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THESIS

A HISTORY OF
THE FRANKLIN SOCIETY AND LIBRARY COMPANY
OF
LEXINGTON, VIRGINIA

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Introduction.

To the compiler of any sort of history the greatest task is the unearthing of source material, whether that history be the narrative of a nation's progress through the centuries or an humble account of the deeds of an individual. In an undertaking of this sort one would naturally expect to discover a plenitude of data from which to select the predominant features and set them forth in an illuminating manner. The Franklin Society had an uninterrupted existence of nearly a century, during which time its records were painstakingly preserved through the vicissitudes of war and reconstruction, Mr. John W. Fuller being custodian of its books and records for almost fifty years. This gentleman seems to have had an acute conception of the duties of his office, for he was constantly reminding the Secretary and other officials to maintain their books in proper order.

However, the successors of Mr. Fuller did not consider their duties quite as important, nor did they apply themselves as conscientiously to the preserving of the documents which came into their hands. As a result of indifference on the part of these men, and as a result of the frequent shifting of the records from one meeting place to another, the documents became woefully confused. But the greatest calamity, so far as the preparation of this paper is concerned, occurred when the property of the Society was transferred to the University. Through some unexplained agency the papers were scattered, the vast bulk of the minutes were lost, and other valuable data became unavailable. For this default no censure is to be attached to the University authorities; it was just one of those misfortunes which happen without any apparent cause or any responsible medium.

The writer has been able to locate most of the minutes of the Society from the beginning of the Union Society until the year 1812, together with the reports of the President and Directors, Librarian, Treasurer and Collector for many years; also the record books of the Librarian and Treasurer, and especially the volume into which Mr. Fuller transcribed his reports and the reports of many different committees for a period covering thirty years of his term. Available to the writer, likewise, were the incomplete files of the Lexington Gazette in the University Library, and the office of the Clerk of Rockbridge County; while the Virginia State Library furnished him with material that was relatively important. Invoices, reports of committees on questions, letters to the President and Librarian of the Society -- all served to furnish information that was highly pertinent to the construction of this sketch. It is proper to mention in this connection the assistance given the writer by many of the townspeople of Lexington, some of whom were acquainted with the Society in its later days, while others repeated facts which had come down to them from members of a by-gone generation.

The compilation and arrangement of the date has proved an attractive burden, for the obstacles confronting the writer gave to his endeavor something of the nature of an adventure, at once stimulating as well as inspiring. It is his earnest hope that this paper will be of value in perpetuating the history and ideals of the Franklin Society;

A History of
the Franklin Society and Library Company

I

Early Literary Societies of Lexington

The earliest record of European exploration of the Valley of Virginia dates back to 1716, at which time Governor Spottswood, conceiving the idea that the Great Lakes lay just over the Blue Ridge, decided to see how close the French were to his colony. As the result of much drinking and carousing, the party was compelled to turn back without accomplishing its mission. Ten years later several families of Germans had settled in the valley.*

In 1731, one John Lewis headed a band of pioneers to settle in the lower Valley, on a tract owned by a man named Just Hit. Finding that this land was claimed by Lord Fairfax, Lewis, who had had experience in quarreling with noble landlords in Ireland, moved a hundred miles away where he would be beyond the domain of Fairfax. He settled near Staunton and was soon followed by wave after wave of people of kindred traits and characteristics.** None of these settlers was of noble blood; none had more than enough of the material things to get him to his destination; there was not a Cavalier amongst them. They

* Publications of Scotch-Irish Society of America, Lexington Meeting, 79-100,

**Morton-History of Rockbridge County, 19-22.

were a sturdy and hardy people who brought with them on pack-horses, beds and clothing, some necessary implements to till the soil, seed corn and Bibles.

Hardly had they built their first crude homes when they began the construction of schoolhouse and churches. They were a religious people, Calvinists of the strictest sort. Many of them had fled from Ulster to the New World because of the rigours of persecution resulting from the test act of 1704. Being Presbyterians they were driven from their homes, turned from every office and, even, according to Froude "were prosecuted as fornicators for living with their own wives," because they were married by other than Episcopal dignitaries.*

Narrow and bigoted as they may seem to have been, they were driven to such a position by the harshness of their persecution. The philosopher was right when he expressed the thought that "Religion feeds on martyrdom." These people were religious martyrs and since, religion and politics were so intimately bound together, they were also political martyrs. Famine and the oppression of landowners had forced still others from the shores of Ulster where long-suffering and want had made them thrifty, if anything was needed to give thrift to penurious Scotchmen. Democratic in the extreme were these children of misfortune. There was not a snob among them, for misery and tyranny had produced a spirit of fellowship, while their only code of ethics, and that code was the very highest, taught the

* Froude- History of England, 265-6.

blessed gospel of the brotherhood of man. There was none superior except God, and all His children were on the same plane of equality.

From the very first these people began the construction of schoolhouses. They held the schoolmaster in high esteem, although they were a plain and unlettered people. In the main, they were farmers and mechanics, but even before 1800 these Scotch-Irish had founded over a quarter of a hundred schools and colleges in all parts of America.* The intellectual activity of these people was always of the keenest. Situated as they were in the Valley, far from all communication with the outer world (Three weeks was consumed in a one-way trip to Philadelphia) they showed, nevertheless, a praiseworthy interest in the external activities of their times. The Valley was hard to penetrate; its fertile lands produced dense forests; and the only outlet was by difficult and tedious trips to the Shenandoah, down this river to the junction with the Potomac at Harper's Ferry, and from there to Baltimore; or else to follow the long and arduous journey along the course of the James to Richmond and the coast.

But in spite of the difficulties of communication, these Scotch-Irish folk kept alive the intellectual fires in the backwoods of old Virginia. Though they had entered by the back door, they had brought with them traditions of intellectual activity and accomplishments. They were one of the earliest

* Publications of Scotch-Irish Society, Harrisburg Meeting, 170-180.

advocates of free public education, and the development of the Pennsylvania school system can be traced to Scotch-Irish influence.

This same spirit manifested itself in the Valley. Although Governor Berkeley, a short time before, had thanked his God that there were no schools and printing-presses in Virginia, the immigrants to the Valley brought with them their own methods of instruction and plans for the spread of their educational ideas. Their first establishment was a rambling home of culture: its location was changed frequently, but its name and its ideals were permanent in educating the settlers of Augusta County.*

In the year 1776 can be found an example of the dominant characteristics of the Scotch-Irish settlers. The first of these in their intense patriotism. They came to the New World after being driven from the home of their ancestors in the Scottish lowlands. So too, had they been expelled from Ireland, the land of their first adoption, and had sought a refuge in new, dangerous, and untrampled forests from the oppression of their homeland. Hence, having severed all ties with the Old World they were above everything else exalted in their patriotism, although we cannot help wondering if the remembrance of by-gone persecutions did not emphasize their changed loyalty.

When the seven elders of the Church assembled in the Timber Ridge log meeting-house (Six miles north-east of Lexington) and renamed the old Augusta Academy they showed that they were

* Publications of the Scotch-Irish Society, Harrisburg Meeting, 170-180.

abreast of the times. They called it the Liberty Hall Academy. It was an afternoon in May, two months before the final Declaration of Independence at Philadelphia. Not only does this incident show that these people were closely in touch with the outside world, but it is interesting and significant that this first outward expression of patriotism should be in their educational institutions.*

Hence, we see that these early settlers of the upper Valley were a sturdy, democratic, thrifty, God-fearing people seeking a home in a new land with new and better chances of self-development along lines of their own choice. Far from the center of the economic and political world of the coast they were, nevertheless, keenly aware of the progress of the times. They did not allow themselves to fall into that state of mental lethargy which is too frequently the fate of isolated peoples. It is my purpose to study one of the means by which this isolated community kept up with and exerted an influence on the times -- through their leading Literary Society.

