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HISTORICAL SKETCH
OF
KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY.

The efforts of the Christians of Kentucky to establish a College for the education of young men began in Georgetown about the year 1836; and, after repeated failures to raise an endowment for their institution, which was removed in 1840 to Harrodsburg, the enterprise was virtually abandoned in 1850. An unsightly building, a small library of almost worthless books, and a small fund of eight or ten thousand dollars, called at that time an *endowment fund*—but which was, in fact, a loan and incumbrance—was all that remained of the results of thirteen years of labor.

A few Alumni of Bacon College—as the institution at Harrodsburg was called—watched the struggle and decline of their *alma mater* with concern and mortification, and a few brethren of liberal views and some philanthropy sympathized with them. But one only seemed to cherish the least hope of a resurrection of the College; he regarded its failure as a sad but suggestive lesson, providentially given, and in his heart resolved to profit by it in future. JOHN B. BOWMAN conceived the idea of concentrating the distracted energies and means of the brotherhood of Kentucky, and the influence of all the liberal citizens of the Commonwealth, upon the great work of erecting a University, in the full sense of the term, upon the ruins of Bacon College.

His simple appeal to them was: Brethren, you have failed to build up a College; now, then, let us establish a great University. The boldness of his logic at first merely surprised them. He asked the co-operation of some already distinguished for their zeal and patience in every good work; they deemed the enterprise as the chimera of a young man, and discouraged his dream as idle, if not dangerous to the Church. Almost alone, and in the face of every adverse circumstance, he began his work. Sacri-

ficing his professional aims, abandoning his farm, and foregoing the comforts of a pleasant home, he started out in the dreary winter to lay the foundation of a great University in the hearts of a people already sick of College enterprises, hopeless by reason of past failures, and suspicious of any new undertaking. The county of Mercer, in which he lived, and in which Bacon College was located, having, at his instance and through the efforts of himself and of its leading citizens, raised conditionally the sum of thirty thousand dollars, he went abroad with this encouragement, to secure from other communities the nucleus of his proposed endowment.

In many places he met the shrug of the cold shoulder, or received the grave admonition to return to his home and be wise. He met with harsh criticisms upon the former management of the affairs of Bacon College, and still harsher prophecies of mismanagement and failure in future. But that which most discouraged him—if, indeed, anything could be said to have discouraged him—was the opinion, bitterly expressed by more than one sorrowful father whom he approached, *that Colleges were unmitigated curses*; and who pointed, in sad confirmation of the fact, to their sons whom some College had ruined—who had been driven from its halls in disgrace. He met with these discouragements, and he dealt with them as with facts. He would sit down and argue at the fireside, first with the father and then with the mother; he would argue along the highway and in the field. Seated on a log, perhaps, in some sleety forest, with bridle in hand, he would unfold his plan to some industrious farmer, in plain and earnest language, unmindful of the freezing winds or inclement skies. Thus he went from house to house, through the few central counties of Kentucky, disarming prejudice, rekindling the hopes of his brethren, and enlarging their ideas of education. *In one hundred and fifty days he obtained one hundred and fifty thousand dollars!* Thus, without the use of the press or the pulpit, he quietly laid the corner-stone of his University.

The simple financial idea, in his endowment scheme, deserves special mention. The notes for money subscribed were made payable in easy instalments, and, when collected, the principal was at once safely invested. A certificate of stock was issued to each subscriber, with coupons attached, bearing value equal to one year's tuition, and made transferable. The coupons were redeemable in tuition only, so that the stock, without interest, would be gradually refunded to the subscriber. But by the scheme devis-

ed, while the capital subscribed was refunded in the form of tuition, it remained in the form of cash as the permanent, unincumbered endowment, the interest on which should pay the expenses of the Institution.

As soon as this amount of \$150,000 had been obtained, Mr. Bowman called together the donors and friends of the movement, in a meeting held at Harrodsburg in May, 1857. The meeting was numerously attended, chiefly by representatives from the seven or eight central counties of Kentucky, which he had already appealed to in behalf of the enterprise. It was a meeting harmonious in spirit, earnest in its action, and most favorable in its results.

"Thus far," said Mr. Bowman, as reported in the published minutes of the meeting—"thus far have we progressed in the work up to the present time, averaging about one thousand dollars for each day that we have been engaged. We have, by this effort, *partially* laid the pecuniary basis for an Institution which, we hope, is destined to become the support of the Church and the ornament of the State, and which will meet the highest expectations of those who have so liberally contributed to it. We beg leave, however, to say, that we regard this as but the *beginning* of a work, which, with the Divine blessing, we intend to prosecute until perfected. In reference to the plan of organization, I would merely remark, in general, that there are some features in our present collegiate system that should be discarded. The spirit of the age, and the present state of society, call for colleges for young men, rather than for boys. The Natural Sciences, in their application to the useful arts and to agriculture, should receive more attention. A higher grade of scholarship should be established, as a condition both of matriculation and of graduation. And, generally, we need a more modern, American, and Christian basis for every department of our proposed Institution."

