

**HISTORY OF THE COLLEGE
OF NEW JERSEY: FROM
ITS COMMENCEMENT, A.
D., 1746, TO 1783**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649304912

History of the college of New Jersey: from its commencement, A. D., 1746, to 1783 by William Armstrong Dod

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

WILLIAM ARMSTRONG DOD

**HISTORY OF THE COLLEGE
OF NEW JERSEY: FROM
ITS COMMENCEMENT, A.
D., 1746, TO 1783**

HISTORY
OF THE
COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY,

FROM ITS COMMENCEMENT, A. D., 1746, TO 1783.

[PREPARED ORIGINALLY FOR THE PRINCETON WHIG, FEB, 1844.]

BY A GRADUATE.

Wm. L. G. A. Dodge.

PRINCETON, N. J.:
PUBLISHED BY J. T. ROBINSON.
1844.

HISTORY OF THE COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY,

FROM ITS COMMENCEMENT, A. D. 1746,

TO THE PRESENT TIME.

[PREPARED FOR THE PRINCETON WHIG, FEB. 1844.]

THE date from which the College of New Jersey commences its existence, as a *legal Corporation*, is the *fourteenth day of September, seventeen hundred and forty-eight*. As a *Literary Institution*, the Seminary from which this College took its rise, went into operation some years before—probably soon after the division of the Synod of Philadelphia—which then represented the whole Presbyterian Church in the British Provinces—into the Synods of Philadelphia, and of New York, which took place in 1741. It is certain that such a school was established as early as the 22d of October, 1746, through the exertions of gentlemen who adhered to the Synod of New York, which at that time comprised among others, the Colony of New Jersey, (and which body, it is in point to notice in this connexion, had been violently reproached, with some show of reason, arising from the urgency of the case, by the partisans of the other connection, with promoting candidates to the office of the ministry, who were deficient in literary qualifications.) For it appears from the notes of President Green, out of which the present account of the College is mainly compiled, that “a charter to incorporate sundry persons to found a College, passed the great seal of this Province of New Jersey, tested by John Hamilton, Esq., President of his Majesty’s Council and Commander-in-Chief of the Province of New Jersey, the 22d October, 1746”—to whom, it was granted, is not a matter of record; but there is no doubt that the patrons of the *School* mentioned were the petitioners for this charter, and that from some inadequate nature of its privileges, they studiously refrained from acting under it. It is also certain that the persons who applied for *this* charter were the same ones that two years afterwards obtained the present charter of the College.

But as they never availed themselves of the corporate powers of the previous franchise it cannot be properly said that they at that time had acquired the corporate style of it. It is true that no mention is made of the *surrender* of this charter; but it is equally true that there is no mention made of its *acceptance*, but from the absence of anything positive, the contrary is to be inferred. And moreover, the instrument under which that body receives its present powers, is not a modification, but is an *original* document in all respects. Still, the question of the legal date of the College, is, perhaps after all, one not so much of technical construction as of historical uncertainty. And he who knows the above facts has as much ground for an opinion as it is possible at this time to obtain. The only important end to be attained by relating the date of the College to the Charter of 1746, is that the *formal* presidency of Mr. Dickinson may be included in the collegiate history, though his virtual authority and connexion with the present Institution, may be considered as incorporated with the very existence of it. And in connection with the difficulty of settling this precise question, it may be remarked, that no incidental information, as from the public prints of the time—local pamphlets, &c. is to be found concerning, or emanating from this College, after the most laborious research. So early even from its inception did it assume that noiseless confidence in the intrinsic truthfulness and fidelity of its fundamental doctrines, that it rejected from the very outset any public appeal to any motive that was not as real as itself. And though its approach to this moment, has been that of a perilous, and often of a truly pathetic discipline of external trial and destitution, yet in all its appeals it has never implored—in all its sufferings it has never complained—and

the paltriness of a *self-glorification*, he must search long after, who undertakes to find. At least such is the fatigued testimony of the compiler, who has no more immediate interest in what he affirms, than that of a proud devotion, in common with his fellow-alumni. The contemporaneous history of *this* College is only in the technical volumes of its own records, and the breasts of its graduates. And those of them who have not had occasion to notice the generality of this fact, ought to be informed of it. Our Alma Mater is forever guiltless of any discoverable instance of self-praise—and she is equally guiltless of any vehemence of self-commissionation. Whatever cries the severity of her reverses may have extorted, have been without emphasis, in words of exact wisdom, that could have come only from a calm self-possession inspired by the steady consciousness of the intrinsic worthiness and dignity of her own doctrine, and by which she has always been majestic even in her lamentations.