In America during the latter part of the eighteenth century and early part of the nineteenth century the rise of national interests, the development of a patriotic spirit, and the increased influence in the government of the legal profession, coupled with the great opportunity for the orator, put a new value on debating. After the establishment of our government townmeetings and legislatures were schools of public speaking, the most successful graduate of which went to Congress. Everyone was deeply interested in oratory. If a man had anything that

* Historical Papers of Washington and Lee Univ. No. I., 13.

interested the world, his neighbors were eager to hear his eloquence. Therefore, we are not surprised to see a great number of debating societies and libraries springing up all over our land.

Debating societies and libraries have the same general ends in view. Often the library feature was coupled with the debate. Benjamin Franklin was the founder of the first free public library in America. In 1731 he laid the plans for a library in Philadelphia. For a period of several years the idea remained dormant, but by the end of the eighteenth century we find similar institutions in many parts of our youthful country.* If we examine the laws enacted by the General Assembly from 1800 to 1816 we shall find no less than five bills incorporating libraries in towns and cities of the Old Dominion, in two cases in conjunction with debating societies. These two were for Londoun and Lexington. The Franklin Society was incorporated in 1816.***

Before entering this short history of the Franklin Society it would be well to give a brief sketch of the Lexington of 1800, the date of the origin of this society. Lexington contained, at that time, only five or six hundred inhabitants. Its comparative limits were thirteen hundred feet in length, by nine hundred in breadth, extending from the lot on the north corner at the intersection of Henry and Lee streets to the

* The Standard Reference Work, Vol.III, Article on Benjamin Franklin.

*** Acts of Assembly, Virginia State Library (Arranged according to years), Vols. 1800-1816.

lot on which the Lyric Theatre now stands, and from the lot occupied by the residence of Dr. F. L. Riley to the lot on which the Alpha Tau Omega Fraternity house now stands. Main street was built up but not nearly so compactly as today, nor of houses of the same type as at present. On the east, or Court House, side of the street, there was only one brick building. The back streets were sparsely occupied by cheap, wooden structures. The only church edifice at the time in the town was the old Presbyterian Church, the site of which was within the enclosure of the cemetery. The College buildings consisted of two two-story brick buildings. They were situated at each end of the present campus. The town was supplied with water from the Back Spring and Pump in barrels on low sleds, for drinking, cooking and washing, was quite an institution. Ice in summer was unknown.*

Among such surroundings and among a people striving for the truth and discarding all superficial and trivial conceptions of life, grew the Franklin Society. The exact date of its beginnings is a mooted question, Doubtless no definite date can be assigned; a few of the leading citizens of Lexington were wont to gather in some friend's home or in some secluded room for an evening of discussion of questions of local and national interest. The desire to learn the ideas of their neighbors and to cultivate the art of public speaking no doubt prompted them to meet.

*Address of Col. J. T. L. Preston at Semi-Centenary Anniversary of Franklin Society. Published Lexington Gazette of Feb. 21, 1873 - in County Clerk's Office.

The Lexington Gazette of March 23, 1848 says the Franklin Society started in 1795. Mr. Morton, in his History of Rockbridge County, states that the Valley Star of 1856 with equal emphasis declares it had its beginnings in 1800. *Be that as it may, we are more inclined to agree with Col. J. T. L. Preston [A gentleman, who enjoyed a long and intimate acquaintance with the society and whose knowledge of its history was very accurate) and the Valley Star who assert that it began early in 1800. The Gazette had no positive ground for it's belief: in fact the reference to the founding of the founding of the Franklin Society was given with a passing notice of a meeting of the President and Board of Directors. It shows no evidence of any research. Unquestionably it's assertions were the result of hearsay and, wishing to assign some date, the editor selected one with the idea of convenience rather than any definite knowledge. Colonel Preston was a member for many years. He devoted many hours to the preparation of a paper on the Society, which he delivered in 1873, and he emphatically states that it had its inception in 1800.

Early in the year 1800 a number of the most influential citizens of Lexington and surrounding community organized themselves into an association for intellectual improvement by weekly discussions of selected question.** The organization had for its name "The Belles Lettres Society." The name was

* Lexington Gazette- March 23, 1848, Washington and Lee Library and Mr. Morton's History of Rockbridge County, 214.

** Address of Colonel Paxton, County Clerk's Office.

not particularly descriptive and it would seem that its import was not accurately understood by all, inasmuch as the French adjective was spelled on the record book, 'Bell! Perhaps some thought it was a tinkling cymbal. "The Belles Lettres Society" went on it unobtrusive way for four years; the membership was constantly shifting; in fact, the organization gave no indication of stability. The meetings were irregularly held and just as irregularly attended.

In August, 1804, they took the name of the "Union Society."* The reason for this name is not given. We can propose only two surmises: probably the members had some disagreement among themselves and in a reorganization they called it the Union Society: the other to us, more plausible, was the influence of the strong union or national spirit then pervading our struggling nation. The Federalist party was on the decline. They retained only a slight hold on New England. The predictions of calamities on the election of Jefferson had failed to bear fruit. The popularity of the Republicans was well established; the debt, under Gallatin's able administration was rapidly diminishing; business was prosperous; and the President early manifested a desire to conciliate all sections and interests.** Yet, the Society, in April, 1808, decided that a state had the right to secede from the Union without the consent of the other states.***

* Col. Preston's Address and Manuscript Minutes of the Union Society, Franklin Society Papers, University Library.

** Bassett - Short History of the United States, 300.

*** Manuscript Minutes of Republican Society, F. S. Papers.

The vote was not given.

The members of the Union Society in 1806 were; James J. Mayers, Joseph Logan, John D. Ewen, Andrew Davidson, Samuel Walkup, Alexander Jourdan, James Gray, Cornelius Dorman, Walentine M. Mason, Matthew Willson, John Ruff, and Joseph Dilworth.*

At this point we may look into the constitution of the Union Society, for it continued to be the organic law of the Union, Republican and Lexington Literary Societies and of the Franklin Society until 1816, the date of the incorporation of the Franklin Society. The officers were; President, Secretary, Treasurer, and Librarian. With the exception of the President, all of them were elected during good behavior. The President was elected for a term of four weeks. The meetings were held at six o'clock every Saturday afternoon and anyone who failed to attend without a satisfactory excuse was fined 12-1/2 cents. The President had the right to determine when a member was out of order and the fine for disorder was the same as for an unexcused absence. Any member, who maliciously slandered another on or out of the meeting place of the Society, was expelled. There were numerous other slight offenses punishable by the standard fine of 12-1/2 cents.** New members might be proposed by any member, but if the applicant received two dissenting votes he was refused membership. Spectators were allowed to attend and the President was compelled to call on them to take one side or the other in debate. The President was always neutral in every discussion.***

*Manuscript Minutes of the Union Society, E. S. Papers.

**Manuscript - Constitution of the Union Society, E. S. Papers, Washington and Lee Library.

*** Ibid.

The Union Society was a more virile institution than its predecessor. The meetings were well attended and the members showed a live interest in the many questions debated. They held their meetings in members' homes by "early candle light." On February 16th, 1807, the Society, after mature deliberation, resolved that the name "Republican Society" be adopted instead of "Union Society" at their next meeting, and that they, thenceforth, be denominated the members of the "Republican Society of Lexington." All the laws and the constitution, however, of the old Society were continued in force.*

At this time the Society subscribed largely to the leading political journals of the day, and the political spirit of the era so far affected this Belles Lettres and Union Society, that they gave it this new name. In this same meeting the Society the following question for discussion at their next meeting: -- "Is it consistent with republican principles for our state legislature to address Mr. Jefferson soliciting him to be a candidate for the next election of president" -- a third term. The question was discussed and decided in the negative.**

By the end of 1807 the Society had added several new members to its roll and one or two of the others had either resigned or been expelled. Among the new were Messrs. Dalton, Cunningham, Mason, Hays, Anderson, Fuller and Smith. In August, 1808, without the slightest quiver the Society again changed its name to the "Lexington Literary of Lexington," and from that time

* Manuscript- Minutes of the Union Society, Franklin Society Papers, Washington and Lee University Library.

