

NATIONAL CRISIS, INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE: PENN AND THE CIVIL WAR

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The University of Pennsylvania is today an institution with a respected national reputation, but in the mid-nineteenth century, each of its departments was independent of the others and, as a whole, it did not attract national attention. Yet, the constituency it attracted and the location of Philadelphia gave it potential to become a prominent and enduring "national" school. The American Civil War interrupted such progress; indeed, Penn emerged from the war as more local than before. Although many individuals associated with Penn were greatly involved in the Civil War, the University itself played little role in the Civil War. The results of the war contributed to a self-absorbed, provincial attitude that remained with the school for years afterward.

In the mid-1800s the University of Pennsylvania consisted of four departments, each of which was, for all intents and purposes, a separate entity. The Department of Arts, also known as the College, and the Medical Department were the largest units. Both the Law Department and the Department of Mines, Arts, and Manufactures were relatively new and still very small. There was little or no interaction between the Medical Department and the College. Medical students were usually in their twenties whereas the College students were substantially younger; they had only to be fourteen years of age upon entering, and the

average entrance age was fifteen. This in itself was not unusual for a nineteenth-century college, but it meant that the students in the Medical and Arts Departments had little in common.

Of the two departments, the College was substantially smaller and commanded less attention and fewer resources. Undergraduate education at Penn was so neglected that in 1836 three of the University's trustees resigned in protest over the emphasis on the Medical School. By contrast, at Harvard during this period the administration expressed little interest in the professional schools and departments of the university, leaving the medical, law, theological, and scientific schools "to their several faculties with the result that none of those departments except the last was much to boast of,"¹ while the university presidents were preoccupied with strengthening the college. As a result, Harvard's Department of Arts and Sciences surpassed Penn's, but its Medical School could offer no such comparison. In 1843 a Penn medical student from Massachusetts wrote that "I had as lief stay at home as go to the Boston school; it is certainly a mere primary school compared to this."²

The strength of the Penn Medical Department derived from its ability to attract many more students than the College, thereby enhancing the University's reputation nationally. In the 1850-51 school term, for example, 95 students attended the Department of Arts and 466 students attended the Department of Medicine. Comparable figures in 1855-56 show 107 College students and 381 prospective physicians. Significantly, almost half of the Penn medical students were Southerners. Recruitment from distant states would have been

DENISE PIECZYNSKI, CLASS OF 1990, IS FROM BALLIETSVILLE, PENNSYLVANIA, AND PLANS TO PURSUE A GRADUATE PROGRAM IN HISTORY AT EITHER THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY OR THE UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS IN THE FALL.

more difficult for the younger College students since no dormitories were provided at the time. In 1850-51, all but four students in the College were Pennsylvanians; in 1855-56, all but seven. As Penn sociologist Digby Baltzell concluded, Penn "was a commuter college for most of its history."³

Penn was considered by many to be the first and foremost medical school in antebellum America. John C. Warren, writing to Caspar Wistar from Boston in 1811, remarked about Penn that "[t]here must be or ought to be a great medical school for

Rights" politicians that Southerners should remain at home to be educated. In 1850-51, each of the states which would eventually make up the Confederacy had at least one of its sons enrolled in the University's Medical Department.⁶ Southern students felt comfortable in Philadelphia, which was in many ways connected to Southern culture, mainly through blood ties and its location just above the Mason-Dixon Line.

Rising sectional antagonisms, however, in the first half of the nineteenth century raised many a

