

Virginia United Methodist HERITAGE
Bulletin of the Virginia Conference Historical Society
of The United Methodist Church
Catherine D. Morgan, president

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HERITAGE is published twice yearly for \$5.00, postpaid, by the Commission on Archives and History of the Virginia Conference of The United Methodist Church. Some back issues available for \$3.00 each, postpaid.

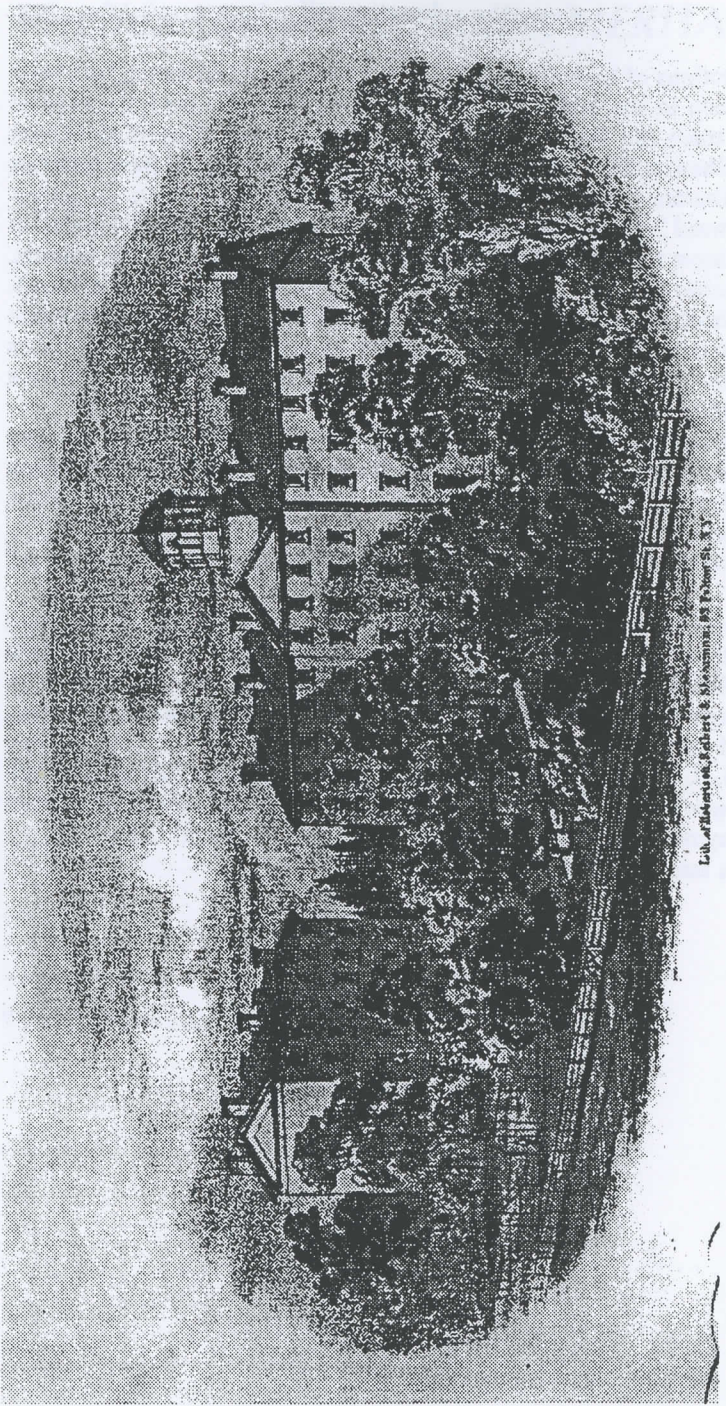
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VIRGINIA UNITED METHODIST

HERITAGE

Bulletin of the Virginia Conference Historical Society
of the United Methodist Church
Volume XXII, Number 2

FALL 1996



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Randolph-Macon College at Boydton. Used by permission of McGraw-Hill, Randolph-Macon College.

Some Social Forces in the Founding of Randolph-Macon College

James Edward Scanlon

The old and familiar story of the founding of the college is purely a Methodist one: some ministers rather arbitrarily decide, while having lunch near Boydton, that the racetrack where they are eating would be a good place for a school. The college was then chartered in 1830.