**Manuscript- Minutes of the Republican Society, Franklin Society Papers, Washington and Lee University Library.

until about 1810 the meetings were held at the Court House.

James Gray was the first President under the new name and William Anderson was the first Secretary. The constitution and by-laws of the Union Society were continued in full force.*

At the present stage in this outline it will be well to relate something of the library feature of the Society. There is a mistaken notion that the Library started in 1813. The record book of the old Union Society refutes this statement. There was a constitutional provision for a Librarian, who kept a record of ~~all books taken out and~~ for neglect of each of any of the duties of his office he shall be fined in like manner with the other officers." Evidently the Society did not appropriate any funds for the purchase of books, but they did have books, most probably gifts from member and other friends of the movement. They were kept in the hatter's shop of Mr. William Ruff, who was one of the most enthusiastic members of the Society.**

Mention ought to be made of another organization that had its origin at about the same time as the Franklin Society -- The Lexington Library Company. The earliest evidence that can be found shows that this body was in existence in April, 1801. The members present at this meeting were: J. Gold, Andrew Alexander, J. Patton, William Willson, E. Graham, A. Walkup, J. Leyburn, A. Trimble, William Lyle, S. L. Campbell, and . Carruthers. Mr. Lyle was President for that year and S. L.

*Manuscript- Minutes of the Republican Society, Franklin Society Papers, Washington and Lee University Library.

** Manuscript- Constitution of The Union Society, Franklin Society Papers, Washington and Lee University Library.

Campbell was Librarian with a salary of \$10.00 per year and he would accept it only on the condition that he be allowed to buy books for the Company. They purchased over \$150.00 worth of books in that year. Cowper's Homer, Mills on Cattle, Stiles' Sermons, A Life of Washington, Russell's Modern Europe, Burke's Reflections on the French Revolution, History of Catherine of Russia, Knox's Essays, Life of Rochester, and Rousseau's Social Compact were some of the titles. * Strange to say none of the members of the Franklin Society were members of the Lexington Library Company and they seem to have no connection whatever with each other. The Lexington Library Company kept up the good work through two decades, each passing year adding considerably to their long list of books. It served its purpose and died from causes unknown to the writer after a diligent search. Among the old papers of the Society are lists of books sold to people of the neighborhood at auction. The Franklin Society bought a few of them at greatly reduced prices, in some instant as low as 30 cents on the dollar.

The Franklin Society, having passed the childhood stage, stepped boldly forward with a feeling of assurance and confidence in its permanence and purchased its first lot of books. From the date of the date of its organization the Society had collected books from members and friends, but 1813 marks the real beginning of the Library. The first purchase was not pretentious by any means. The list comprised thirty-eight volumes, mainly

* Among the Franklin Society Papers are number of invoices of the Lexington Library Company. Washington and Lee University Library.

of a historical nature, but nevertheless as general as it is possible for so short a list to be. Since the inhabitants of Lexington and vicinity of that day depended almost entirely on agriculture for their existence, we find several books in which the farmer was likely to be interested. Rousseau's Social Compact stood at the head of the list.*

The Lexington Literary Society survived as the title for the short period of three years. 1 August, 1811, by an overwhelming vote the Society adopted the name of America's greatest diplomat, Benjamin Franklin.** The name of Franklin suggests usefulness, seriousness, intellectuality, and, above all, patriotism. Moreover, Franklin did not belong to the aristocracy of birth or wealth, nor to the laboring population. The name is a good representation of all that is essentially American. These Valley people of 1815 had none of the animosity for everything from the North that their sons had after them. To them Benjamin Franklin did not represent a section or faction. He belonged to the citizens of Lexington as much as to the citizens of Philadelphia.

For many years he owned and published the Pennsylvania Gazette, which circulated from Maine to Georgia, and was the most influential newspaper in the colonies.*** He made it the vehicle of his thought on politics, business, education, thrift, economy, methods of farming, and all those homely

* Address of Col. Preston, County Clerk's Office.

** Manuscripts- Minutes of Lexington Literary Society, F. S. Papers, Washington and Lee University Library.

*** The Standard Reference Work, Vol.III, Article on Benjamin Franklin.

topica that endear a family newspaper to the husbandman and housewife. As we have learned, he set on foot the first public library. If we trace our public libraries, our magazines, and our postal service to their beginnings we shall find that they have emanated from the same active mind. It is not peculiar in the light of these facts that he would appeal to the sturdy folk of the Shenandoah Valley.

The loose organization and the slipshod methods of operating the Society up to 1815 were not at all conducive to stability and permanence. About that time the members not only felt the need of a more solid foundation, but also saw the opportunity for spreading education and culture through a well supplied library. They, therefore, sent to the General Assembly of Virginia late in the year 1815, a petition for a charter of incorporation. On January 30, 1816, the legislature passed an act incorporating the "Franklin Society and Library Company of Lexington."* On June 22, 1816 the Society held its first meeting to organize under the charter. The meeting was held in the hall of Washington College and Samuel McDowell Reid was elected the first charter President. The members of the first Board of Directors were: William Taylor, Andrew Hays, Valentine M. Mason, and Andrew Herron.** A little later the Society began to hold the weekly meetings in the hatter's of Mr. Ruff. The early success was in a large measure due to the persistent and sacrificial efforts of two men-- Messrs. Ruff

* Acts of Assembly, Vol. 1815-1816, Virginia State Library.

** Address of Col. Preston, County Clerks Office and Morton-History of Rockbridge County, 214.

and Mason. They were prominent in all discussions and the existing minutes of the Union, Republican, and Lexington Societies their names more than any others. Conforming to the usual custom of their day the members were convened by the sounding of the horn,* and the meetings were held on Saturday nights between the hours of six and seven, "by early candlelight."

It would be well to consider the type of questions debated in that early period of this history. Even before 1815 slavery was frequently discussed. They seemed doubtful of its advantages but they were unreservedly against Congressional interference with it.** In 1847 Dr. Henry Ruffner prepared a paper dealing with the question of dividing the State of Virginia into two parts with the Blue Ridge as the line of division.*** As early as 1807, in Rockbridge County, there were many people who were not in sympathy with slavery, and seeing the growing distrust between western and eastern Virginia, were of the same opinion as Dr. Ruffner. On Friday evening, February 27, 1897 the Society discussed the following, -- "Would a division of the State of Virginia, by the Blue Ridge, be good policy, and advantageous to the inhabitants residing on the west side thereof." It was decided in the negative by a large majority. On April 9th, 1808, the emancipation of the slaves was declared

*Address of Col. Preston, Lexington Gazette, Feb. 21, 1873.

** All the following political, social, and moral questions were taken from the minutes of the Union, Republican, and Lexington Literary Societies' Minutes - Manuscript- F. S. Papers, Washington and Lee University Library.

*** Mr. W. M. Paxton.

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inconsistent with justice and good policy by a vote of six to five. The reader will understand that a decision was reached by the vote of the whole society present at that particular meeting.