TABLE 1: STUDENTS IN THE DEPARTMENT OF MEDICINE, 1850 TO 1877

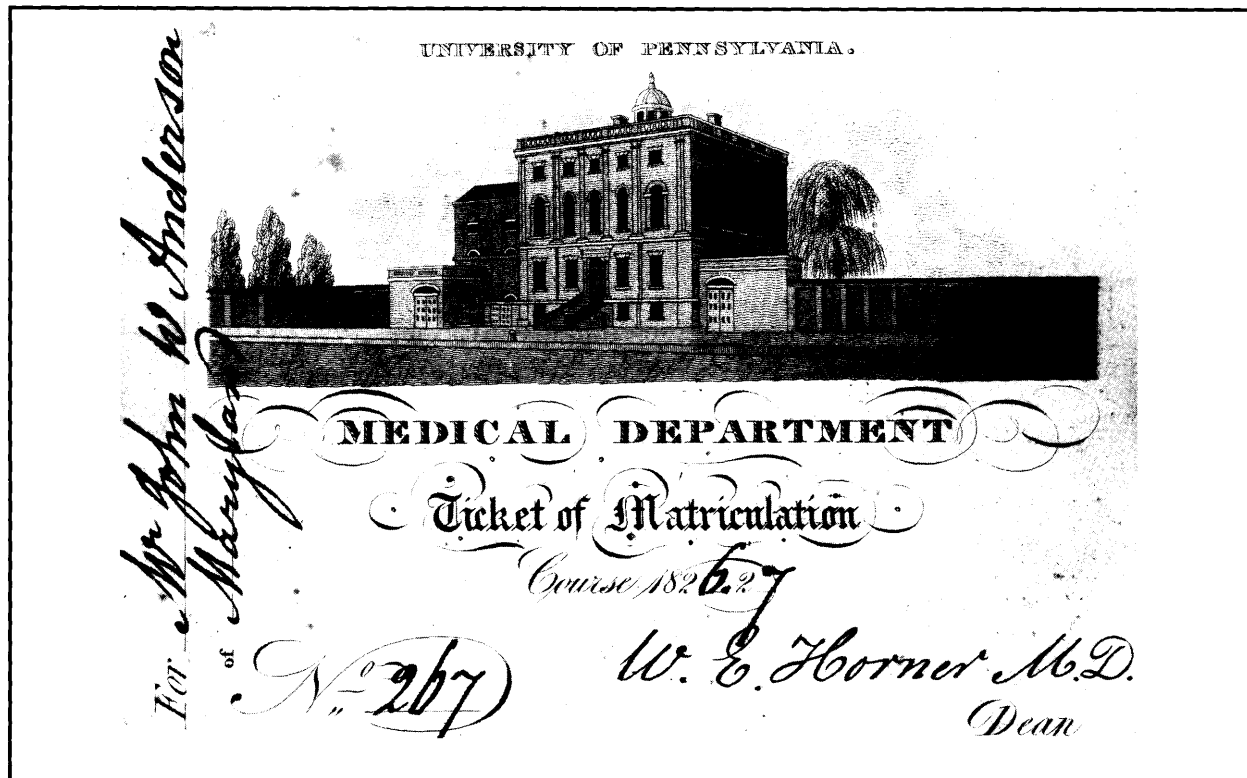
YEAR STATE	1850 -1851	1855 -1856	1860 -1861	1863 -1864	1865 -1866	1870 -1871	1876 -1877
PA	164	130	222	267	332	200	293
NJ	22	14	31	32	37	25	43
DE	9	3	10	8	11	12	9
SOUTH	228	180	130	20	66	26	29
OTHER	43	54	72	74	74	47	123
TOTAL	466	381	465	401	520	310	497

TABLE 2: STUDENTS IN THE DEPARTMENT OF ARTS, 1850 TO 1877

YEAR STATE	1850 -1851	1855 -1856	1860 -1861	1863 -1864	1865 -1866	1870 -1871	1876 -1877
PA	91	100	111	99	94	115	111
NJ	0	0	2	2	2	5	6
DE	2	3	3	2	0	1	0
SOUTH	1	3	5	1	0	0	1
OTHER	1	1	0	0	1	4	1
TOTAL	95	107	121	104	97	125	119

the U.S. Yours has taken that rank and nothing but a complete revolution or commutation of the greatest talents for the meanest can shake the prosperity of the Philadelphia school."⁴ This esteemed reputation remained with Penn in the period up to the Civil War, and in 1843 Henry O. White wrote that Penn's Medical School was in "every way decidedly the first on the continent of America."⁵ Because of its prominence, many Southerners sought admission, despite rising sectional tension and the demands of "Southern

warning against the dangers of sending Southern boys to Northern colleges "...where they were subjected to pernicious political Doctrines."⁷ As a result, the Southern states, particularly the coastal ones, made repeated efforts to establish their own medical schools. Yet, young men from Florida to Maryland continued to favor the older, established medical colleges of the North and continued to patronize the University of Pennsylvania's Department of Medicine. It was this constituency that gave the medical school its national character



