

= Romney Classical Institute =

Romney Classical Institute was a 19th @-@ century coeducational collegiate preparatory school in Romney , Virginia (present @-@ day West Virginia) , which was in operation between 1846 and some time after 1866 . Prior to its establishment , Romney was served by Romney Academy . By 1831 , the academy had outgrown its facilities , and the Romney Literary Society set about raising the necessary funds for the construction of a new educational building . The Virginia General Assembly permitted the society to raise funds through a lottery . By 1845 construction of the building had commenced and was completed in 1846 . On December 12 , 1846 , the Virginia General Assembly formally established the Romney Classical Institute , and empowered the Romney Literary Society with its operation .

From 1846 to 1849 , the institute was operated under the direction of Presbyterian Reverend William Henry Foote , who had been a teacher and principal at Romney Academy . In 1849 , when the Romney Literary Society established a new operating code for the institute and a new system of bylaws , Foote took offense and in 1850 founded a rival school , which was known as the Potomac Seminary . Professor E. J. Meany succeeded Foote , followed by John Jeremiah Jacob who served as the school 's principal from 1851 to 1853 . Jacob later served as West Virginia 's first Democratic governor . Reverend Joseph Nelson later served as the school 's principal until the American Civil War , and shortly after hostilities ended .

The institute and the society experienced a hiatus during the course of the war . The school held sessions under Reverend Nelson , and subsequently William C. Clayton in 1866 . Clayton later served in the West Virginia Senate . The Romney Literary Society was revived in 1869 , and following the passage of a bill which established the West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind in March 1870 , the society offered the institute 's building and grounds to the state of West Virginia for the new school . The institute 's property was transferred to the state and the West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind opened for its first term on September 29 , 1870 . Following the schools ' subsequent expansions , the institute 's former building became the center portion of the administration building of the West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind , in which capacity it serves at the present day . In addition to Jacob and Clayton , Robert White , Attorney General of West Virginia , was also an alumnus of the institute .

= = Background = =

Prior to the establishment of the Romney Classical Institute in 1846 , Romney and its environs had been served by a school as early as 1752 , and by Romney Academy , which had been incorporated by the Virginia General Assembly on January 11 , 1814 . By 1831 , Romney Academy had outgrown its educational facilities in an old stone building just north of the Hampshire County Courthouse in Romney . Also at this time , several academies in present @-@ day West Virginia were aspiring to collegiate status , as there were few colleges operating in the region prior to the American Civil War .

To remedy this issue and improve the educational opportunities for local children , the Romney Literary Society commenced an initiative to raise funds for the construction of a new school building . On January 6 , 1832 , the Virginia General Assembly authorized the society to raise \$ 20 @,@ 000 by way of a lottery for the funding of educational purposes . Following an intermission of ten years , the society made arrangements with James Gregory of Jersey City and Daniel McIntyre of Philadelphia to finance the lottery , " for raising a sum of money not exceeding twenty thousand dollars , for the purpose of erecting a suitable building for their accommodation , the purchase of library and Philosophical apparatus " . The lottery was conducted over a ten @-@ year period , and sums of \$ 750 , \$ 1 @,@ 000 , and \$ 1 @,@ 500 were to be raised in semiannual installments .

= = Construction and establishment = =

The society was successful in raising the necessary funds by 1845 . By April 4 , 1845 , bids were

called for contractors to build the new school and library facility , and the bids were to be submitted to the society by May 24 . On that date , the land was deeded for the new school . Construction commenced that year , and the building and its grounds cost approximately \$ 8 @, @ 000 to complete .

According to an 1845 bid advertisement , the building was originally planned as a brick building , 36 by 40 feet (11 by 12 m) and 22 feet (6 @. @ 7 m) in height from the foundation . Plans also called for a tin roof to " be surmounted by a cupola . " The bid advertisement also stated that the end of the building was to be the main façade , which was to be embellished with a " handsome portico the whole width of the house " . This advertisement was signed by the committee for the school building 's construction , which consisted of E. M. Armstrong , John B. Kercheval , and David Gibson .

On December 12 , 1846 , the Virginia General Assembly further empowered the Romney Literary Society : " To establish at or near the town of Romney a Seminary of Learning for the instruction of youth in various branches of science and literature ; and the Society may appropriate to the same such portion of the property which it now has or may acquire , as it may deem expedient " . Following the passage of this act , the Romney Classical Institute was formally established . That same year , the new two @- @ story brick educational building was completed and the society 's library and classes were relocated there . The completed building measured 54 by 40 feet (16 by 12 m) , with an additional wing which served as the residence of the institute 's principal . The society utilized the second story of the building , which was divided into two rooms : a hall for society meetings and a hall for its library . Only society members , Romney clergymen , and the institute 's principal were given library privileges , and were each furnished with keys to visit the library at any time .

