggart, letter to Professor Andrew F. Ross, March 19, 1844. In possession of Mr. John S. Campbell, Cadiz, Ohio.
THE CLEVELAND BANNER INCIDENT:  
WHEELING AS THE FOCAL POINT OF A NATIONAL CONTROVERSY IN 1887

By BEVERLY FLUTY and  
KENNETH R. NODYNE

Nothing aroused more bitter feelings in American history than the Civil War. During the generations after the Civil War, the veterans of the Union cause met periodically in local meetings of the Grand Army of the Republic.

For almost twenty years after the close of the war, the Republican Party won election after election by what was called "Waving the bloody flag of the rebellion." The Democratic Party, both because of its strength in the South and southern sympathizers in the North, did not regain public confidence to elect a president for twenty-four years.

This period, known as the Gilded Age, was one of the most corrupt in the annals of local, state and federal governments. The presidency of General U.S. Grant was riddled with corruption and city governments were run by such notorious outfits as the Tweed ring in New York City.

In this national mood, a grateful Congress and Republican Party presidents were more than willing to grant pensions to veterans who could claim they were wounded, no matter how slight the injury, during the Civil War. The flimsy pretexts upon which pensions were granted the years amounted to a national scandal. So long as the White House was in the hands of Republican presidents and the Congress in favorable hands, pensions could be easily obtained.

This attitude altered suddenly with the election of the first Democratic president in almost twenty-five years, Grover Cleveland of New York. Cleveland has a long standing reputation as a man of integrity in politics in an age when political integrity was sadly lacking.

Cleveland's refusal to go along with the granting of pensions on flimsy pretexts resulted in a string of veto messages which ridiculed the claimants and aroused the ire of the Grand Army of the Republic. By 1884, the Federal pension list amounted to $60,000,000. Before Cleveland took office, it was rumored that one fourth of the pension list was fraudulent. The financial burden was made more cumbersome in 1879 when the arrears of pension act was passed. The law, signed by President Rutherford B. Hayes, himself a veteran and member of the G.A.R., provided that all pensions should begin with the date of discharge of the pensioner.¹

Cleveland felt that the administration of the laws needed overhaul-
feelings between President Cleveland and the G.A.R., the Society of the Army of West Virginia planned its 11th annual Re-Union in Wheeling, on August 26, 1887. The participation of units from around the state and neighboring states aroused anticipation in the city which was proud of its role as host to the event. This attitude is reflected in an article in the Wheeling Intelligencer of August 20 which commented that

"Never in her whole history... has Wheeling experienced such a stirring up as she has received in the past week. Everybody is enthusiastic. One man who a week ago laughed at the idea that there would be any unusual crowd in the city next week, has applied to the Committee on Public Comfort for a number of cots, intending to improvise a lodging house." The article estimated that as many as 100,000 people would come into the city for the celebration.  

An indication of the staunch patriotism of the people of Wheeling may be seen in an article in the Intelligencer, a Republican newspaper, which commented on August 26 that:

"Today the Grand Army of the Republic moved on Wheeling, and Wheeling will capitulate without firing a gun except to boom a rousing welcome. The men who come wearing the old familiar blue — the one national color in which, by their deeds and their devotion they have blended all other colors — are entitled to the hearty reception which they will receive at the hands of the people of the city... it will all mean that the Grand Army is esteemed, not only for what it did when the life of the Nation was staked on the dread hazard of war, but as well for the noble sentiments of humanity, comradeship and patriotism upon which the order is founded."

The parade was the scene of throngs of enthusiastic bystanders watching columns of aged and ageing veterans march past to hearty cheers. The parade got off to a late start, not beginning until after 11 a.m. The line of march went along Chapline Street from Public Building Square to Twelfth Street down Twelfth Street to Main, on Main to Twenty second, returned by way of Chapline, Twentieth, and Market Streets to Tenth where the column was reviewed by those in the carriages at the head of the line, as it marched over the Suspension Bridge and down South Front Street to the Retuion Camp.