The rest of the story is the usual one of presidents and their buildings. As this author has tried to show in another place,¹ that story is not sustainable in its details and does not do justice to the role of the citizens of Mecklenburg County in bringing the college to that place. That the Methodists were instrumental in forming the school is without doubt, but they did not act alone. Nor did they act in a vacuum. The Methodists were part of a larger society. As Professor Paul Mattingly of New York University points out, if one looked at a large city newspaper in the 1830s, one would see competing for the reader's attention advertisements for colleges amidst the other notices of everyday life.² Universities today do not, typically, advertise in a public way; they seek to attract students through direct mailings or through high schools. As a result they are today less prominent in our consciousness (unless, of course, one has children going to them). A century and a half ago, colleges interacted more with their communities.

Commencements, which today are for graduating seniors and their families, were in the 19th century community events. In Randolph-Macon's case, a commencement could last for two days. Every senior made a speech, and interspersed between them were musical performances. A commencement was pageantry and entertainment of rare occurrence before motion pictures, television, and radios.

The commencements of the 19th century are visible symbols not only of the colleges' education but also of the interconnectedness of school and society, an interconnectedness just as real, but not nearly so visible, today. To place early Randolph-Macon College into a context, something needs to be said about the historical background without which the actions of the founders are not fully clear.

The Planters

A good beginning, though seemingly remote from the college, is Rhys Isaac's *Transformation of Virginia 1740 - 1790*.³ This work is only tangentially a political or even economic history. Isaac is concerned with the nature of social relationships, for which the church became an outward and visible sign. The Church of England, where attendance was required by law in the Colonial period, was not simply a place of worship. It was the stage on which the drama of the social hierarchy was performed. Small planters waited until the arrival of the large planters before entering. The wait entailed a show of deference (bowing, curtsying) before the local elite. This display of deference also revealed economic realities: the large planters were sources of credit, marketing,

and consumer goods. The large planters, not coincidentally, were the holders of political power: vestrymen (who set taxes), justices of the peace, burgesses.

Distinguishing the large planters was not simply wealth. They lived differently.⁴ Their large houses, sometimes of brick and patterned after classical English models, stood in contrast to the simple one- and two-room dwellings of the ordinary planters.⁵ The great planters dressed — appeared — differently. The astonishment with which Devereux Jarratt first viewed a gentleman was so vivid that he remembered it all of his life and recorded the phenomenon many decades later in his memoirs. His description is one of the few of lesser folks to survive in writing and is widely quoted.⁶

The manner of living of the elite was distinctive: gambling on cards, horses, cockfights; alcohol; dancing; lavish hospitality. These qualities reflected English gentry customs and carried on a medieval ethos where social status was not only expressed by but depended upon display and a kind of recklessness that showed indifference to money. A gentleman was one who could bear the port, charges, and countenances of a gentleman. (After all, a gentleman's income came from agricultural rents, and these would always come again next year.)

Isaac suggests, but does not work out explicitly, that the appearance of the representatives ("factors") of Scottish tobacco merchants offered the smaller planters alternatives to the big planters for getting credit and marketing their crops.⁷ A shift from raising tobacco to raising grain for export also undercut the financial power of the elite. Grain was stored for shipment at towns which make their appearance in Virginia in mid-18th century (for example, Fredericksburg). This development meant that the small planters no longer needed the acquiescence of the big planters whose docks had been the landing and loading places of the Atlantic ships. In sum, the change in the economy meant that the social hierarchy, played out before and in the Church of England, would begin to crumble.