MEDICAL MATRICULATION TICKET FOR 1826-1827, SHOWING THE 9^m STREET CAMPUS AS IT APPEARED BETWEEN 1802 AND 1829. DEAN WILLIAM E. HORNER WAS ONE OF THE MEDICAL DEPARTMENT'S GREAT FIGURES IN THE ANTE-BELLUM PERIOD; HIS STUDENT, JOHN W. ANDERSON OF MARYLAND, LIKE SO MANY OF HIS CLASSMATES OF THAT ERA, CAME NORTH TO PENN FOR HIS MEDICAL EDUCATION.

and subsequent influence over the rest of the university.

The coming of sectional strife instituted no change at Penn until 1859 when, following John Brown's raid, hundreds of students walked out of Northern medical schools and transferred to Southern counterparts. Right after the raid on Harper's Ferry, the Governor of Virginia sent a wire to Philadelphia encouraging Southern medical students to return home and finish their studies at local institutions. On December 23, 1859, the *Daily Dispatch* of Richmond, Virginia, reported the arrival of Philadelphia students: "An extra train of cars in the Richmond and Fredericksburg Railroad arrived yesterday, at the depot in this city, bringing over 200 returning Southern medical students from Philadelphia."⁸ Although former Penn students transferred to Southern schools, this did not mean that they believed these schools were superior. The medical schools recognized as the best in the country when the war broke out were the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, Jefferson Medical College, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Columbia University, the University of the City of New York Medical Department, Harvard

University Medical Department, Chicago Medical College and the New Orleans School of Medicine.⁹ Only one was a Southern school. Thus, the Department of Medicine was affected early on by the coming of the war. The Department made up for the loss of Southerners by recruiting more heavily from the local area. Thus, it was already becoming evident that what was once the nationally minded branch of the University was being forced to turn inward to survive.

Once the Civil War started, the College students seem to have distanced themselves from the conflict. A number of recollections from students of the period attest to this. George Woolsey Hodge, Class of 65, reflected the view of many of his class-mates when he commented that "as to the feeling in the College at that time...I should say that the war did nothing to interfere with its regular procedures....In fact there was an unusual spurt, so to speak, in College interest."¹⁰ The University Glee Club, Class Day, and the Bowl Fight were all instituted during the war years. Many of the College students were rather young to have joined the services, and also, "public opinion in the North did not require students to take up arms..."¹¹

These statements indicate a rather distanced

view of the war. This is not to imply that College students were not concerned or alarmed about the conflict, but Penn as an institution did nothing to encourage active participation in the defense of the Union. The Trustees' establishment of a University Light Infantry might seem to refute this; however, this Corps was created by the dictates of state law. Henry Coppee, the professor of Belles Lettres and the English Language and Literature, was selected as Commandant and Instructor of the Corps. He had graduated from West Point and had served in Mexico. He selected and the faculty appointed the student officers of the company which was to meet and drill at 1:45 p.m. on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays in the yard of the old Academy Hall at Fourth and Arch streets. The drill was supposedly mandatory, but attendance was often lacking and by 1865 the Trustees declared attendance not compulsory.

Penn's Light Infantry never saw active duty, although it did participate in local parades and received its own silk standard from a local woman of the community. In 1864 it received six cannon and was converted to a battery of light artillery. Interest in the corps could not be maintained once the war ended, however. Although 22 students, mostly officers of the battery, petitioned in 1865 to

maintain military instruction, the accidental discharge of one of the guns on April 22, 1865, which injured two students, brought about an end to the University Corps.

