HISTORICAL SKETCH

OF

Kalamazoo College,

BY

REV. S. HASKELL.

Prepared by request of the Board of Trustees, to be read to the Baptist State Convention of the State of Michigan; adopted by the Convention Oct. 9th, 1864, as a portion of its historical materials, and ordered printed.

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On the 23d of November, 1821, Rev. Thomas W. Merrill alighted from his Canadian rackrer in Ann Arbor, and commenced a classical school. A few months previous he had come preaching in the wilderness, as an emigrant from Maine, and a fresh graduate from Waterville College and Newton Theological Seminary.

The object of his coming as he then wrote, was, to promote the intellectual as well as moral advancement of the people of the Territory of Michigan.

He was not that light, but he came to bear witness of that light, which now shines in the blended radiance of Kalamazoo College and Kalamazoo Theological Seminary. In the spark which he struck, and the tent fire which he lighted in Ann Arbor on that day, thirty four years ago, he saw, as he then said, the kindling hope that God would open the way for the enlargement of his effort, until it should become a literary and theological institution, under the influence of the Baptists of Michigan: The Baptists of Michigan being then, of course, objects of perception to faith chiefly.

This school, being the only one of the kind, as is supposed, in the Territory, was patronized from Detroit and the other early settlements, and enjoyed an interesting prosperity.

From it the next season, July, 1820, Mr. Merrill issued, and traversed the Territory, with a petition of which he was the author, asking the Territorial Legislature to charter an institution,
under the name of the Michigan and Huron Institute, and secure its control to the Baptist Denomination, by prescribing that three fifths of its Trustees should be of that faith. The object of the petition was favorably considered in the Legislature, but finally, meeting with objections from those opposed to its denominational features, the bill was laid over to the next session.

Meanwhile, under the influence of those who had opposed it, an Academy was incorporated and started at Ann Arbor, of which Mr. Merrill was urged to take charge. But feeling that his Christian and denominational aims and hopes would thus be compromised he declined.

And the same season, concluding that the eastern shore of the Peninsula was to prove ungenial to the growth of his cherished enterprise, he resolved to transfer it to the western shore. And, as Kalamazoo was a forest through which the smoke of one log cabin rose, he sought the older settlement of Prairie Ronde, amongst whose first settlers, he assisted in building a house for schools and meetings, and occupied it for those uses as early as the winter of 1830.—31.

The question now was where to drive the stake for the permanent Institution; and how to purchase lands for its use, for it was then in the design that it should incorporate the manual labor system. And another question was, how to re-appear before the Legislature and secure the act of incorporation.

Fortunately the practical wisdom, the generous liberality, and the intelligent Christian citizenship of Caleb Eldred stood now waiting to ally themselves with the high aims and the unconquerable tenacity of Thomas W. Merrill. Judge Eldred was then just dragging his surveyor’s chain through the untrodden grasses and the unbrushed bushes of our Western prairies and openings; and encamping with enthusiastic admiration beneath our majestic forests, and beside our miniature lakes. And among the way-marks which he was setting up, some of the first were those which, in his own mind, designated the places where his children should be baptized, his neighbors have their house of prayer and praise, and his denomination their Hamilton of Christian learning; for he had come from where the long shadow of the Hamilton of Hasdell and of Kendrick had swept over him.

In the autumn of 1831, there are to be seen traces of these two
pioneers coming together, and planning methods by which to raise money to purchase land for the occupancy of the contemplated Institution. And an appeal to the benevolent Baptists of the East was agreed upon. Accordingly Mr. Merrill visited the meeting of the Michigan Association at Pontiac in September of that year, and secured the recommendation of that body for him to visit the East on such an agency. A month later he was at the Baptist Convention of the State of New York, and received a hearty commendation of his object there, signed by Elon Galusha, John Peck, C. M. Fuller, Archibald McClay, Charles G. Somers, Jonathan Going, B. T. Welch, B. M. Hill, Philander D. Gillette, and others.

The result of this agency was the nest egg for all pecuniary gifts that have been laid together, or shall yet be, in the Baptist educational work of Michigan. So far as appears, the first subscriptions paid in this work, except what Mr. Merrill paid in defraying his own expenses, were seven ten dollar ones from these seven remembered and ever to be remembered names: Jonathan Going, Nathan Caswell, James Wilson, John H. Harris, Byron Green, William Colgate and E. Withington. This money went to purchase the property first bought for the Institute in Bronson, (now Kalamazoo.)

