

Early Warren Academies

...The grove of Academus, resting within the shadow of ancient Athens, was originally a deserted and unhealthy spot. But when Plato commenced his instruction there, the grove ceased to be either considered unhealthy or deserted, and it soon became the favorite haunt of philosophers and poets.

...From an address delivered to the students of the Warrenton Male Academy in June, 1850 by David A. Barnes.

By HOWARD JONES

The village of Warrenton, North Carolina, although perhaps not an unhealthy place, was, in reality, almost a deserted place at the close of the American Revolution. To the visitor, Warrenton would have appeared but little more than a cross roads community. The bulk of the population of the county was stretched from Shocco Creek to the winding Roanoke River. The majority of the influential citizens lived an agrarian life and visited the town only when necessity demanded.

Although the seat of Warren County, Warrenton then was little more than a small cluster of unpretentious homes, built around a few larger ones and a courthouse. There were no sidewalks and the dirt streets were red mud in winter and stifling dust in summer. While only a few miles from the Richmond-Columbia stage route, the town was fairly isolated and communication with the outside world was available only by private means.

Nevertheless, before the turn of the century, Warrenton found itself growing in both numbers and prestige. Just as in the case of Academus's grove, it was becoming a haunt of scholars. Its growth can be linked with the rise of the academy, which was seen to give the town the reputation of an ideal community in which to gain an education. As early as 1796 Warrenton and Williamsboro, in neighboring Granville County, received recognition for their "very good academies."

Probably the most influential institution in early Warrenton was the Warrenton Academy (later officially called the Warrenton Male Academy). For more than a century this institution, along with others of the community, and the educational atmosphere of the county of Warren, were to produce governors, generals, congressmen, and scores of other influential leaders. To say that these academies helped to plot the destiny of states and nations might be overly-imaginative, but to say that they played a prominent part in the lives of the men who were later plotters of this destiny would be nothing more than truth.

Gone now are many of the frame structures which housed hundreds of academy students. But here and there one may yet see a crumbling building, an old academy, that stands in mute and eloquent testimony to a time that was.

In the year 1786 the townspeople of Warrenton were able to prevail on the General Assembly to pass an act for the establishment of an academy in Warrenton "to hold forth every possibility, opportunity, and encouragement to liberal education."

The wishes of the Warrenton citizens were granted by the state's legislative body and among the trustees appointed were Nathaniel Macon, William R. Davie, and Benjamin Hawkins. The General Assembly also authorized the trustees to conduct a lottery, the profits of which were to go for the construction of an academy.

That same year a visitor from Massachusetts who knew George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and John Adams was impressed by Warrenton. He later wrote that it "was just emerging from the forest, but possessed of a refined neighborhood, a salubrious air, temperate climate, and pure, delightful water."

It was in this community that lottery tickets were sold, profit realized, and work begun on a building to house the academy. A small building was begun on four acres of land shaded by beautiful oaks on the northern edge of

town. The building was far from pretentious, being a "large low wooden house," and containing an auditorium. It was here that the Warrenton Academy, as it was then called, opened its doors in 1788.

An Irish scholar and former actor by the name of Marcus George was named the first principal by the trustees. He proved an excellent instructor, especially in Greek, Latin, and elocution, and staged occasional plays in the modest academy's little auditorium. The principal taught by himself and did not hesitate to switch lazy or impudent scholars of all ages and sizes.

Apparently the new academy met with success as students from the county, joined with new friends from neighboring counties, began to patronize the institution. When the student graduated from the academy, he was presented a certificate of proficiency, as the Warrenton Academy could not at that time award degrees.

As more students began to enroll in the academy, limited space became a problem for both Principal George and the trustees. In 1800 the trustees authorized a new building which was completed in 1802. Built by subscription, the new building was forty by thirty-four feet in dimensions, and two stories high. It had four large and tall outside chimneys, and heating was by means of open fireplaces. The exterior of the building was painted a dark red, and was called by some people "The Red Academy." On the lower floor there was a recitation room, fitted with maps, charts, globes, and an electric battery, used for classes in chemistry and science. The rest of the bottom floor was used as a study and recitation room. On the upper floor were four large rooms, designed for teachers and students.