= = Growth and curriculum = =

From its foundation , the Romney Classical Institute was a coeducational collegiate preparatory school . The institute first operated under the principalship of Presbyterian Reverend William Henry Foote , who had been a teacher and principal at Romney Academy . Foote served as the school 's principal until 1849 . Theology was one of the courses taught at the institute under Foote 's leadership . In 1849 , the Romney Literary Society established a new operating code for the institute and a new system of bylaws for the governance of the school , which empowered the society to appoint teachers , fix salaries , and provide conditions of payment . Foote took this new code as a criticism of his leadership , and he resigned . In 1850 , he founded a rival institution known as the Potomac Seminary . Foote raised the necessary funds , and a brick building for the seminary was constructed approximately 902 feet (275 m) north of the institute building .

Professor E. J. Meany was selected by the society to head the institute following Foote 's departure . Meany 's assistant principals were John Jeremiah Jacob , Mrs. Meany , and Miss Kern . Jacob was West Virginia 's first Democratic governor , who had attended both the institute and its predecessor , Romney Academy . Meany remained principal of the institute until at least 1851 . Following his graduation from Dickinson College in 1849 , Jacob became the institute 's assistant principal under principal Meany . He became the school 's principal in 1851 and served in that position until 1853 , during which time he taught classes and practiced law .

While the school was operated under the leadership of the Romney Literary Society , the institute became associated with another literary organization known as the Phrena Kosmian Society . On November 15 , 1850 , the society debated the question , " Would the Southern States be justified in seceding from the Confederacy under present circumstances ? " There are no existing records of the debate 's conclusion .

In 1850 , the Virginia House of Delegates amended the act of December 12 , 1846 , establishing the school , and empowered the Governor of Virginia to appoint the institute 's Board of Visitors . According to an advertisement for a female teacher in the Baltimore Sun on November 9 , 1853 , William C. Clayton was serving as the institute 's principal in 1853 . Clayton stated in the advertisement that the institute was seeking an experienced female teacher to lead the school 's Female Department . The candidate for the female teacher was to be qualified to teach French ,

English , and music . Later in 1853 , Reverend Joseph Nelson became principal , and he continued to serve in this capacity until the outbreak of the American Civil War in 1861 . By 1859 , John Kern , Jr . , was the secretary of the school 's Board of Visitors , and Nelson had accepted a position in Mississippi . In December 1859 the institute advertised the position of principal , and received applications until January 5 , 1860 . In the school 's December 1859 advertisements in the Richmond Dispatch , the institute sought " a gentleman well qualified to teach the classics thoroughly , whose lady could teach French and music , would be preferred " . At that time , the institute had 50 students . Nelson 's replacement was expected to take charge by February 1860 . There are no records to indicate that Nelson left his post prior to the American Civil War .

According to its May 1853 advertisement in the Virginia Argus and Hampshire Advertiser , the institute provided instruction to the following grades during its summer session : fifth grade for \$ 5 , fourth grade for \$ 8 , third grade for \$ 10 , second grade for \$ 12 , and first grade (its highest grade) for \$ 15 . Boarding , including laundry , meals , and lighting , was \$ 45 , and music lessons with use of the piano were \$ 25 . An additional fee of 25 cents was charged if a student was suspended . The fifth grade was taught by the institute 's Primary Department , and lessons included spelling , reading and elementary arithmetic . The fourth grade was taught by the institute 's Junior Department and included courses in writing and preparatory English grammar and geography . The third grade was instructed by the English Department and offered studies in geography and English ; and the second grade was also taught by the English Department with courses in history and natural philosophy . The school 's highest grade , first grade , was instructed by the Classical and Mathematical Department and offered studies in Greek , Latin , French , geometry , algebra , trigonometry , surveying , mensuration , navigation , astronomy , and bookkeeping .

By 1853 , the Romney Literary Society received an endowment of \$ 20 @,@ 000 , and possessed a permanent fund of \$ 12 @,@ 000 , which yielded \$ 720 per year . Half of this yield was utilized to support the institute , including for the purchase of textbooks . These figures remained the same in 1859 .

= = Hiatus and final years = =

The institute and the society both continued to grow in importance until the outbreak of the American Civil War in 1861 . After the war began , the institute 's professors and older students joined the Confederate States Army and other Confederate partisan groups , and the institute and the society experienced a hiatus .

The Romney Literary Society 's library suffered significant losses during the war , and by the war 's end in 1865 , only about 400 volumes of its once large 3 @,@ 000 @-@ volume library could be located . Many of the society 's members never returned from the war , and those who did were at first too weary and discouraged to revive the society or the Romney Classical Institute .