As for other political the party of Jefferson was usually sustained. They debated the proposition of conceding the English contention that a British subject could not renounce his allegiance in favor of another government. It was decided in the negative. Republican governments were compared favorably with those of the monarchial type. In April, 1808 a national bank was sustained unanimously. This was an all-consuming question in our domestice politics of that day. In the same month a protective tariff was voted in the affirmative by the count of eleven to three. In April, 1807 they decided against a navy by a large majority and in the following year reversed their decision. The British second Order in Council and Napoleon's Milan Decree might have influenced this reversal. "Was the Embargo a politic measure at the time it was laid in the United States" was considered so important that it was debated at two consecutive meetings before it was decided in the affirmative by the casting vote of the President. In 1806, nineteen years after the making of our Constitution there was one man present at the meeting of September 20, who did not think the American Colonies justifiable in taking up arms against the Mother Country." Should a representative implicitly follow the directions of his constituents, in preference to his own opinions" was decided affirmatively by a vote of nine to eight. They decided that it would not be propitious to allow the judges of the United States to be removed

by a two-thirds vote of both houses of Congress instead of the method provided in the Constitution. That the early residents of Lexington had a kind of premonition of the coming conflict between the North and the South is very apparent for in one of their earliest debates the following topic was discussed, "Is it probable that the government of the United States will be divided into two or more distinct governments within the next two hundred years?" Although this question was decided in the negative by the close vote of seven to five it shows that the citizens of Lexington did not have an abiding faith in the perpetuity of the Union. This debate occurred in February, 1807.

From the foregoing account we might conclude that political questions occupied all their time. In February, 1808 they were somewhat skeptical of the desirability of female education as is shown by the vote of eight to four in the affirmative on the question, "Are Public Seminaries for the education of females advantageous to the community or to the individuals educated thereat?" Lexington, at that time, was the location of the Ann Smith Academy.

Moral questions also received much attention. "Will the attainment of a lawful end justify the use of unlawful means?" was decided affirmatively. They resolved that dueling was justifiable though the tie was broken by the deciding vote of the President. Lotteries were declared for by a vote of four to three. With typical Scotch-Irish veneration for orthodoxy they disposed of everything of a religious nature. They declared that

that the Catholics were an evil force in the world from the very first.

Probably to relieve the monotony of lengthy and tiresome arguments over foreign and domestic affairs, and religious and moral issues there were other discussions of a lighter and more vantering vein, such as; "Is there more pleasure in married or single life?" They must have very wholesome respect for their wives for they agreed unanimously that married life was better. With equal concord they thought it more conducive to happiness to marry for love than for riches. "Are bachelors and old maids a nuisance to society and if they are, which is the greater?" must have afforded much relaxation from the consideration of weightier matters. Perhaps more abstruse if not more diverting was the question; "Can a handsome young widow or a virtuous old maid bestow the more charms on a husband?" It was carried in favor of the young widow by one vote.

As a matter of convenience we may call the years between 1800 and 1816 when the legislature granted a charter, the formative ~~period~~ period of the Franklin Society. The Franklin Society started under the constitution and by-laws of the old Union Society and there were not changed until 1816. It, then, discarded the old Union Society organization and adopted a new constitution and by-laws. The Union Society constitution may have served the immediate purpose for which it was devised, but it is hardly probable that the founders of the earlier organization had any idea of the permanency of their work. It shows the effect of haste; for instance, the President under the old reime, was elected

for the long term of four weeks and he could not succeed himself, but he could be elected again with one term intervening. This constant shifting did not admit the application of one's whole ability. By the time the new President got the reins in his hands he must step down and give over the duties to another.

II

Incorporation and Early Expansion

With the incorporation of the Franklin Society in 1816 we can easily notice a more determined and abiding tone. (The constitution of the Franklin Society has been lost, but we can get the essential features of the internal workings from the reports of the Librarian, Treasurer, Collector, and President and Directors) As we have seen, Samuel McDowell Reid was elected the first President and the administrative department was to be supplemented with four other members forming the Board of Directors, the President, being 'ex officio' the fifth member. The Treasurer, like the President, was elected for one year. His duty was to keep a record of the finances; pay all bills on the order of the President; and in a general way to direct all financial transactions.

By way of contrast with the later period of the Society it might be of some interest to note the exact financial status of the Society in 1818. The fines for that year amounted

to \$11.00. The current running expenses for the same length of time totaled \$16.95 1/2, leaving a deficit of \$5.95 1/2, which was paid out of the funds appropriated for the Library. The report estimated the current expenses for the coming year at \$14.00 and the sum to be raised from fines at \$8.00. At that time there were thirty-five members and if they were assessed 37 1/2 cents each the Treasury would show a surplus of \$1.17 1/2.* From this we see that the Society was not an expensive organization. The Library was kept alive by spasmodic assessments and, of course, these amounted to much more than the actual dues. A \$2.00 levy on each member was quite common, usually taking place in June and December of each year.

The Collector was an entirely different official, and it was not necessary that he be a member of the Society. It was his duty to collect all money owed to the Society, and he was given a commission on the amount collected. The one, who submitted the lowest bid, was given the position. A Mr. Dold was appointed collector, his bid of eight per cent commission being the lowest that could be found. The President, writing about Mr. Dold's appointment, remarked that he was given the position because he "possessed good dunning faculties."**

The Librarian was the most important of all the officers, not by any constitutional provision, but owing to the influence of one man, Mr. John W. Fuller. The Librarian was the only

* Report of the Treasurer, March 7, 1818. Manuscript - F. S. Papers, Washington and Lee University Library.

** Manuscript - Report of President and Directors, January 17, 1824. F. S. Papers, Washington and Lee University Library.

salariied officer and this came about after the earnest request of Mr. Fuller in his first report. It was his duty to keep the book of entry in which he must record the names of all books distributed and an account of all fines imposed for infringement of Library regulations.* He must render to the Collector on the first days of June and December in each year, a list of all persons violating the regulations. A book might be kept out one week for every one hundred pages of reading matter and fifty per cent longer for any member residing at a greater distance than one mile from town. Fines of different amounts were imposed at the discretion of the Librarian for varying degrees of negligence. All fines over 50 cents were subject to appeal to the President and Directors.** Fines for negligence in carrying the duties within the Society proper were quite common. A fine appearing more frequently on the books was the one for failure to prepare questions for debate. Each week a member was designated to draw up three or four questions from which the Society would chose the most suitable for debate. Failure to attend a meeting without sufficient excuse brought upon the offender a fine of 25 cents. At the annual meeting of the Stockholders, the Librarian and the President and Directors were required to submit reports fo their stewardship for the year. This meeting was always held about

* Manuscript - Rules and Regulations of the Library, F. S. Papers, Washington and Lee University Library.

**Ibid.

the middle of January of each year and sufficient notice in the papers was required by the by-laws.

Any person could apply for membership in the Society. First, he must fill out an application blank supplied by the Society and if he were elected he gained the status for which he applied. There were two kinds of active members, the stockholder and the debating member. The debating member was elected for a term of five years and if he did not become a stockholder within that time he must give up his membership.* In 1820 a share of stock in the Society cost \$12.00. At first the initiation fee was \$1.00, but in 1829 it was as high as \$5.00.* The Society, during its lifetime, elected a number of men to honorary membership, but the great majority were men of Lexington and vicinity. These men were entitled to participate in the debates, vote in the businessmeetings, and to use the Library, but they were relieved of any debts that might be incurred by the society.

Its membership in 1829 numbered forty-one (stockholders), an increase of six in thirteen years. The list comprises the following names: William C. Lewis, William H. Letcher, Alfred Leyburn, John Ruff, Valentine M. Mason, Alexander H. Barclay, R. R. Burton, Samuel McD. Reid, William Finley, John F. Carruthers, George A. Baker, David Hopkins, Joseph Steele, David E. Moore, William Stevens, Charles P. Dorman, Hugh Barclay, Samuel Jordan, William Taylor, John W. Fuller,

* Manuscript - Account Book of Society 1820-1824, F. S. Papers, Washington and Lee University Library.