Returning from this agency in 1832, Mr. Merrill, Judge Eldred and others renewed the petition to the Legislature for the incorporation of the Institution, under the name of the Michigan and Huron Institute, and without any provisions for denominational control: Suggesting however the names of the petitioners and others as Trustees. These names embraced the early ministers and active brethren of the Baptist denomination then resident in the Territory.

The Bill, introduced in answer to the petition, had to work its way through some objections, but receiving the helping hand of Judge Manning, in addition to the watchful efforts of the petitioners, it passed. And after lodging some time in the hands of the Governor, was helped over his scruples by a committee consisting of John Booth, F. P. Browning and T. W. Merrill, and finally approved April 22, 1833.

As Mr. Merrill paused to take breath here he wrote, "The Michigan and Huron Institute is the school, upon which I have
had my eye since I came into this Territory. The one for which I drew a petition, gave it circulation, and presented it to the Legislative Council two years ago. For which I have petitioned thrice. For which I took up a subscription in the City of New York, in May 1832. This Institution I trust will exert a most salutary influence upon the Baptist cause, and shed an enlightening, reforming and sanctifying influence upon the citizens of this Territory. May our anticipations be more than realized." The third petition spoken of was one addressed to Congress, asking modestly for the grant of one township of land. A petition which, failing, perhaps imparted a hereditary impotency to its descendants begotten in its likeness in later years.

The first President of the Board of Trustees was Caleb Eldred, who for twenty-five years so worthily filled the office, and was believed of it only after his repeated and earnest solicitations.

As the charter did not locate the Institute, a tedious work awaited the Trustees in determining that important matter. There were long journeys over primitive roads to meetings in Clinton, Troy, Ann Arbor, Comstock, Whitmansville and elsewhere; often resulting in a failure of the necessary quorum, and sometimes issuing in nearly a dead lock of rival contestants for the prize. But at length in the autumn of 1835, Providence gave the weary fledgling a nest in Kalamazoo, through the subscription of $2,500, by residents there, and the purchase of 115 acres of land in what is now the South part of the village; which property was afterwards converted into the site and building accommodations now occupied on the West side of the village; where, through favoring Providences, no complaint of inselicibility has ever arisen, or can ever arise, to be among the embarrassments of the enterprise. Twenty years later the adjoining site for the Female Department was secured through the liberal and timely supply of $2,000 by Mrs. H. E. Thompson. And the beautiful and commodious building which now graces it was entered and dedicated in the Autumn of 1859.

No effort was made to endow the Institution, or was any debt suffered to accrue from its operation, during the first twenty years of its history. Its expense of instruction was not large, as its course of study was chiefly preparatory. Moreover the inferior condition of the public schools, and their lack of all high school
facilities, left the people quite ready to extend to a good select school a remunerative patronage. And much of the time other corporations assumed the current expenses of the Institute, as for awhile the State University supporting it as one of its Branches; and afterwards the Baptist Convention adopting it as the literary helpmate for its theological education. Yet the property of the Institute always remained distinct, and its Board of Trustees allowed no intermission of their meetings and controlling care.

The privileges of the Institute were alike free to both sexes from the first, except during, and for a little after, the time that the Baptist Convention paid the teachers. And indeed throughout this period, rooms were supplied free of rent, in which Mrs. Stone might keep up a school for females, which, though separate in form, carried that part of the common life down to the point of confluence below; which point was the more perfect combining of the Female Department with the other in 1859.

The last of the three decades of years has been the one of enlargement. Commencing with the effort, introduced by recommendation of the Baptist Convention, in 1853, to raise $30,000 by the sale of scholarships or otherwise. In about two years $20,000 was secured, chiefly in scholarship notes, through the laborious efforts of T. Z. E. Jones, S. W. Pattison and S. Cornelius.

In February 1855 the charter was amended so as to confer full College powers, the name changed to Kalamazoo College, and the corps of instructors enlarged so as to meet the demands of the College course, which was required to be of as high grade as that of the State University.

