

THE LAWRENCEVILLE SCHOOL

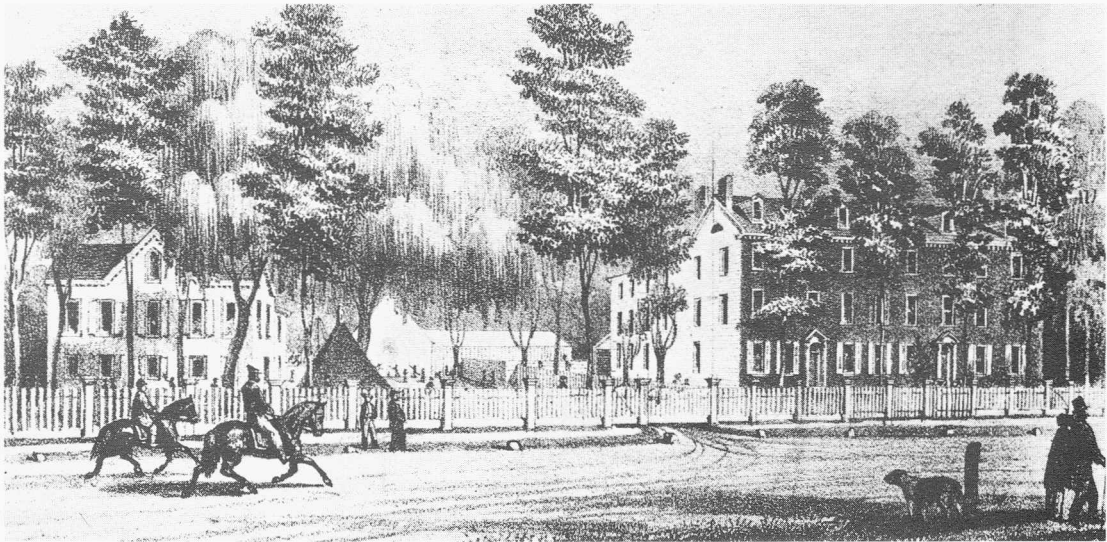
Highlights of a Century and a Half

By

Gerrish Thurber

In 1810 Isaac Van Arsdale Brown, pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Maidenhead—as Lawrenceville was then called—opened a school in his own home with an enrollment of nine boys. Within a few years he had established a flourishing academy whose reputation attracted students from as far away as Kentucky, Georgia, and Cuba. A school building, part of the present Hamill House on the main street, was erected in 1814. In 1828 Brown resigned his pastorate to devote his entire effort to the expansion of the academic program. Alexander H. Phillips became co-principal in 1832 and, two years later, bought the School from Brown. It was one of seven academies remaining in New Jersey of the large number started at the beginning of the century.

Upon Phillips' retirement in 1837, a young teacher named Samuel McClintock Hamill took over the principalship in association with his brother. The Lawrenceville Classical and Commercial High School, as he called it, enjoyed under Dr. Hamill more than forty years of solid growth. The Semi-Centennial in 1860 found it with about a hundred students and a faculty of eight. Among its graduates there already were, as the old catalog states, "many Ministers of the Gospel, and in civil life, Judges, Governors, and members of State and National Legislatures."



Classical & Commercial High School
Lawrenceville, N. J., 1854

After the Civil War a time of marked change approached. In the will of John Cleve Green, who was born at "Cherry Grove" farm in Lawrenceville and who had been the youngest of Isaac Brown's first nine pupils, was a provision expressing the hope that his residuary legatees would apply the property "to such persons and objects and purposes of friendship as I would approve." As one enterprise in realizing that hope, the legatees, among whom were his widow, his brother, and his nephew, bought the School in 1879. They eventually developed impressive plans for a great endowed school comparable to similar institutions in New England. In 1883 Dr. Hamill was succeeded by Dr. James Cameron Mackenzie, the first Head Master of The Lawrenceville School, as it was henceforth to be known. Radical improvements in curriculum and faculty were shortly followed by the completion of numerous new buildings, extensive landscaping, and the inauguration of the "House System" adapted from British patterns. An upper house for the senior class, as well as a separate School chapel, were key elements in Dr. Mackenzie's program and completed the "Circle" campus originally designed by the famous landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted. By 1898 there were 392 boys and a faculty of twenty-two. An alumnus of the old School could scarcely have recognized Lawrenceville.

