

**THE BACKGROUND, FOUNDATION AND
EARLY HISTORY OF THE WEST VIRGINIA
SCHOOLS FOR THE DEAF AND BLIND**



Home of the W. Va. School for the Deaf & the Blind, 1934 – from the collection of Charles Hall

The Proposed Library,

The West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and the Blind

Committee

Martha G. Martin, Chairman
Carson E. Martin
Nelle P. Scanlon
A.C. Scanlon

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Early Development of West Virginia	
a. Some New Aspects of the History and The History and Economic Interests of the Eastern Panhandle Counties	1
b. District Racial and Economic Differences found East and West of Allegheny Mountains	2
c. Early Education of Deaf and Blind in Virginia	4
d. Founding and Brief History of the West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind	5
II. The Literary Society of Romney and the Romney Classical Institute	
a. Formation and Purpose of the Literary Society	10
b. Founding and History of the Romney Classical Institute	12
c. Literary Hall Construction	13
d. Romney Classical Institute Becomes Foundation Gift To State 1870	13

III. Prof. H. H. Johnson, Creator of the West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and the Blind	
a. Early History of Prof. Johnson	14
b. Prof. Johnson’s Idea of Aiding the Unfortunate and Its Development	15
c. The Establishment of the Schools	16
d. Prof. Johnson’s Appointment to the West Virginia Schools Deaf and Blind and His Work	17
IV. The Romney Classical Institute Building	
a. The Original Building, Construction and History	18
b. Later Successive Additions	21
c. A Suggestion for Its Future, Form and Use	25

A NOTE OF APPRECIATION

This committee wishes to acknowledge its sincere gratitude of Miss Edith Pancake, who so graciously typed the stencils and aided us by many other means.

Edited February, 2020 by Dan Oates

THE BACKGROUND, FOUNDATION AND EARLY HISTORY, THE WEST VIRGINIA SCHOOLS FOR THE DEAF AND BLIND

The selection of this topic by the members of this committee was one which could be expected. All are citizens of Hampshire County and have established homes in or near Romney. Two members of the committee graduated from this schools training classes for instruction to teach the deaf, and have taught here under several superintendents, and political administrations.

Three of the committees are representatives of a family whose total years as members of the West Virginia School for the Deaf teaching staff exceeds seventy-five years.

Thus, it is with a bit of confessed pride that we as individuals feel our own history is closely related with the history of this State Institution.

It would seem proper that to clearly construct the motives and reasons for the founding of this Institution in Romney. We glance back upon the pages of economics and history of the past of what now comprises the state of West Virginia.

The counties which are east of the Allegheny Mountains, as well as some few of the now so called "Southern Counties" such as Greenbriar, had close ties with the citizens, churches, education, and financial institutions of the Piedmont and Tidewater counties of "Old Dominion."

The period prior to the Civil War was an age of agriculture in the South, and the systems and practices of these sections were much in common.

Land holdings were frequently large, slave ownership was common, and the commerce, and business interests were mostly guided by Northern and English Banking interests. In many instances both master and slave traced proudly with ease, his direct

and close relationship to those who were residents of what is now Virginia.

The master's son and daughter were frequently educated in "Valley" and Tidewater schools, and colleges. The loans, and credits which made possible the agricultural pursuits were mostly granted by the larger Richmond Banks, or English factors located in Virginia. The products of the soil and towering forests were sold either in Virginia cities or exported through its ports.

Not only did the Valley and Tidewater Society receive its homage in pride and financial gain, they in turn relaxed, dated their important events and financial obligations by the seasons spent in the fashionable retreats from summers excessive heat at the Baths of Berkley Springs, Capon Springs, Old Salt, Old Blue and Greenbriar.

Those present counties of West Virginia west of the Allegheny Mountains and of the Northern Panhandle were for the most part of a different type of soil, having a more adverse climate, and were populated with people who had weaker ties with the "Mother State."

Ownership of land was not secure west of the Allegheny Mountains, and for the most part were based upon "Tomyhawk Rights," rather than direct purchase or lease from the "Crown" or "Landed Proprietors."

The Eastern and Southern tier of today's West Virginia's counties had quickly become a place of investment for the funds of Virginia in the form of larger land ownership. It became a natural event for members of the younger generation of these owners to establish homes in this section. With their family heirlooms they brought their own culture, slaves, livestock and practices of agriculture.

