

History of the Mechanics' Library.

The agitation of the A. Herr Smith Free Library project, during the past year, has suggested the propriety of writing a brief history of the Mechanics' Library Association, undoubtedly the oldest organization of its kind in Lancaster, the object of the author being to give an outline as to its origin and early struggles, and also a short sketch of some of the parties who were the prime movers in its formation, and at the same time to touch lightly upon a few of the more salient points in its career from then until now.

The Mechanics' Library Society was the outcome of a series of meetings of prominent and public-spirited citizens of Lancaster, who had at heart the establishment of a society in the interests of the mechanic arts, and especially to meet the needs of the apprentices; a library to be one of the features.

As early as December 30, 1828, a meeting, with the foregoing object in view, had been arranged for, which was, however, not held until January 10, 1829, and was then convened at the "Bull's Head" tavern, kept by the widow Charlotte Eichholtz, on the corner of East King and South Christian streets, the site now occupied by Augustus Rhoads, jeweler. This meeting was presided over by General Jeremiah Mosher,¹ with James Cameron² and Col. Levi Rogers, Vice Presi-

¹"Jeremiah Mosher was a blacksmith, and carried on the business in Lancaster for many years. He served under Arnold in the attempt to storm Quebec, and was one of the forlorn hope which penetrated to the works in what was

dents. Henry Breneman and Ingham Wood were the Secretaries.

The meeting was attended by some of the most intelligent citizens of Lancaster, and the subject was fully and freely discussed, after which committees were appointed.

In accordance with previous arrangements, meetings were held on February 4 and June 18, 1829. Through the efforts of those at the head of the movement these meetings were largely attended. The object of the Society was explained and rules and regulations discussed. After a very general interchange of views, the meeting of June 18 adjourned to meet again on the 8th of July.

July 8, 1829. In pursuance to call a meeting was held at the Bull's Head tavern, and the Mechanics' Society (later on the title was changed to the Mechanics' Library Society) was formally organized, with the following board of officers: President, Hugh Maxwell;³ Vice President, Ingham

called the lower town. All his companions were killed or wounded but himself, and he, being taken prisoner, was afterwards released and served in the American army until the close of the Revolution. He was made a Colonel in 1812, and was a member of the State Legislature, 1815-18. At his death he was buried with the honors of war."—Harris' History.

²"James Cameron (a brother of Simon Cameron) was at this time owner and editor of the Lancaster Sentinel, and took a prominent part in the affairs of the city. He held the position of Colonel in the War of the Rebellion, and was killed at the first battle of Bull Run."—Harris' History.

³"Hugh Maxwell was born in Ireland, on December 7, 1777, and came to Philadelphia when quite young. At the age of nineteen he entered the publishing business. That he was particularly fitted for this calling is shown by the fact that he cast his own type and made his own wood cuts. In 1817 he removed to Lancaster and established the Lancaster Gazette, which he conducted with marked ability for a number of years. He afterward purchased the Lancaster Journal, one of the oldest Democratic papers in Pennsylvania, which he continued up to 1839. He

Wood; Librarian, Abner Thomas; Treasurer, Arthur Armstrong;⁴ Secretary, Abm. N. Breneman.⁵

Committees on Constitution, Library and Soliciting Contributions were now appointed, and the scheme was in motion.

After its organization the Society went actively to work. Meetings for consultation and the hearing of reports were frequently held. After a good deal of earnest consideration, a constitution was finally adopted, which was subsequently signed by ninety-nine members, of whom, report says, as early as 1880, the late Dr. John L. Atlee, Sr., was the sole survivor. The writer was unable to procure a list of these names, as they are not recorded upon the minutes of the Society.