Even as the new building was being erected, George found himself burdened with a heavy teaching load and by the end of 1801 thought it necessary to advertise for a "person well qualified to teach the French language, reading, writing and arithmetic."

As there was no dormitory connected with the new school, pupils who came from a distance boarded in the homes of the town's citizens. Late in 1804, the Assembly at Raleigh heard the academy called a losing enterprise, sinking to the level of an old-field school. The trustees concluded that something other than the teaching was wrong; Marcus George and his assistants, now several in number, were sending graduates to the finest colleges and universities in the country. Early the next year the trustees agreed that the Warrenton Academy needed dormitories, a kitchen and a dining hall. They felt that if students were provided with proper boarding and lodging, under the supervision of the principal and an efficient steward, expenses of education would be reduced and more students attracted.

The wishes of the trustees were carried out, and Jacob Mordecai, who later opened a school for girls in Warrenton, was engaged to take charge of the steward's home. In 1806 students were told of the new additions by means of an advertisement in a leading North Carolina newspaper:

"The following are the terms of tuition and board. For teaching the Classics, Mathematics, Geography, and the use of globes, etc., twenty dollars per annum. For teaching the English, Arithmetic, etc., fifteen dollars. Students not having relatives in the town, or its vicinity, must board with the steward and lodge in the Academy. The price of board is seventy-five dollars per annum. Candles will be furnished at two dollars and washing and mending at eight dollars. Those who do not furnish their beds and bedding will be charged eight dollars per annum.

In her history of early Warrenton, Lizzie Wilson Montgomery, who seemed blessed with a remarkable memory, wrote that "classes lasted most of each day, and vacations were brief - a single week in May and a month in December." Final examinations were held annually before the spring vacation. Graduates found



This photo was taken in 1904 at the Warrenton Male Academy. Students identified include the following: bottom row, left to right, unknown, Kalfort Burton, Gilmour Parker, unknown, Edmund Gregory, Walter Parker, Alex Macon, Sam Tim Nicholson, Robert O. Edwards, Tom Gardner, Rob Palmer, Herbert Scoggin, unknown, Will Rodgers, unknown, John Rodgers, Edward Allen; next row, Sam Allen, unknown, Helen Thompson, Amelia Harrison, Mattie Williams, unknown, Lizzie Jones, Sue Williams, "Miss Maria" Graham, Kate Johnson, Mattie Hunter, Blanche Foote, Mamie Gardner, Nettie Rodwell, Mamie Aycock, Mary Hunter.

"Miss Amma" Graham; next row, Jeff Rodwell, unknown, Stuart Lewis, Gaston Foote, John Bell, unknown, Norwood Boyd, Lewis Scoggin, Mr. John Graham, unknown, Bernard Gardner, Sara Gardner, Myrtice Gardner, Myrtice McMichael, Eugenia Satterwhite, teacher, Rosa Rodwell; next row, unknown, Mr. Maxwell, teacher, unknown, Alston Twitty, Raymond Thornton, unknown, unknown, Joel Bullock, Fab Shell, unknown, unknown, Sumner Burgwyn, Edmund White, unknown, Archie Daniel, "Ras" Daniel, Charlie Cook, unknown and DeLeon Green. Shown in window is Walter White.

themselves able to follow the studies of second-year and even third-year students in the leading colleges and universities of the land. Mrs. Montgomery published some of the rules governing the student body, two of which appear below:

"The Principal shall cause the bell to be rung every morning at sunrise, when the students shall rise, and (again) within a half hour when the students shall assemble in the common hall and the Principal shall deliver a prayer, immediately after which the students shall go to their studies. The Principal shall cause the bell to be rung at dark every evening, after which no student shall be absent without license from him or a tutor....."

"Every student who shall be concerned in any kind of gambling, if he be under the age of 14 years shall receive from the Principal such correction as in his opinion he shall deserve. If over 14 for the first offense, he shall be publicly admonished, for the second offense suspended....."