In addition to those from Virginia, we find another source of migration of settlers from the northern ports of entry of New York and Philadelphia down through Pennsylvania, and through the

breaks in the mountains by which streams enter the Potomac.

*“Among our early settlers, several Irish Presbyterians removed from Pennsylvania and settled along Back Creek, the North Mountain and Opequon. A few Scotch and English were among them. The ancestors of the Glasses, Allens, Vances, etc, were among the earliest settlers on the upper waters of the Opequon. The ancestors of the Whites, Russells, etc., settled near North Mountain.”*¹

The rich soil of its rivers, and creek valleys produced even under primitive forms of agriculture, excess crops of tobacco, corn, wheat and the lesser grains. The virgin stands of pine, oak, walnut and wild cherry had a marketable value when transported to the sea. The importance of the tobacco crop, the grains as such, or in the form of fat livestock, and the various kinds of lumber is little realized today. These counties east of the Allegheny Mountains quickly grasped the idea of marketing their excess crops by way of transportation on the flowing rivers upon rafts of logs or crudely sawed timber. When the rafts and their loads reached Virginia Tidewater they found an export market awaiting them.

Under the reign of George II and III, Custom Houses were erected at the mouth of the North and South Branch Rivers of the Potomac and here Michael Creasap collected a tribute for the crown.

Ruins of the one constructed on the South Branch still remains on land owned by members of this committee. The fine woods used in the massive “Georgian” homes and furniture of England can frequently be traced to the timbers exported by the colonies.

1. History of the Valley, Samuel Kercheval, p.61

With the advent of wealth even though of a minor degree came leisure and the fostering of education through the use of private and “Subscription Schools,” the building of small selected private libraries and the enrollment of the youth from the Eastern and Upper southern tier of counties in the established Valley and Tidewater seminaries and colleges.

At this time because of the freedom from Indian attacks, an increasing upward economic trend, and the advantages of a higher education level, the citizens of Virginia were more prone to recognize the suffering, and needs of those in their midst, who were less fortunate.

One finds that Virginia has the distinction of having the first established school for the instruction of the deaf in the present United States.² Under the patronage of Col. William Bolling, “Bolling Hall,” Goochland County, Virginia: John Braidwood about 1812 established a small private school for the instruction of the deaf.

This first attempt failed through the unfortunate habits of the instructor. Failure cannot be traced to the lack of ability of this member of a famous English family or from the lack of cooperation or financial support of its prominent patron.²

March 31, 1838 the Legislature of Virginia passed the first act which enabled the foundation of the Virginia Institution for the Education of the Deaf, Dumb and Blind at Staunton.³

We who are residents of West Virginia may be surprised to note that:

“The first pupil registered in the deaf-mute department was Elisabeth Baker, of Pendelton County, the date of registrations being November 30, 1839.”⁴

2. Histories of The American Schools for The Deaf, Thomas S. Doyle.

3. Ibid

4. Ibid

It is also interesting for us who are West Virginians, to discover that the Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind, are and have been from their conception a dual institution. That the Virginia schools when first organized had two principals coequal in authority and the practice continued for a few years only to be discontinued in favor of a principal responsible for the conduct of both departments. ⁵

The Acts of Secession again shows clearly the differences of opinion as found in the several sections of the present State of West Virginia. When due to the results of the Virginia Convention held in Richmond, February 13, 1861 the mother state joined, “The Confederate States of America.” One finds that the bitterness which existed between those who lived eastward from the Allegheny Mountains, and those who resided westward from this line sprang into flame.

The Wheeling Convention which began its sessions June 11, 1861 for “the purpose of reorganizing the government of Virginia” realized this distinction. Even when the second convention beginning February 12, 1863 formed the constitution for the new state there was doubt as to its size and boundaries.

“When this Constitution was formed, it did not regard Hampshire, Hardy, Pendleton and Morgan as parts of the state, but provided that they might become parts of West Virginia if they voted in favor of adopting the Constitution.” ⁶

The newly founded state floundered through the trials of the Civil War only due to the aid of the Federal Government and the

5. Histories of The American Schools for The Deaf, Thomas S. Doyle.

6. History of Hampshire County, Hu Maxwell, H. L. Swisher, p.111

of the Federal Army. At the close of the war it found itself without any public institutions and torn by many political and sectional factions.

Each section of the state desired special recognition and political rewards. As was expected of the Eastern and Southern counties; which had through the war only been held in check by the Federal Army; had little voice or influence in the State Government.

