

# **EARLY PRINCETON PRINTING**

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Early Princeton Printing by Varnum Lansing Collins

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GATEWAY PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS

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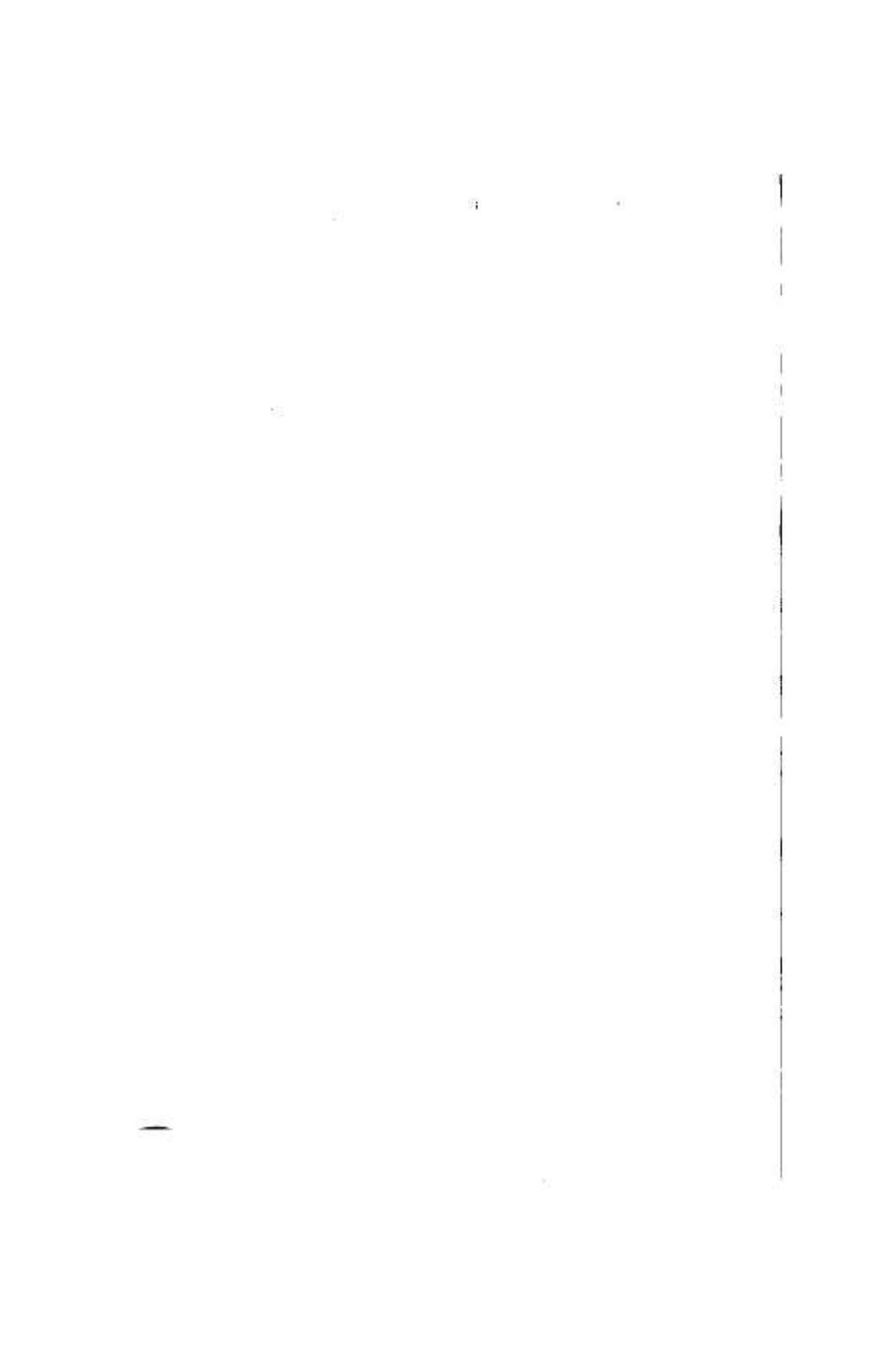
BY

VARNUM LANSING COLLINS



PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS  
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

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### EARLY PRINCETON PRINTING

The installation of the Princeton University Press in a building of its own, with an equipment worthy of its affiliations and adequate to its ambitions, marks the beginning of a new epoch in the history of printing in the town of Princeton. And it is to commemorate the event that this slender appreciation of early Princeton printing is put forth.

The history runs back exactly one hundred and twenty-five years to the days when the town was still a colonial village with the scars of the Revolutionary War fresh upon it, when on one side of the highroad the College of New Jersey was still undergoing repairs, and on the other lay a scattered handful of dwelling houses and little shops clustering about the one or two comfortable taverns whose stage-coach business was fast mending now that the war was over. Under President With-



erspoon's untiring efforts the College, which for thirty years had shared with the taverns the honor of being the community's chief asset, was beginning slowly to gather itself together again, and the village was facing the future bravely, confident in its belief that prosperity for the institution set in its midst meant also its own growth and progress.

It was at this time that Doctor Wither- spoon lent his support to the establishment of a printing press in the village. However easily he may have turned American on his arrival from Scotland in 1768, he had never forgotten his mother-country nor waived aside a chance to help a fellow-countryman. Any worthy Scotsman landing at an American port, could he but make his way to Princeton, would be sure to find welcome and to receive advice and assistance at the hands of the President of the College of New Jersey. And so it came about that early in 1786—unless all indications are at fault—there reached Princeton a young Scotsman named James Tod, a man of more than average education and a printer by trade, seeking work.

Half a dozen other towns in New Jersey at this time could boast printing presses, but none had ever been set up at Princeton. The proximity of Trenton, where Isaac Collins had won a reputation, and the wider possibilities of New York and Philadelphia had hitherto easily controlled all the work for compositors' hands to do that eighteenth century Princeton could offer. While, unfortunately, there is no definite authority for the belief one would like to entertain that Doctor Witherspoon had some dim vision of a future university press devoted to the promotion of education and scholarship—a vision that has needed the varied fortunes of a dozen decades to transform it into reality—yet it is reasonably certain that, if not at the President's suggestion at least with his hearty good will and support, Mr. Tod resolved to see what opportunity lay for him and his little press under the shadow of Nassau Hall; and opposite the College therefore he opened his shop. Meanwhile he had to live; and to help him eke out an existence until his press should win a clientele and be able to support him, he

was permitted to give French lessons in the College.

His best advertisement would obviously be a newspaper; so, backed undoubtedly by the interest of his patron, and viewing undismayed the ill-luck of Isaac Collins' "New Jersey Gazette," of whose approaching discontinuance he may have had an inkling, he issued in May or June 1786, the first number of the "Princeton Packet and General Advertiser," Princeton's first newspaper. That summer or autumn he published for the College a catalogue of its graduates and officers, the first to be issued in octavo form; late in 1787 he printed President Witherspoon's famous baccalaureate sermon of 1775 on "Christian Magnanimity," with the "Address to the Senior Class" which the Doctor had repeated each commencement since he first delivered it; and later still in the same year, 1787, he issued a volume of sermons by the President's friend, the Reverend John Muir of Bermuda. And here our actual knowledge of Mr. Tod's work ends. His output must have been larger, but these are the only monuments at present