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**Collection 194  
Trenton Academy  
Records**

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**History**

The Trenton School Company was founded on 10 February 1781 by 20 of Trenton's prominent men. The trustees purchased the original plot of land on Fourth Street (later Academy) from Moore Furman, and built a two-story stone school building, 20-feet in breadth by 26-feet in length with a full cellar underneath. Teacher James Burnside and 40 students began the first semester in February 1782. At its opening, it was an elementary school but in August the grade was raised to "academy" level. On 10 November 1785, an act was passed incorporating it as The Proprietors of the Trenton Academy.

The Academy was a private school with each proprietor's share entitling the holder to send a child without other charge. Those pupils not with shares were required to pay a fee in addition to tuition. Originally teaching the courses of arithmetic and public speaking, the curriculum was soon enlarged to the studies of English, algebra, history, logic, rhetoric, and philosophy. Among the well-known graduates of the Academy were engineer Col. Washington A. Roebling, archeologist Charles Conrad Abbott, Chief Justice William S. Gummere, and *Daily True American* editor Joseph Naar.

Additional lots of land were purchased in 1783, 1788, and 1854 and numerous additions and alterations were made to the original building. A belfry was built in 1785 and a bell borrowed from the Episcopal Church was installed in 1788. It was said that the ringing of the bell could be heard all over the city. The main building was also used at times for religious purposes and one of the earliest Sunday Schools founded in the nation held sessions there.

In 1787, girls were admitted half-days and were taught in an unfurnished room by the wife of teacher John Mease. A brick school house which stood on the grounds of the Presbyterian Church on State Street was leased in 1800 for 99 years and used as the school for girls. The school house was repaired and a second story added and renamed the Young Ladies Academy.

The Trenton Academy closed in 1884 and the buildings and grounds were purchased by former pupil Clark Fisher so he could obtain the bell, which he moved to his Fisher and Norris Anvil Works. The property remained in his possession, used as a public school annex and a temporary location for the School of Industrial Arts. In 1900, Fisher sold the property to the Trustees of the Free Public Library of the City of Trenton in order to build the city's first permanent library building. The bell was presented by Mrs. Harriet Fisher-Andrew to the Free Public Library in 1935 in memory of her former husband.

## **Scope and Content Notes**

This collection consists of material related to Trenton Academy, and is separated into three series: I. School Records, II. Publications, III. Trenton Academy Association, IV. Scrapbooks, and V. Text Books.

## **Series Description**

### **Series I. School Records**

This series contains material related to the business operations of the Academy. It includes the original minutes and records of the Proprietors and roll books. The minutes book includes the list of original subscribers in 1781 with their individual number of shares. Isaac Collins is the first name listed. There are indentures conveying property to the Trustees from Benjamin Yard, and selling the overall property to Clark Fischer upon the Academy's dissolution. Also included is a report card for Richard R. Rogers for the quarter beginning November 1877, signed by his teacher W.M. Lanning. Oversized material includes diplomas for Robert Hunt (1791), Charles Ewing (1796) and James Ewing, Jr. (1820).

### **Series II. Publications**

This series contains items that were published by the school such as annual circulars and catalogues that include lists of currently enrolled students, faculty, trustees, text books used, course of study, and daily schedules. There is a handwritten transcript of the 1876 circular, done by a nephew of pupil George A. Howell, which also contains an appendix of recollections of later activities of several other pupils. Also included is the "Historical Sketch of the Trenton Academy" read by William L. Dayton at the Centennial Anniversary of its foundation on 10 February 1881.

### **Series III. Trenton Academy Association**

This series contains items related to the alumni reunion dinner of 10 February 1916, including planning material such as receipts, invitations, menu, and roster lists of names and addresses. It was held at Hildebrecht's Restaurant in Trenton, and after the dinner it was discovered that there was a \$38.81 deficit for which letters went out asking certain alumni to donate \$2 each to meet the shortfall. One folder contains responses and envelopes of these donors. Other folders contain letters of life updates and memories of school days. There was a Second Alumni Dinner in honor of George S. Grosvenor (Academy principal 1859-1875) on his 99<sup>th</sup> birthday, held at the Hildebrecht Hotel on 25 November 1930. This series contains three copies of the program from that dinner, with a list of participants' names and addresses.