In addition, these counties were so depleted in leadership due to death upon the battlefield or disfranchisement, lacked little wealth upon which to rebuild their meager fortunes and basically were not of the aggressive merchant type which then firmly held the reins of State and National Government.

The wondering blind men with his stories of the plight of one portion of the unfortunate and handicapped citizenry rekindled the spirit of former years.

The neglected Literary Society with its abused building, and scattered members and assets was their only means of aid for this unfortunate group of citizenry as well as an effort to receive some meager share of the state's political patronage.

Selden Winford Brannon, in 1947 submitted as a partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts to the Faculty of the Graduate School of West Virginia University the Thesis, "History of the West Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind."

Mr. Brannon covered this subject with exactness and detailed care. One who desires to gain a detailed account of the History of the Schools should count themselves fortunate to have access to his world.

Because Mr. Brannon's Thesis has proceeded this committee's report we have decided rather than to cover the same ground, to select the one person who had so much to do with the school's creation, and the Society which made the school's location in

Romney possible, and incorporate these two Reports within a Report.

In addition, because of local interest centered upon the original building of the school, we have made a fuller report upon it, as constructed, its uses, and our suggestions for its use in the coming years and under ever changing conditions.

We are thus merely giving a brief History of the West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and the Blind from its founding, and continuing till the end of Major John C. Covell's Administration, June 4, 1887.

At the close of the Civil War arrangements had been made by the State of West Virginia by which its deaf and blind children could be educated in the neighboring states of Ohio and Virginia. As could be anticipated such an arrangement proved most insufficient and few handicapped children used this means of securing an education.

H. H. Johnson, a native of Pendleton County, who had received his education at Staunton was aroused to the states needs to care of its unfortunate. With the cooperation of Governor William E. Stevenson and unlimited encouragement from its members, a bill was prepared and passed by the Legislature March 3, 1870 which created the West Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind.

Under this law, the Governor created a Board of Regents and the first Board appointed consisted of:

Hon. W.G. Brown, President, Kingwood, Preston Co.

Rev. D.W. Fisher, Wheeling, Ohio Co.

Gen. D.N. Crouch, Concord Church, Mercer Co.

Rev. T.H. Trainer, Benwood, Marshall Co.

Rev. R.N. Pool, Clarksburg, Harrison Co.

Col. G.K. Leonard, Parkersburg, Wood Co.

Hon. Henry Brannon, Weston, Lewis Co.

J.D. Barnes, Esq, Charleston, Kanawha Co.

Prof. H.H. Johnson, Moorefield, Hardy Co.

Maj. J.H. Bristor, Martinsburg, Berkley Co.
Capt. A.W. Mann, Falling Springs, Greenbriar Co. ⁷

Various locations were considered for the new institution's location, but it created so little interest that few sections were truly interested. The Literary Society of Romney and some of the latter's citizens did make an offer to donate to the state the "Romney Classical Institute" and some fifteen acres of ground. This was the only fully important offer, that was received by the Board of Regents, who accepted at a meeting held at Parkersburg, June 23, 1870.⁸

At a meeting of the Regents held in Romney, July 20, 1870, H. H. Hollister was elected Principal and on September 29, the school opened with a student body of 25 deaf and 5 blind and three teachers. Miss Rosa R. Harris, and Mr. Holdridge Chidister in the department of the deaf and Prof. H. H. Johnson in the department of the blind. ⁹

For three years under the guidance of Mr. Hollister, the school prospered. From funds appropriated two brick wings each 30 feet by 70 and three stories high were added to the original building.

Mr. Hollister resigned, and was followed by Dr. S.R. Lupton, School Physician, as temporary Principal.

At a meeting of the Regents held in Romney January 5, 1874, Levens Eddy, Esq., a former deaf instructor at the Wisconsin School was elected Principal and filled this position till July.

The Regents on July 30, 1874 selected Major John C. Covell, former Principal of the Staunton, Virginia school as Principal. ¹⁰

7. Minutes, Regents of West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind, Vol. I.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid

Major Covell had a wealth of experience, sound judgment and full knowledge of the Institution, and problems which confronted the holder of such a position. During his successful administration of 13 years, he proved to have full ability, and the desire to guide this newly created school to a place of prominence and importance, not only to the citizens of West Virginia, but other states as well. New buildings were constructed, steam, gas and water were added to the conveniences, and an efficient instruction staff selected and maintained.