Across Market Street near 16th in front of the offices of the Wheeling Register, a Democratic newspaper, was stretched a large banner with President Grover Cleveland’s picture on it and the saying “God Bless our President Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States.” There was some feeling that this banner had been set up as a political provocation to the G.A.R. Political controversies fired by a zealous press were not new in Wheeling. During the 1860 presidential election campaign the pro-Lincoln Republican Intelligencer carried on a heated controversy with the Pro-Breckenridge newspaper, the Wheeling Union.

An enthusiastic group of Democrats was gathered around the banner. Nearby was an equally enthusiastic band of Republicans. The first group of marchers proceeded under the banner without pausing, paying no heed to the picture of Cleveland and the inscription there on.

A politically explosive incident soon occurred when Lieut. E.W. Geary Post No. 88 reached the spot and there was a halt. The command was given by the post commander "Left oblique — March!" The crowd gave way to the veterans, making a path for them to pass through. The posts which followed also bypassed the banner, some dipping their colors, some dragging their colors and some holding them straight as if in disapproval of the action taken by the Geary post. When the line of march resumed, some posts continued their march. The Lyle Post No. 157 of Pittsburgh approached and an attempt was made to take an oblique course, but the crowd did not at first make a path. The ex-Post commander pushed them aside. As each flag was lowered the crowd cheered. Some in the lines gave groans as they passed the picture and a few fell out of line and marched on the sidewalk. Some were heard to say "You don't get me to march under that thing!"

The banner incident resulted in a national political scandal which was published in papers around the country. Both the Democratic Register and the Republican Intelligencer published some of the comments. The way the Register told the story the conduct of the hotheads was condemned by most G.A.R. men, but then the paper added that most of them worked for the government. They quoted an Ohio Republican as saying that Governor Foraker of Ohio was a demagogue who sought to make political capital out of the incident. The paper claimed that most Republicans and many Democrats were against Cleveland because of his vetoes of pension bills. The paper quoted a prominent Ohio Republican as saying

"That Governor Foraker of Ohio was a demagogue who sought to make political capital out of the incident. The paper claimed that most Republicans and many Democrats were against Cleveland because of his vetoes of pension bills."

Foraker seized the opportunity afforded by Governor Wilson's speech to make himself the champion and mouthpiece of this opposition, as he rushed into the breach a few weeks ago with the
audacious command to sue for an injunction to restrain the Chief Executive and the Secretary of War from disturbing the flags. I call that pretty cute political work and there is no telling where it will land him. If there should be a big fight between Blaine and Sherman for the nomination it might land Foraker in the President's chair. It is all well enough for you fellows outside of the Grand Army to deplore the resurrection of the bloody flag, but that will not persuade the Grand Army, or the great majority of it, that Cleveland is the friend of the Union soldier, or that he would be a good man to re-elect. The Republican members of the Grand Army can dictate the Republican nominee for President if they want to, and if this excitement be kept up don't you think they will be likely to howl for Foraker?"

The paper quoted an editorial in the Washington Critic which said

The Grand Army men at Wheeling exhibited a narrow-minded and malicious spirit in which it would be very difficult to detect a trace of patriotism and which, if we are not worse mistaken than ever before in a political prognostication, they will have serious cause to regret... If they were acting under the instruction of Governor Foraker or of Governor Beaver, or any other rank partisan, they are to be pitied for having fallen under such baleful influence... Such conduct not only belittles the organization but affects indirectly - we need not say injuriously - the interests of all the older soldiers of the Republic, especially those who are looking to the Government for further bounty. Depend upon it, no measures of relief will ever get through Congress in behalf of the man who thus persistently indulge in studied insult to the President of the United States."

The Philadelphia Press commented

When the veterans of the Union are called in a legitimate way to recognize the President, they will respect the President as the Chief Magistrate of the nation. When the attempt is made to force or trap them into an apparent endorsement of Grover Cleveland as a politician they will resent and resist it. They honor the office, as every citizen does. They dislike and condemn the man, as they have a right and reason to do... There was nothing in the circumstances for the office of President - Nothing which called upon them to suppress their feeling towards the man... They were in Wheeling to celebrate an army reunion. It was peculiarly and exclusively their occasion. Their line of march had been designated. Suddenly and unexpectedly they found stretched over their pathway for the office of the Democratic organ a Grover Cleveland banner -

Stretched there with the evident design of forcing them to march under it and of thrusting Cleveland in their faces. In view of their well known hostility to him they were justified in regarding this act as gratuitous and wanton offense, and they resented it by the simple method of marching around it.