From what has been already said—from the most abundant direct evidence from sources to be mentioned, and from the nature of the existing circumstances, it is manifest that, under those circumstances, the College of New Jersey traces its immediate origin to the *influence of religion*. And it was only an influence so vital and so urgent, that could by any ordinary possibility at that juncture, have educed the result. Doubtless a merely secular and prudential necessity for a corporate literary institution was strongly perceived at that time and had been felt for years previous.

Throughout the whole extent of the British Provinces lying between Connecticut and Virginia, there was no institution having authority to confer degrees in the arts. From the date of the charter of the present College of New-Jersey back to that of Yale, in Connecticut, was a period of forty-seven years. The New-England Provinces had established their Harvard, in Massachusetts, in 1638; the southern had founded their William and Mary in Virginia in 1691. And certainly in the middle portions of the country—though from their later date of settlement, and from their conflicts and ill-adjusted arbitrations with foreign pre-occupants of their territory, their colonial polity was later in coming to the equilibrium, and energy of a well-confirmed government; yet no one doubts that their constitutions and

resources had by this time worked out for them such a degree of refinement and importance, that the necessity for an incorporated institution of learning had become imperative upon them as well as their neighbors, both for the utility and the accomplishment of the education which it should impart. But no one who has only cursorily examined the political aspect of the middle provinces during those forty-seven years, will for a moment suppose, that under the circumstances, any principle less urgent than that of the force of vital religion could have met that necessity and have obviated it in any other way than that of abandoning it. It cannot be too strongly insisted upon that the College of New Jersey is not only religious in its principles, but was the necessary and only possible *product of religion*. That, as no merely external necessity could have been sufficient to originate it under the political circumstances existing at its commencement, neither could the utmost pertinacity of a purely sectarian impulse have any more accomplished and sustained the end. And that while it is thus removed from a sole dependance upon any principle of temporal association, it is equally, if not much farther removed from any alliance or connexion with the unnatural and partial force of any superstitious partisan preference. It will be manifest to any one who looks for a moment at the tumultuous state of society in these provinces during the administration of Governor Morris, the commotions of which had not subsided even long after the more rational and dignified rule of Gov. Belcher, and which before they came fully to rest, were met and still more violently agitated by the influx of yet fiercer sources of disagreement; in addition to all their difficulties with border aggressors; the incessant demands of the mother country for supplies to promote her own wars; the obstinate contest that had already commenced between the prerogative and democratic element; one part of the government in a constant attitude of suspicion and onset against the other; each only studying how it might over-manœuvre and thwart its *rival*; the exorbitancy and superciliousness of the aristocratic branch, and the retaliating incompatibility and sullenness of the commons. In the midst of a complication of things so hopeless and so far removed from the temper of any kind of literary complacency, it is manifest that not only was it the radicating efficacy of

a *religious* principle operating upon the necessity created by its own wants, as well as that of the external public, that *could* alone have overcome those difficulties; but that if the College of New Jersey had not established itself during Belcher's administration—the only time of comparative quiet that the colony enjoyed from its settlement to the war of the revolution—then after that crisis, no possible union of *any kind* could have been adequate to the confirmation of such an undertaking till after the peace of 1783. This is a vital point in the history of the College, and it has been thought proper to insist upon it; and those who may not have turned their attention to its history may easily see that of the two opposite reproaches which have been cast upon the Institution, that it originated and advanced under a political subserviency, or else that it grew out of an ecclesiastical sectarianism—the one is as impossible as the other is absurd.