Major Covell's death June 4, 1887 was a distinct loss to the West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind, but he had so well conducted the office of Principal that the school was upon a first foundation and could have the strength to continue with his loss of guidance.

Had not the West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind obtained a Superintendent, who was trained in such work and a successful administrator as was Major Covell the results of this experiment in the new state to educate a portion of its handicapped citizens would have been doubtful.

There are many reasons why Major Covell should receive full honor and esteem for the manner in which the schools were conducted under his leadership.

THE LITERARY SOCIETY OF ROMNEY AND THE ROMNEY CLASSICAL INSTITUTE

The Romney Literary Society, which gave its property to the state of West Virginia in 1870 for the establishment of the Schools for the Deaf and Blind, was organized January 30, 1819. No other one thing in the history of the town has had such lasting results for good as this society founded by a few energetic citizens. Never at any one time were there more than fifty-two members on the roll and there is no record that of this number more than seventeen were ever present at one meeting. The purpose of the society was to “advance science and literature.” At first it was called the Polemic Society of Romney.¹¹

One of the provisions of the constitution was that no religious or political question should be debated unless in the abstract and in general terms. Another was, that a member who should use profane language in the presence of the society or bring spirituous liquors to meetings, should be fined one dollar for each offense. The first money appropriated was paid the doorkeeper. The sum was twenty-five cents. The dues were fifty cents a month. After the running expenses had been paid, the remaining funds should be expended in buying books.

After the business meetings debates were held. Some of the questions debated were, “Is education in a public school better than that in a private school?” “Can the human mind, by its own reflection arrive at the conclusion that the soul is immortal?” An abstract question decided in favor of the negative. Another spirited debate was on the question, “Is it to the interest of the people of Hampshire to encourage the canalling of the Potomac River?” Unfortunately, no record exists of the arguments advanced in this

11. Maxwell and Swisher, History of Hampshire Co. p.p.431-432

discussion, but the decision was that it would be detrimental to the interests of Hampshire County. It is presumed that the objection to the Canal was that it would destroy the business of teamsters who hauled merchandise from the East. Such, at least, was the objection to building the Baltimore and Ohio railroad.¹²

The by-laws stated that any member who published his own or anyone else's speeches delivered before the society should pay a fine of five dollars. Subsequently no speeches were published. The society met at least twice a month and sometimes four times.

No record of the proceedings can be found covering the period from January 22, 1830, to May 15, 1869, nearly forty years. The records of this period are supposed to have been destroyed during the war. This is to be regretted, because during the period the society did its great work.

“It is learned from the proceedings of the Virginia assembly and from other sources, that on January 6, 1832, the assembly passed an act authorizing the society to raise by lottery the sum of twenty thousand dollars to be expended for educational purposes. A detailed statement of how the money was spent cannot be found; but it is known that large sums were paid for books; a building was erected; strong financial support was given to the Romney Academy, which stood on the site of the present Court House. On February 15, 1844, the Virginia assembly passed an act authorizing the society to donate to the Romney Academy the balance of the money raised by lottery and on December 12, 1846, another legislative act was passed, empowering

12. Ibid, pg. 432

the society to establish at or near the Town of Romney, a seminary of learning, for the instruction of youth in the various branches of science and literature; and the society may appropriate to the same such portion of the property which it now has or may here after acquire as it may deem expedient."¹³

In accordance with this act a handsome building was erected which still forms the central unit of the West Virginia School for the Deaf. The library of the Literary Society and the classes of Romney Academy moved into it. Thus, was created the Romney Classical Institute.

The Literary Society and the school flourished until the beginning of the Civil War. Nearly all of the members joined the Confederate Army, and the building and books remaining in Romney were considered legitimate plunder by the union troops. There were about three thousand volumes in the library at the beginning of the war in 1861. About two hundred were on the shelves, when the war was over, but a considerable number of others were found. However, the value of these were greatly lessened by sets being broken. The most valuable were never recovered. Many who were members in 1861 did not respond to the roll call of the society in 1869. They were in soldier's graves along the rivers of Virginia.

A new hall was erected in 1869 and in November of that year the remnants of the library and the other property were removed to the new quarters.

At that time the proposition of establishing a school in West Virginia for the deaf and blind was under consideration; and the literary society took up the work of securing the institution for

13. Ibid, pg. 433-44

Romney. On April 12, 1870, the society passed a resolution by which it agreed to deed free of cost, the building and grounds of the Romney Classical Institute to the Deaf, Dumb and Blind Institute, on Condition that the institute be located in Romney. A.W. Kerchevel and Robert White were sent by the society to Wheeling, then the capital of the state, to make the offer of the building and grounds to the board of regents.