The Register quoted the Pittsburgh Dispatch as commenting

"There was little or no doubt that the display of the Presidential banner and portrait and inscriptions, by the too officious Democratic paper there, was for a political purpose. It was probably meant to put the G.A.R. men who had been at issue with President Cleveland in an awkward position. If they marched under the banner it would have been heralded far and wide that their opposition to Mr. Cleveland politically was dying out. If they refused they would have been censured for want of respect for the President of the United States. The device was tolerably shrewd, and sure enough it came to a climax... Democrats as well as Republicans declined to see anything in the scheme, except an exhibition of bad taste, considering that the Grand Army were the guests of Wheeling, and of all things wanted to avoid political disputes at their reunion.

The Pittsburgh Leader printed the following bit of poetry

With fire in his eye
And his mustache fiercely curled,
Foraker stood on the balcony
And forth invectives hurled.
Swear, swear, swear to trample the Rebs like dirt.
And still he yapped with ferocious air the
Song of the Bloody Shirt.

O Foraker! put up your gun
Why thus on bloodshed bent?
If you keep this up your race is run
In the fight for President.
Swear, swear, swear to trample the Rebs like dirt.
But you'd better let up if you want to get there -
On the song of the Bloody Shirt.

The Columbus Dispatch sought to enlighten its readers as to why the President and the G.A.R. were at odds. The five reasons given for this were that (1) he vetoed pension bills (2) the flipant tone in his pension bills. (3) the use by Northern editors in the discussion of his vetoes (4) the use of the word "pauper" in the southern press and opposition by
Southern Congressman (5) and most importantly the proposition to return the rebel flags.14

Within the state, the Wheeling Register reported that the people in Charleston were disgusted with the management of the Wheeling Reunion. The paper noted that a Democrat who had fought for the Union was heard to say he would be glad to have the opportunity to thrash every politician in the G.A.R.

The controversy continued in the pages of the staunchly Republican Intelligencer; there appeared a notation that the President was unable to visit Wheeling on his Western tour and claimed that the local “keepers of his sacred person” will not fail to see in this a base Republican scheme. The Intelligencer reported that “Nothing occurred for some time which has caused so much excitement in political circles at the National Capital as the recent refusal at Wheeling of G.A.R. posts to march under the Cleveland banner hung out by the editor of the Democratic Register for the express purpose of insulting the veterans. The Washington correspondent noted “The Inscription on the banner was not only irreverent but the fact that Mr. Cleveland was in no way either officially or personally connected with the organization did not call for a display of his picture on what was distinctively a day for the reunion of old soldiers. The report stated that “Cleveland was greatly mortified that his too zealous friends are indulging in such tactics.”2 Cleveland was said to feel that the veterans had a right to express their political feelings.

The reason that this incident attracted so much national attention was a matter of timing. The nation was entering one of those historic watersheds where the bitterness of the great struggle in the Civil War was beginning to fade into memory. Conciliatory statesmen sought to heal the wounds of war between North and South. Cleveland had followed in the tradition of Lincoln whose moderate Reconstruction policy twenty years earlier had aroused the wrath of the hateful extremists of his own party.

Pitted against these moderates, were the unforgiving Yankees in the G.A.R. and demagogic Republican politicians who had held onto power for twenty years after the Civil War by “waving the bloody shirt” — that is portraying Democrats as treasonous rebels. In a similar fashion, later, the Democrats would be able to stay in power for twenty years after the Great Depression by blaming that national catastrophe on the inept policies of Herbert Hoover.

The Cleveland banner incident symbolized the clashing forces of the Gilded Age on the larger national scene. The Civil War was fading into the past and new, more substantive issues over monetary policy were moving into the forefront. The national significance of the Cleveland Banner incident in Wheeling was that the days when Republican politi-
cians could win election after election in the North by “waving the bloody shirt of rebellion” and portraying the Democrats as disloyal rebels were passing. A new sense of conciliation between the two sections was emerging. The festering wounds of the Civil War would soon give way to a united national sense of patriotism forged in what one historian has called “the splendid little war,” of 1898 — the Spanish-American War.

