March 2009

Chapter XVI, pp. 279-293

Let us know how access to this document benefits you

Follow this and additional works at: http://jdc.jefferson.edu/gould1

Part of the History of Science, Technology, and Medicine Commons

Recommended Citation
http://jdc.jefferson.edu/gould1/17
CHAPTER XVI.

The Board of Trustees.

In the year 1824, four persons then resident in the city of Philadelphia applied at the doors of Jefferson College at Canonsburg, in the State of Pennsylvania, and asked that the private school of medicine with which they were identified should be taken under the patronage of the former institution, and established as its medical department, with whatever powers and privileges the trustees might grant, and subject to whatever restrictions might be imposed upon them. These men were George McClellan, John Eberle, Joseph Klapp, and Jacob Green.

They were not especially desirous to attach their school to Jefferson College as a permanent department of that institution, but rather to accomplish an object which the chiefest among them, George McClellan, had in view at that time, and which had for some time been his most cherished hope. He had attempted the accomplishment of a certain object in which others before him had met with disastrous failure, and he, too, had been baffled in his earliest efforts in that direction. He had opened a private school of medicine in Philadelphia, and had given his pupils good practical medical and surgical instruction—but that was all. He could not complete their education, could not graduate them, could not confer medical degrees upon them. It was this task he set out to accomplish; a corporate character, and a guardianship by a regularly constituted board of trustees were required for the diploma he would award the students who patronized his school.

As law and custom required, McClellan first applied to the State legislature and asked for a College charter, but this was refused him, because there were influences in medical educational circles in Philadelphia that opposed his plans, and whose persuasions prevailed with the legislative and executive powers in Harrisburg. They were turned away with absolute refusal.
They had asked for the mere formal college charter and the establishment of a board of trustees to manage the business affairs of the institution they hoped to build up. The educational department McClellan had already provided for, but his efforts to secure a charter were fruitless, and he must look elsewhere for the necessary authority to found an institution that could grant diplomas in medicine.

In this emergency, in June, 1824, McClellan, Eberle, Klapp, and Green formed themselves into a Medical Faculty and presented a petition to the Trustees of Jefferson College, asking them to be their Trustees, and assume the nominal guardianship of a medical branch in Philadelphia, at least to the extent of giving it legal standing with power to confer the degree of Doctor of Medicine. There was nothing unreasonable in this request; the Trustees of the strict denominational institution in Canonsburg were not especially desirous to assume University powers, but they saw no impropriety in establishing a medical branch in a distant city. The cause of general education would thereby be promoted, and that was their principal object in life. Hence they freely accepted the new trusteeship and gave life to a new institution—the Jefferson Medical College.

They did no more than that. They gave the medical branch an existence and moral support, but expressly provided in their "articles of union" that they would not support it in any way other than to commend it to students who were about to prepare themselves for the medical profession. Although they undertook no more than moral support, the Trustees of the parent institution were thoroughly loyal to all they had promised, and when in the course of a year their authority to confer the doctor's degree was questioned, they felt that the integrity of their institution was at stake, that its character had been unjustly assailed, and they entered into the spirit of the contest before the legislature with characteristic energy; that body so amended their College charter as to give them, without doubt, the authority they had before claimed.

The Act of April 7, 1826, gave to the Trustees of the corporation of
Jefferson College and its Faculty the express authority to confer on graduates of Jefferson Medical College the degree of Doctor of Medicine, and it also authorized the Trustees of the parent body to elect ten Additional Trustees, “who may be residents of the city or county of Philadelphia,” which Additional Trustees, or any six of them, were constituted a committee to superintend the medical department, “with such powers as to the appointment and removal of Trustees, the holding of public commencements, and conferring degrees,” as the general board at Canonsburg might direct.

Thus was constituted the first Board of Trustees that was directly representative of the Medical College interests. The Faculty of the school, McClellan and his associates, had now accomplished that which had been to them a source of anxiety three years before, and the main obstacle to their success had been overcome. It is true that the powers of the Additional Trustees were limited, and their proceedings were at all times subject to the censorship and approval of the parent board at Canonsburg. Their principal duties required them to give attention to the physical affairs of the medical school, but with no voice in the councils of the board in relation to the mother College.