Richard T. Gibson, Joseph Hoffman, John Whiteburn, John B. Campbell, Hugh Irvine, Samuel Doist, J. W. Paine, Edmund M. Dold, John T. McKee, John A. Cummings, John H. Hydes, John Irvine, James McDowell, Samuel McD. Moore, Nathan Patton, William A. Carruthers, Henry McFadden, William McCoy, James R. Jordan, and P. P. Burton.*

In order to get an idea of the personnel of the Society a brief summary of the lives and accomplishments of some of these men will be given.

James, the only son of Colonel James McDowell, was born at Cherry Grove, Virginia, October 12, 1796, and was graduated from Princeton College (now Princeton University) in 1817. The same college gave him the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws. He read law for a time but never practiced it. His vocation was that of a planter, first in Kentucky, later in Rockbridge County. He served in the General Assembly; was governor of Virginia from 1843 to 1846; and was, then, elected to Congress. As a statesman he possessed unusual foresight and judgment. He believed that the emancipation of the slaves was inevitable, and he was not shaken from his views by Nat Turner's insurrection. The Lexington Gazette (Whig) of Nov. 21, 1850 expressed the sentiment of the county when it backed McDowell, who favored the Compromise of 1850, against Senator Mason, an uncompromising opponent of that Compromise. The same paper, a week before, gave a clipping from the Richmond newspapers

* Manuscript - Report of John W. Paine, Collector, January 24, 1829, F. S. Papers, Washington and Lee University Library.

in which Governor McDowell was mentioned as the Democratic vice-presidential candidate for 1852. He died on August 24, 1851.*

Samuel McDowell Moore, a son of General Andrew Moore, was born in Rockbridge County in 1796 and died in 1875. Mr. Moore was a man of powerful build, strongly marked countenance, and commanding force. He believed that the institution of slavery was wrong: in fact, in everything he did not allow his neighbors' ideas to influence him one iota. In the secession convention of 1861 he bitterly contested the arguments of those, who wished to withdraw from the Union.**

Samuel McDowell Reid, one of the founders of the Franklin Society, was born in Lexington in 1790 and died in 1869. He was an adjutant in the War of 1812. He served as county clerk for thirty-five years, succeeding his father in that office, this office being held by father and son through a period of eighty-five years. He was a trustee of Washington College and Ann Smith Academy, the latter a private school in Lexington for girls, and was mainly instrumental in opening the North River to Lexington.***

Charles P. Dorman was a distinguished lawyer and editor. He was interested in politics and represented his county in the General Assembly for thirteen years. He served as an

*Morton - History of Rockbridge County, 265-266.

** Morton - History of Rockbridge County, 268.

***Morton - History of Rockbridge County, 271 and Dr. Reid White, the grandson of Samuel McDowell Reid.

adjutant in the second war with England.*

Samuel Jordan was the son of Colonel John Jordan. When Colonel Jordan came to Lexington, Rockbridge County was almost wholly rural and he had much to do with its industrial development. He became interested in iron smelting, flour and grist mills, blacksmith shops, and the weaving of cotton and woolen goods. Samuel Jordan was particularly interested in the iron business.**

William Taylor came from Ireland. His wife was Janet Paul, a sister of the justly famous John Paul Jones of the Revolution.***

John McKee was later a member of Congress from Alabama.****

After its incorporation in 1816 the Society grew by leaps and bounds. The character of the membership and the interest in the debates attracted widespread attention in the community. Every question brought up for discussion was sure to receive attention: the discussions were always contested with characteristic Scotch warmth, and the decision was more often close than otherwise. The number of times the President had to cast the deciding vote is surprising. The members saw the need for a permanent home for an organization destined to wield such a large influence in the community. Prior to 1816 it had held its meetings principally in the hatter's shop of Mr. Ruff and in the homes of individual members. This haphazard method

* Morton - History of Rockbridge County, 249.

**Morton - History of Rockbridge County, 259-60.

*** Morton History of Rockbridge County, 274.

**** Morton - History of Rockbridge County, 276.

could not for for the growing Franklin Society. After 1816 the Society rented rooms from William H. Letcher.* The exact location of these rooms we are unable to ascertain, bu in 1823 Mr. Letcher was \$24.00 for rent and candles for eighteen months. The date of the bginning of an agitation for a home for the Society is obscure, but in October, 1826, two committees were appointed; one composed of C. P. Dorman, S. McD. Reid, and John P. Carruthers to recommend a location; and another made up of the above three, S. McD. Moore and John Ruff was called the Hall Committee. The latter committee thought the sum of \$600.00 would be sufficient to erect a suitabel building. In the Treasury at that time was \$367.00, including \$200.00 donated by Mr John Robinson.** They adopted a plan of assess- ing each member \$5.00 yearly for four years to defray the remaining expense. In this same report the committee recommended a "plain neat" building of 25 by 30 feet.

* Manuscript - Receipt from Mr. Letcher, F. S. Papers, Washington and Lee University Library.

** The Reports of these committees were transcribed in the Report Book of the Franklin Society 1825-1859, Washington and Lee University Library.

Note:-Mr. John Robinson ("Jockey" Robinson) was born in County Armagh in the North of Ireland in 1753 and came to Rockbridge County in 1770. Dissatisfaction with his lot as a weaver's apprentice caused him to flee to America. He became a horse-trader and by speculating in soldiers' certificates, he collected enough money to buy Hart's Bottom. It was mainly by the distilling of whiskey that he accumulated his fortune. Mr. Robinson was without an heir, and decided to devote his entire estate to educational uses. He left his estate to Washington College. By almost prophetic foresight, Mr. Robinson singled out Science as be- longtin to the class of subjects he would be pleased to

The society settled upon the lot recommended by the Lot committee. It belonged to Samuel M. Dold, and was located on the corner of Nelson and Jefferson Streets. In January, 1829 the building committee submitted its report and announced that the building had been erected and the accounts with the contractors settled. The former estimate was far below the actual cost. The immense sum of \$1,552.26 was expended in providing a home for Lexington's old debating society. Of this all but \$675.00 was paid to the various contractors immediately. The first donation from any member of the Society toward the building fund was the sum of \$25.00, which was given by Mr. John W. Fuller.* The bill rendered for the furnishing and outfitting the new building shows the characteristic Scotch-Irish conservatism: a horn was purchased presumably to call the members together on Saturday evening, exactly as they had done in the days before the War of 1812.**

The needs of the Society did not require the use of all the space in the hall, and so, they rented office rooms to lawyers and others. Accompanying the first report of the President and Directors after the erection of their new

* Manuscript - List of Subscriptions, F. S. Papers.

** Report Book of the Franklin Society 1825-1859, Washington and Lee University Library.

Note, continued: promote the study of. His name is attached to the Chair of Geology and Biology, and two medals are given annually, as provided in his will. With the exception of General Washington he was the first considerable benefactor of Washington College. Mr. Robinson died in 1826, and in 1855 a monument to his memory was erected on the college campus.

building, they submitted a proposition from the Rockbridge Masonic lodge, offering \$300.00, for a lease of the hall for special occasions when the Society was not using it. This lease was to expire at the termination of the then existing charter of the Franklin Society. The proposition was accepted.

III

Greater Expansion

The construction of a permanent home for the Society was an expensive undertaking, and the year 1830 found the organization in debt. The debt required several years of the strictest economy to liquidate it. Even though it had a satisfactory home, so far as external appearances go, the large amount of money expended in the venture left it without sufficient means to furnish the building in conformity with the tastes of the more critical. In his annual report* Mr. Fuller, the Librarian, said: "It is remarkable that a society composed of men, not merely ambitious of literary distinction, but refined tastes in the elegances and ornaments of life, should have erected a beautiful edifice and stored it with the wisdom of the past and the

* Manuscript * Report of Mr. John W. Fuller, 1838, F. S. Papers, Washington and Lee University Library.

present ages and yet have omitted everything connected with its interior embellishments. In view of this matter and with a distinct reverence to the state of the finances, I earnestly recommend a handsome carpet for the floor, and curtains for the windows. These things are demanded upon the score of decency and comfort, and cannot be objected to by the most fastidious economist." In furtherance of this idea, no doubt, bills were soon presented for cuspidors. Mr. Fuller's suggestions were carried out, in the main.