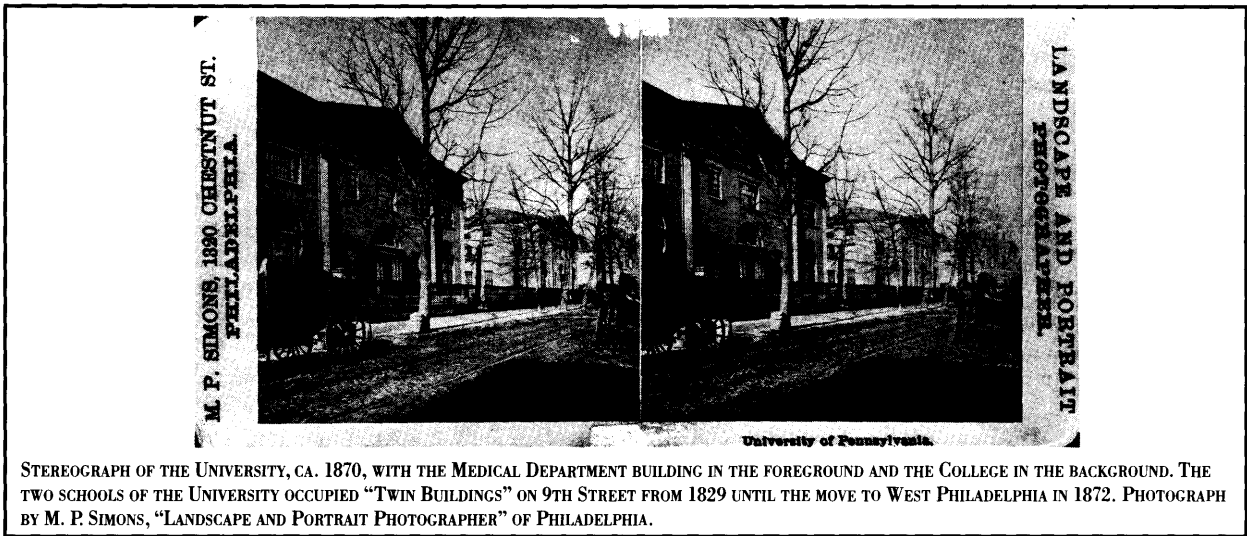
The Battle of Gettysburg was of special interest to the College, not just because of the proximity of the fighting to Philadelphia, but also because July 3 was the traditional date for commencement at the Musical Fund Hall. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* during these anxious days was filled with calls to arms to the citizens of the city to organize rapidly to defend the city. Penn remained absent from its pages except for a few brief notices about the commencement. Individuals at the University did, however, assist in the war effort during the Gettysburg scare. James W. Ashton reports that Professor Coppee and Ashton's classmate George Strawbridge were on the outskirts of the city "...throwing up breastworks and digging trenches, and preparing as well as it could be done for a resistance of the Rebels..."¹² Also, William B. Rawle, a College man, was actually fighting at Gettysburg at the time commencement was taking place.

It was through individuals such as Rawle and Ashton that Penn made a difference in the Civil War. It is, in a sense, ironic that although Penn



CLINIC

OF DR. JOSEPH LEIDY (M.D. 1844), PROFESSOR OF ANATOMY (1853-1891) AND DIRECTOR OF THE DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGY (1884-1891). LEIDY WAS ONE OF THE EMINENT SCIENTISTS WHO CONTRIBUTED TO PENN'S NATIONAL STATURE IN THE ANTE-BELLUM PERIOD. PHOTOGRAPH TAKEN BY HENRY L. BELL, 1888, IN THE



