

# Dr. Alexander Donaldson Credited With Establishing Of Elders Ridge Academy In Log Springhouse In 1832

Back in 1832 a few persons began reciting privately to Rev. Alexander Donaldson in the second story of a log springhouse at Elders Ridge.

This was the beginning of the famous Elders Ridge Academy.

Four students were in attendance at the first lessons Jacob Kiers, practiced in Detroit; Matthew Wilson, who became a minister and preached at Jacksonville, Pa.; Mr. McAdoo, who settled in the oil region, and Peter McGoff, who became a banker at Franklin, Pa.

With no thought of an institution evolving from the lessons he gave, Rev. Donaldson agreed to give private instruction in the classics and other branches to young men preparing to enter college.

and claim to the academy building, its grounds, etc., asking in return that whenever any of his descendants, one at a time, should be sent to it as a pupil, no charge should be made for tuition.

The board, having accepted the trust, re-roofed the building, made other repairs in the amount of \$900 and reelected the faculty. Dr. Donaldson was retained as principle and reelected each year.

In 1834 he asked to be relieved from all further connection with the institution but the board unanimously refused to consent. They acceded to the request, however, in the year 1835.

Dr. Donaldson had filled the office for a period of more than 28 years, with such marked success in training mind and stamping character as to justify place him in the front rank of successful educators.

On the release of Dr. Donaldson Professor T. B. Elder, who had been associated with him as assistant for nearly half the time since its organization, was chosen principal.

Other principals since that time were N. B. Kelly, James Galley, W. S. A. Wilson, W. B. Elder, R. A. Henderson, Preston Urey, and Professor Smith.

The school became involved financially and was about to be sold for debt around 1919 when Lucius W. Robinson agreed to give the school \$2,000 to help pay off the debt and turn the school over to a board of trustees in five years, provided it could be conducted in a self-supporting fashion.

In 1914 the Elders Ridge Vocational School was established. It was the pioneer school of its type in the state. On October 31, 1922 the gymnasium with the original log academy burned.

In 1933 a large yellow brick building was erected on the site of the old gymnasium. Most of it was destroyed by fire on March 4, 1931. The portion of this building not too badly burned has been repaired and is being used. The remainder is being rebuilt to be used as a junior high school.

A new building in process of erection is to be used as a senior high school. It will be called Donaldson Memorial High School in honor of Dr. Donaldson.

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Dr. Alexander Donaldson

However, during the winter and spring of 1847 the number of applicants for instruction had so increased that Rev. Donaldson was faced with the decision of either giving up the instruction or obtaining assistance in teaching.

Accordingly J. M. Barnett of Blairsville, then an undergraduate in Jefferson College, was engaged as an assistant. On the 15th of April, 1847, the academic school was opened in Mr. Donaldson's "study" with 16 pupils.

Thirty-one students were admitted during the first two sessions, with a total of 62 students being taught in the seventh year.

The first schoolroom was a small one-story frame building designed to accommodate from 20 to 30 students. Rev. Donaldson built the school at his own expense (\$320).

When this building proved too small, Rev. Donaldson built another structure, a two-story brick, erected in 1853 at a cost of \$2,000.

The institution had the advantage of an entirely rural situation, in an agricultural community, on the ridge farm land running parallel with the river.

Mr. Barnett remained as assistant in the academy until October, 1853, with the exception of a brief interval when he was completing his college education.

The purpose of the institution from the first was twofold; to prepare young men for entering college and to provide properly qualified teachers for common and other schools.

In both of these aims the academy had considerable success.

Soon after the opening of the school patronage came from Clarion County on the north and Cambria County on the southeast, and all intervening counties, some even from Huntington, Bedford and Franklin.

The position taken and maintained by students from the academy in what was then Jefferson College attracted attention, and numbers who had enrolled at the college in the lower classes thus attended the Elders Ridge Academy as a more profitable place to spend the earlier years of a college course.

In this way the academy came to have representatives from all the surrounding states, principally the middle and western, but also Mississippi and Louisiana.

Ten or 12 families within a circuit of two miles for a few years at first accommodated the students with boarding at one dollar per week. Within ten years John Smith, Christopher Iman and John Thom had erected boarding houses.

During the same time boarding rose to \$1.25 and increased from year to year until it was raised to \$3.50.

In 1849 a woman's department of the academy was opened under the care of Miss Martha Bracken but it was abandoned in 1858 because of the difficulty in securing suitable boarding places for ladies. Some years later the academy admitted the ladies upon condition they would keep up with the boys in class work, and its door were never closed to the fair sex after that.

In 1876 Dr. Donaldson, wishing to secure in a legal way the perpetuation of the academy after he would be separated from it, selected a board of 12 trustees from the different religious denominations in the vicinity. The agreement contained the condition that in selecting the faculty, the principal should always be a Presbyterian.

To this board Dr. Donaldson conveyed all his right, title, interest