If the Society accomplished nothing else on its annual meeting of January 17, 1830, than the election of Mr. John W. Fuller to the office of Librarian it deserves to be remembered as the red letter day in its history.* Mr. Fuller held this position for upwards of forty years and no other man wielded a stronger influence on the affairs of the Society than did this hard working, modest tailor. In his first report he makes mention of the fact that he had held the office for one year before his election, 1825-1826.** Heretofore the Librarian had received no salary for his services, and in this same report Mr. Fuller suggests an annual salary. The office had always been accepted with reluctance and resigned with delight. It was attended with considerable trouble and inconvenience, especially after the removal of the books to the hall. There was no member who would willingly accept the job if he were not compelled to do so by a constitutional regulation binding him under a penalty of a

* Manuscript - Report of President and Directors, F. S. Papers, Washington and Lee University Library.

**Reprot of Mr. Fuller, January 17, 1831, F. S. Papers, Washington and Lee University Library (Manuscript).

\$2.00 fine. The Society later voted the Librarian a small salary, which was increased, or decreased as the reader may decide, until it amounted to \$20.00 in 1864 in Confederate money.

As we have seen, the Society was in none too flourishing condition about 1830. They owed quite a large amount on their hall, and in 1832 the President reported many obstacles in collecting the debts. The Collector would collect only the easier debts, leaving the harder ones to the Society and, furthermore, the Collector charged such a high rate they considered dropping that scheme as impracticable.* But the members got busy and in 1835 the financial status was on a higher plane. In 1836 the Directors, James Rockwood and James D. Davidson, reported that they found the Society entirely free from all claims. Whereas fifteen years before the Society could run on \$15.00 yearly, now ten times that amount would hardly suffice.**

While the literary and scientific spirit of the age was making rapid strides in the march of improvement, the Library of the Franklin Society was not keeping with the progress of the times. Paying their debts had prevented any additions except by donation from 1825 to 1833, when \$100.00 was appropriated for books. In 1831 the Librarian remarked on the dearth of reading among the members. The Scarcity of the latest popular fiction partially accounted for this.***

*Manuscript - Report of Pres. and Directors, 1832, F. S. Papers.
**Manuscript - Report of Pres. and Directors, 1836, F. S. Papers.
***Manuscript - Report of Pres. and Directors, and Librarian, 1831, F. S. Paper, Washington and Lee University Library.

Prior to 1835 the Library possessed no satisfactory way of shelving the books. In 1832 Mr. Fuller visited the libraries of Washington College and the Virginia Military Institute in order to study their methods. Mr. James Rockwood built the shelves and in return he was given a share in the Society.* After 1833 we notice an awakened interest in the Library and Mr. Fuller reports books taken out totaling three or four hundred annually.** Formerly, the number had dropped to about one hundred and forty.

During this period in our outline not a single provision had been made for the students of the two colleges. About 1835, an extraordinary meeting of the stockholders was held, led by the over-active Mr. Fuller, for the purpose of drawing up regulations for admitting the young men of both schools.*** Evidently some action was taken, for the rolls of the Society contain the names of students. However, there were not as many as were expected. Washington College had its own literary societies, the Washington and the Graham Philanthropic, as they were then called.

The preamble of the original act of incorporation declared that the association was incorporated for the purpose of literary improvement and the establishment of a library. Its history, up to 1850. proves the entire fulfillment of those purposes.

* Manuscript - Report of the Librarian, 1833, F. S. Papers.

** Manuscript - Report of the Librarian, 1835, F. S. Papers.

*** Manuscript - Petition to the President and Directors, F. S. Papers.

Note:- The constitution of the Franklin society provided for extraordinary meetings for the consideration of special subjects. Ten members was the number required to sign the petition to have it placed before the stockholders.

Therefore a renewal of the Charter, which would expire by limitation in January, 1850, was easily obtainable. The Franklin Society was an institution on which Lexington was justly proud, and we may believe the assertion of a somewhat boastful President that it was the best institution of its kind in the old commonwealth.* A committee was appointed in 1847 to report on a memorial to the legislature for an extension. This was adopted and the legislature in March, 1848, extended the charter until January, 1870.**

At the time of the extension the number of shareholders had increased to thirty-six; and the value of each had risen to \$120.00. according to an estimate of the President. The real property was estimated at \$2,250.00: the Library, containing 1400 well-bound volumes, together with the furniture was placed at \$2,070.00.***

Although in 1851 the Librarian's report shows that the members took out more books than ever before (682), the Society as a whole was going into a period of about four years of hard times. Especially in 1852, the attendance was very small, no more than six shareholders were ever present and the character of the debates was reduced to a much lower plane by frequent resort to personalities. Serious recommendations were brought up in the annual meeting for the purpose of increasing the attendance.****

* Manuscript - Report of the President and Directors, 1848, F. S. Papers.

** Acts of Assembly, Vol. for 1848, Virginia State Library.

*** Manuscript - Report of President and Directors, 1848, F. S. Papers.

**** Report of the Librarian, 1851, F. S. Papers, Washington and Lee University library.

During the long period from 1830 to 1855 the Society's debates were wide and comprehensive in scope and as we expect from an organization exhibiting such a profound knowledge in all political questions they show an insight into the politics that was remarkable indeed. A few of the debates will be quoted in order to give an idea of their discussions. The reader will remember that all the minutes of the meetings during this period have been lost. Under the constitution the President appointed a committee each week to submit questions for debate, and it is from these scattered scraps of paper that we get our information. Of interest at this point is a list of questions submitted by General "Stonewall" Jackson in 1855. He was a debating member for five years during his residence in Lexington as one of the faculty of the Virginia Military Institute. On one occasion General Jackson was fined for failure to submit questions. It is said that on one occasion, when called on to speak (he was a poor public speaker), he rose from his seat, stammered something and sat down again. But, with his usual persistency, he would stick to his subject until he had finished.* The following are the questions submitted by him: 1., "Should the Alumni of Washington College be incorporated and invested with the power of electing all Trustees, and have the management of the affairs of the institution?"; 2, "Should the Public Lands be given to actual settlers or sold to them at nominal prices with a view of inducing emigration (immigration) to this country?"; 3, "Are Poorhouses a blessing to the

* Major Wade.

community?"; 4, "Should the present County Court system be abolished?"

Slavery was of prime importance to the Franklin Society from 1830 to 1855, so we put the questions on that subject first:

"Can we conclude from the Scriptures that slavery is to exist as long as the human race?"

"Would it be good policy to reduce the free negroes to slavery upon their failing to leave the State within a given time?"

"Was John C. Calhoun responsible for the agitation of the slavery question?"

"Has the existence of slavery been advantageous to Virginia?"

Others of a political nature:

"Ought the United States to establish a protectorate over Mexico?"

"Has General Walker in his Nicaraguan expedition violated neutrality or the spirit of treaties of the United States?"

The acquisition of Cuba was submitted several times.

"Is it the policy of the South to encourage indiscriminate immigration?" (1850)*

"Should we compel Brazil to open the Amazon to foreign navigation?"

"If the Kansas-Nebraska bill be repealed should Southern representatives leave Congress?" (1854)

"Is Democracy dead in Rockbridge?"

"Is it probable that Virginia will ever regain her former position in the Union?" (1849)

When the dates of these questions could be found, they are given in this paper.

Other questions of moral and religious significance and some of no significance whatever:

"Is it justice to the honest mechanic to teach their trades to the convicts in the penitentiary?"