In August 1865 Nelson attempted to resurrect the institute following the war , and he submitted an advertisement to the Civilian & Telegraph newspaper in Cumberland , Maryland , in which he billed the institute as " A Male and Female Boarding and Day School " . The institute opened on the first Monday in September in 1865 for its fall and winter session . According to Nelson in the advertisement , " parents desiring for their children a sound English , Classical and Mathematical Education would do well to patronize this School . " Student education was divided into three levels : the Lowest Grade level for \$ 10 for a five @-@ month session , Intermediate level for \$ 15 , and the Highest level for \$ 20 . Latin and Greek each cost \$ 5 additional per quarter . Boarding at the school cost \$ 3 per week ; however , laundry , fuel , and lighting were not included in this fee . Music lessons were also taught " at Professor 's charges " .

In 1866 William C. Clayton became the institute 's principal and presided over the school for a few more terms . Like his predecessor John Jeremiah Jacob , Clayton had been a student at both the Romney Academy and at the institute , and he later served in the West Virginia Senate . A Mr. Dinwiddie was also a teacher at the school during this period following the war .

= = Disestablishment and legacy = =

Despite the institute 's effective disestablishment after 1866 , a meeting was held on May 15 , 1869 , with nine original members of the Romney Literary Society : James L. Armstrong , David Entler , William Harper , John C. Heiskell , Andrew Wodrow Kercheval , Samuel R. Lupton , James Parsons , Alfred P. White , and Robert White . These nine men set about expanding the society 's membership rolls and reviving its library . Over the next few years , 20 younger members were added to the society 's rolls .

By 1869 , the state of West Virginia was considering the establishment of a school for deaf and blind students , and the newly reorganized Romney Literary Society resolved to secure the institution for Romney as part of its Reconstruction development efforts . On March 3 , 1870 , the West Virginia Legislature passed an act providing for the establishment of the West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind . The society passed a resolution on April 12 , 1870 , by which it agreed to deed , free of cost , the institute 's building and grounds to the state for the planned West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind . On April 20 , 1870 , the society sent its members Robert White and Andrew Wodrow Kercheval to the then @-@ state capital of Wheeling to offer " the grounds and buildings of the Romney Classical Institute ... to the Board of Regents , free of debt , and in good repair " on the condition that the proposed institution be located at Romney . At the time of the society 's offer , the institute 's grounds consisted of 15 acres (61 @,@ 000 m2) . Offers for campus locations were also made by citizens of Clarksburg and Parkersburg .

The society 's offer was the only one to include an existing building on its grounds . The Board of Regents accepted the society 's offer , and a formal transfer of the Romney Classical Institute 's former campus was made . The society discovered that , in order to make good on its promise , it had to raise more than \$ 1 @,@ 000 , a close to impossible task during the Reconstruction Era in Romney . Following a resolution on July 11 , 1870 , to raise between \$ 1 @,@ 200 and \$ 1 @,@ 300 , a subscription of \$ 1 @,@ 383 @.@ 60 was raised after 118 individuals and firms donated the needed funds , and shortly thereafter the formal transfer of the property was completed . At that time , the institute 's property was valued at about \$ 20 @,@ 000 .

The West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind opened for its first term on September 29 , 1870 , in the former Romney Classical Institute building , which provided space for administration offices , classrooms and dormitories . Following the schools ' subsequent expansions , the institute 's former building became the center portion of the administration building of the West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind , which it remains as of June 2015 . Between 1871 and 1872 , the schools added two wings to the old institute building , each measuring 70 by 30 feet (21 @.@ 3 by 9 @.@ 1 m) . Following the transfer of the institute 's grounds , the Romney Literary Society built a new building between 1869 and 1870 , which became known as Literary Hall .

= = Alumni = =

During the existence of the Romney Classical Institute , the school educated several prominent educators , lawyers , military officers , and politicians . In *West Virginia and Its People* (1913) , historians Thomas Condit Miller and Hu Maxwell averred that the Romney Classical Institute " exerted a great influence upon the educational work of the South Branch Valley " . As stated above , West Virginia 's first Democratic governor , John Jeremiah Jacob , was educated at the institute , and later served as an assistant principal , and finally principal . West Virginia state senator William C. Clayton also attended this school , and later served as its principal following the American Civil War . Craig Woodrow McDonald , son of Angus William McDonald , attended the school in its early years of operation . Following his education here , he attended the Virginia Military Institute and the University of Virginia , then taught school in Culpeper County . During the American Civil War , McDonald served in the Confederate States Army as aide @-@ de @-@ camp to General Arnold Elzey and was killed in battle on May 29 , 1862 . Robert White attended the institute prior to serving as a law apprentice to his father John Baker White , Hampshire County Clerk of Court , and attending Lexington Law School . White later served as Attorney General of West Virginia .