Change and Reaction

Following Isaac's implicit argument, the nature of religion changed as well. New religious forms sprang up: egalitarian, not hierarchical; spontaneous, not structured; vernacular and barn-like timber church buildings, not formal and alien brick piles distinct from ordinary experience.⁸ The *Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church* exhibited for many decades — into the 1850s — this sort of dislike of elaborate architecture:

Let all our churches be built plain and decent, and with free seats; but not more expensive than is absolutely unavoidable, otherwise the necessity of money will make rich men necessary to us. But if so, we must be dependant [sic] upon them. And then farewell to Methodist discipline, if not doctrine too.⁹

Just as the buildings of the new religious groups were different, so were their *mores*. If the Anglican elite danced, drank, and gambled, the new churches would prohibit these activities. Thus Isaac presents the churches of the mid- and late 18th century as a kind of anti-Anglicanism, what he calls an evangelical

counterculture.¹⁰ By the late 18th century, the hegemony of the Anglican church was destroyed. From one side, its privileged position was contemned by American *philosophes* like Thomas Jefferson and James Madison. Jefferson drafted the law and Madison led the legislative attack that succeeded in disestablishing the Episcopal Church (successor to the Church of England) in the Virginia Bill of Religious Freedom in 1786. People would no longer be taxed to support a church nor be obliged to attend one.

From the other side, the Baptists exhibited a kind of rage against the remaining traces of Episcopal prestige. Arguing that the extensive real estate of the churches (the glebe lands) had been paid for by taxes, the Baptists demanded that the lands be sold and the sales' money go to support the poor in the state. Through the 1790s the Baptists, then the largest denomination in the Commonwealth, had organized a widespread campaign to pressure the legislature. In this endeavor they were aided by individual Methodists who gained signatures in the counties for support of the sale of the glebes. The Virginia Conference, as a formal body, did not join in the attack, in part because it was an offshoot of the Church of England, in part because it was satisfied with the *status quo*, and in part because the Baptists were perceived as rivals. By 1802 the evangelicals, led by the Baptists, succeeded in getting the legislature to sell the church lands.¹¹

The Virginian insistence on the strict separation of Church and State led to a refusal to grant incorporation to church property. Incorporation was viewed as a privilege: corporations were perpetual; they could own, sell, and buy property; the members of the corporation were not personally liable for its debts. Legislators saw creating a religious corporation as breaking down the barriers between Church and State. As the Rev. Thomas E. Buckley, SJ, points out, no other state interpreted the concept this way. Perhaps this argument was only a rationale. Many laymen thought that incorporation would give control of the churches to the clergy instead of the Virginian traditional secular control.

The result of the legislature's refusal to grant incorporation, ironically, was to throw church problems into the political arena. Church trustees wishing to dispose of property had to go to the legislature or the courts.¹² The attitudes of the Virginia legislature would present problems to the Methodists who wished to establish a college in 1830.

Socio-religious attitudes and political theory are only part of the mixture that shaped the founding of Randolph-Macon College. The nature of agriculture in the United States changed, if not dramatically and suddenly, then profoundly and permanently. Farmers were never completely independent in the Colonial period. They depended upon others for iron tools, weapons, salt, and textiles initially, and, as Colonial society matured, for shoes and tableware. Still, at the time of the Revolution most ordinary farmers consumed as food and wore as clothing the bulk of what they raised and grew. They sold their little surplus for what they could not themselves produce or manufacture.¹³

Virginians in the Colonial period were rather less self-sufficient than their Northern fellows. They preferred to raise tobacco and exchange it for necessities. When tobacco prices fell, home production went up, but never did most of the small planters become self-sufficient. According to Alan Kulikoff, only five

percent of households in Prince George's County in the 1760s had both sheep and looms, although 50 percent had sheep. In southern Maryland fewer than one in three households had both. Even in Pennsylvania, which did not have a single staple crop like tobacco, home textile production was far from universal.¹⁴

The subsistence economy meant more than a scarcity of goods. Subsistence farmers were part of a community that emphasized cooperation; in other words, they were part of a traditional society for which commercial exchange as a way of life was alien. Traditional agrarian society began in the late 18th century to be undermined and then destroyed by the force of consumerism. Social status began to be defined by the ownership of things not produced in the home. For example, at the beginning of the 18th century in rural Anne Arundel County, none of the wealthiest estates had tea and tea services; by the time of the Revolution 85 percent did and over a quarter of the poorest group did.¹⁵ To acquire luxury goods (which quickly ceased to be luxuries and became necessities), farmers turned more and more to raising crops for sale.