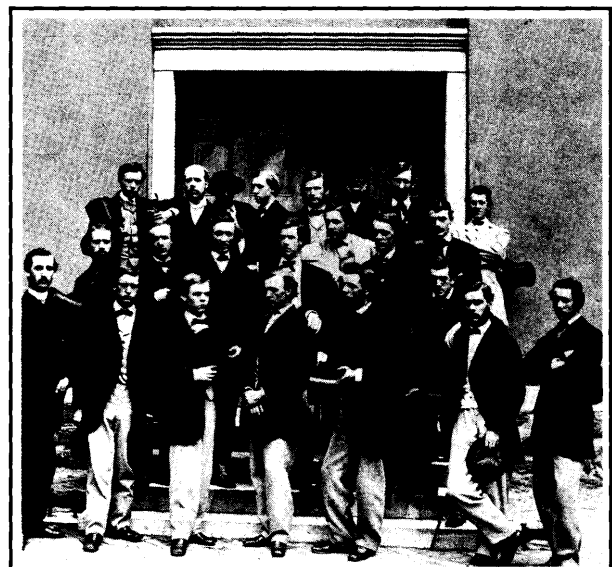
STEREOGRAPH OF THE UNIVERSITY, CA. 1870, WITH THE MEDICAL DEPARTMENT BUILDING IN THE FOREGROUND AND THE COLLEGE IN THE BACKGROUND. THE TWO SCHOOLS OF THE UNIVERSITY OCCUPIED "TWIN BUILDINGS" ON 9TH STREET FROM 1829 UNTIL THE MOVE TO WEST PHILADELPHIA IN 1872. PHOTOGRAPH BY M. P. SIMONS, "LANDSCAPE AND PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHER" OF PHILADELPHIA.

remained detached from most wartime experiences, it indirectly contributed a great deal to the war effort. A significant number of Penn graduates, including both Northerners and Southerners, enlisted in the two armies. In fact, more men from the University of Pennsylvania were involved in the war than from any other collegiate institution in the United States. According to Ewing Jordan, who compiled lists of the University men who served in the Civil War, 32 College men served in the Confederate services while 399 served in the forces of the United States.¹³ From the Department of Medicine, 633 were in the United States' services with 553 serving the Confederate States.¹⁴ Although both of Jordan's lists are admittedly incomplete, they give a telling picture of the extent of Penn graduates' involvement in the war. Also, the University provided more department and corps commanders than any other school in the United States. There were six major-generals, including McClellan who had attended the College before transferring to West Point. Another notable was Lieutenant-General John C. Pemberton, C.S.A., who graduated in the Class of 1834 and commanded at Vicksburg.

The University also sent more surgeons to the Union and Southern armies than were sent by any other university. The Surgeon-General of the United States Army was a Pennsylvania Medical School graduate, along with the Surgeon-General of the state of Virginia. Included also in these distinguished ranks were Venable, of Virginia, the Medical Director of General Ewell's Division, C.S.A.; and Garnett, of Virginia, Chief Surgeon, C.S.A., and physician to President Jefferson Davis and his cabinet.

The fact that Penn sent a large number of grad-

uates into both armies may have prevented the University officials from taking a definitive stand in the conflict. Instead, the Trustees and Faculty promoted a disengaged reaction which resembled a "business as usual" attitude. Trying to maintain a consistency in the face of potential disruption was not unusual in colleges at the time. At Harvard, for instance, college life went on much as usual, yet there were indications that the school had a more identifiable attitude toward the war. A volunteer company of undergraduates and instructors began drilling BEFORE war broke out, but once Fort Sumter was fired upon, "flags then blossomed from College windows. and a trans-