NOTES


2. Ibid., pp. 328-329

3. Ibid., pp. 332-334

4. Wheeling Intelligencer, August 20

5. Ibid., Aug. 26

6. Ibid., Aug. 27

7. Ibid.


9. Wheeling Intelligencer, Aug. 27, 1887

10. Wheeling Register, Aug. 28, 1887

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. Wheeling Intelligencer, Aug. 31, 1887
ORIGINS OF
THE LA BELLE NAIL WORKS

By
AMOS J. LOVEDAY
Chief Curator The Ohio Historical Society

Between 1870 and 1890 Wheeling was the center of the western cut nail industry. Mills in Wheeling and surrounding communities turned out millions of nails with such efficiency that the town by the mid 1870's was known as the "Nail City." My task here is to examine the early history of one of the firms — Bailly, Woodward and Company — that played a prominent part in Wheeling's rise as a manufacturing center. The firm and its successors not only played a central role in the evolution of the Wheeling nail industry but throughout the period between 1855 and 1870 was among the most innovative manufacturing establishments in the nation. Today the old Woodward, Bailly and Company plant — The La Belle — continues to exist as one of only two American factories manufacturing cut nails.  

Before proceeding with the story of Bailly, Woodward and Company, a summary of the events that led to the invention and development of the cut nail is necessary. Prior to the 1770's craftsmen fashioned nails from long narrow, square rods of wrought iron. The system known generally as wrought nail making was tedious, labor intensive, and wasteful, particularly in the American environment. Scarce labor in the colonies, the need for nails because of heavy reliance on wooden structures in the new world, the lack of mills to manufacture nail rod, and an official British policy that discouraged the manufacture of nail rods in the colonies contributed to the scarcity and high cost of nails.  

The lack of nails throughout the colonial period was hinted at in several documents. Some authors listed nails among "necessary" items for settlement in the new world. Even after settlements were established nails were so expensive as to prompt those contemplating new construction to burn the old buildings in order to obtain nails.  

When hostilities between the colonies and Great Britain disrupted trade during the 1770s, the nail supply dwindled and this article of "indispensable necessity" became the center of attention for American inventors. During the American Revolution several colonies offered premiums to manufacturers who could produce nails in quantity. After the Revolution the new Congress continued to encourage nail manufacture when it enacted substantial tariffs to protect American craftsmen from British im-

ports. The policy not only protected the craftsmen producing wrought nails but it also encouraged innovators to continue perfecting machines to make nails. During the first 30 years that the patent office granted protection to inventors fully seven percent of all patents were for nail manufacturing equipment or processes.  

The cut nail was the most successful response to the Revolutionary War's disruption of nail supply. Jeremiah Wilkinson, a textile card manufacturer from Cumberland, Rhode Island, is credited with manufacturing the first cut nail sometime around 1777. Instead of forging nails from "rods" Wilkinson used shears to cut slivers of metal from a "plate." The new process had several advantages over the old one, the most notable of which was the potential to greatly speed up the manufacture of nails. A wrought nail maker could produce 2000-3000 nails each day. Using the new process an unskilled nailer could manufacture, when working on some types of nails, several thousand per hour.  

Inventors, who by the late 18th century sought ways to completely automate nail manufacturing, seized upon Wilkinson's process, added power, and supplemented the original equipment with automated headers and automatic feeders. By the 1830's the cut nail was completely manufactured by machine, and as a result was less than 1/3 the cost of the wrought nail. For the next 60 years the cut nail was the mainstay of the American construction industry.  

During the early decades of the 19th century commercial large scale nail making was confined to the eastern portion of the United States. Boston, Providence, Albany and Philadelphia were focal points of the industry, although smaller factories could be found all along the eastern seaboard. The first factory to appear in the Ohio Valley was built in Pittsburgh sometime around 1800. While the growing number of Pittsburg mills provided the valley with a large quantity of nails, the eastern mills continued to be the largest suppliers. This continued to be so until the 1850's, when the large factories in Wheeling came into production.  