There is little recorded concerning the Warrenton Male Academy (as it was now called) during the next few decades. Apparently it was flourishing as additional institutions, marvelling at its success, began springing up in Warren County.

During the time of the War of 1812 Warren County held perhaps the greatest political power of any like community in the United States. It furnished the governor of the state, both United States senators, and the United States Congressman and judge from the district. Many of these leaders had been trustees of the Warrenton Male Academy and now some had children in the academy.

There were seven schools in Warren County in 1820 and by 1840 the county boasted one college, thirteen academies and grammar schools with 283 students, and ten primary and common schools having an enrollment of 162 boys and girls.

Many principals and teachers came to Warrenton to teach in the academies during this period. One who taught in the Warrenton Female Academy, which had recently been built and operated similarly to the Warrenton Male Academy, was Bronson Alcott, father of the author of *Little Women*.

Yet another teacher in the Warrenton Academies was a girl from Connecticut, Mary Youngs Cheney, an outspoken Abolitionist, who married Horace Greeley in Warrenton's little Episcopal church on the morning of

July 5, 1836.

During the winter of 1852, she arrived in Warrenton from Canada a woman school teacher who was "struck with the 'Sleepy Hollow' air" which she said filled Warrenton. After teaching a year in Warrenton she left, apparently disgusted with the proprietor of the school, whom she termed "a large, unwieldy, pompous and illiterate man, (the latter circumstance being apparently no disqualification for his election as Member of Congress) and totally unfitted for his post."

The Warrenton Male Academy had a number of principals during this period, including two who later became the bishops of Tennessee and Arkansas, but the one who appeared to have made the deepest impression among the students and townspeople was John E. Dugger. He bought a bronze bell to hang to the branches of a giant oak tree in the academy's front yard. A year later Dugger resigned to accept a commission in the Confederate Army, and the large bell was sent to Richmond to be moulded into cannon.

John Dugger returned to Warrenton following the Civil War and took over once again as principal of the Warrenton Male Academy. Two years after the surrender at Appomattox, Warrenton had one female college, one female seminary, one children's day school, one male academy and three freedman's schools.

John Graham, who like Dugger, had fought beneath the Stars and Bars a few short years before, had since opened a private school in the county. Graham was invited to take charge of the Warrenton Male Academy in 1898. He changed the name of the school to Warrenton High School and purchased a fine old home for use as a dormitory and dining room. As more students were attracted to his school, Principal Graham bought two more private homes and made the institution co-educational. His chief assistants were his son and two daughters.

Among the students who studied under John Graham were Frank Graham, president of the University of North Carolina, United States Senator, and mediator for the United Nations; Robert House, chancellor of the University of North Carolina; Sidney Blackmer, distinguished actor; and William Polk, editor and author.

In his history of Warren County, Manley Wade Wellman wrote that in 1917 "Professor John Graham, gentle and wise and old, prepared to close his academy, last of Warren's great private schools. It was the end of an era."

English Couple Becomes 'Steeped' In American Ways

By HELEN HOLT
News Editor

In the six weeks since they arrived in Warrenton, the English born and bred Selbys have slowly become accustomed to the American ways here.

But one custom both adamantly declare they will never understand—or acquire—is the American tea brewing method.

"Jerk tea," as they call our familiar tea bag system where the drinker casually dunks his bag and then flops it over into the saucer, is only one of many differences Ray and Wyn Selby have noticed since coming to Warrenton in September.

Fortunately, most American manners and methods have not had the same effect on the English couple as has the "ghastly" jerk tea. By and large, the couple finds the area accommodating, the people friendly and the experience enjoyable.

A recent rainy day provided the proper setting for the Selbys to chat with a visitor at the Episcopal rectory here where they are making their home for the year.

Selby, more appropriately titled the Rev. Dr. George R. Selby, came here to serve the Emmanuel Episcopal Church, All Saints Episcopal Church, Church of the Good Shepherd at Ridgeway and, on occasion, the Littleton Episcopal Church.