The office and duty of the Additional Trustees, however, were more than perfunctory, and occasions were not wanting in which they interfered with proceedings of the Medical Faculty, and settled the difficulties which frequently arose among the members of that body. They made regulations to be observed by their own body in the transaction of business, and also established rules for the government of the Faculty; and in the latter case they required that all the Professors accept these rules and hold their respective chairs subject to them. When occasion presented, and a new Professor was called to any chair, the Trustees from the outset made a careful examination into the standing and qualifications of the candidates, and such as fell short in proficiency were rejected. And occasionally in the early history of the school these Additional Trustees exercised their authority in subjecting to discipline the entire Faculty body. This was first done in June,
1828, when the Trustees recommended to the general board that all the chairs be vacated, and that there be made a radical reorganization of the Faculty. This was done, and afterward it was required "that those gentlemen who were lately Professors in the Medical Faculty of Jefferson Medical College, if they wished to be considered candidates for Professorships, must make application accordingly, or they will not be considered as candidates."

From this it will be seen that the Faculty was not the supreme power of the College, even during the period of its early history. There were many events in the subsequent life of the school that would seem to give a contradiction to this statement, but it must be remembered that in the course of a few years the Additional Trustees became lax in the performance of their duties, and permitted the affairs of the school to be managed almost wholly by the Faculty. Evidently, they reasoned that the school had been founded by the Faculty, and that as the Professors had agreed to stand responsible for its failure, financial and otherwise, they should be allowed wide latitude in matters of policy and government. At first, too, the general board at Canonsburg was inclined to hold the Additional Trustees to strict account, but subsequently they virtually gave the Medical Department into the hands of the local Trustees, and regarded their determination of any question as conclusive. This rule thereafter prevailed until the Act of 1838 separated the institutions, and established the Medical Department a distinct body corporate, and an independent Medical College.

The original Board of Additional Trustees was comprised of men of the highest personal integrity. Each felt the full weight of responsibility resting upon him when he assumed official relations with the young struggling institution quartered first in the little building down on Prune street, and afterward in the old Tivoli Theatre building, in the city of Philadelphia. All were sworn to the faithful performance of their duties, as the law provided. Judge Edward King himself took the prescribed oath before William Tilghman, Chief Justice of the Supreme
Court of Pennsylvania, and in turn administered the same oath to his colleagues.

This notable body—the "Additional Trustees"—comprised such well known figures in the professional and business history of Philadelphia county as Edward King, LL. D., President Judge of the Common Pleas, first district; Samuel Badger, James M. Broom, Joel B. Sutherland, Samuel Humphreys, Edward Ingersoll, Rev. Dr. Ezra Styles Ely, Charles Sidney Coxe, and General William Duncan. Rev. Ashbel Green, D. D., LL. D., also was of the number, and likewise a member of the Board of Trustees of the mother College at Canonsburg. By virtue of his relation with the parent institution, his knowledge on subjects pertaining to education generally, and his high standing in the gospel ministry, he was called upon to preside over the deliberations of the newly established body of Trustees, and to guide them in right paths in administering to the wants of the young Medical School. His counsel with his associates was always for the best interests of the College, and he contributed largely to the measure of success it achieved during his long term in the presidency. To a greater or less extent he guided its policy, and to his advice his associates and also the Faculty had frequent recourse.

Dr. Green's service as virtual head of the corporation of the Jefferson Medical College covered a period of twenty-three years, and was terminated with his death in 1848. He witnessed the founding of the institution, was interested in its welfare even from the beginning of its history, and was in part instrumental in effecting the alliance with Jefferson College. His son Jacob was of the original Faculty in the McClellan School of Medicine, and one of the applicants in the petition presented to the parent College. It was only natural, therefore, that Dr. Green should feel more than passive interest in the medical branch, and should give to its management his ripe experience and best personal effort. It was, indeed, fortunate for the school that such a man as he was at its head, for he as much as any other man of his day had a strong influence with McClellan; and the latter would yield
to him what he would not to any other, with the possible exception of Dr. Ely.