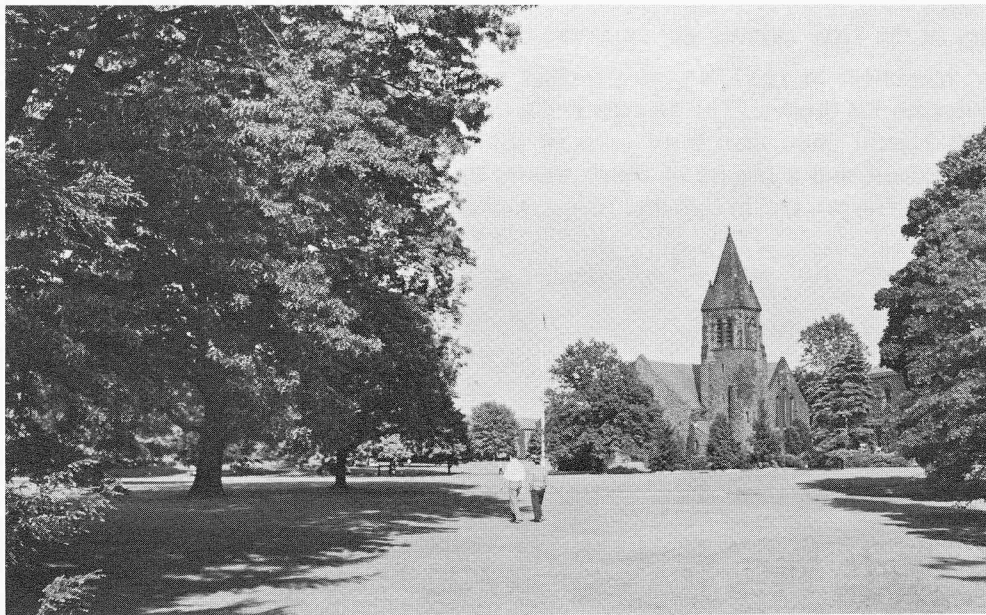


NEW JERSEY TERCENTENARY

1664-1964

It remained for Dr. Simon J. McPherson, who became Head Master in 1899, to regain the support of the alumni of earlier times and reestablish the School's historic traditions. His accomplishments, signalized by the great reunion at the Centennial in 1910, carried over into the administration of his successor, Dr. Mather A. Abbott, Head Master from 1919 to 1934. This period was characterized not only by steadily increasing alumni participation in the School's affairs, but also by the raising of academic standards, broadening of student activities, administrative reorganization, and an ambitious program of expansion which added six new buildings to serve the complex needs of a school of 500 boys. These included a Lower School, an additional classroom building, two dormitories, an infirmary, and a library.

The quarter-century from 1934 to 1959, under the administration of Dr. Allan V. Heely, saw Lawrenceville rise to the challenges of a violent age. More rigorous standards were set through the establishment of the Conference Plan in teaching and through the revision of the curriculum to afford both a deeper and broader program.



The School Chapel as it appears today

Advanced work in many fields was constantly added, while the School continued to grow in numbers until, by 1958, the present figure of some 630 boys and ninety masters was reached. Dr. Heely won wide and essential backing from trustees, alumni, parents, and friends for the resources necessary to increase endowment, scholarships, and physical facilities. The Lavino Field House and Noyes Science Building were opened in 1951; the Kirby Arts Center, which completed the building program envisioned for the School's 150th Anniversary, was opened in 1963.

Upon Dr. Heely's death in 1959, he was succeeded by Bruce McClellan, under whom Lawrenceville has set goals which will strengthen its basic traditions in the light of the foreseeable future — traditions which find a source in the old Presbyterian Church of Maidenhead.

Mr. Thurber is one of the original members of the Lawrence Tercentenary Committee. He has been associated with the Lawrenceville School since 1937 assuming his present post of Librarian in 1948. He is a graduate of Princeton University, Class of 1928.

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