This meeting was important as having recognized the contemplated University as the property of the people at large who had subscribed the money. They divested it of all local character, and suggested such provisions in the proposed Charter as would give to the donors a perfect representation in the Board of Curators.

During the following winter the Legislature granted a liberal Charter, incorporating a Board of thirty, under the name of the *Curators of Kentucky University*, giving them full power, for the purpose of promoting the cause of education in all its branches, and of extending the sphere of science and Christian morality, to

establish and endow fully, in said University, any departments and professorships they may deem necessary to carry out their objects. By the same organic instrument, the Trustees of Bacon College consenting, the property of that defunct Institution was transferred to the new Board, and Bacon College ceased to exist, in name as well as in fact.

One of the early prejudices that had to be met in raising a sufficient endowment for a University, was the notion that no institution of learning ought to be largely endowed; that it was better to keep the Professors dependent on tuition fees for their support. This, it was frequently argued, would make them more active in obtaining patronage and more faithful in the discharge of their duties. In fact, the last attempt that the Trustees of Bacon College had made to revive that Institution was to elect a nominal President, and send him out to raise a fund of thirty thousand dollars from the State at large! This amount, it was supposed, would be sufficient for all the purposes of a first-class College.

When, therefore, Mr. Bowman had obtained *one hundred and fifty thousand dollars*, the general expression was that he had enough—that it was already a magnificent endowment, and many of the friends of the enterprise seemed to be satisfied. But this view of the matter seriously embarrassed his operations in two ways: *First*, it made any further appeals for money seem like extravagant and unreasonable demands. *Second*, it led to an urgent request, which, at last, amounted almost to clamor, that the Institution should be opened forthwith. Mr. Bowman, and others, saw that a premature opening of the College would be ruinous; and yet the popular demand must be satisfied. It was accordingly agreed that a *Preparatory School* should be opened temporarily in the old Bacon College building; and in September, 1858, this school went into operation under the name of the *Taylor Academy*, with nearly one hundred students in attendance. At the same time, it was agreed that in September, 1859, a College of Science and Arts should be opened under the Presidency of R. Milligan, assisted by the proper number of Professors.

In the meantime, in order to present the plan of a University more plainly to the people on whom he relied for the material aid, Mr. Bowman began to discuss earnestly the great question of collegiate and professional education, and to insist that he needed not less than *one half a million of dollars* in order to lay the foundation of his enterprise. He says:

“Why should we not be as progressive in the cause of education as in our industrial and commercial enterprises, and why should we be dependent upon New England or Old England for our best educational facilities, when we are so rich in ability to have our own, and when our wants, in this respect, are so varied and pressing? It is true that we have, scattered all over the West, scores of unendowed, half-starved, sickly, puny Institutions, called Colleges and Universities, many, indeed, of which, have their piles of bricks, stone, and mortar, making an imposing show. But how many of them, in the way of Endowments, Scholarships, Libraries, Instruments, and *literary and scientific men*—the TRUE apparatus of an education—are prepared to furnish to our young men such a liberal education as the times, and the peculiar circumstances of our age and country, demand? And, above all, how few secure and enforce that effective discipline which, at the same time, is conservative of good morals and productive of good scholars? It is to be confessed and regretted, that while our march has been onward and upward in other respects, we have been lacking in this, and have, as yet, to be considered as empirics; so much so, that it is a problem not solved, whether Colleges are a curse or a blessing. While, then, we have no spirit of antagonism to any other Institutions, but are kind and catholic in feeling to all, we would not be deemed arrogant in proposing to build, upon a more modern basis, an Institution equal to any in America—an Institution for young *men* instead of *boys*, with a high grade of scholarship, and which, especially in its Ministerial, Normal, Scientific, and Agricultural Departments, will meet the wants of our young giant West. For it does seem, that as the ‘Star of Empire’ is moving onward and westward, there is opened up a special missionary field for the Minister, Teacher, and intelligently educated Farmer.

“We only propose, in our day and generation, to lay the *foundation* of such an Institution, with the full hope and confidence that others to come will build upon and perfect the superstructure.”

Such views he sought perseveringly to impress on the minds of the people, and it was gratifying to see that his appeals found a ready response in the hearts of many.