Other efforts in raising funds have been but of an interrupted character. Resulting however in securing some $10,000 for the erection of Kalamazoo Hall, and furnishing it for the Female Department. Of this Mr. Van Husen gave $1000, and the rest was raised pretty exclusively in Kalamazoo. Considerable additions have also been made at different times to the notes for endowment, while there has at the same time been no little loss on these notes, from the many causes which have rendered them difficult or impossible of collection.

For all these efforts for endowment none have responded with a
liberality more generous and persevering, or a love more true, than Judge Eldred and his family. To their continuous benefactions, and accommodating helps, it is largely owing that the Institution has thus far outlived its pecuniary struggles.

The present property of the College, in lands, buildings, apparatus, and accredited paper is estimated at $46,810 on which a debt has accrued, in the erection of buildings and in maintaining the extended course of instruction, amounting to $20,545.

Thus has grown up, and thus stands the exterior structure of the College. Let us now return for a few moments to acquaint ourselves with its interior inhabitants.

Here we are first met by a goodly succession of Teachers and Professors, "of whom the greater part remain unto this present but some are fallen asleep." I have neither the time nor the means, nor is it required of me here, to do more than notice them.

First after the forerunning of Mr. Merrill, the Institution was started under Mr. Marsh as its teacher. His successor was Walter Clark. The next name is that of Nathaniel A. Balch, and the next is David Alden.

The fifth principal teacher was William Dutton, appointed in 1841, the year of his graduation from Brown University, and continuing three years; soon after which he was arrested in his work by death. The Institution not only, but the community at Kalamazoo also, is a vase in which the fragrance of that flower still sensibly lingers. The Church and the Sunday School have a precious memory of him enshrined, and many families speak his name never without a blessing, while his pupils of the Institute have no path so worn by their student recollections, as the path to his lamented grave.

To Prof. J. A. B. Stone fell the lot of following Dutton. And the short course of the one is in contrast with the long course of the other. Dr. and Mrs. Stone commenced their labors as instructors in 1843. And they twain have been one flesh and one spirit in those labors, uninterruptedly until the present time. Their work has been multiform and multiplex. There is nothing which they have not touched, from the gravel beneath all material foundation stones, to the finish of each pupil's edification in learning and character. Their means, the while, spreading as diffusively through the work as their labors have done. With
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the entrance of the Institution upon its full College career, Dr. Stone was appointed its President and has so continued through these nearly nine years; Mrs. Stone throughout occupying the position of Principal of the Female Department.

With them William L. Eaton was an early, long continued, and faithful coadjutor. Being present, not with us but with the Lord, we might praise his work; but need not. He lives yet freshly in our love, and in the characters that he helped to form, so numerous over Michigan and beyond it, and now risen to usefulness in the manhood and womanhood of their years.

Of female assistants there were others; and since the expansion of the course, the associate Professors have been, as you know, Rev. Samuel Graves, Professors Daniel Putnam, Edward Oney, M. A. Page, L. E. Holdets, Rev. Edward Anderson, Prof. A. J. Curtiss, and a number of temporary gentlemen instructors, together with Mrs. Osborn, and Misses Fletcher, Finney, Shaw, and others.

Of the pupils that surround these instructors, through the history of some twenty-seven years, we cannot speak individually. We would be glad to pass them in full review before your eyes. Armies have not many large brigades than they would make. And though the gentler sex would be seen marching with the stern, it would be a host not less worthy of your respect, should you contemplate the warfare for which they were marshalled.

As Christians, who desire to educate for Christ, and not for Belial, it would interest you to see among them from forty to fifty, bearing the insignia of the highest office in the Christian Church, and many others who have won good promotion in the Christian service; noble Christian men, and honorable women not a few.

And this view brings us to the presence of one other Dweller within our Institution. You have seen that it was founded with the design of its being “a habitation for God through the spirit.” The Hamilton, or the Waterville and Newton, of our denomination in Michigan. So the fathers in New York, who bade it God speed, and offered to it the first gifts, conceived. So you, fathers of our people in Michigan, conceived of what you were doing in those rough clearings which you made for its erection. You wanted a school where God should reside and call the youth to
gather for his use, and draw them near to himself in his grace, and put the sacred oil upon them for his official service. Hence you wanted a praying denominational brotherhood, with joined hands gathered around the school. And you wanted Theological teachers seated in, or beside the school. For I find it not only on the Christian and denominational banner which you first sought to bear, but as an early record in the doings of your Institute Trustees, that you sought through the help of the Baptist Convention, to organize in the Institute itself a Theological Department, some twenty years ago. This was the school you wanted,—God's school.