It is evident, however, that other grants were made besides that of the Literary Society. No doubt this organization gave the building and other grantors gave adjacent land.¹⁴

The society in its offer had promised to have the Classical Institute building in good condition before turning it over to the state. One hundred eighteen individuals and firms of Romney subscribed \$1,383.60 to repair the buildings.¹⁵

The full results of labors of the Literary Society of Romney can not be measured. The influence has been very great. The principal visible results may be summed up in the collection of the fine library; the substantial support of the Romney Classical Institute; and the great influence and assistance in securing for Romney the Deaf, Dumb, and Blind Institute. It detracts none from the credit due to others to say that without the aid of the Literary Society it is barely possible that the Institute for the Deaf, Dumb, and Blind could have been secured for Romney.

14. Handbook, West Virginia Schools for Deaf and Blind, 1870-1940.

15. Historic Romney, 1762-1937, pg. 37

PROFESSOR H. H. JOHNSON, CREATOR OF WEST VIRGINIA SCHOOLS FOR THE DEAF AND BLIND

Professor H. H. Johnson was born in Pendleton County near Franklin, West Virginia, February 19, 1846. He was the person to first give our school shape.

From birth Prof. Johnson was afflicted with imperfect vision and in a few years became totally blind.

Having heard of the Staunton, Virginia School for the Blind, he went there at the age of eleven. He remained there for four years.

Progress in his studies were remarkably rapid and his ability was a subject of remark among his teachers and acquaintances.

Returning to Franklin, West Virginia he attended school where his brother James, also blind, was teaching.

When he was seventeen years old, he went to New Market, Virginia to school for two years.

Returning to Franklin in 1865 he taught a private school for one school term.

Desiring to have the best in education to offer his pupils, he returned to Staunton, Virginia and took another year of training in advanced studies.

Returning to teaching in the fall of 1867 he taught two years in Moorefield, West Virginia.

Early in 1869 he got the idea of establishing a school for the blind. He opened correspondence with Governor W.E. Stevenson regarding his hope and ambition to open a school for the blind in West Virginia.

With assurance of support from the Governor, Prof. Johnson on his own, canvassed the state, stirring up public thought and discussion concerning his enterprise.

“It was doubtful if the bill would have gotten through legislature had it not been for the sympathy and good will aroused by this canvass.” ¹⁶

Legislature convened in Wheeling on January 18, 1870. It was decided to make an effort to establish a school that year.

Prof. Johnson discussed the matter with Ex. Governor Pierpoint at Fairmont to get him interested in the proposed institution. Pierpoint said he could not afford to connect his name with an enterprise so sure to fail and would not consider presenting it to the legislature.

Hon. Joseph Wheat, member of the house of delegates from Morgan County declared to Prof. Johnson that the bill would fail and should fail because West Virginia was not financially able to support any more institutions.

None of this opposition dampened Prof. Johnson's spirits. Even though he was only a young man of twenty-four.

Through the kindness of some friends he was granted the use of the hall of the house of delegates in which to give an exhibition in connection with his brother James and Miss Susan Ridenour, also blind.

After the exhibition was over Prof. Johnson talked for an hour reasoning and pleading with the law makers of the state to establish a school for the blind.

At the end of the speech people gathered around him congratulating him on his wonderful effort. Hon. Wheat, only the day before saying to Prof. Johnson the bill should fail, “I will vote for your bill if it cost a hundred thousand dollars.” After that, there was no lack of interested persons who were willing to put the bill before the house. It was finally done by Hon. J. J. Davis, Harrison

16. Hu Maxwell and H.L. Swisher, History of Hampshire County, p.465.

County representative.

At the time the bill was presented it was only for a school for the blind. No mention of the deaf had been made.

Before the final necessary stage of becoming a law, Monroe Jackson of Wood County offered as an amendment that the words deaf and dumb be inserted before the word blind. The amendment was accepted and the bill became a law March 3, 1870 establishing what was first called the West Virginia Institution for the Deaf, Dumb and Blind.

The first school opened September 29, 1870 with twenty-five deaf and five blind students.

"The faculty comprised of: Principal, H.H. Hollister, of the Ohio School of the Deaf.

