

## Alexander Graydon at Pennsylvania

There was published at Harrisburg, in 1818, a volume of memoirs, parts of which should prove interesting to Pennsylvania men. The author, Alexander Graydon, was born at Bristol, Pa., in 1752, the son of a family of position. Alexander, in his eighth year, was entered at "the academy, then, as it now continues to be, under the name of a university, the principal seminary in Pennsylvania."

The account which he gives of his life at the academy shows a most curious and primitive state of affairs there, and it is hard to believe the present University had such a small and un-aspiring beginning.

In the catalogue of matriculates of the college Graydon's name appears as a member of the class that entered in 1770. He did not remain to graduate, but after a period of inactivity commenced the study of law. In 1775 Congress appointed him a captain, and he busied himself in raising recruits for the Continental Army. His active service was terminated at the battle of Long Island, where he was taken prisoner, and after confinement in New York and Flatbush, was released on parole. He went to Reading; was appointed prothonotary of Dauphin County; and settled in Harrisburg. Later he removed to Philadelphia, dying in 1818.

The volume of memoirs is rare, and it is unlikely that his account of the academy is widely known. It is best given in his own words:

Upon its being decided that he should enter he was introduced by his father "to Mr. Kinnersley, the teacher of English

and professor of oratory. He was an Anabaptist clergyman, a large, venerable looking man, of no great general erudition, though a considerable proficient in electricity, and who, whether truly or not, has been said to have had a share in certain discoveries in that science, of which Doctor Franklin received the whole credit. The task, of the younger boys at least, consisted in learning to read and to write their mother tongue grammatically; and one day in the week, I think Friday, was set apart for the recitation of select passages in poetry and prose. \* \* \* \* \* After Aesop's fables, and an abridgment of the Roman history, Telemachus was put into our hands; and if it be admitted that the human heart may be bettered by instruction, mine, I may aver, was benefited by this work of the virtuous Fenelon. \* \* \* \* \*

"A few days after I had been put under the care of Mr. Kinnersley, I was told by my classmates that it was necessary for me to fight a battle with some one, in order to establish my claim to the honor of being an academy boy; that this could not be dispensed with, and that they would select for me a suitable antagonist, *one of my match*, whom, after school I must fight or be looked upon as a coward. \* \* \* \* \*

"A combat immediately ensued which for some time was maintained with equal vigor and determination, when, unluckily, I received his fist directly in my gullet; the blow for a time depriving me of breath and the power of resistance, victory declared for my adversary."

The father died in 1761, whereupon the rest of the family moved to Philadelphia. It was time for Alexander to enter the Latin school of the academy.

"The person whose pupil I was consequently to become was Mr. John Beveridge, a native of Scotland, who retained the smack of his vernacular tongue in its primitive purity. His acquaintance with the language he taught was, I believe, justly deemed to be very accurate and profound. But as to his other acquirements, after excepting the game of backgammon, in which he was said to excel, truth will not warrant me in saying a great deal. \* \* \*

"He was assisted, indeed, by two ushers, who eased him in the burden of teaching, but who in matters of discipline seemed disinclined to interfere. I have seen them slyly slip out of the

way when the principal was entering upon the job of capitally punishing a boy, who, from his size, would be likely to make resistance.

“So entire was the want of respect towards him, and so liable was he to be imposed upon, that one of the larger boys, for a wager, once pulled off his wig, which he effected by suddenly twitching it from his head under pretense of brushing from it a spider; and the unequivocal insult was only resented by the peevish exclamation of ‘hoot mon’!

“As it frequently happens in human affairs, that men are misplaced, and that those found in a subordinate position are better fitted for the supreme authority than those who are invested with it, so it generally was in the Latin school of the academy. The ushers during the term of my pupilage, a period of four years or more, were often changed; and some of them, it must be admitted, were insignificant enough; but others were men of sense and respectability, to whom, on a comparison with the principal, the management of the school might have been committed with much advantage. Among these was Mr. Patrick Allison, afterward officiating as a Presbyterian clergyman in Baltimore; Mr. James Wilson, late one of the associate justices of the supreme court of the United States; and Mr. John Andrews, now doctor Andrews, of the University of Pennsylvania. It is true they were much younger men than Mr. Beveridge, and probably unequal adepts in the language that was taught; but even on the supposition of this comparative deficiency on their part, it would have been amply compensated on the score of judicious discipline and instruction.

“My mother removed to Philadelphia in the view of keeping a lodging house, an employment which, in Philadelphia, has been the usual resource of persons in her situation, that is, of widows, reputedly brought up, left in circumstances too slender for the support of their families. She began with taking boys who went to the academy, of which there were generally a number from the southern provinces and the West India Islands. \* \* \* The first lads that were placed with her were two brothers, the sons of a Colonel Lewis, of Virginia. The younger, named Samuel, about a year older than myself,

had the attractions of a pleasing countenance and great gentleness of manners. Though he belonged to a younger class than mine, the living and sleeping together were sufficient to cement a warm attachment between us, and there was not a boy in the school in whose welfare and competitions I took so decided an interest, the ardor of which was in almost perpetual requisition, from the circumstance of his being a champion in the gymnastic exercise of running, which was then the rage. The enthusiasm of the turf had pervaded the academy, and the most extravagant transports of that theatre on the triumph of a favorite horse were not more zealous and impassioned than were the acclamations which followed the victor in the foot-race round a square. Stripped to the shirt, and accoutred for the heat by a handkerchief bound round the head, another round the middle, with loosened knee-bands, without shoes or with moccasins instead of them, the racers were started; and turning to the left they encompassed the square on which the academy stands. The four sides of this square cannot be much less than three-quarters of a mile; wherefore bottom in the coursers was no less essential than swiftness, and in both Lewis bore away the palm from every one that dared enter against him. After having in a great number of matches triumphed over the academy, other schools were resorted to for racers; but all in vain. Lewis was the eclipse that distanced every competitor.

“With respect to my progress and that of the class to which I belonged, it was reputable and perhaps laudable for the first two years. From a pretty close application we were well grounded in grammar, and had passed through the elementary books, much to the approbation of our teachers; but at length, with a single exception, we became possessed of the demon of liberty and idleness. We were, to a great degree, impatient of the restraints of school; \* \* \* and accordingly, when the question was proposed which of us would enter upon the study of Greek, the grammar of which tongue was about to be put into our hands, there were but two or three who declared for it. As to myself, it was my mother’s desire, from her knowing it to have been my father’s intention to give me the best education the country afforded, that I should go on and acquire every language and science that was taught in the

institution ; but as my evil star would have it, I was thoroughly tired of books and confinement, and her advice and even entreaties were overruled by my extreme repugnance to a longer continuance in the college, which to my lasting regret I bid adieu to when a little turned of fourteen, at the very season when the minds of the studious begin to profit by instruction. We were at this time reading Horace and Cicero, having passed through Ovid, Virgil, Cæsar and Sallust."

ISAAC ANDERSON PENNYPACKER, '02C.

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