Herewith is appended an abstract from the Preamble to the Constitution: "We, the mechanics of the city of Lancaster, aware of the importance of the station which we fill in society; of our numbers and our strength, and being deeply impressed with an opinion that the duty which we owe to youths placed under our care does not merely consist in giving them instructions in the mechanical branches which we pursue, but that, as far as in our power, we should bestow upon them those advantages of education

was also the inventor of the printers' roller. He was classed as one of the most active and enterprising citizens. Through him, was called, at Columbia, the first meeting which proposed the uniting of that place with Philadelphia by railroad. He died in November, 1860, at the age of eighty-three years."—Harris' History.

"Arthur Armstrong was a noted painter, and there are still, it is said, in the possession of citizens of Lancaster quite a number of his paintings. As an artist he enjoyed a good reputation in his day."—Harris' History.

⁵Abm. N. Breneman was one of Lancaster's old-time business men. For many years he carried on the shoe business on West King street. He was an enterprising and progressive citizen.

which many of us have reason to deplore were withheld from ourselves; have determined to form ourselves into a society under the name and title of "The Mechanics' Society" of the city and county of Lancaster; for the purpose of promoting the improvement of the Mechanic Arts, elevating the character of those concerned in them to their just standard, and advancing their general interest and welfare. To attain these ends it behoves us, while we labor to meet competition on fair grounds and to encourage each other in our several avocations, to provide the means of instruction and improvement to our apprentices. We must encourage virtue and discourage vice; we must wean them from spending their leisure hours in idle and immoral pursuits; we must foster industry and reward merit; we must open to them the sources of knowledge, that on their arrival at maturity they may be enabled to take that station in respectable society to which the ignorant and uneducated never can be admitted.

"One of the steps toward the attainment of these objects is the formation of an Apprentices' Library and School. The library should consist of books of instruction upon the Arts and Sciences, Civil Government, Natural Philosophy, etc. Also works of fancy, of standard value."

On November 13, 1829, by-laws were adopted, and Friday evening fixed as the time for its opening to subscribers, and, singular as it may seem, this rule still holds good, as the above evening of the week is the one now observed in serving books to subscribers. The committee on collections reported at this meeting.

Among the contributors' names we find those of Ex-President of the United States James Buchanan, \$50.

Among those giving lesser amounts and books are Amos Ellmaker, Esq., Benjamin Champneys, Esq., John Yeates, Esq., Hon. A. L. Hayes, R. Moore, M. D., Samuel Park, Esq., Redmond Conyngham, Esq., George Bryan, Esq., Newton Lightner, Esq., Geo. Ford, Esq., E. R. Evans, Esq., A. B. Kauffman, Esq., David Paul Brown, Esq., Hon. Thaddeus Stevens, David Longenecker, Esq., A. Carpenter, M.D., A. Ellmaker, Esq., E. C. Reigart, Esq., Hon. W. Franklin, George Ross, Esq., Joshua Scott, Adam Diller, John Bachman, C. Hager, Mrs. Charlotte Eicholtz, S. R. Slaymaker, G. H. Krug, W. Hambright, Jonathan Foltz, N. C. Schofield, R. Moderwell, J. F. Heinitsh, J. Zimmerman, William Kirkpatrick, John F. Steinman, W. Hopkins, Esq., R. A. Evans, C. Bachman, John W. Cochran, John W. Forney, Esq., and Mary Dickson.

A charter was obtained under date of May 26, 1831, and in connection therewith the following certificates of the Attorney General and Judges of the Supreme Court may be of interest:

“Pennsylvania, ss

“I, Samuel Douglass, Attorney General of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, do hereby certify that I have perused and examined the preceding instrument, and am of the opinion that the objects, articles, and conditions therein set forth and contained are lawful.

“In witness whereof I have hereunto set my hand, the twelfth day of May, Anno Domini, 1831.

“S. DOUGLASS,

“Attorney General, etc.”

“Pennsylvania, ss.

“We, the Justices of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, severally certify that we have perused and exam-

ined the preceding instrument, and concur with the Attorney General, that the objects, articles and conditions therein set forth and contained are lawful.

“Witness our hands at Lancaster, the 26th day of May, Anno Domini, 1831. John B. Gibson, Molton C. Rogers, Charles Houston, John Ross, John Kennedy.

