

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

Carroll's Yesteryears
28 July 1991

Irving College honored author
by Joe Getty

A college education could be achieved in several of Carroll County's small towns during the late 19th century. One of the prominent institutions was Irving College in Manchester.

This college was founded by Ferdinand Dieffenbach, a German scholar and graduate of the University of Geissen. In 1854, he established a school in Manchester known as the Independent Academy. He changed the name in 1858 to honor the distinguished author Washington Irving.

The new name caused much excitement in the community and the Westminster newspaper, *The Carroll County Democrat*, reprinted the exchange of correspondence between Dieffenbach and Irving in the Jan. 21, 1858, edition:

"The following correspondence between WASHINGTON IRVING, the oldest living American Author, to the Principal of Independent Academy, will prove interesting to the friends of American Literature as well as to the patrons of said institution.

"INDEPENDENT ACADEMY, Manchester, Md.

"January 5th, 1858

"TO WASHINGTON IRVING, L.D.S., &C.

"Much esteemed and Dear Sir: I contemplate applying to the Maryland Legislature at its next session, for an act to incorporate the Classical and Military School, over which I have presided for the last four years, as a College; and in considering the selection of an appropriate name for the christening of the Institution, none occurs more readily or seems more fit than that of the honored patriarch of American Letters, who, while he has added new and undying classics to the English tongue, has not failed likewise to illustrate the annals and heroes of our own country, to enlarge the intelligent patriotism of its youth, and to augment, in no small measure, its moral and substantial dignity.

"I propose, therefore, with the kind permission which I doubt not you will grant, to give my school the style of "Irving College." Under the auspices of a name so dear and venerable in all our hears, I cannot but believe that the pupils of the institution will enter, with increased

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enthusiasm, upon the study of those genial humanities, which constitute a common bond of sympathy between scholar and scholar in all nation and ages of the world.

"I am, respected sir, with sentiments of the highest consideration.

"Your obliged, humble servant,
F. DIEFFENBACH,
Principal, Independent Academy,
Manchester, Md."

"Sunnyside, Jan. 11th, 1858.

Dr. F. Dieffenbach, Principal of the Independent Academy, Manchester, Md.

"Dear Sir: - I have to acknowledge the receipt of your kind letter of the 5th inst., proposing to honor my name by using it to designate your Institution. Though I am far from considering myself worthy of this kind of discrimination – yet I cannot but feel deeply sensible of the good opinion and good will which prompt you to confer it upon me.

"With best wishes for the prosperity of your Institution, I remain, dear sir, your obliged and obt't serv't.

WASHINGTON IRVING"

The reputation of Irving College grew quickly as a quality institution for higher education. The September 13, 1860, edition of *The Carroll County Democrat* reprinted the following letter that first appeared as correspondence in the Baltimore Republican.

"Letter From Manchester

"(Correspondence of the Baltimore Republican)

MANCHESTER, Md. Aug. 31, 1860.

Messrs Edition: - I have been sojourning here for a few days, and have thought a few jottings down with respect to the place and neighborhood might not be unacceptable to the readers of the Republican. This is an elevated region of the country, with an undulating surface, presenting a great variety of landscape. The ground is not naturally very fertile, but has been rendered quite productive by the land of industry, thrift and improvement. The town is an ancient settlement, the houses are good, for the most part, for a rural town, and everything has an air of neatness, quiet and comfort. There is not, perhaps, a more moral place in the State. I was glad to meet here an old acquaintance, who is a resident of this place, Dr. Jacob Shower, an ex-member of Congress,

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

and son of the late Col. Shower, who distinguished himself by his bravery in the war of 1812. The Doctor has a genial temper and pleasant manners, and in his feelings still preserves all the freshness of youth. This is sound philosophy, and, in consequence, Time touches him but lightly in his flight, for, excepting an occasional silver hair in his beard, he looks as well as he did twenty-five years ago. The ladies of the town have a rosy cheek and a healthful look, and have considerable pretensions to beauty and they are not only pretty, but many of them quite intelligent.

"The town is the seat of Irving College, a thriving institution of some ten years growth. The head of the College is Dr. F. Diffenbach, a gentleman of learning and peculiarly fitted to be head of such an institution. He is supported by a faculty of able instructors, and will raise the College to an elevated position. There is a military organization connected with the College, and the military drill and the gymnastic exercises, for which there is ample provision, secure to the students the development of strong, vigorous bodies. This is of the first importance to them, and the first thing that will arrest the attention of a stranger is their erect bearing and their healthful, happy look.

"We attended the examination of the College classes on the 29th and 30th, and were greatly pleased with the evidences they presented of successful training in all of the several departments of English, Mathematics, Ancient and Modern Languages, the Sciences, and Music, both vocal and instrumental. There are two bands of music, composed entirely of students, one of stringed instruments, and the other a brass band. – Their execution was of a most creditable character.

"The examination was conducted by a committee of literary gentlemen from Baltimore and elsewhere, who expressed high gratification at the manner in which the students acquitted themselves.

"During the afternoon of the second day, Col. S.S. Mills, of Baltimore, inspected the young cadets, and their military evolutions were witnessed by a large assembly of ladies and gentlemen, who were much pleased with their appearance and military exercises.

"The commencement took place on the evening of the 30th, and consisted of orations, addresses, essays and dialogues, interspersed by music from the two College bands, and pieces by individual performers, all of which gave great satisfaction to a large audience of ladies and gentleman. The salutatory and valedictory addresses possessed very great merit and elicited high commendation. The following honorary degrees were conferred: The degree of Doctor of Philosophy, upon President Comaders Snyder of the College at Alsey, Germany, and that of Doctor of Divinity upon Rev. Wm. H. Brooks, Brockport, N.Y.

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

"The President and Faculty form one family with the students, so that the Institution has all the comforts and social happiness of a home school. We dined among the other invited guests with the inmates of the College on two occasions, and were gratified with the good and plentiful cheer, and the kind feelings that prevailed on all sides and blessed the repast.

"Mrs. Dieffenbach, the amiable lady of the President, graced the table by her presence. She is not only a lady of great refinement, but supervises the comforts of the students with a motherly care and devotion.

"We were glad to meet with a number of gentlemen and ladies from the city, whose children are enjoying the advantages of the institutions. Their gratification will doubtless commend the College to many friends.

"We attended the camp meeting near Hampstead, and were much pleased with a discourse of a young Baltimorean, Rev. David Monroe, a former pupil of your Central High School, I believe. The camp was not a very large one, but delightfully situated in a pleasant grove, and blessed with measurable success.

"Very Respectfully,
VIATOR"

Photo credit: Courtesy of Historical Society of Carroll County

Photo caption: Illustration shows Irving College in Manchester as it looked in 1858.