The College of Science and Arts was opened, according to promise, in the autumn of 1859, with nearly two hundred students in attendance. At once the Institution was in need of an extensive Chemical and Philosophical Apparatus. The interest on the

endowment fund was already pledged to the Professors, and the College had no other resources. Mr. Bowman appealed, once more, to the citizens of his county, and, in a few days, he was able to buy all the apparatus that was wanted. But the most serious want, that had been created by the premature opening of this College, was that of adequate buildings. The old edifice of Bacon College had been repaired; but it was found to be insufficient for the wants of the single College then in session. In the midst of his labors for the University endowment, therefore, Mr. Bowman found himself called on to provide all the necessary buildings, not only for the College of Arts, but in anticipation, for the University, with all its contemplated Schools and Colleges. The funds already raised could not be used for this purpose, and the amount required would, necessarily, be very large. To this part of his work he now addressed himself with renewed energy.

One of the most beautiful and healthful sites for an institution of learning, in the State of Kentucky, was the famous Harrodsburg Springs, for many years one of the most popular resorts in the West. These grounds, with their elegant and extensive buildings, had been purchased by the United States Government as the site of the Western Military Asylum; but they were now abandoned, and fire had consumed the main edifice. This place, containing about two hundred acres of land, Mr. Bowman determined, if possible, to secure. After repeated visits to Washington City, he finally obtained the passage of a bill ordering it to be sold at public sale. In anticipation of the day of sale, he went to work and raised the sum of *fifty thousand dollars* for the specific purpose of buying it. But, through the interference of parties who desired to secure the property as a fashionable summer resort, his efforts to purchase it were defeated, and the notes of the subscribers were surrendered. He thus had the mortification to see the spacious, eligible grounds and buildings, on which he had long set his heart as the site of a great University, pass, by means of an opposing and inferior interest, forever from his hands.

To increase his embarrassments as the founder and financier of the University, the war, with all its social and commercial distractions, came on. The work of increasing the endowment was necessarily suspended; but his labors as Treasurer were more delicate and onerous. He continued to collect and invest the funds subscribed; he received and disbursed the interest thereon;

and kept all the accounts of the Institution. He watched with a vigilant eye every pecuniary interest through all the crushing storm of rebellion. Not a dollar was lost, and not a week's suspension of College exercises occurred during this period, on account of the war, although opposing armies were encamped around, and the buildings were finally taken as hospitals for the sick and the wounded. It is proper to add, that all this labor was performed by him, as, indeed, all other labor from the beginning, not only without charge, but at the sacrifice of his own pecuniary interests.

But the necessity for buildings grew daily more and more urgent. The failure to obtain those at Harrodsburg created a lively sympathy abroad, and all the necessary grounds and buildings were offered, if the Institution could be removed. But it was suggested that the old edifice of Bacon College could be repaired and enlarged, and made to meet all the *reasonable* wants of the University. This idea the friends at Harrodsburg generally favored, when a spark from a defective flue fell on the roof of the building, and, fanned by a dry February gale, it soon wrapped the pile in flames, and all that remained of the building, apparatus and library, was a heap of smouldering ruins. This disaster pressed upon the Board of Curators the necessity for immediate action. They were forthwith convened, and all eyes were turned to Mr. Bowman.

The Trustees of Transylvania University at Lexington, at this juncture, intimated a willingness to convey the grounds and buildings of that Institution to the Curators of Kentucky University, on the condition of its removal to Lexington. Citizens of Louisville and Covington also manifested a desire to have the Institution located in those cities. The board, however, not agreeing in this exigency, resolved to leave the whole question of removal and location to a Committee, of whom Mr. Bowman was Chairman. It was ordered, however, that if the Committee should locate the Institution at any other point than Harrodsburg, an act authorizing the removal should be first passed by the Legislature, that every thing might be done legally. The Board, in the meantime, expressed it as a judgment that the Institution should be removed from Harrodsburg.

Accordingly, Mr. Bowman called the committee to meet at Frankfort in January, 1865; but an expected *denouement* followed. While there, the proposition of Congress to donate to Kentucky 330,000 acres of land, for the purpose of agricultural and mechan-

ical education, came up for consideration. The State was not prepared to accept the grant with the conditions imposed, and the munificent provision of Congress seemed likely to be lost to the State. Mr. Bowman proposed to make the State Agricultural College a Department of Kentucky University, and to consolidate into the great Institution the University of Harrodsburg, Transylvania, and the Agricultural College, and the whole to be located at Lexington. He further proposed, if this should be done, to provide an experimental farm, and all the requisite buildings, and to give gratuitous instruction to three hundred students, to be selected by the State; and he furthermore pledged, that the Board of Curators would carry out, in the Agricultural Department, the spirit and intent of the act of Congress encouraging the education of the industrial classes.

