Our Special Contributions.

EARLY HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN.

By Hon. C. L. Walker.

There is no one thing for which Michigan is so much honored abroad as for her valuable and distinct characteristics of her location, for her healthful climate and fertile soil, for her wealth of pine lands and her valuable mineral resources, she can claim no honor. These are the bountiful gifts of nature. But her University stands alone, and is at once the outgrowth and the safeguard of their intelligence and their enterprise.

The University as now organized dates its existence from March 18, 1837. But it was declared by the Supreme Court in the case of The Regents vs. The Board of Education, in 4, Michigan Reports: that the present corporation was but a continuation of "The Trustees of the University of Michigan," incorporated April 30, 1821. It is equally clear that that corporation was the legitimate successor of "The Catholic Seminary, or University of Michigan," incorporated August 21, 1817. The very existence of these early institutions is entirely unknown to any portion of our present population and a knowledge of their history is confined to a few individuals. The Supreme Court in the case already referred to, said that it did not distinctly appear that the Catholic Seminary had ever been organized, and Mr. Sherman, in his invaluable report upon the history of our educational institutions, does not give any intimation of such an organization. Nor is this surprising. No public record of such organization, or of its location thereunder is known to exist, and the evidence of this fact is thoroughly scattered, and not easily accessible. But the history of the institution in connection with the present charterable institution, is full of curious interest.

The object of this article is to give a brief sketch of these two organizations which preceeded the present one. It is a chapter in our history that ought not to be forgotten or overlooked.

The ordinance of 1817, under the provisions of which Michigan was organized as a territory, provided that the means of education shall be forever encouraged. The first practical step taken toward establishing a University was, that by act of Congress, March 3, 1825, a township of land was reserved (not given) in the Detroit land district for the use of a seminary of learning. And the second was, the act of August 23, 1817, already referred to, establishing "The Catholic Seminary, or University of Michigan."

It was drawn by Judge Woodward, who was the Chief Justice of the Territory from its organization until 1825, a man of much sagacity and learning, but pedantic, visionary, and exceedingly eccentric.

The pontifical and absurdly pedantic character of this charter and its entire want of adaptation to the then existing state of things in the State, blinded us at first to the broad and far-seeing wisdom that characterizes it. At this time the population of about 1,500 was mostly of the old settlement, and the whole of the territory only 5,000 or 6,000. It was largely of French origin, a happy, gradual erection of a building thereon completed. James McClosky was appointed to superintend the erection of the building, and only furnished with a very limited sum for the purpose. This was the foundation of the old state University building so well known, and only recently torn down, was laid. It was 50 feet by 54, two stories in room in each story, and the only structure of this kind ever erected in the city. Some of the subscriptions were as follows: The Terriory, $400; Zion's Lodge, $250; Wm. Woodbridge, $200; James Abbott, $200; John R. Williams, $200; Abraham Edwards, $180; Solomon Sibley, $150.

But through this unpromising state of things, the future began to loom up to the fore, seeing, with something of its real grandeur. Possessed with this prophetic vision, Judge Woodward conceived the plan of our first University, and from his pen came the provisions by which (as our paper) it sprang into being. The first rough draft of this bill in the hand writing of its author, full of errors and interpolations, now lies before me. It will be seen that under its peculiar provisions there was a provision for "a complete system of education organized by law under one control and sustained at the public expense." English was the language prescribed for the public. A system resting on the basis of the common school, ascending through academies and colleges and crowning with a University where all science was to be taught.

It is true, I have not been able to find in the large number of people who were present at the first and second sessions of the University, 1826, that all were of that exalted character which is prescribed by the charter. The charter provides: 1st. That the institution shall be composed of thirteen deans or professors, which are all named, the first being a "Canon or Professor of the Colleges or University of which shall be president." The others are named in the same pedantic manner.

The professors were to be appointed and commissioned by the Governor and paid an annual salary to be fixed by law.

They were to have the control of the whole educational interests of Michigan, with authority to "establish colleges, academies, schools, libraries, museums, botanical gardens, libraries and other useful literary and scientific institutions, and to appoint officers, instructors and instructors amongst the territory, who were also to be paid from the public treasury."

2d. To meet these expenses, fifteen percent was to be added to the taxes, and the University was also permitted to draw down its reserve to the extent of fifteen percent from the prizes. Tuition fees were to be charged, except in the case of indigent students, who were to be educated free of expense.

This plan, so magnificent on paper, was made somewhat ridiculous by the act of the Governor and judges, passed the same day, fixing the salaries as follows: That of President, $55; of the Vice-President, $15; of the Professors, $12; and of the Instructors and Instructors, $8 each. The salaries of Professors were doubled, the number of the professors was reduced, and the institution would probably be supported from tuition fees. On the 8th day of September following, Gen. Cass appointed John M. Michie, of New York, minister of the first Protestant Society, a worthy and capable man, President and Professor of Universal Science. He was also commissioned to six other professorships, and Father Richard, the well-known and universally reverenced Catholic priest, received and accepted a commission for the six other professorships, and President Michie entreated in his correspondent, that a commission for the office was now ready to go into operation.

A subscription of over $3,000 was proposed in Chicago for the building, and on July 22, 1826, a lot was sold on Bates street, opposite St. Anne's Church, and the arrangements for the erection of the building thereon completed. James McClosky was appointed to superintend the erection of the building, and only furnished with a very limited sum for the purpose. This was the foundation of the old state University building so well known, and only recently torn down, was laid. It was 50 feet by 54, two stories in room in each story, and the only structure of this kind ever erected in the city. Some of the subscriptions were as follows: The Territory, $400; Zion's Lodge, $250; Wm. Woodbridge, $200; James Abbott, $200;
It provides that the governing power shall reside in thirteen regents of the University of Michigan, and makes many other radical changes.