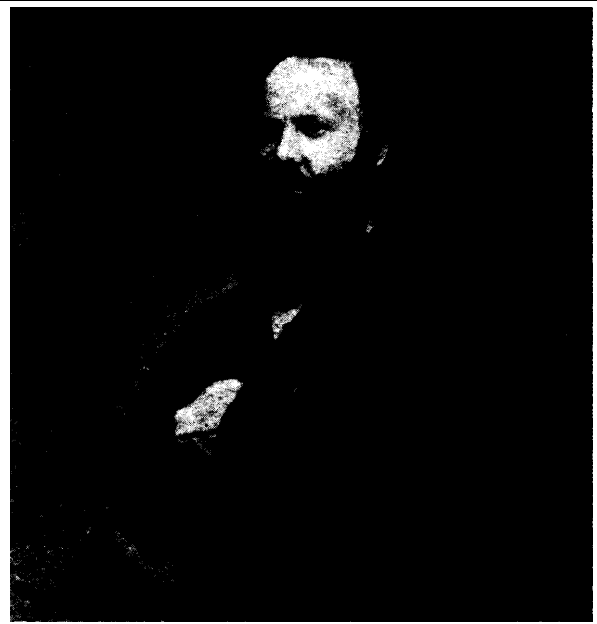
COLLEGE CLASS OF 1865, POSING ON THE STEPS OF THE 9TH STREET BUILDING. GEORGE WOOLSEY HODGE, STANDING AT THE EXTREME RIGHT, BACK ROW, RECALLED MANY YEARS LATER THAT "THE WAR DID NOTHING TO INTERFERE WITH [THE COLLEGE'S] REGULAR PROCEDURES"

parency 'Harvard for War' appeared on Halworthy."¹⁵ Harvard, though, never had the significant number of Southern students that Penn did. Penn chose to withdraw itself from national events, and thus perpetuated a local attitude.

Although Penn's major activity in the war was indirect, through individuals, this is not to imply that the University of Pennsylvania actively attempted to restrict serious wartime involvement. The activities of the Trustees themselves demonstrate where the loyalties of most of them lay. Adolphe Edward Borie became a founder of the Union League and contributed largely to the funds for the relief of the Northern troops. John Welsh was the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Sanitary Fair held in Philadelphia to raise money for northern soldiers and sailors; and Francis Gurney Smith, Jr., a professor of medicine, served at the Christian Street Military Hospital in the city and made several visits to military hospitals in the field. These trustees, however, did not encourage any official show of patriotism on behalf of the school.

Like most universities of the period, however, including Southern ones, Penn did give students the opportunity to join the services and still receive their degrees. On August 6, 1862, the Board of Trustees passed a resolution allowing students in good standing who had volunteered or been drafted into the service within twelve months of their graduation to receive their diplomas. Only four men received such leaves of absence from the Board of Trustees, however.

No matter how introverted the University remained, the school was affected by the war. The dramatic decrease in the number of Southern students was the most obvious result, which proved to be a serious crisis for the Medical School. The College of Arts and Sciences, however, changed little structurally except for the formation of the Light Infantry/Artillery. The students who attended had always been local, and enrollment remained relatively constant, even through the war years. Thus, the College remained more stable than the Medical School, and when the war ended, it possessed more influence in the University as a result. Yet, with more influence it did very little. There were no curriculum changes made, and the trustees contributed little toward innovations or new policies in response to the war. Provost Goodwin, in office at this time, exemplified this attitude toward structural changes when he observed that "...any modification of the pre-sent system to meet the demands of public opinion was unlikely to be agreed to by the University



HENRY COPPEE, GRADUATE OF THE UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY AT WEST POINT AND PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH AT PENN, 1855-1866, WAS COMMANDANT AND INSTRUCTOR OF THE UNIVERSITY LIGHT INFANTRY CORPS DURING THE CIVIL WAR.

authorities."¹⁶ This statement in itself indicates that there was a call for some change coming from the community, but Penn was not responsive to it.

Despite its self-absorption, the University, it should be remembered, was not disloyal toward the Union. Penn supported the Nation's cause and denounced what it considered to be a "wicked rebellion." However, ties had been established between the University and the South due to the significant number of students from those states who had attended the Medical School before the war. The students of the school and University professors and Trustees participated in the war as their own consciences allowed, but Penn as an institution remained aloof from the conflict.

The Civil War was in some respects a turning point for the University of Pennsylvania. The division between the Department of Medicine and the College was, to a degree, ameliorated as the constituency of all the departments became the same and stayed the same for years afterwards. It was obvious that Southerners would not again attend the University in large numbers as before the war. Most universities in the North were so affected, but Penn's Department of Medicine was especially hurt by this loss. This department had provided Penn with national recognition, but the war had greatly transformed it, and now a more local point of view dominated its new constituency. This narrow provincialism took many years to overcome.