It is not the purpose of this chapter to treat at length of the individual qualities of the men who comprised the Board of Trustees of the College, but, in the early history of the school, previous to the changes effected under the provisions of the Act of 1838, there were a few of the Additional Trustees who were peculiarly and essentially a part of the College life, but Dr. Ely was one of the most devoted and self-sacrificing friends of the institution during the period of its early history. His motives, too, were pure, and he neither received nor asked any reward other than the consciousness of having done something for the good of his fellow men. When the school had outgrown the capacity of the Tivoli Theatre building, and the Trustees were casting about in quest of another location, and almost without the means with which to make a purchase, Dr. Ely came forward with a proposition to erect a college building on his own lands on Tenth street, near Walnut, and lease the property to the Trustees for the use of the Faculty on payment of a moderate annual rental. He not only proposed this, but he carried out the project, and to-day the lands he once owned form a part of the valuable properties of the corporation. Later on, Dr. Ely removed to Missouri, but he still retained his connection with the Additional Trustees, and was continued in that relation after the College became an independent corporation.

When the Board of Trustees was created under the Act of 1838, Dr. Ely leased the College land and buildings to the corporation for one year, with the option to the Trustees to continue the lease for twenty years, or to purchase the property within that period for the principal sum, which would yield annual interest amounting to $1,770. At one time the Trustees found themselves at variance with Dr. Ely regarding the acquisition of the property, but the matters of difference were amicably settled, and the land and building eventually passed to the ownership of the corporation.

Among those who comprised the additional Trustees was Judge King, the first secretary, who by virtue of his judicial office was looked upon as
the conservator of peace when the members found themselves unable to agree in matters relating to the policy of the school, and particularly when the Faculty members were at odds with one another, a condition which frequently was presented during the first fifteen years of Jefferson history. Then there was Edward Ingersoll, a leader of the Philadelphia bar. General Duncan should be mentioned in the same category; decidedly a man of affairs, and of influence in the councils of the auxiliary trustee body.

All of these men were of more than ordinary prominence, all well equipped for the special duties they assumed in connection with the business management of the school, and all intent upon building up a flourishing Medical Department in connection with the mother College. Tradition says that nearly if not quite all of the Additional Trustees, like those of the general board, were Presbyterians, but that the school over which their trusteeship extended was not in any sense a denominational institution, although Jefferson College did partake of that distinctive character. There was nothing unnatural in this, yet it had no particular significance. The parent institution was conducted as a sectarian school. It was governed by a Board of Trustees composed of Presbyterians, and when Additional Trustees were appointed to supervise the affairs of a medical branch in another part of the State, they naturally were chosen with reference to their religious preferences.

The governing body of the College at Canonsburg was what is frequently termed a close corporation, and the auxiliary body in charge of the medical branch was of similar character; and it so continued after the separation was effected in 1838, and from that time until the present; but Presbyterian influence began to disappear after the Jefferson Medical College of Philadelphia became a distinct corporation. If the medical branch was in fact under the trusteeship of men who were Presbyterians, it does not appear, nor was it ever charged, that Faculty members were chosen with reference to their religious preferences. In this respect the government of the College always has been thoroughly democratic, and free from religious bias;
and, from the day the school was opened to the present time, no Professor or instructor, in whatever capacity, has been elected or employed with reference to his religious belief or views. Of a truth it may be said, that in all the history of the College from the year 1825 to the year 1904, no member of its teaching force, whether Faculty member, Honorary or Clinical Professor, Demonstrator or Lecturer, ever received an appointment as a result of personal favor, and in disregard of individual character and general proficiency. No man in any capacity in the College has been chosen in its service by reason of what is known in political circles as “a pull” with the appointing power. It is one of the distinguishing features of this history that every candidate and appointee whose name has been presented to the consideration of the Trustees should possess the required qualifications for the office and its duties. The appointing power is vested in the Trustees. The privilege to recommend rests with the Faculty, but the selection of Professors and Instructors in every department of the College rests with the Trustees alone.