This change and its ramifications have been described by Charles Sellers in *The Market Revolution*.¹⁶ He notes that the market had lured multitudes from the traditional rural values of patient industry, economy, and limited expectations.¹⁷ European demand for grain after 1788 began a generation-long period of agricultural prosperity.¹⁸ The rapid expansion of agriculture following the War of 1812 (fed by European demand for food and a glut of European manufactured goods) led to much borrowing and an expansion of credit through an exfoliation of state banks. The whole business collapsed in 1819 with the inevitable recovery of European agriculture. A growing political movement, ultimately headed by Andrew Jackson, would present itself as the opponent of the new market system, or at least the opponent of its most visible aspect — banks. Ultimately, Jackson would take on and finish off the federally chartered Second Bank of the United States.

None of this opposition, in the end, would matter. The transformation of American agriculture from subsistence to market, from traditional to modern, from community-connected to isolated was irresistible. But during the initial stages of transition, politicians who aligned themselves against the new capitalistic institutions were to find support among the agrarian traditionalists.

Foremost among these politicians were Nathaniel Macon (37 years a congressman) and John Randolph of Roanoke (34 years in Congress).¹⁹ That the Methodists of the Virginia Conference named their college after these two politicians may be more than simply the facts of their local prominence and their not being Methodist, to appease the anti-establishment principles of the legislature. That the Methodists named their college Randolph-Macon may reflect a deeper motive: to express the Church's attachment to the traditional ways of agriculture or at least to the traditional ways' lack of consumerism.

An Educated Clergy

The reason for the founding of the college was not agricultural. The Methodists, who had begun as a rural movement, by the 1820s wished to compete successfully in the cities of Virginia. An undocumented story, which

survived as an oral tradition through the 1970s, attributes the beginning of the college to a remark made by Hezekiah Leigh to John Early in front of the Methodist Church in Petersburg: "When are the Methodists going to get preachers who know how to preach?"²⁰ Certainly Petersburg did play a role. Writing in 1847, J.W. Hardy asserted that "the first popular movement in favor of the College was made in the year 1825" in that city.²¹ Whether or not the remark was actually made, the story captures the real problem facing the Methodists in the 1820s. Urban congregations were more sophisticated than rural ones, and to compete successfully with the Presbyterians the Methodists needed clergy who could deliver a sermon that pleased an educated congregation.

Also in the 18 'teens and '20s, the church membership in the Virginia Conference seems to have been declining. Losses of more than 1000 members annually occurred in 1818, 1819, 1820, and continued until 1825. Some of this loss could be explained by westward migration.²² (Not coincidentally, the Virginia Historical Society was founded in 1831 to preserve the state history.) Perhaps the founders of the college might have thought it would help stem the losses, but if they thought this they did not record it.

In 1822 the Virginia Conference attempted to remedy the problems in preaching by requiring candidates for the ministry to pursue a course of readings upon which they would be examined. The topics to be covered were divinity, ancient history, English grammar, and geography. The chairman of the examining committee, John Early, noted that the aspirants were more often "indifferent" or "deficient" than "good."²³ (The same pattern, more or less, continued until 1828.) In sum, the record shows that the self-education of ministers was working poorly if at all.

Virginia Methodism faced, if not a crisis, at least a major problem. The solution was a college. In February 1825, the Virginia Conference, moved by a recommendation of the General Conference that each conference form a "Seminary of Learning," created a committee "to consider and report the best method of establishing ... a Seminary with suitable Constitutional Principle."²⁴ In the same year the Virginia Conference began appealing for money.²⁵

A college could solve another problem. Believing that true conversion to Christianity came in the teenage years, Methodists faced a danger when sending their sons off to college. Should the conversion occur at a school of another denomination, the young man would naturally turn to the church of that school. Having a Methodist college encouraged conversion to Methodism.²⁶

A college meant a charter of incorporation. Apparently expecting opposition on the grounds of separation of Church and State, the Methodists and their allies from Mecklenburg County took steps to disarm criticism by naming the college after non-Methodists, Patrick Henry and Nathaniel Macon.