"Ought the Virginia legislature provide a common school system similar to that in New England?" (1854)

"Is single life an unnatural institution?"

"Can constitutional liberty long exist in a community in which the Calvinistic religion is not predominant?"

"Should a standard of scholarship be required for admission to the University of Virginia?" This was submitted at least three times from 1845 to 1860.

"Is marriage, as instituted in civilized communities a law of nature or a law of society?"

"Is it not time for Virginia and the other states to adopt prohibitory laws regarding the manufacture of liquor?" This was suggested also.

"Would it not be well for the world if there were no doctors?"

"Is Yellow Fever contagious?"

"Is conscience the most authoritative faculty?"

"Is it the duty of society to furnish the laborer with a decent living wage, where slavery does not exist?" If it were not for the last clause, this would remind us of a modern day problem, which has been settled, we hope, with some thought for humanity.

"Has the government the right to compel parents to educate their children?"

"Is it possible to filch a war speech from a Quaker?"

"Does falling in love contract or enlarge the heart?"

"Is the disposition to put the 'best on the outside'
Beneficial to society and individuals?"

"Which would a man find most profitable, minding his own
business or letting that of other peoples alone?"

"Is Roman Catholicism compatible with a republican government?"

"Should Washington College confine itself to members of the
Presbyterian Church in the election of professors?"

IV

Enlarged Community Service

We saw that the Society was in a none too prosperous ~~condition~~
condition about 1852, but this state of affairs was of short
duration. In 1855 the Society increased its activities by giving
a course of lectures, delivered by prominent men in the town; and
faculties of Washington College and the Virginia Military
Institute.* Mr. C. C. Baldwin delivered a course of six lectures
in 1857. They were held during the winter months (on every other

* Manuscript - Report of the President and Directors, 1856, F. S.
Papers, Washington and Lee University Library.

Friday night).* A ticket, costing one dollar, would admit an entire family for the whole course. The Monthly Meeting was inaugurated at this time. The Society was thrown open and the members could invite their friends, "giving character to the institution and also giving assurance to the speakers that there would be an audience in attendance on those occasions."** The Society was well pleased with the response from their friends in the neighborhood.

The Society was rapidly outgrowing its quarters. The President and Directors, in 1855, borrowed money from a Lexington bank and the Society used it in enlarging the hall. In 1858 the value of the hall was placed at \$3800.00 and insured for the amount, while the books were estimated at \$3069.00.***

In 1860 the debates were better attended than at any other time except for a few weeks when some pestilence, the nature of which the writer is unable to learn, was raging in the town. Disunion was the all-absorbing topic of the day, and undoubtedly this must have attracted many who otherwise would have stayed away. In the same year lectures were delivered before the Society by The Rev. Dr. Pendleton, Major Preston, and Colonel Smith of the Virginia Military Institute. In early 1861 the impending war with its many questions kept the hall crowded at every meeting.****

To the reader the following questions may be of little interest, but to the members of the Franklin Society they were of vital

*Manuscript - Report of the Pres. and Directors, 1858, F. S. Papers.

** Ibid.

*** Ibid.

**** Report of the Librarian, 1862, F. S. Papers, F. S. Papers, Washington and Lee University Library.

importance:

"Should Virginia allow the United States troops to pass through her borders?" (November 10, 1860)

"In case the Cotton States secede should Virginia go with them?" (October 27, 1860)

"Should the Democracy of the South rally to Bell and Everett, since Breckenridge has no earthly chance to be elected?" (August 23, 1860)

"Can all the dangers which threaten the Union be traced to foreign influence?" (December 2, 1860)

V

Struggle for Existence

During the last few months of 1861 the debating feature was at a standstill. From that time on until the close of 1865, war and its attendant hardships occupied the minds of all the South, and the citizens of Lexington had no time nor little taste for any other reading than the daily papers. Meetings were held occasionally and most of the members, remaining at home, usually attended. In June, 1864 General Hunter and his command invaded Lexington, and some of the incidents of the raid were most regrettable. The Virginia Military Institute and the home

of Governor Letcher were burned. Several attempts were made on the Franklin Society's property, but the unceasing efforts of Mr. Fuller saved the building and the books from destruction. Mr. Fuller reports: "During the summer we were visited by the Yankee Vandals, who mutilated and destroyed all the libraries belonging to the Virginia Military Institute and Washington College. Amidst this wanton destruction of books I am happy to say that our Library escaped, but not without several attempts, on the part of the Vandals, to enter the hall, but my unceasing exertion succeeded in preventing their disturbance." Mr. Fuller collected as many of the books, belonging to the colleges, as he could find, and returned them to their owners. Mr. Fuller was thanked officially by the Society for this action - what he did to foil the Yankees we are unable to learn.*

Some questions discussed during the war are:

"Was the seizure of Mason and Slidell a violation of the laws of nations, and an insult to Great Britain?"

"Should the Confederacy admit free states to their Union?"

"Did the commercial interests of the North have more to do with the present war than slavery?"

"Is there not an opinion among the Southern States of the Confederacy denying the right of a state to secede at will, and would not this strengthen our position with the other nations of Christendom?"

* Report of the Librarian, 1865, F. S. Papers, Washington and Lee University Library.

"Would it be good policy to arrest all citizens of Western Virginia, who have taken office under the Pierpont government, and try them for treason?"

"Would it not be better for the various Churches of the Confederacy to limit their respective organizations to their respective states?"

"Is the administration of President Davis worthy of the confidence and support of our people?" (December 6, 1863)

"Is the invasion of the North good policy in the South?" (December 13, 1862)

VI

Revival and Renewed Service

After the state of abeyance into which the Society had fallen during the War of Secession, we would expect the expiration of several years before the Society could recuperate and resume its former activity. However, it seems to have started upon a new and vigorous career of prosperity and usefulness very soon after the close of the conflict. The new era was well inaugurated by the address of Col. J. T. L. Preston, at the semi-centenary celebration of the incorporate birth of the Society.*

* Manuscript - Report of the President and Directors, 1867, F. S. Papers.

The public attention thus aroused was maintained by interesting debates and, incidentally, a course of lectures that were well received. A large number of new members were added to the rolls in 1866. The prosperous state of affairs of 1867-68 lasted for nearly ten years, or until the date of Mr. Fuller's death. That venerable old gentleman practically the routine work of the Society upon his tooping shoulders. He did more to keep up an interest in the debates than any other man.

The financial condition of the Society began to decline before any other department, finally, culminating in the lease of the property to the Young Mens Christian Association of Lexington. The interest in reading was sustained, and in 1868 Mr. Fuller states that about 1000 books were taken out by members.* The lecture courses were delivered nearly every winter until 1877, by prominent men in the community.

The charter again expired by limitation in 1870, but was again renewed by the General Assembly: this time it would expire whenever the whold number of stockholders desired. One dissenting vote could prevent the dissolution of the Society, or the transfer of its effects.**

The year 1876 is of interest for two reasons. Mr. Fuller died in November, and an extraordinary meeting was called at once to pass on suitable resolutions. At the same meeting held on the 8th, the Society decided, as a mark of tribute, that the

* Manuscript - Report of the Librarian, 1869, F. S. Papers.

** Manuscript - Act of Reincorporation, F. S. Papers, Washington and Lee University Library.

funeral expenses of their old Librarian should be paid out of the funds in the hands of the Treasurer. The other thing of importance was the decision to permit optional attendance of members, relieving them of a fine for non-attendance.* This marked the end of practical usefulness of the Society, and the last few years are of interest only for the attempts to settle upon a solution of the problem of giving their beloved institution a satisfactory termination.