### **Series IV. Scrapbooks**

This series includes a scrapbook [SB253] that was probably compiled in the 1930s but contains ephemera as early as 1853, including documents, photographs, rules & regulations, transcribed

letters, newspaper clippings, student rosters, and transfers of shares. Another scrapbook [SB256] was created in 1929 by Warren G. Donaldson as a memorial album dedicated to George S. Grosvenor (Academy principal 1859-1875) and alumni, which includes business cards, letters, signatures, and photographs. It is presumed that this scrapbook was presented during the Second Alumni Dinner in honor of Grosvenor in 1930. Note that the original photographic prints were removed from the album at some point prior to 2015 and replaced with photocopies. It is unknown at the time of this writing where the original prints are located and who made the switch.

### **Series V. Text Books**

This series contains text books that were used at the school. Titles include *The Principles of English Grammar Applied* in which the author David Cole writes the introduction to teachers from the school (1856, C. Scott Publisher, Trenton); and *Spelling by Oral and Dictation Exercises* (1857) which contains a school book plate and the names and handwriting of various students you may have used the book.

**Provenance:** Mostly unknown, but gathered together from throughout the overall Trentoniana Collection. The original minute book was by Edwin R. Walker's widow. Robert Hunt diploma donated by Harriet Fisher Andrew (Nov. 1935).

### **Container List**

#### **Box / Folder / Folder Title**

Series I.

- 1 / 1 / Records of the Proprietors, 1781-1859
- 1 / 2 / Roll Book, 1805 January 1 to 1822 October 1
- 1 / 3 / Roll Book, 1864 September 5 to 1870 April
- 1 / 4 / Indenture, purchase of land from Benjamin Yard, 1 May 1788
- 1 / 5 / Indenture, sale of land to Clark Fisher, 28 January 1889
- 1 / 6 / Report card, Richard R. Rogers, 12 November 1877
- OS2 / Diploma, Robert Hunt, 22 September 1791
- OS2 / Diploma, Charles Ewing, 16 September 1796
- OS2 / Diploma, James Ewing, Jr., 22 September 1820

Series II.

- 1 / 7 / Annual Circular and Catalogue (1851-1852, 1855 [2], 1856)
- 1 / 8 / Handwritten transcription of 1876 Circular, with recollections of pupils (1971)
- 1 / 9 / Historical Sketch of the Trenton Academy (1881) – 2 unbound copies
- 1 / 10 / Historical Sketch of the Trenton Academy (1881) – 2 bound copies

Series III.

- 2 / 1 / Planning ephemera, reunion dinner, January 1916
- 2 / 2 / Invitation and related material pertaining to reunion dinner, 2 February 1916
- 2 / 3 / Letters from donors in response to reunion deficit, 13 March 1916
- 2 / 4 / Correspondence from Lewis and Samuel Cheeseman, 15 & 22 February 1916
- 2 / 5 / Correspondence between James Lee and Howard Van Sant, S. Butler Murray, H. Way re: George Edmunds, 16 March 1916
- 2 / 6 / Program, Second Alumni Dinner in Honor of George S. Grosvenor, 25 November 1930

Series IV.

- 3 / Scrapbook [SB253]
- 3 / Trenton To-Day scrapbook [SB256]

Series V.

- 2 / 7 / Text books

## **Bibliography**

Felcone, Joseph J. *Clayton L. Traver: Antiquarian Bookseller & New Jerseyana Specialist*. Princeton, 2019.

Podmore, Harry J. *Trenton Old and New*. Trenton Tercentenary Committee, 1964.