Since the passage of the Act of 1838, the Trustees have been the real power of the institution. Previous to that time they were merely Additional Trustees, subject to censorship by the general body of Trustees of the parent College. Although in effect their conclusions were final, their duties were largely perfunctory, hence it was hardly expected that the interests of the school would appeal to them as closely as if their powers were absolute. Prior to the Act, no real responsibility rested upon the Additional Trustees; they had allowed the Faculty to conduct its business and educational affairs, and they had become somewhat negligent in their own duties. This condition of things prevailed, not continuously but at intervals, between 1828 and 1836, until Robley Dunglison came into the Faculty and strengthened that body, and also awakened the Additional Trustees to a clearer sense of their duty.

Trustee laxity during the period referred to, gave rise to what has been known in Jefferson history as “Faculty domination.” The characterization
was emphasized by the fact that the surplus revenues of the College were apportioned among the Faculty until the Trustees reorganized the system of school government in 1895. But the term, Faculty domination, never applied strictly to the relations of the Faculty with the Trustees, except perhaps during the ten years previous to 1838. The Trustees certainly were not dominated in 1828, when they vacated all the chairs and laid down specific rules of Faculty government; they certainly were not subject to the Faculty in 1839, nor in 1841, when all the chairs were peremptorily vacated and the teaching force radically reorganized; nor again in 1895, when they put an end to the custom of sharing surplus moneys among the Faculty, and instead paid a salary to every Professor and other teacher according to their own estimate of his worth to the College.

The real purpose of the Act of 1838 was to enable the Trustees of Jefferson Medical College to hold real and personal property without vesting title in the general board of the College at Canonsburg. This called for an entire separation of the institutions, and the result was to establish the medical branch a distinct body corporate, "with the same powers and restrictions as the University of Pennsylvania." The Additional Trustees then in office were reappointed, and were authorized to increase their number to fifteen members through their own election. The new members were added in 1838, and the Board in 1839 took upon itself the difficult duty of reorganizing the whole Faculty and omitting from the roll the name of George McClellan.

This undertaking was not carried out without contention in the Trustees' meetings, and for a time the Board became as a house divided against itself. But, arbitrary and revolutionary as the proceeding may have been, it was held to be necessary for the welfare of the school. The Trustees went about their duties manfully and finally emerged from the contest with "an unbroken front." The meetings were frequent—and animated—and for a time the division of forces was about equal; there was the McClellan side and the Dunglison side, each well generalized and admirably led, but final victory was awarded to those who sought to establish a new, improved, and more
peaceful order of things in Faculty life. In doing this an old leader was overthrown, shorn of his power as a factor in Jefferson's history, and he fell outside the breastworks; but he was not destroyed; he rose up, gathered about him a goodly force, and set up a new medical school that drew largely from the strength of Jefferson.

The weighty matters considered and disposed of by this first Board of Trustees drew together in their meetings the full membership, except Dr. Ely, who from his residence in Missouri vainly endeavored to exercise his trustee privileges by letter. Others made similar attempts, but their claims were not recognized. There were good parliamentarians in that first Board, and personal attendance was a prerequisite to a voice and a vote in its councils. The members of the Board at this time were Rev. Dr. Ezra S. Ely, Col. James Miller, Jacob Fricke, Joel B. Sutherland, Jesse R. Burden, Rev. C. C. Cuyler, Rev. Dr. Ashbel Green, John R. Vodges, David S. Hassinger, Thomas S. Smith, Gen. William Duncan, Joseph R. Jones, Samuel Badger, and Edward King.

Notwithstanding the apparent suppression of discord as a result of the radical action of the Board in 1839, the feeling of discontent found fresh manifestation in 1841; and again the Trustees exercised their supreme authority, and effectually put an end to the disturbing element so frequently mentioned in Jefferson history as "Faculty dissension." If Faculty domination had previously existed, its end came with the action of the Trustees in the year mentioned, and it never again appeared in the subsequent history of the school. Then the Trustees organized the historic Faculty of 1841, the most notable corps of Professors of which any medical college in America then could boast, and one which by its splendid educational work made known the name of the Jefferson Medical College throughout the world. The results which followed the reorganization were due primarily to the resolute action of the Board of Trustees, and that body shared the honor of subsequent achievement with the gentlemen of the Faculty. From that time the Trustees became the recognized power of the institution, for their action had demon-
strated that they were competent to select Professors and organize a Faculty without leaning heavily on the advice of one or a few of those who proposed to occupy Professors' chairs.