A bill to this effect was accordingly drawn up, and, after a long and animated discussion in the General Assembly, it was passed by a large majority, and Kentucky University was removed from Harrodsburg, the grounds and buildings and endowment of Transylvania were transferred, and the State Agricultural College was made a part of the University, with an aggregate capital of more than one half a million of dollars. Thus he accomplished by one act what he had allowed himself many years to bring about.

But he had obligated himself by this scheme to raise *one hundred thousand dollars* with which to purchase an experimental farm and a site for all the buildings requisite for the several Colleges of the University. He at once removed to Lexington and began his work, and, before the Legislature adjourned, he reported to that body that he had secured from the citizens of Lexington over one hundred thousand dollars.

In June following, the Curators formally ratified his action, and ordered that Kentucky University be opened in Lexington in October following, and three Colleges, to-wit: that of Law, that of the Bible, and of the Arts and Sciences, went into operation accordingly. It was further resolved by the Board, on the recommendation of Mr. Bowman, that, as soon as practicable, a College of Medicine, a Normal College, and the Agricultural College, be added, making in all six distinct departments, each under its own Faculty of Instructors and Tutors.

In October nearly three hundred students assembled from several different States, and were admitted into the several Colleges, so far as they had been organized; and the Institution has been,

thus far, prosperous. During the present year, Mr. Bowman has purchased, for the use of the Agricultural College, the splendid home of the departed statesman, HENRY CLAY. "Ashland" is now the property of Kentucky University. But, in addition to this, he has added a highly cultivated farm adjoining, making some four hundred and fifty acres in all, so that the Agricultural College of Kentucky University may be early opened for the reception of students, on the most splendid farm in Kentucky.

On reporting these purchases to the General Assembly at its late session, they at once voted an appropriation of twenty thousand dollars to aid in securing the opening of the College next fall; and Mr. Bowman is now bending every energy to the work of putting the Institution into full operation.

A few remarks, from his address to the Curators, will close this sketch of the origin and progress of one of the most remarkable educational and benevolent enterprises in America:

"I have but one desire in all this matter; I want to see accomplished through this institution the *greatest good* to the *greatest number* of our poor fallen race, thus giving the *greatest glory to God*. I want to build up a *people's institution*, a *great free University*, eventually open and accessible to the poorest boy in the land, who may come and receive an education *practical* and suitable for any business or profession in life. I want to cheapen this whole matter of education, so that, under the broad expansive influences of our Republican Institutions, and our advancing civilization, it may run free as our great rivers, and bless the coming millions. Hitherto, our Colleges and Universities have been accessible only to the few, such are the expenses attending them. We therefore want a University with all the Colleges attached, giving education of the highest order to all classes. We want ample grounds and buildings, and libraries, and apparatus, and museums, and endowments, and prize-funds, and professors of great hearts and heads, men of faith and energy. Indeed, we want everything which will make this Institution eventually equal to any on this continent. Why should we not have them? I think we can. I believe there are noble men enough all over this land who will give *us* the means which God has given *them*, if we will only move forward to the work before us like true men.

"In conclusion, I wish to submit for your consideration a *plan* of just such a University as is contemplated above. I do not claim that it is perfect, but it is the embodiment of much thought on the subject; nor do I claim that it is *all practicable now*; but let us

have before us a complete scheme, and let us work to it by detail. I think it practicable to open by next fall several of the proposed Colleges of this scheme. I therefore recommend it for your adoption, with such modifications as may be found necessary, and I herewith submit it, asking for a committee of conference for its perfection."

The Committee of Conference was at once appointed, with Mr. Bowman as Chairman, and, in accordance with these liberal and comprehensive views of a great University, and after a careful examination of the best Institutions of the country, they submitted a Plan of Organization and Code of General Statutes, which, in some of the details of Government and Study, are *peculiar* to *this* Institution, and which, after a thorough discussion by the Board of Curators, was unanimously adopted as the permanent Scheme of the University.

Under this *regime* it now enters upon its career of usefulness, with greatly increased facilities, and with the assurance that its Founder, now the Regent of the University, will labor on for the full development and perfection of his ultimate plans. It is confidently believed, that, with its superior advantages of location, with its splendid basis in the way of Endowment and Real Estate, and with its moral and social surroundings, it is destined to exert a mighty influence upon the educational interests of the great Mississippi Valley.

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