The Wheeling nail industry was actually an outgrowth of the Pittsburg mills. In the early 1830's Peter Shoening and David Agnew, two Pittsburgh iron manufacturers, constructed a small mill that, among other products, manufactured nails. "Top Mill," as the factory was called, operated with but limited success until 1844 when a man by the name of E.W. Stephens took control and concentrated on the production of nails. He installed the most up to date equipment, and imported from other factories a number of experienced nailers.  

Beginning in 1847 with the organization of Hunter, Morrison, and Company and the construction of Virginia mill a series of mills specializing in the production of nails appeared in Wheeling. By the Civil War, in addition to the Top Mill, Virginia, Belmont, Benwood (which replaced Vir-
LA BELLE IRON WORKS.

OF EVERY VARIETY ARE MANUFACTURED BY THE
WHEELING, W. VA.

LA BELLE STEEL NAILS.
way of organizing a mill. The firm elected to move out of Wheeling and developed its factories in a country setting. It purchased part of the Caldwell farm and immediately set to work building facilities. When it opened in the fall of 1852, La Belle mill, as the new facility was christened, had a state of the art rolling mill, 10 furnaces, and 25 nail machines. But by standards of the day the complex was relatively small, and it had no new technical innovations.\(^{14}\)

In addition to acquiring the mill, the firm also laid out lots and began the process of developing a small town for the partners and workers. As the *Wheeling Intelligencer* observed in 1874 “Comparatively far removed from the usual stir and bussel of the city’s activity, the company built up their comfortable homes and carried on their business without ostentatious display to the music of their own clattering industry.”\(^{15}\)

It is difficult to determine just what role the separation played in the success of the La Belle works. Contemporaries frequently argued that the isolation served to focus attention on nail making rather than on speculation. While containing some truth it is more likely that the composition of the partnership was the primary factor that promoted concentration on nail manufacturing. Baily, Woodward and Company was the only firm organized solely by craftsmen and funded completely by capital raised by craftsmen. The other firms were built with the capital of an investor, who frequently had little interest in the nail manufacturing process.\(^{16}\)

With a stable organization and a sound command of the manufacturing techniques, La Belle prospered during its first years of operation. Although the records are sketchy for the period between 1851 and 1860, newspaper accounts and secondary sources suggest that the partners made handsome returns on their original investment. It is clear that the firm survived the nail market recession of 1857 which sent all but one of the other Wheeling mills into reorganization or bankruptcy. Moreover La Belle emerged strong enough financially to undertake its first major expansion.\(^{17}\)

In 1856, Frazier, Kilgore Company of Steubenville, Ohio, constructed a mill known locally as the Jefferson Works. The Jefferson Works, which went into operation shortly before the panic of 1857 soon failed forcing the partners to liquidate. The Baily, Woodward and Company partners organized a second partnership (Spaulding, Woodward & Company) headed by David Spaulding, Calvin Doty and John McCinton and purchased the Jefferson Mill as well as surrounding mineral lands. The firm took over a nail works that had 40 machines, rolling and puddling mills and 184 acres of coal land. La Belle and Jefferson works combined made the Baily, Woodward and Company group the largest nail manufacturer in the Ohio Valley on the eve of the Civil War period. But more importantly, the new acquisition with its large supply of coal and room for expansion, provided the firm with potential for growth that competitors could not match.\(^{18}\)

In 1862 Baily, Woodward and Company undertook a second expansion when the firm began the process of integrating backwards into iron production. Initially, this backward integration was done through contracts with the Mendenhall furnace of Martins Ferry. By the middle of the decade, however, the La Belle firm had constructed its own blast furnace in Steubenville. This pattern of development assured both a good supply of pig iron when war needs were draining the competitors sources and a control over the price of pig iron during post war era when the market discriminated against nail producers.\(^{19}\)

A survey of the corporate records from the middle years of the 1860’s shows the scope of La Belle’s success and hints at some of the reasons. By 1867, for example, the original $60,000.00 invested in the La Belle works had grown to an asset base of $413,144.00 not including the Steubenville plant. For the proceeding year (1866) the books show a profit of $164,780.00. No other firm in the Wheeling area showed the same level of growth as La Belle and no other firm came near the same level of profit. In fact, as the post war economy cooled in the late 1860’s each of the Wheeling nail firms, except La Belle, was forced into some sort of reorganization in order to raise the capital for furnace construction.\(^{20}\)