Prof. Johnson, a teacher in the blind department. Salary of one thousand dollars a year plus room and board for self and wife.

Miss Rose Harris, teacher in the deaf department. Salary of five hundred dollars a year plus room and board.

Holdridge Chedister, assistant teacher in the deaf department. Salary of four hundred dollars a year plus room and board.

Mrs. Lucy B. White, a matron. Salary of four hundred dollars a year plus room and board.

*Dr. Samuel R. Lupton, visiting physician. Salary two hundred dollars a year."*¹⁷

For more than fifty years the Blind and Deaf were housed in the same school.

17. Seldon Brannon, Thesis, pg. 19

Finally, the school grew too large. In 1919 the old Potomac Academy was purchased to house the Blind. The center building is old Potomac Academy building and two dormitories were erected.

From 1870 to 1928 the school grew from twenty-five pupils to four hundred pupils.

In an old South Branch Intelligencer, dated April 1, 1870, now the Hampshire Review, was the following statement.

“Professor H. H. Johnson is due all the honor of this enterprise. But for his untiring effort, energy and canvassing the state and the proper people no action would have been taken at this time by the state and no institution of this kind would have been established. All praise to Professor Johnson.”

THE ROMNEY CLASSICAL INSTITUTE BUILDINGS
ITS ORIGINAL FORM, LATER ADDITIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR
ITS USE IN THE FUTURE



Pre-civil war picture of the Romney Classical Institute, future W. Va. School for the Deaf and Blind

In 1845 The Literary Society purchased lots on the eastward side of Romney, and bordering the Northwestern turnpike, with funds raised by permission of the General Assembly of Virginia, through a lottery, (not exceeding \$20,000) prepared to erect a building.

“There is not a way of knowing just how much of the \$20,000 was used in the erection of the building as the minutes of the Society covering this period are lost.”¹⁸

18. Maxwell and Swisher, Hampshire Co., pg. 298

Mr. Brannon quotes from Maxwell and Swisher History of Hampshire County as follows:

“Some idea of the size and shape of the building may be gathered from a notice appearing in a Hampshire county newspaper dated April 14, 1845 asking for bids from contractors for the erection of the building for the Society. In this notice the Society specified that the structure should be brick building thirty-six by forty feet, twenty-two feet high from the foundation to the square, to consist of two stories to have a tin roof, and to be surrounded by a cupola, the end to be the front, and to be embellished with a handsome portico the whole width of the house.”¹⁹

It appears as if these specifications were with exacting care complied with the exception that the building's final size changed to fifty-four by fifty-four feet for some reason or reasons now unknown.

Mrs. Scanlon's father has informed us that he recalls his father, the late Major James Parker, relating to him that the late Tobias Mytinger was the contractor-builder of the original Classical Institute. Mr. Mytinger's daughter only recently died at an advanced age, and Romney still has among its honored citizens a remaining son and a granddaughter.

The committee has been unable to obtain any reliable description of this building's interior as first built. From old photographs of the exterior it appears as if this brick structure followed the Greek classical mode, as favored by the Southern builders of that time.

19. Maxwell and Swisher, Hampshire Co., pg. 294.

It is a matter of speculation that the city used the bricks from this vicinity and there is a strong possibility that the clay was dug on or near the location of the present Primary School Building and fired in kilns there, but this is not a matter of proven record.

From 1845 till the beginning of the Civil War, the Classical Institute Building was a center of culture and education for the town of Romney and the surrounding area.

Within its brick walls were heard the voice of orators discussing in debate such varied subjects as Classical Education and the best existing methods of transportation of goods. In fancy we can watch the youthful students gazing from its windows to the fancied pleasure of outdoors, and not only did the sounds of oratory and the drone of class recitations erupt the tenor of the countryside, but the scrape of the bow upon the well-worn "Fiddle" at times drift from its windows, when on some gala occasion a dance was held to enliven the rural existence of its membership.

In fancy one can picture the line of buggies and carriages drawn by sleek horses and guided by the nimble black finders of the slave drivers rolling along the curved driveway to the portico. The candles flickering as the doors were opened to admit some new guest, and perhaps to the perfume of the oaken logs roaring in the fireplaces could be detected the slight odor of "punch which had been spiked" with cloves and that essence of corn which had long been made famous by some few of the countless distillers.

This truly was an age which can no longer exist. An age of culture, of security, modest but ample means so that many citizens could indulge in fostering education and encourage the development of simple pleasure and sciences.