Exactly as predictable, when the incorporation was introduced, objections flew. Delegate Benjamin Cabell of Pittsylvania County, apparently calling the college a "snake in the grass," attempted to table the bill under "some apprehension it was intended to establish a Theological Institution." When Mecklenburg Delegate William O. Goode (a member of the Board of Trustees) offered to

accept a "Ryder to the bill which went to prohibit the establishment of any such School," Cabell withdrew his motion. The "Ryder" came from a Delegate Atkinson from Isle of Wight County: "nothing herein contained shall be construed as at any time to authorize the Establishment of a Theological Professorship in the said College."²⁷ As amended, the bill passed the House with 106 ayes (nays not recorded.)

James Garland offered the House a long speech which is perhaps topical still:

he could not look to the history of past ages, or read the events of his own day, without highly appreciating the great value of the principle, that there should be no connexion between church and state; that religion and politics are the children of different climes, and all alliances between them are illegitimate....[but] he thought the principle, that there should be no connexion between church and state had been pushed to a point beyond its proper limitations. He did not understand that the operation of this principle was to put down Christianity or to keep it in check, but simply not to give to any of the branches of its professors exclusive privilege or bring one set of opinions in subordination to others by authority of law.

Garland added an interesting argument: "he believed in the necessity of education to preserve freedom, and that this school because of cheap tuition would give education to classes that could not then afford it."²⁸ Certainly the idea of low tuition costs was in the minds of the founders and is consistent with the notion that the Methodists represented a stratum of society below that of the most wealthy.

The fees in the early years were low: tuition, room, board, and miscellaneous expenses amounted to \$120 in 1833.²⁹ This sum was about \$25 less than at Hampden-Sydney.³⁰ In fact, the fees were too low at the Methodist college. The tuition was only \$30 for a year, an amount insufficient, given the few students, to keep the college solvent. In fact, the college suffered severe, almost fatal, financial problems until the late 1840s.

The bill chartering the college was enacted on February 3, 1830. In the law's passage through the legislature the name of the school was changed to Randolph Macon (the hyphen appearing in the 1880s.)

One feature of the charter is curious. The trustees were empowered to grant the degrees. At first glance such a power might seem unexceptional, but in practice the Methodist ministers on the first board had less education than the seniors whom they were supposed to examine. Quickly the board had to have the examinations done by the faculty of the college. It is far from being the case that trustees granted degrees everywhere. For instance, from at least 1792 on, the College of William and Mary's diploma stated that the degree was awarded by the "*Praeses et Professores*" [president and professors].³¹ A Dickinson diploma of 1805 announces the award of the degree from "*Nos Primarius et Professores*"; University of Pennsylvania, "*Praefectus, Vice Praefectus, et Professores*" (1808); West Point, "by virtue of authority in the Academic Staff" (1818). A Hampden-Sydney diploma of 1822, interestingly, has the degree

awarded by the *curatores* "[trustees]."³² Perhaps an alumnus of that school in the legislature assisted with drafting the charter and incorporated his tradition.

Following the legislative struggle, the new board of trustees needed to build a college. Architectural historian Thomas W. Dolan has convincingly argued that the buildings of the old campus near Boydton derived from a plan drafted by Joseph Carrington Cabell. Cabell's plan (which apparently no longer exists) called for a "central building," a "Steward's Hall," and a "President's House," which were, in fact, built for Randolph-Macon. Other elements of Cabell's design are evident at the old Randolph-Macon: "a pedimented front and rear" and a cupola on the main building.

The scheme came to the buildings committee of the trustees in May 1830 through William B. Philips, who had been a principal bricklayer at the University of Virginia and who was in correspondence with Cabell. In the end, the trustees hired William A. Howard and Dabney Cosby as the contractors. Cosby also had worked on the University of Virginia.³³ Mr. Dolan notes the very fine workmanship of the masonry at the old college and the striking Jeffersonian influence of the president's house, similar to that of Edgemont in Albemarle County designed by Jefferson.³⁴

The differences between the University of Virginia and Randolph-Macon are quite striking. Where Jefferson's 10 pavilions and rotunda are models of classical architecture and adorned by the classical orders, Randolph-Macon is very simple. The trustees decided in 1830 that the main building was to be "in a plain workmanlike manner of the best materials."³⁵ The main building was impressive in its great size (larger than any single edifice at the university), but remarkably simple. In fact, the architectural supports in the chapel were not classical columns with properly proportioned base, shaft, and carved capital. Instead, they were massive tree trunks, unadorned.