His stay here now is not the first time he has visited America although it will probably be the one of longest duration. Both Selbys spent five and one-half weeks in America in 1974 during what "began as a holiday."

"We have a cousin in Winston-Salem with whom we have been corresponding for 30 years or so," Selby said. "I think it was on her birthday and Wyn and I were playing records and I said, 'Why don't we go there?' and my wife said, 'Well, why don't we start saving for it?'"

"So that's what we did," he concluded, nodding to his wife seated on the couch.

Their visit in 1974 took them to their cousin's home and later to lectures at Wake Forest, Sewanee University and the convention of Episcopal Women.

Last year, the Selbys visited America again through the auspices of a program entitled Theological Education by Extension.

At that time, they visited numerous seminaries along the east coast, including those in New York,

Philadelphia, Alexandria, Va., and others.

Consequently, the English minister—better known as canon or vicar—has been exposed to a variety of religious diffusions in America. He notes considerable differences in the religious customs of his native England and its Bicentennial offspring.

"A smaller proportion of people go to church there than over here," he said. "English people have never been a very religious people and this may shock many Americans."

"The Scots and the Welsh are religious," he continued. "The English are moral."

Americans may find his assessment a revelation. Impressed with the photographs of astoundingly beautiful cathedrals, many people here connect a traditional piety to English religious habits.

But perhaps the only area in which religion takes a compulsory stance is in the public schools where classes in religion are required by law.

Unlike America where the concept of separate roles for church and state are strongly emphasized, the two ideas are in close relationship in Great Britain.

There is some resistance to this tie today as it was years ago when the king's subjects fled in pursuit of more religious freedom. Subsequently, therein may lie the basis for the rather low rating of ecclesiastical matters, Selby acknowledged.

However, as Selby observed, there is a slow but steady movement to more unity among the churches and those who support them. The trend is evident not only in the church but also in the state, again tying the two together.

With England becoming an increasingly multi-racial society with a population that bulges to the seams of the small island, changes were inevitable.

Selby described, as a good example, the Silver Jubilee heartily celebrated by the British this year. Both he and Wyn were surprised and pleased at their country's reaction to the double celebration of Queen Elizabeth's

25-year reign and 50th birthday.

"We all thought the Silver Jubilee would go off half-cocked," Selby recalled. "But when she stepped out into a wonderful reception, that set the tone for the rest of the celebration."

England, in short, experienced a kind of "latent patriotism" that came "almost as a relief," the minister described. "It's been a very good thing for the country."

Wyn added that the celebration demonstrated that the queen serves a very vital and important function for the country as well.

More than being a decision-maker, the queen—or if it were king—stands as representative of stability, of endurance, of continuity.

"The king is dead, long live the king." You see, we are never without a monarch," Selby said. "In some ways, a monarchy is an extremely democratic system of government."

The American system, by comparison, puts perhaps "too much of the responsibility" upon the president who has to exist as the focal point of all pressure. Cabinet members in England are elected, not chosen, and are charged with responsibility in whatever area they were elected to represent.

On the other hand, the American system of government offers advantages that the Selbys would like to see instilled into their own government. The system of checks and balances between legislative, judicial and executive branches of government is one position enforcement of democracy.

And the American way of life offers still further advantages that the Selbys are enjoying immediately. Wyn says she enjoys the large grocery stores here, the good food and being called "Wyn" by the people she has met.

Selby says he likewise finds the food good, the people friendly, the services excellent and the informal first-name basis commonly used here between congregation and minister comforting.

"One thing happened to me the other day that I don't believe has ever happened to me before," Selby said. "I was walking down the street, coming back from the post office, I believe, and this guy riding by in a car sticks his hand out the window and calls out, 'How ya doing, Ray?'"

He smiled at the recollection. "It was a nice thing to happen."



Wyn and Ray Selby, the English couple who will direct all Episcopal churches in the county for the coming year.

sip hot tea during a cool afternoon at the rectory here. (Staff Photo)