It has been said, that there was nothing existing under the turbulent political character of the times, at all coincident with the necessity that had grown up for a literary institution, which was not either too partial or too busy to produce it, except it be found in the consistent and predominating force of a truly religious sentiment. And in the same thing consists the design of this College—namely, “an union of religion and learning.” It is not now, for the purpose of resisting reproach or the possibility of it, that this point has been noticed. For, although it is not always easy to make all persons distinguish the difference between a technical inception and a vital origin; or the after distinction, between the obvious supervision of a mere executive unity, and the equitable administration of a general design—yet it is not supposable that the Institution is in any great danger on this point. It is to make apparent the precise nature of this College, and the grand aim and purpose of its founders, who in the best earnestness of humanity and godliness set themselves to the work which they accomplished. The piety and patience of these excellent wise men to be appreciated must be understood.

Those gentlemen of the Synod of New York who instituted the plan and method of this undertaking, selected the State of New Jersey as the centre of their operations, probably because it was the most central in territory—the most congenial at the time in its moral aspect—and chiefly because they found in

the elegant and public spirited Belcher, for whom they were waiting, a mind and a heart consonant with their own efforts—New Jersey too, was the place of residence of the most influential characters engaged in the work—and it happened also that the man of all of them who was in all respects the best adapted to superintend and conduct the education of youth, was likewise a resident of this State.—This was the *Rev. Jonathan Dickinson* of Elizabethtown. “We have seen that Mr. Dickinson was President of the College only under the first charter. Who were the trustees named in that charter, or appointed under it, when or where they met, or at what time and in what manner Mr. Dickinson was appointed President, cannot now be known and it is useless to conjecture.* It is not improbable that he had long been accustomed to receive youth for instruction in classical literature. For this employment Mr. Dickinson was better qualified than most of his brethren; and there is little reason to doubt that he had been engaged in it for a considerable time. But however this might have been previously to the granting of the charter for a college, it is certain that he was so employed for the short period that intervened between the date of the charter and time of his death. It is also certain that his pupils had made very considerable progress in the course of their education; for about a year after his decease, it appears that six individuals received their Bachelor's degree. This was under the present charter, which in the mean time had been obtained by Gov. Belcher, but it is probable that the whole of these youths had been previously in the training of Mr. Dickinson, and that by his instructions they had advanced so far as to be within a year of graduation.

“How many pupils, in all, were under his care, at the time of his decease, can only be conjectured. From the number graduated the author thinks it probable that the whole number did not exceed twenty. Some of them, it is likely, boarded with the President, and the others in families near to his dwelling,

* Concerning this doubt of a “*bona fide*” acceptance of the first charter a piece of information was overlooked in the last communication, it is this:—“In a conversation on the subject with the late Dr. Boudinot, a few months before his death, he assured the writer (Pres. Green) that such a charter had been granted, and that Mr. Dickinson *had acted under it, as President of the College.*”

in Elizabethtown, as no public buildings had then been erected for their accommodation.—It is presumed that an usher or tutor was employed to assist the President, but the chief labor of instruction must have fallen upon himself. What must have been his activity and industry, when, to all his other occupations and engagements were added the duties of a practising physician? Yet those duties he so performed as to obtain a considerable medical reputation.* The building in which this school, or incipient college, was held is said to have been near to the first Presbyterian Church of Elizabethtown: and its foundation walls, yet remaining on that spot, are now pointed out as the embryo Nassan Hall. Mr. Dickinson was a native of Hatfield in Massachusetts. His descent was from a reputable family. His parents were Hezekiah and Abigail Dickinson. The tradition is that, his mother was a widow, married and removed to Springfield, with her children, and that their step-father furnished their education. Her son Moses was a clergyman of high distinction in his day, and was pastor of the Congregational church at Norwalk, in Connecticut. Jonathan, as it appears by the town records of Hatfield, was born 22d April, 1688. He was one of the brightest luminaries of the American church at the period in which he lived. He was graduated at Yale College in 1706, and within one or two years afterwards, he was settled minister of the first Presbyterian Church in Elizabethtown, New Jersey. Of this church he was, for near forty years, the joy and glory.** The abilities and character of President Dickinson are so well known, that it is deemed unnecessary to make any further extracts. This venerable man, so intimately connected with the first existence of this Institution of learning, and who was one of the most strenuous and most laborious of all its early promoters, died at his own parish, where his body now lies, the 7th of October 1747—as appears from a part of the inscription on his monument

"Here
Lies the body of the Rev'd
Mr. JONATHAN DICKINSON, Pastor
of the first Presbyterian Church
in Elizabethtown, who died, October,
The 7th, 1747; *etatis suae* 60."