This was an age of society which at least upon the surface seemed secure and staple. A period of History which can only be compared to that brief span of years enjoyed by the ancient Republic

of Athens, and it was ably represented by the brick building fifty-four by fifty-four feet, two stories in height and crowned by a cupola and known as the Romney Classical Institute.

The Civil War erupted, and quickly terminated the age which this building first represented, neglect and lack of funds caused the buildings and grounds to fall into a low state of repair and appearance.

As a final gesture of formal farewell the few remaining members of the Society were joined by some of the Romney's Citizens and a fund of \$1,300 raised to repair and restore the building prior to its gift to the state as a School for the Deaf and Blind.²⁰

In recent years it has been mentioned that it would perhaps be of the best interests of the state if either the School for the blind or the School for the Deaf could be moved to a more central location. To those who suggest such an idea it would be well to bear in mind that the Board of Regents came into full possession free of charge, of the building known as the "Romney Classical Institute" and fifteen acres of ground, then valued at \$20,000. This gift was based upon a conditional clause in all of the original deeds.

"Now this deed witness that the Literary Society of Romney does give, grand and convey unto the said Board of Regents of the West Virginia Institute for the Deaf and Dumb and Blind all real estate lying near and east of the town of Romney known as the "Romney Classical Institute" to have and to hold forever for the establishment and continuance of said institution and for the use thereof for during such continuance and for no other use for purpose whatsoever, with this express condition limitation, that should said West Virginia Institution for the Deaf and Dumb and Blind cease to exist or cease to continue as such, the said property of the granter

20. West Virginia Schools for the Deaf, Dumb and Blind Board of Regents, Minutes, Vol. I p.191.

herein or its assigns as if this deed had not been made.”²¹

It would appear that any change in this manner would at least hazard the danger that the State of West Virginia would lose title to the original fifteen acres and the buildings which are now upon them.

The first changes of the original building were described by Superintendent Hollister as:

*“to facilitate communication between the different parts of the building and especially between the different stories, a double porch was constructed in place of the old back porch, the stairs were transferred from the wing to the porch, and a door was cut through the wall to give entrance to the upper rooms in the main building. The upper porch was used by the girls, the lower by the boys. A hall was constructed through the main building from which the doors opened into the boy’s dormitory and the school rooms. A room for hospital purposes was partitioned from the chapel.”*²²

In the fall of 1870, Superintendent Horace H. Hollister, admitted thirty pupils, but he had to reject eighteen others who applied for admission because of lack of room. The Legislature when it met in 1871, in response to a request of the Board of Regents and the governor, granted an appropriation to provide additional much needed housing for the new school.

21. West Virginia Schools for the Deaf, Dumb and Blind Board of Regents, Minutes, Vol.I p.191.

22. Hampshire County, Deed Book, No.55, p.p. 109-114.



Early picture of the Administration Building. Date unknown.

The winter of 1871-1872 witnessed the second change in the appearance of the old Classical Institute Building. The sum of \$21,000 was used to construct two wings which were three stories high, each wing being seventy feet long and thirty feet wide. In addition to the main building there was added a third story. The schools were now housed in one building constructed of brick, three stories high and measuring one hundred ninety-four feet across the front.²³

Improvements within the building are of interest. We know that the only means of illumination and heat in the old Classical Institute at the time of its construction was by means of candles and fireplaces. Existing photos show the four larger chimneys which were necessary for the fireplaces.

23. Board of Regents, Minutes, Vol. I, pages 51-57

Later of course oil burning lamps replaced the candles and coal burning grates were installed within the fireplaces. Both were of course primitive and not satisfactory.

“The newly enlarged school building was heated by stoves and grates burning coal until the summer of 1874, when a steam-heating system was installed. Light was provided by coal-oil lamps until the fall of 1874, when 150 burner gas machines for the creation of artificial gas was purchased and installed. At the same time pipes were laid to conduct water from a spring located on a farm west of the river about two miles from Romney.”

The last known change in the appearance took place in the beginning of the administration of the late Superintendent Parley DeBerry, who first assumed office in January, 1914. In a conversation with Mr. E.F. Staub; former Financial Secretary; one of the committee was told that the present front entrance was constructed soon after Mr. DeBerry's arrival, and was first built with a wooden floor.

Mr. DeBerry assumed his second term as Superintendent on August 1, 1923 and continued as such till July 1932. It was soon after the beginning of Mr. DeBerry's second term that the former wooden floor was replaced by the present concrete and tile floor.”