Thereafter for a period of almost twenty-five years the principal duties of the Board consisted of the transaction of routine business, and they were given ample opportunity calmly to observe the progress of the school whose guardians they were. Only once during that period was there any serious apprehension on the part of the Board regarding the stability of their school, and that was during the ante-bellum days and the early years of the war of 1861-65, when Hunter McGuire led away almost one-half of the total students of the College, and took them either into southern medical schools or enlisted them in the Confederate service. This, however, was only a temporary loss, and did not really impair the efficiency of the school, although for a time its resources were diminished. But the echoes of the war had hardly died away before the Trustees began devising plans to increase the clinical facilities of the school, which could be best accomplished by the establishment of a large Clinical Hospital and its maintenance in connection with and as a part of the College curriculum. In a way the old Hospital had served an excellent purpose, but the College had outgrown it, and there was a demand for something better, more complete and elaborate, and more in keeping with the elevated character of the College.

The Trustees had discussed this matter informally for some time, but they had not the means at command to carry out their desires. They had made additions to the College buildings at various times, had acquired properties by purchase, and had maintained the several departments of the school with the revenues derived from attendance. They had no endowments and no considerable amount of capital with which to meet extraordinary expenditures; and they were men of too good business capacity to allow themselves to run heavily in debt or to encumber their property with embarrassing mortgages.

While these matters were weighing heavily upon the official Trustees'
mind, an Alumni Association was being founded to make clear the way for the accomplishment of the desired end. Gross was engaged in missionary work among the graduates, and in 1870 he perfected the organization of an Alumni Association that shared with the Trustees the burden of erecting a large Clinical Hospital—the Hospital whose doors were opened in 1877.

The Trustees found the Alumni Association a faithful ally and earnest supporter in every good work, and learned to lean upon it for counsel and assistance, although at first the Board was inclined to doubt the expediency of such an organization, fearing lest it be a burden rather than a source of help. But the Association soon "proved" itself and was readily admitted to fellowship with the governing powers of the College.

Now that the graduate forces of the College were organized and allied to the Trustees, the spirit of progress which had before begun to germinate soon developed into active organization. The construction of the Hospital was only the beginning of the work: the honor and reputation of the College demanded an advanced position in respect to modern methods of education. The College had always been an initiator in advanced medical thought and teachings. This was shown during McClellan's time, and was again manifest during the year following the reorganization of 1841.

The Trustees had reason for congratulation when the work of the College and Hospital were combined in the curriculum, but they were not content even with that achievement. With the assistance of the Alumni and other generous friends, they built and equipped the College Laboratory, added the Hospital "Annex," established a Nurses' Training School, and also a Maternity Hospital Department, erected a large new Medical Hall at a cost, land included, of several hundred thousand dollars, and finally laid the foundations of what will be, when finished, one of the most modern and complete Hospital structures in the world.

On the part of the Trustees these results, accomplished and prospective, have called for determined effort, personal sacrifice, individual contribution of time, energy, and, in many cases, considerable donations of money. But
there has been something in the personnel of the Board of Trustees to commend itself to the confidence of friends of the school and to induce their generous support, and also that of the legislature. In the history of the school the integrity of its Board of Trustees has never been attacked, and not since the year 1839 have the Trustees been subject to any dominating influence of the Faculty. For more than three-score years these great bodies have worked in harmony, and at all times have the ears of the Trustees been open to the suggestions of the Faculty. Occasionally, differences have arisen, but they were honest differences, and were adjusted without recourse to radical measures.

In the reorganization of the plan of College government in 1895, there was no rupture between the Trustees and the Faculty. At that time the Board was actuated only by the purest motives. The highest and best interests of the College required that there should be no further division of the surplus funds among the Faculty, but that in the future they inure to the benefit of the School; and when the Board frankly laid the subject before the Faculty, the latter yielded, and accepted salaries fixed by the Trustees according to their own estimate of the worth of each Professor.