Only the president's house appears distinguished, an effect achieved by a porch supported by four Tuscan columns, *i.e.*, lacking flutes and ornate capitals — as simple a form as could be without simply being an upended log. The statement of the architecture was perfectly consistent with the way the Methodists saw themselves: plain, direct, earnest, and significant. The mass of the main building, not its decoration, was the statement. There seems to have been a conscious effort to match, at least, the main building at Hampden-Sydney. The Randolph-Macon trustees contracted for a building 165 feet in length, but as the Hampden-Sydney building was extended, the Randolph-Macon board added 22 feet. One cannot believe that this was a coincidence.³⁶ Just as the Methodists were taking on the Presbyterians in the cities they began to rival them in college buildings.

Very frequently in newspapers, colleges and universities are termed ivory towers. They are seen as places isolated from and in a sense unrelated to the rest of society. Institutions of higher education do have their own cultures and rules: the rhythms of their calendar reflect a long-lost agricultural world; precision of language is more valued than anywhere except contracts; and success is measured in honors and not in money. But at a deeper level these qualities, however quaint, are not so important as they appear. Colleges and universities

reflect a set of societal values: students learn that work brings success; that talents may lie undiscovered until challenge reveals them; that mental, as distinct from physical and social, skills are necessary for achievement in careers. In other words, colleges, although they insulate the world from the initial failures and novice mistakes of the young, are more a communion with society than an island away from it.

NOTES

1. James Edward Scanlon, *Randolph-Macon College: A Southern History* (Charlottesville, Va.: 1983).
2. Paul H. Mattingly, unpublished ms. history of American education.
3. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982.
4. An example of their style of living is found in *Journal and Letters of Philip Vickers Fithian . . . 1773-1774*, Hunter Dickinson Farish, ed. (Charlottesville: Dominion Books, 1988). Fithian was a tutor in the household of Robert Carter of Nomini Hall.
5. Probably the best work on the homes of ordinary Virginians in the 18th century is Henry Glassie, *Folk Architecture in Middle Virginia: A Structural analysis of historic artifacts* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1975).
6. The autobiography for 1732-63 is found in *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Series, IX, 346-93. Richard Hofstadter cites the episode in *America at 1750: A Social Portrait* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), p. 162; so does Lawrence Henry Gipson, *The British Isles and the American Colonies: The Southern Plantations 1748-1754* (New York: Knopf, 1967), p. 44, to give but two examples.
7. Isaac, *op. cit.*, pp. 21, 29.
8. The barn-like Mill Creek (or Mauck's) Meeting House of the German Baptists [Figures XII and XIII] is strikingly different from the elegant Anglican edifices of St. Peter's (New Kent) and Aquia [Figures XI and XIV]. Isaac, *op. cit.* [pp. xi-xiv].
9. 1828 edition, p. 156.
10. *Ibid.* p. 164.
11. Thomas E. Buckley, SJ, "Evangelicals Triumphant: The Baptists' Assault on the Virginia Glebes, 1786-1801" in *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, XLV, 1 (January 1988), pp. 33-69, esp. 59-60.
12. Buckley, "After Disestablishment: Thomas Jefferson's Wall of Separation in Antebellum Virginia" in *Journal of Southern History* LXI: 3 (August 1995), pp. 445-480.
13. For a minute examination of the nature and scale of this economy, cf. David P. Szatmary, *Shay's Rebellion: The Making of an Agrarian Insurrection* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), Chapter I. Adrienne D. Hood makes a very good case that in Chester County, Pennsylvania, there were never enough locally woven textiles to satisfy local needs. This county may be taken for the whole of the province. "The Material World of Cloth: Production and Use in Eighteenth-Century Rural Pennsylvania" in *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series LIII, 1 (January 1996), pp. 43-66.
14. *Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), pp. 101-102.
15. Lois Green Carr and Lorena S. Walsh, "The Standard of Living in the Colonial Chesapeake" in *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Series, XLV, 1 (January 1988), p. 146.