And this, Fathers, is what we who are following after you want. Some of us at least understand this thing a little, if not as we should. We want no man's school for our College. We would not give a farthing nor a thought to one, though Baptist might be written upon every brick of it. If God is not inside, converting, sanctifying, commissioning, let the world have its flag above it, as it has its headquarters in it.

We rejoice therefore in looking through the history of the College, that we are brought into something of the presence of an indwelling God. Revivals of religion have not been strange things in this history. For a long time, nearly every year witnessed the cloud of God's saving and consecrating presence, standing at the door of the Institution. Some years the companies that have joined themselves to the Lord in covenant have been large, and the standard of devotion steadily high. Fifty in a year we have seen, half of them sons and half of them daughters of the Lord Almighty, enter our Baptist family, through the appointed door; while many others confessed Christ otherwise or elsewhere. And not a few have owed their passing into the Theological Seminary to these seasons of quickening from death, or from a lower life.

And yet truth to history, and duty to the enterprise, compel us to say—and we would tremble in saying it—that there have been years in which great darkness and coldness have reigned in the Institution. And what is worse for us just now, some of these years lie close to the present. And they synchronize with years and scenes of revival outside of the Institution, and in other Institutions. Brethren, it will be an awful thing if God goes out of
our College. Who can help constrain him to abide in it? Is not this the first thing to be determined, whether or not God, by his reviving and consecrating power, will abide in the Institution. If He do its prosperity is irrepressible. Your sons and your daughters will come to it, past a hundred secular Institutions never so attractive. Your money will come to it. Instructors will come to it and stay in it. Agents will find work enough that they can do, and open roads to reach their work.

And let me say if God thus abides in your educational Institutions and associations, He will abide in your families and churches, and we shall be a delightful land. But if He go out thence where else will He stay? Do you know a people with Ichabod inscribed on their Colleges and Theological Schools, and yet the glory remains with them in any general degree elsewhere? I know not any.

Come then, let us bow ourselves with all our might, our hands grasping the pillars of the worldliness and indifference that imprison and restrain us, and our cry struggling up to God out of our weakness, and let us trust and rejoice that, though we may die under the worthless ruins which prayer brings down, the cause of God—the precious interests of Christian learning and Christian life, will have deliverance.

Brethren, there are propitious signs. A choice and large assemblage of your daughters, and a worthy representation of your sons, are in the upper rooms of their study, and in many cases their prayer. They wait, and we wait the Pentecostal Baptism.—There will be no lack when it has come. The multitude will come together. Lands will be sold and the price presented for distribution, as this and every work of God has need. And disheartened, and, as they feel, deserted laborers, will be found "praising God and having favor with all the people."

And now friends, the proper conclusion of this sketch is the question, "Shall Kalamazoo College be carried up and forward in its work, by vigorous and liberal Christian hands?" Since its establishment things in Michigan have wonderfully changed. The Public Instruction of the State has gathered a breadth and risen to an elevation, then undreamed of. Rejoicing in its commanding posture and benificent working, and claiming our share as grateful citizens in its maintenance as well as in its privileges, we yet
ask whether our College, in its distinctive work, as the Christian work of our denomination, and the culturist of the Female no less than her generally more favored brother, has not its claims yet valid upon us? And whether those claims have not run up on a parallel grade with the ascent of the more secular educational facilities? Thankful that the State and our civic communities are doing so much and so well, have the Church and the Christian not an educational mission of higher and still rising importance? So much as the Christian College, standing where the breathed air-currents of prayer converge and the pillar of cloud and fire rests, is the hope of our youth spiritually, and the hope of the fields that appeal for Christ's laborers imploring, must we not still hold it foremost and uppermost, amid whatever schools are reared around it? Personally our conviction is clear and deepening that the people who say No to these questions are accursed. Beholding, therefore, what the fathers have prepared in their affection for this sacred work, and wherein we may add thereto, "Who, then, is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the Lord."