The Society discussed many questions from 1866 to 1876 of which the following are most important:

"Is it probable from the present aspect of affairs that the Radical Congress will attempt confiscation of the property of prominent Rebels?" (April, 1867)

"Will the advantages secured to the United States by the recent territorial purchases justify the national expenditures for the same?" (Feb. 8, 1868)

"Should the United States recognize the belligerency of the rebels in Cuba?" (Nov. 21, 1869)

"Would it not be to the interests of the Valley to unite with West Virginia and make the Blue Ridge the line between the two states?" (1868)

"Does civilization increase the happiness of man?"

"Do the Southern people underestimate the virtues of the Puritans?"

"Are the Southern people entitled to claim any protection or privileges under the Constitution of the United States?" (Nov. 8, 1867)

"Is it to the interest of the Southern people that the existing form of government of the United States be maintained?" (Dec. 2, 1872)

"Is the State of Virginia in honor bound to keep the pledge made to army officers leaving the United States' service, that in case of failure on the part of the South in the war they should be provided for by the State?" (March 30, 1872)

"Are the teachings of History favorable to republican governments?"

"Ought punishment by stripes be abolished?"

"Can government interfere with advantage in the conflict between Labor and Capitol?"

VII

Decay and Dissolution

~~The~~ The Society held very few meetings after 1878. The debating member list grew shorter and shorter. The President and Directors report their conviction of the fact that a renewed interest must be instilled into the Society, or its end was inevitable.*

The Librarian's report was just as dismal. However, there was

* Manuscript - Reports of the President and Directors, and the Librarian, 1879, F. S. Papers.

a short revival about 1882,* but in 1885 the President stated that the Society was drifting to the point where its usefulness would cease, and that its end as an institution for good would not be long postponed unless something was done.**

A committee was appointed to decide upon a proper solution and it recommended that the books and property be given over to Washington and Lee University, and in return, the University should assume the debts of the Society and allow its stockholders the use of the University Library.*** Almost pathetic is the report of a minority of the stockholders - Mr. Barclay and Mr. Cowardin - protesting against such action. They believed that the Franklin Society had not outlived its usefulness. The Society took no action upon the committees recommendations.

In 1887 the Young Men's Christian Association leased the property for fifteen years. The books, 3850 in number, were to be kept in the hall, and a Librarian paid by the Association was to keep the Library open from seven to ten each night. The Young Men's Christian Association assumed the debt of the Society amounting to over \$900.00, but this lease was surrendered in 1890.****

After the surrender of the lease by the Young Men's Christian Association the Society met again on January 17, 1891, to decide on a satisfactory disposition of their property.

* Report of Pres. and Directors, 1879, F. S. Papers.

** Report of the Pres. and Directors, 1885, F. S. Papers.

*** Report of Committee on transfer of property, F. S. Papers.

**** Joint Report of the President ~~of the president of the~~ Franklin Society and the President of the Y. M. C. A., 1888, F. S. Papers.

The following resolutions were adopted to be proposed to Washington and Lee University:*

1. That Washington and Lee University assume the payment of all debts of the Franklin Society, and pay each of the shareholders the sum of \$50.00 for his share of stock within thirty days after the acceptance of these propositions.

2. That the shareholders shall have the use of the Library of the University without fee or charge during life, under the same rules and regulations that governed the Franklin Society.

3. That a perpetual scholarship of the value of \$300.00 per annum be established, to be known as the "Franklin Society Scholarship."

4. The books of the Franklin Society are to be labelled "Franklin Society Library," and the records of the Society are to be carefully preserved.

The Board of Trustees of Washington and Lee University met on June 16, 1891 and accepted the whole proposition, and ordered the payment of \$50.00 to each shareholder and the establishment of a scholarship to begin in the session 1891-92.** On June 30, 1891 the Executive Committee of the Trustees directed the Librarian of the University to take charge of the books and records, and the Treasurer to sell the Real Estate, collect

* Ms. Proposition to W. & L. University, Jan. 17, 1891. Treasurer's Office, W. & L. University.

** Ms. Minutes of the Board of Trustees, 1891, Treasurer's Office, W. & L. University.

the debts, and sell as much of the personal property as would not be needed by the University. Also, he was ordered to pay the interest due on the four notes, and the Rector was ordered to execute the bond of the University for the principal of the said debts.* On July 1, 1891 the Franklin Society and Library Company of Lexington deeded all its possessions to Washington and Lee University.** In 1909 the University sold the hall, and six years later it was destroyed by fire - ninety-nine years almost to the day after the passage of the original act of incorporation.

VIII

Conclusion

The Franklin Society lived nearly on hundred years. It added to its rolls year by year and built up an estate worth nearly ten thousand dollars. It was known throughout the State of Virginia, and in one or two cases visitors from a distance came to Lexington for the avowed purpose of copying its organization and framework. Every live political question was discussed within its halls. It is said that no public man in

* Ms. Minute Book of the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees of W. & L. U. Treasurer's Office.

** Deed Book No. 73, County Clerk's Office Lexington, Va.

this section of Virginia would dare to express an opinion before the Franklin Society had passed on the question.* The legislators of this community, both state and national, were in nearly every case members and took leading parts in the discussions. The transformation of the arsenal into the Virginia Military Institute was first agitated by the Franklin Society, and by the means brought to the attention of the General Assembly.**

As might have been expected, the Society always was the champion of education. From the earliest period a good understanding existed between it and Washington College. The professors and students were admitted as members, and liberal arrangements were made to extend to them the use of the Library. Col. U. T. L. Preston attributes the permanency of the Franklin Society, unusual in such associations, to three causes: 1, the character which its founders impressed on it, and which continued to be felt through its history; 2, the more than common literary spirit of this community. The influences of Washington College, The Virginia Military Institute, and the Ann Smith Academy is accountable to a great extent for this spirit; 3, and mainly, the possession of valuable property. The property gave sense of solidity that could be secured in no other way. After a devastating war that would have destroyed other societies, they came back to their property, their hall, and soon resumed their former functions.

*Mr. William A. Anderson, Lexington, Va., Rector of W. & L. U.

** Mr. W. M. Paxton, Lexington, Va., Editor of the 'Rockbridge County News.'

The The Franklin Society exerted a wide influence in Lexington and surrounding county, even outside of Rockbridge County, and it is to be regretted that it had to discontinue operation. In this age of fast trains, airplanes, wireless, and radios we are likely to overlook the more serious things of life in the excitement of this thoughtless age. We do not take the time to study the problems of the day, as our fathers did. This tendency caused the Franklin Society to close its doors and mournfully announce the end of its usefulness. Now, the only things to remind us of this wonderful old society are a few, scattered, old, tattered books in the College Library; a reference to it in the rules and regulations of the Library; and the announcement in the College catalogue of a scholarship bearing the once highly honored name. Let us hope if modern civilization ever takes the time to revert to an interest in old fashioned debates, the Franklin Society and Library Company of Lexington, Virginia, will be the first to be revived.

APPENDIX

List of Shareholders when the property was transferred to
Washington and Lee University in 1891.

John W. Barclay, James B. Dorman, Alexander M. Glasgow, William
McLaughlin, James T. McCrum, James J. White, Archibald Alexander,
Alexander T. Barclay, John C. Bonde, James K. Edmondson, S. Houston
Letcher, Calvin M. Dold, John A. R. Varner, William A. Anderson,
William Wolz, William P. Houston, Charles M. Figgat, James D.
Anderson, Joseph K. White, John C. Campbell, David E. Moores,
Elihu H. Barclay, William S. White, Samuel J. Graham, E. Morgen
Pendleton, J. Resston Moore, John P. Welsh, William S. Hopkins,
Herbert P. Preston, Heuri Davin, J. Alexander Steele, Frank T.
Glasgow, Edward L. Graham, Matthew W. Paxton, Edward W. Nicholas,
Henry H. Myers, Jacob Fuller's Heirs, William G. White's Heirs,
Charles A. Davidson's Heirs.