16. *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian Revolution 1815-1846* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).
17. *Ibid.*, p. 161.
18. Joyce Appleby, "Commercial Farming and the 'Agrarian Myth' in the Early Republic" in *Journal of American History*, Vol. 68, No. 4 (March 1982), pp. 833-859, pp. 840-841.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 164-5.
20. Retired president of Randolph-Macon College, J. Earl Moreland, to author, *ca.* 1981.
21. *Richmond Christian Advocate*, June 24, 1847, I, 25, p. 97.
22. William Warren Sweet, *Virginia Methodism: A History* (Richmond: Whittet and Shepperson, 1955), pp. 170-1.
23. Early Papers, Randolph-Macon Archives [RMAr], committee report, March 21, 1822.
24. "Virginia Conference Ms. Minutes, "1823-[1829]" p. 38, McGraw-Page Library, Archives.
25. "Address to the Members and Friends of the Methodist Episcopal Church"[1825], Early Papers, RMAr., "R.M.C. Correspondence undated."
26. For contemporary arguments along these lines, cf. Emory Stevens Bucke, gen. ed., *History of American Methodism*, 3 vols. (New York and Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1964), I, 551, quoting John Durbin (1831), and *Methodist Magazine* (1839).
27. *Richmond Enquirer*, Jan. 30, 1830. For "snake in the grass" reference, see next note.
28. *Richmond Enquirer*, Jan. 30, 1830.
29. Trustees' Minutes, 1830-1865, p. 88.
30. George P. Schmidt, *The Liberal Arts College: A Chapter in American Cultural History* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1957), p. 275.
31. E-mail communication August 28, 1996, to author from Sharon Garrison, archives assistant, The College of William and Mary.
32. Virginia Historical Society. The diplomas are found catalogued by institution.
33. Thomas W. Dolan, "Origins of the First Campus of Randolph-Macon College: An Architectural Note" in *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 93, No. 4 (October 1985), pp. 427-434.
34. *Ibid.*, 433.
35. Trustees Minutes 1830-1865, p. 16.
36. *Ibid.* p. 53.

Round Heads, Character Notes, Singing Schools, and the Music Tradition at Shenandoah University

Bruce C. Souders

Despite differing objectives, the singing school movement in the South and the Conservatory of Shenandoah University in its early years were closely intertwined for about 50 years. It all began when the founders of Shenandoah Seminary (predecessor to Shenandoah University) — A. P. Funkhouser and J. Newton Fries — engaged two descendants of Joseph Funk to provide music instruction. They were Miss Annie Baer and William C. Funk. According to the first catalogue of the seminary, Miss Baer taught instrumental music and Mr. Funk, vocal and instrumental music.

Under "Courses of Instruction," the catalogue gives the following information:

Music - Embracing Getz's New Improved School for the Parlor Organ; Clarke's New Method for the Reed organ and for the Piano-Forte; Geo. F. Root's Piano Instructor and Sheet Music.

Under a description of the Seminary as a whole appears this notice:

The department of vocal music will be under the personal care of Prof. A. S. Kieffer [a grandson of Joseph Funk of whom more later], whose widely known abilities need no commendation here. An accomplished and skilled lady will have charge of the instrumental department ...

The roster of students lists one class of 26 students in vocal music and a class of 17 students in instrumental music. Twelve students were taking both instrumental and vocal music.¹

The "widely known abilities" of Aldine Kieffer had been nurtured under the close watch of his grandfather, Joseph Funk, a native of Berks County, Pennsylvania, who had established himself in Mountain Valley, now Singers Glen, in Rockingham County early in the 19th century. Kieffer had been born in Missouri to Mary Funk Kieffer, who brought him and his sister back to Virginia after the drowning death of their father. Either because Aldine was the son of his favorite daughter or because of a special talent he detected in the orphan, Joseph took an interest in his grandson and prepared him for a career in music and publication.

It was in these two areas that Joseph Funk had earned the title, "Father of Song in Northern Virginia." Because of him, the area around what is today Singers Glen became, in the words of John H. Wayland,

... a famous music center, not only for the adjacent districts of Virginia and West Virginia, but also for a number of States south and west. It is probably true that there is not another County in any State of the United States where the rudimentary knowledge of music is so generally diffused among the