“In open Court, at Lancaster, the 27th day of May, A. D., 1831.”

At this time George Wolf was Governor and Samuel McKean, Secretary, of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

The charter is in the usual form, setting forth the object of the society, as already briefly given in the abstract of the preamble to the Constitution.

The officers of the Society at this time were: President, Bonam Sampson; Vice President, Jacob Snyder; Secretary, Abm. N. Breneman; Treasurer, Jacob L. Hoffmeier; Librarian, Peter G. Eberman; Library Committee, Emanuel Shaeffer, Jacob McCulley, William Frick, Thomas Feran and Thomas Cox.

Through the activity of the officers and members, in connection with the liberality of the citizens, a library of respectable size was soon secured, and which was added to from year to year, until in 1844 it numbered some two thousand volumes.

In November, 1836, a committee having been appointed to suggest a plan for the putting into operation of the provisions of the constitution calling for an evening school for apprentices, reported at considerable length. The following is a brief abstract:

“Your committee suggest that the institution be called the Hall of In-

struction of the Mechanics' Society of the City and County of Lancaster.

"The instruction shall consist of individual teaching, suited to the wants and capacities of the youths attending; and of popular instruction by familiar lectures.

"The teachers to consist of such members of the Society as may volunteer their services, and of other patriotic individuals similarly disposed.

"The course of instruction to continue twelve weeks, and teaching and lectures to be given one evening in every week during the course.

"Tickets of admission to members of the Society for the course, fifty cents for the first pupil, and twenty-five cents for each additional one. To others, not belonging to the Society, one dollar for the first and fifty cents for each additional pupil.

"Balance of expenses to go to profit and loss of the Mechanics' Society.

"Lewis C. Jungerich, Henry Pinkerton, Henry E. Leaman, Henry C. Locher, Peter McConomy, committee."

The scheme here proposed was inaugurated the following month. Some of the day-school teachers took part as instructors (the common school having come to life by this time). This school became quite popular and resulted in some good work. It was supplemented by lectures on history, natural philosophy, chemistry and astronomy. These lectures becoming very popular, their scope was extended until they embraced almost every science and subject except that of religion. Among the lecturers we find the names of Redmond Conyngham, Esq., Washington L. Atlee, M. D., John W. Forney, Esq., David Paul Brown, Esq., Dr. Buckingham, Dr. Gleason and Dr. Fowler, the latter on phrenology.

A vote of thanks tendered Dr. Atlee.

by the Society, for his able lectures on chemistry, elicited the following reply:

“Lancaster, Nov. 13, 1837.

“Gentlemen: Please accept my thanks for your very friendly and polite communication. The course of lectures on chemistry, delivered at the Mechanics’ Institute, was necessarily imperfect. It was my constant endeavor, however, to impress upon you the great and fundamental principles of this Science. With this foundation it will be easy for you now to raise the superstructure, by the daily application of these principles, and by appropriating a portion of your time to the study of chemical works. You are well aware that all the natural sciences are, more or less, connected with chemistry, and it is for the advancement of science in general that I would urge your continued attention to this branch in particular.

“Permit me, gentlemen, to assure you that my greatest regret is, that I was not able ‘to subserve the purposes’ of the Mechanics’ Institute better; and if I have, in any measure, aided in ‘implanting the seeds of knowledge and virtue in the rising generation,’ it is my greatest satisfaction, as it was my sole aim.

“Gentlemen, I return my sincere acknowledgments to you, and through you to the Mechanics, Apprentices and Members of your Society, for the more than ordinary attention bestowed upon my course of Lectures.

“I am, gentlemen, very respectfully,

“WASHINGTON L. ATLEE.

“To Mr. L. C. Jungerich and others, committee.”

Similar action was taken by the Society in reference to the course of lectures delivered by Redmond Conyng-

ham, Esq., and which brought from that gentleman an equally warm acknowledgment.