On the 28th of April, 1821, an act was passed to incorporate "The Trustees of the University of Michigan." It provided for 21 Trustees, of which number the Governor was to be one, who were clothed with power to establish colleges and schools as they thought fit and the funds would permit. Religious belief was not to disqualify either for trustee, teacher or professor. The corporation was to control the township reserved under the act of 1804, and the three sections given by the Indians, and were entitled to all the property and were to assume the liabilities, when the Catholic episcopate

The Trustees comprised many of the most prominent men of the Territory, and were as follows: Gov. Cass, John Biddle, Nicholas Baldwin, Daniel LeRoy, Christian Clemens, Wm. H. Puttkeff, John Anderson, John Hunt, Charles Larned, Gabriel Richard, John R. Williams, Solomon Sibley, John Montelth, Henry J. Hunt, John L. Leidy, Peter J. Denoyer, Austin E. Wing, William Woodbridge, Benjamin Stead, Philip Leeong and William Brown. None of these men are now living. The last surviving was John Montelth, who died at Adrian a year or two since. Other Trustees were subsequently appointed in the place of some who died, resigned or removed: viz., Abraham Edwards, Rev. A. Welton, Thos. Rowland, James Ely, Rev. N. M. Wells, Luther Humphrey, James Kingsley and Richard Bury. The first meeting of the new corporation was May 29, 1821. Samuel Shattuck was the first Secretary, but he soon resigned and C. C. Trowbridge was made Secretary December 4, 1821, and held that office until February 18, 1835, when he resigned and was succeeded by G. Mott Williams.

The organization continued to employ Mr. Shattuck as teacher until he resigned December 3, 1821. The trustees resolved that he was entitled to thanks for the zeal, industry, intelligence and fidelity with which he had discharged his duties. He had previously been authorized to correspond with Mr. Bass, a Turner Duley of Albany, as to a successor, and the result was that John Farmer, a name familiar to all in connection with Farmer's map of Michigan, was on the 23d day of December, 1821, to take charge of the Lancasterian school. He remained as teacher two years, the first year he had $500 salary, and the second year he received the tuition as a compensation. I cannot ascertain that the Lancasterian system was continued by Mr. Farmer left, which was in January, 1824. In October, 1824, Eleazar Shepard was teacher of the primary school at a salary of $75 per quarter, and he is spoken of as one of the instructors in December, 1825. In May, 1827, a Mr. Cook came on from Albany to take charge of this branch, but died in July following.

In the fall of 1821, Mr. E. Clapp was teacher of the classical school, and continued in charge thereof, until April 1, 1822, when he was succeeded by the Rev. A. Walton, who was in turn succeeded by Rev. Asahel Wells, A.M., November, 1823. He was a teacher of great merit, and was employed at a salary of $500, which, afterward increased to $600. He remained until November, 1826, when he resigned and was succeeded by Chas. E. Searle, who remained until October, 1827, when he resigned to remain if he would accept of such compensation as he could get from individual subscriptions, which he declined to do.

It had evidently been a great struggle peculiarly for many years to maintain these schools, and from this time none were maintained at the expense of the University, but the building was used for private schools. Thus Mr. Healy, a teacher long connected with our public schools, commenced a school there in 1828, and Mr. Hathorn was in use of the rooms in 1829. On the 8th of May, 1831, the building was delivered to the directors of the Common Schools of the city of Detroit, and was for a time occupied for the purpose of city schools.

At the last meeting of the trustees, November 18, 1837, it was resolved that the University building be granted to the Regents of the University (the present organization, for five, and committed to the old organization, to be occupied for a Branch University, and it was so occupied for a long time. Rev. Mr. Field, now of Cincinnati, was for many years the successful principal. As already said, it was ultimately decided that the buildings, though conveyed to the old organization, belonged to the present organization, as it was the University of Michigan and the legitimate successor of "the trustees, etc.

We are very largely indebted to the teachers for their wise, energetic and successful efforts in securing, enlarging and making valuable the contribution of public lands, which is now the foundation of the endowment of our University. The act of 1804, already referred to, contemplates the reservation of an entire township in one body.

The advantages of selecting the same amount of land in small parcels in different parts of the State, were clearly seen by the trustees. On the 30th of November, 1823, the Board adopted a lengthy and able memorial to Congress, drawn by Mr. Woodbridge, asking an amendment to the law authorizing the selection of those lands in parcels. Austin E. Wing, another of the trustees, and our delegate in Congress, urged these views so effectually that an act was passed May 30, 1838, by which authority was given to select the townships of land or seventy-two sections instead of one township, and that it might be selected in any legal subdivision. The importance of this act both as to the amount of land and the mode of selection is obvious. Without it our University could not have existed.

The Trustees caused forty-nine of these sections to be selected. The rest have been selected under State authority. The Trustees also selected, and selected well, the three sections granted them under the "Treaty of Fort Meigs." From the proceeds of the sale of a portion of this three sections, they were able to pay over to the Regents $5,694.88. Prominent among the trustees and in rendering valuable service in these selections, were Austin E. Wing and Daniel Lorcy.

While it is true that the early organizations did not succeed in permanently establishing a school of a high order, it would be difficult to estimate the amount of good accomplished by their efforts. They procured several valuable teachers from abroad, who otherwise would not have come here. For many years they maintained a classical school, of a highly respectable character, and a very successful Lancasterian school. They raised the general standard of education in the community and materially aided in preparing the way for our present educational system, as broad and comprehensive as any in the country, and proposed by Judge Woodbridge, which is at once the pride and glory of the State, and the guarantee of its future intelligence, prosperity and do.