The post war ledgers also show clearly that Baily, Woodward and Company had modernized its management structure while expanding. Financial statements by the late 1860’s analyzed costs in a way that was revolutionary for the day and well in advance of the standard accounting system of the time. For example, the cost of a keg of nails was divided into 10 categories and profits were figured on the unit.\(^{21}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expenses</th>
<th>.274</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pig Metal</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oil and Tallow</td>
<td>.030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brick and Clay</td>
<td>.046</td>
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<tr>
<td>Iron Ore</td>
<td>.141</td>
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<td>Steel and Iron</td>
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<td>Coal</td>
<td>.014</td>
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<td>Wages</td>
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<td>Kegs</td>
<td>.213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxes</td>
<td>.079</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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\[
\text{Total} = 4.146
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In addition, the financial reports were beginning to show how much material was required per keg of nails and the yield of nails per ton of metal.
These ratios, taken with the attention to cost breakdown shows Baily, Woodward and Company was moving rapidly towards scientific management. In doing so, the firm was well ahead of the competition. "A very striking feature in the management of the company," one observer noted in 1874, "is the careful economy, which in general is too often neglected by most manufacturing companies . . ." 22

By the mid 1870's La Belle mill had been expanded to 83 nail machines, 21 puddling furnaces and associated rolling and keg mills. Jefferson Works operated 84 machines, supporting mill and two blast furnaces that supplied both factories. Together the works produced an average of 4,920 tons of nails per week, employed 900 people, and were clearly the largest manufacturer establishment in the nail industry. 23

After the mid 70's La Belle was unquestionably the industry leader, a position it maintained well into the 1880's and 1890's. The firm led in the organization of the Western Nail Association and the application of technical innovations such as the use of steel in the nail manufacturer. During the late 1880's and early 1890's when the wire nail began to replace the cut nail La Belle nailers clung tenaciously to their faith in the old products, while expanding the mill to accommodate the manufacture of tin plate. As the profits left nail making, La Belle's competition gradually dropped from the scene. By 1920, when Wheeling Steel was organized, La Belle nail mill was the only one left in the Wheeling area. 24

La Belle, long since engulfed in the city as Wheeling expanded south, stands today as a successful business, a unit of the Wheeling-Pittsburgh Steel Company, and as a monument of sorts to the industry that once dominated the city. The physical plant is in many ways a museum of technology. Portions of the building date to the middle years of the last century and the nail machines and some of the associated equipment are at least a century old. Tucked away in La Belle are numerous reminders of the firm's heritage. The crafted foundry patterns that allowed aging machines (whose manufacturers have long since passed into oblivion) to be rejuvenated are stamped with dates or numbers that place their origin in the 1860's. Sales kits once carried by a host of salesmen who marketed Wheeling nails in such frontier towns as Denver and Leadville or to the construction superintendent who built Thomas Edison's first power plant offer a glimpse at the industry's past.

NOTES

1. For a general discussion of Wheeling's nail industry see Henry Dickerson Scott, Iron and Steel in Wheeling (Toledo, Ohio: Caslon Co., 1929); Earl Chapin May, Principio to Wheeling 1715-1945 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1945); Amos John Loveday, Jr. The Rise and Decline...
of the American Cut Nail Industry" (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983).


6. For a more complete discussion of the evolving nail technology see Loveday, American Cut Nail Industry, pp 9-30.


8. The Wheeling Intelligencer April 9, 1956, Feb. 2, 1874; Feb. 29, 1884; Scott Iron & Steel, pp 8-14.


10. Ibid.


12. Ibid., Feb. 18, 1874

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. Scott Iron & Steel, p. 18

17. Ibid., pp 17-31; also see The Wheeling Intelligencer articles noted above in Footnote 9.

18. The Wheeling Intelligencer, February 18, 1874.


21. Ibid., p. 10.

22. The Wheeling Intelligencer, February 18, 1874

23. Ibid.

CONTRIBUTORS

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