On March 20, 1837, the Legislature was petitioned for an appropriation for books, etc., but did not respond—perhaps fortunately, as the Society developed capacity for self help. Another effort for State help was made in 1839, and an item appropriating \$3,000 to the Mechanics' Institute of Lancaster was inserted in a general appropriation bill which passed both Houses of the Legislature. The bill was, however, vetoed by the Governor, David R. Porter. An effort to pass the bill without his signature was unsuccessful. The Examiner and Herald, of May 23, 1839, edited and published by Robert W. Middleton, makes this comment:

“This is not the first time the Governor has shown his opposition to the Mechanics of Lancaster. Two or three years since, after one of our members, by great perseverance, had an appropriation to the Institute inserted in a bill, David R. Porter had it stricken out, and the bill passed without it.”

On May 28, 1838, we find a committee of the Society attending a lyceum convention held in Lancaster, of which considerable notice was taken at the time. During this period, 1836 to 1839, we find the names of Geo. M. Steinman, Christopher Hager, G. Sener, Hon. W. Franklin, Eli Parry, John F. Shroder and other prominent citizens quite active in the affairs of the Society, though not among the officers. About this time John W. Forney, Esq., then editor and proprietor of the Lancaster Intelligencer, and later on distinguished as politician and Secretary of the United States Senate, proposed an exhibition of Lancaster manufactures, similar to one that

had just been given by the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia, but the project was evidently abandoned.

On February 18, 1839, Christian Gast was elected a member, who soon after became Treasurer, which office he held for more than half a century, resigning in 1891, when his son, Wm. H. Gast, was chosen to fill the position, who, however, a year later resigned, when the Lancaster Trust Company succeeded to the office.

1838-39. The interests of the Society were now rapidly growing, and it was during the latter year that they built the hall, afterward known as the Mechanics' Institute, now No. 31 South Queen street, and at present occupied by Julius Loeb. The ground site cost \$2,000, and a \$5,000 building, 30 by 70 feet, put under contract. On the 16th of December of the same year the Society met in its own hall, and found they had in subscriptions to date \$3,677.43. The ground floor of the hall was occupied as an apprentices' library and reading room. The second floor was let out for concerts, balls, lectures and other entertainments.

The Society was originally organized for the benefit of mechanics, and especially apprentices, and none but such could become members. But as early as 1837 this provision was modified to apply only to the officers and standing committees.

Evidently more than ordinary interest was manifested in the study of astronomy, for early in the year 1840 we find the Society in possession of a telescope.

On January 19, 1841, their indebtedness was \$700 on lot, \$2,700 on building; total, \$3,400. March 21 the building in the rear of the hall was leased "for a drill room."

On March 22, 1842, the books had been used enough to require repairs,

which were made. In this year the ladies came to the support of the Society by holding a fair, which netted \$1,000, of which \$800 was promptly paid on the debt. In the same year, in October, the experiment of a reading room was abandoned, after several months' trial. John R. Russell was Secretary at this time. Edward C. Darlington, one of the proprietors and editors of the Lancaster Examiner and Herald, a fine scholar and writer, became actively interested in the Society during this period.

During the year 1843 the interest began to lag, the finances were at a standstill, with a debt of \$2,666, which was evidently pressing the Society. For the next few years it hardly held its own, and in 1846 the School Board contributed \$75 for the use of the books. In the same year the hall was let to the Friendship Fire Company to hold a ball. After a struggle of a year or two longer, it was compelled to discontinue its meetings and close its library.

At a meeting of the Society, held on December 20, 1852, owing to the continued lack of interest and financial difficulties, it was agreed to sell the hall to the Second Presbyterian Church for \$4,000, and the building in the rear to John Keller for \$1,400. The sale was completed in 1853. Previous to this the library had been loaned to a Young Men's Society, who did not take proper care of it, and for which reason the loan was of short duration.