On four different occasions during the history of the school, the Trustees found it necessary to reorganize the Faculty, but only once in all that time did they take opportunity to reorganize their own body; and that was purely the result of a desire to infuse into the life of the Board a new spirit of energy and progress. Several radical changes and as many important measures of improvement were in contemplation, and young, strong men were needed to carry them into successful operation. The reforms then under consideration, which must be carried out if Jefferson were to maintain its supremacy, called for a complete revolution of College affairs and government, and in American history the struggles of a "revolution" must be contested by young men of superior strength; the old warriors, the veterans of earlier contests are retired, but not dismissed, their generalship always being of value. So it was at this juncture. In order to accomplish
certain reforms in the College it became necessary to revolutionize its entire system of government and its plan of operation, and men who were equal to an emergency were needed for the work in hand.

In 1893, when the plans of the Trustees were presented for consideration, the members of the Board were Edwin Fitler, chairman; George W. Fairman, secretary; Edwin H. Weil, treasurer; and Joseph Allison, Furman Sheppard, Joseph B. Townsend, Simon Gratz, Michael Arnold, Henry D. Welch, Sutherland M. Prevost, George D. McCreary, Thomas B. Wannemaker, Edward de V. Morrell, and Luther S. Bent. In 1894 the personnel of the Board was not materially changed, except that Mr. Sheppard was no longer a member. In 1895 Mr. Fitler retired from the President’s chair, and was succeeded by Mr. Townsend. Mr. Gratz, secretary, and Mr. Weil, treasurer, both old and necessary officials in the service of the Board, were continued in their respective positions. The other Trustees of former years who were continued in membership were Messrs. Allison, Arnold, Prevost, Wannemaker, and Morrell. The new members elected were William Potter, Joseph de F. Junkin, Louis C. Vanuxem, Samuel Gustine Thompson, Louis A. Biddle, and William H. Newbold.

The Board in February, 1895, promulgated an order by which, after the first of June following, the Faculty were bound to accept fixed salaries as their measure of compensation for services. With it also disappeared the character of a “proprietary school,” as Jefferson was formerly known. It now had become a collegiate institution. With this desired end attained, the Trustees entered upon the performance of the great work laid out by them and their ever-faithful ally, the Alumni Association. They acquired more lands and set about the erection of a new College building—the present Medical Hall, which cost approximately two hundred thousand dollars. It was finished and occupied in 1899. Other forces than the Trustees and the Alumni Association were instrumental in the accomplishment of this undertaking, but their part in the work is mentioned in another chapter.

The next considerable work of improvement was the acquisition of lands
and funds for the erection of the new Hospital. In laying the foundations for this great structure, the Trustees caused the Hospital Annex to be torn down, and with it a part of the Laboratory Building and others of less note. The work of construction is at this time in progress, the funds to carry it forward being at the command of the Trustees; if more is required, the Board and the Alumni Association have still other resources within reach. The proposed building will cost from seven hundred thousand to one million dollars, and when it is completed the corporation of the Jefferson Medical College will be as well equipped with buildings for thorough educational work as any other similar institution in America.

Since 1895 there have been few changes in the composition of the Board. In the next year, President Townsend died, and William Potter was elected his successor. He is still in that office, and it may be said that he has brought into the life of the institution an influence for good greater than any other one man.

In 1896 Trustees Allison and Wanamaker retired from the Board, and their places were not immediately filled. In the next year Joseph B. Townsend was replaced with James P. Townsend; and Charles Hebard, Daniel F. Baugh, and William M. Singerly were elected. The names of Edward I. Smith, George F. Edmunds, and Mayer Sulzberger appear in 1900, and that of Daniel Moreau Barringer in the following year. In 1904 occurred the death of Mr. Vanuxem, a most valuable member of the Board. That body is now constituted as follows: William Potter, president; Simon Gratz, secretary; Edward H. Weil, treasurer; Sutherland M. Prevost, Joseph de F. Junkin, Samuel Gustine Thompson, Daniel Baugh, Edward I. Smith, Mayer Sulzberger, Charles C. Townsend, Daniel Moreau Barringer, and Alba B. Johnson.