NEW USES FOR THE ROMNEY CLASSICAL BUILDING

As we have noted this old building constructed in 1845 has had a varied history of ownership, use, size and design. Recent examination proved to state authorities that it no longer could be considered safe for the purposes of its last use. At this time new building construction will soon provide for its dormitory space and the future of the building is at stake.

The members of this committee have neither the writing skill nor prominence of the late Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, Oliver Wendall Holmes, who prevented the destruction of the great ship, "Old Ironsides" by writing his famous poem concerning this veteran. Yet we wish to make a plea and a proposal for the restoration and use of this ancient building.

We feel that the State of West Virginia is under direct obligation to those of its citizens who fostered and sheltered education, science and culture in the decades of the past, and who in their opinion could best fulfill their creed of service to aid in the distribution of knowledge by giving their greatest asset to the newly founded state, in order that the handicapped could gain knowledge.

We feel that the Deaf and Blind of West Virginia owe the citizens of Hampshire County and the present, and future students of the West Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind a debt which can now be in a means repaid.

With these things in mind we propose that the old Romney Classical Institute be remodeled and used as a library. Permit its doors to be opened to both the student body of these two schools and the public alike. That the alumni and friends of the West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind recognize their obligation to those ancient citizens who made possible a site for their education, and that these same alumni recognize that encouragement by means of a library would contribute much to those who do and will follow in

their education footsteps. That active support of such a program will contribute much towards making it a reality.

We believe that the faculty of the West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind recognize that the existing quarters and material in use in the school's library is inadequate and handicaps the development of the students.

We are of the opinion that the citizens of Hampshire County, the members of its several "Service Clubs" and the parents of pupils in attendance at the Romney High School should and do recognize the fact that the local High School Library is inadequate and poorly supplied with materials and the so termed Hampshire Public Library is merely a term which means little.

By returning the Old Classical Institute to the use of a library we attain many objectives.

First, we honor those who over one hundred and ten years ago nurtured and sheltered a feeble spark of education and knowledge.

Second, we provide a means of aiding the handicapped children of the West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind and the pupils of our County school system with an aid in obtaining a fuller use and knowledge of education.

Third, we provide a means by which the Alumni of both schools can show their appreciation of the aid and encouragement given them by these schools in fostering such a movement and after its creation they can materially aid its importance by making it a depository for the writings and skills of these groups.

Fourth, by restoring the old building and its wings a form which we shall suggest, aid materially to the appearance of the school's campus, provide a monument to the contributions made by past generations, and yet have a practical, necessary use for all space.

It is suggested that the original Classical Institute of fifty-four feet be modernized and developed for use as a Library for the West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind with provisions made by

which the citizens of Hampshire county may have access to its volumes and building at all regular times.

Should the wings on each side of the building prove upon examination to be unsound for use, they should be removed.

Should said wings be found not to be serviceable they should be replaced by two wings of ample size to provide adequate space in one for suitable living quarters for the Superintendent and his family.

The other wing should be so constructed within its exterior that all space for the school's administration offices are quartered.

It is suggested that the wings constructed of brick and be designed both within and without in the Georgian style of architecture so that they blend with the original Classical Institute its history and the history and past architecture of this section.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The main sources of this paper are confined to the several listed works below. Additional information has been secured either by engaging in conversation with persons who had some connection with the Schools or by making an effort to trace the many stories which have been circulated in the years of the past.

Primary Sources

“History of The Valley”---Samuel Kercheval

“Histories of The American Schools for the Deaf”---Volta Review---
West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind---C.H. Hill

“History of Hampshire County”---Hu Maxwell and H. L. Swisher

“History The West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind”
Unpublished Thesis---Seldon Winford Brannon, 1947

“Some prominent Virginia Families”---Louise Pecquet Du Ballet

“Shenandoah Valley Pioneers and Their Descendants”---Thomas
Cartwell

Minutes, Regents of West Virginia Schools for the Deaf, Dumb and
Blind---(3 Vols. Unpublished)

Secondary

Hampshire County Deed Book---No.55, Unpublished

Journal---House of Delegates of The State of Virginia---Session of
1852

South Branch Intelligencer---Romney, Virginia, 1860-1872 (Random
Copies)

Statements From

Howard Mytinger, Esq.; James N. Parker, Esq.; E.F. Staub, Esq.; and
Others