Having thus disposed of its real estate, and paying its debts, the balance, \$3,850, was invested in mortgages on city property. Subsequently \$300 were added to this sum, making a total of \$4,150. The following action relative to the investment was unanimously adopted: "which shall be permanently invested, and which shall

in no event be expended unless for the purchase of real estate, if the Society may at some future period consider it necessary. The interest only to be expended in the purchase of books and the incidental expenses in the support of the library." This action, so wisely taken long ago, is still strictly adhered to.

The Society, in thus winding up its affairs, did not, however, permit its organization to die. The possibilities of its object, though never fully attained, lay very near to the hearts of a faithful few, who held stated meetings and kept the interest alive. They met annually and elected officers to look after its investments, making reports thereon from time to time.

In December, 1854, a room had been secured on the second floor of the building then occupied by Peter McConomy as a shoe store, now No. 17 West King street, and once more gathering its books again opened the library, and from then until now it has been open to the public, and its collection of books has steadily increased in number and value.

On January 18, 1858, the Society had total assets of \$4,385.54. This year a catalogue was made by John Baer, of which works of fiction occupy one-half page in a total of eleven pages.

In 1860, another catalogue was issued, in which the list of officers were: President, P. G. Eberman; Vice President, Chas. Gillespie; Secretary, Henry Pinkerton; Treasurer, Christian Gast; Library Committee, S. S. Rathvon, H. C. Locher, Geo. Wiant, J. M. W. Geist, F. Smith. Of these Geo. Wiant alone survives.

At a meeting of the Society in 1864, the Library Committee reported three thousand volumes, which number has been more than doubled since then.

In 1866 Thaddeus Stevens presented

public documents relating to the war and other subjects. During this period, from '63 to '66, Messrs. H. A. Rockafeld (Secretary) and Joseph Preston were actively interested.

In 1871 G. W. Reichenbach became Secretary and in 1878 was succeeded by S. H. Zahm. During this period William Diller was President and S. S. Rathvon was Librarian, and so continued until his death, when Percy Carpenter, the present officer, was elected.

At the annual election of 1879 the following board of officers were chosen: President, H. R. McConomy; Vice President, J. W. Byrne; Secretary, S. H. Zahm; Treasurer, Christian Gast; Librarian, S. S. Rathvon; Property Committee, G. M. Zahm, Philip Doersom, Thomas Bakes; Library Committee, S. S. Rathvon, W. F. Duncan, D. C. Haverstick, George Wiant, J. W. Byrne. Of these Wiant and Haverstick alone survive.

H. R. McConomy held the office of President until his death, in 1890, when the late William A. Heitshu succeeded him, the latter retaining the office until his death in 1904, when he was succeeded by D. C. Haverstick, the present incumbent.

In 1881, through the efforts of the late J. W. Byrne, the library was opened twice a week, but, the increase in its patronage not justifying the additional expense, the effort was soon abandoned.

In 1883, through the efforts of Dr. Buehrle, the library made special arrangements to issue books to the schools, at reduced rates, which continued for some time, but was abandoned.

In 1885 Dr. R.K.Buehrle was elected Secretary, the old limitation of "mechanics only" as officers having become obsolete. He held the office

until 1900, when the late Joseph D. Pyott was elected.

In 1886 a new constitution was adopted and approved by the Court, which is still in force. It broadens the scope of the Society in respect to membership, but continues the old provision against merging into any other institution.

1890. During the early part of this year the society lost by death its President, H. R. McConomy, who had held the office for over fourteen years.

During this same year the librarian, Dr. S. S. Rathvon, presented an unusually full and interesting report, referring to the fact that while the aims and purposes of the original founders of the Society had never been fully realized, nevertheless its mission of usefulness had been continuous for a period of over fifty years, and was slowly but surely growing. This report of the Society's venerable librarian proved to be his last, his death occurring the following year.

In 1891 Percy Carpenter, the present incumbent, succeeded Dr. S. S. Rathvon as librarian.

1894. In January of this year a largely attended special meeting was held to consider two propositions—one in favor of an independent hall for the use of the library, and one in favor of a combination with the Y. M. C. A. (This question came up in connection with the fact that the rooms of the Society on West King street, and which had been occupied for so many years, had to be vacated.) The meeting decided to continue the library as heretofore, and rooms were secured over Locher's Drug Store, No. 7½ East King street, to which it was removed. It remained here until April 1, 1900, when it was removed to the A. Herr Smith Free Library Building, No. 125 North Duke street. Miss

Eliza Smith, who had donated the building to the city for a free library, generously offered the Society the use of two of its rooms rent free.

1900. The late Joseph D. Pyott was elected Secretary, succeeding Dr. Buehrle, who declined a re-election.

The proposition of Miss Eliza Smith, to lease, free of cost, a portion of the building donated by her to the city for a free library to the Mechanics' Library Society was accepted, and a vote of thanks tendered the generous donor. The Society met in its new quarters for the first time on April 17, 1900.

The death of Vice President John W. Lowell is also reported as occurring during this year.

1904. In the death of the Secretary, Joseph D. Pyott, which occurred early in this year, the Society lost one of its most useful members. His wide knowledge of authors and books made him especially valuable on the Library Committee, of which he had been a continuous member for many years.

William A. Heitshu, a prominent citizen, and President of the Society for fourteen years, also passed away during the year 1904.

After the death of Miss Smith the building passed into the hands of an Executive Committee, appointed by the Court, for the purpose of carrying out the wishes of the donor. Therefore, on the first of October, 1904, the Society entered into an agreement with said committee for the continuance of the rooms at a rental of \$100 per year.

1905. The officers of the Society, elected in January of this year, are: President, D. C. Haverstick; Vice President, Hon. John B. Warfel; Secretary, Frank Shibley; Treasurer, the Lancaster Trust Company; Trustees,

M. T. Garvin, John H. Baumgardner, R. J. Houston; Library Committee, Dr. R. K. Buehrle, Hon. J. B. Warfel, Frank T. Thurlow, R. J. Houston and Percy Carpenter. The librarian, elected by the Library Committee, is Percy Carpenter, who has held office continuously since 1891.

As previously referred to, the Society has invested funds to the amount of about \$4,300, of which the principal is kept intact. The receipts, from interest, membership dues and subscriptions to the library, amount to a considerable sum, and the Library Committee are constantly on the alert for new books, and purchases are made at least once every two months, in amounts of from \$10 to \$20, as the accumulated funds warrant. This continuous adding, it will be readily seen, keeps the collection fairly well up with the times. The expenses of the Society, outside of the \$100 per annum rent, are comparatively small.

The library is open to subscribers for the drawing of books every Friday evening, from 7 to 9 o'clock, and \$1.00 pays for a year's subscription.

The books drawn and exchanged by subscribers and members on one of these evenings number from eighty to one hundred.

The Society meets for the transaction of business on the third Tuesday evening of each month.

In closing this somewhat lengthy sketch, the writer wishes to add that among this collection of books may be found many rare and antique volumes, of which, however, the author of this history has not the time to examine and describe, but trusts some future historian, with abundant leisure and inclination, will explore and bring to light the stores of ancient thought, now hidden away on crowded shelves and between time-worn covers. Many

of these ancient volumes were donated by citizens of Lancaster, and others secured through once existing libraries. Among the latter may be mentioned the Juliana Library, founded before the American Revolution, and of which, history tells us, Thomas Penn and wife were patrons. Others came from the Misses Jordan's and the Young Men's Private Library.

The facts of this historical sketch are gleaned, first, from the minutes of the Society, in part, as prepared by the late Secretary, Joseph D. Pyott, and published in the Lancaster Labor Leader of April 7, 1900. Also from the Lancaster county histories of Rev. J. I. Mombert, D.D., Alexander Harris and Ellis and Evans, the latter of whom draw this conclusion:

"It must be very apparent how the Mechanics' Library has been enabled to prolong its existence and usefulness for more than half a century, namely, by keeping intact its invested funds, and economically confining its expenditures within the limits of its income from accruing interest and subscriptions to the library."

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