* The pupils who had been under the

* Alden's Collection, as quoted by Dr. Green.

charge of Mr. Dickinson, at Elizabethtown, were, after his death, removed to Newark and placed under the care of Mr. Burr. He, therefore, was considered as the successor of Mr. Dickinson in the Presidency of the College, even under the first charter. Whether there was any formal appointment to that effect, is unknown. But it appears that he had the superintendence and instruction of the youth who had been collected as the beginning of a College, for about a year, before the charter was obtained under which they received graduation. It will be seen, among other things, by extracts from the minutes of the trustees, which will be given after noticing the history of Belcher's charter, that a class was in readiness to receive their Bachelor's degree, within a month after the time that charter took effect; and that under that charter the degrees were conferred by Mr. Burr, on the very day on which he was elected President. Everything therefore, must have been previously prepared and arranged with a view to this event." Now to accommodate this difficult business of the first charter, it manifestly appears from an examination of the history, and the *silence* of it, to be simply this:—That such a document was applied for, and obtained, almost immediately after the ambitious and troubled administration of Gov. Morris, is beyond all question, for in Lib. C. of Commissions, Charters, &c., fol. 137—the same book in which at page 196, the charter under Gov. Belcher is recorded,—of ancient records in the office of Secretary of this State, is found the authentic *memorandum*, before spoken of, and which cannot from history be referred to any other persons than those in the premises. And it is equally certain that there was something in the nature or circumstances of this charter which rendered it so dishonorable in their sight that they maintained themselves in an attitude of cautious reserve towards it—that in the mean time they held themselves in abeyance, in strong and silent faith, proceeding with their preparations, until they should perceive some indication of a congenial moment of peace, in which to advance into a public consummation of their labor. And that when in the good providence of God, that moment did for a time appear, in the genius and spirit of the great and excellent Belcher, whom He sent to them—they then came forward with all confidence in obedience to that call—and that having once obtained an incorporation, agreeable in

all respects to the greatness and piety of their own intentions, they not only cast off the previous imbecile instrument which had been tendered to them, but were willing to efface every memory of both it from their hearts and records.

As the name of Governor Belcher is so intimately connected with the history of this college, it will not be out of place to preface an account of the charter which his liberality and influence obtained for it, with some notice of his life.

"Jonathan Belcher, governor of Massachusetts, and afterwards of New Jersey, was the son of the Honorable Andrew Belcher, of Cambridge, one of his Majesty's Council in the province of Massachusetts Bay, and was born about the year 1681. He was graduated at Harvard College, in 1699. Not long after the termination of his collegial course, he visited Europe, and every opportunity was furnished him for the most liberal education. The acquaintance which he formed with the Princess Sophia and her son, afterwards George II. laid the foundation of his future honors. After his return he settled in Boston. He was chosen a member of Council, and having joined the popular side in the long contest which Massachusetts had with Gov. Burnet on the question of a permanent salary, he was sent as an agent of the Assembly to represent the views to the king. After the death of Gov. Burnet, he was appointed by his majesty to the government of Massachusetts and New Hampshire in 1730. In this station he continued eleven years. His style of living was elegant and splendid, and he was distinguished for hospitality.* But with him, as in the case of some other leaders of democracy, the lavishness of his expenditure, though it was only to the ruin of his own fortune, exposed him to the censures and finally to the hatred of his own party; and though he abandoned none of his liberal principles, yet by his mistaken extravagance he affected an outward station that seemed to compromise them; and the result was some disputes between him and his legislature, which occasioned his removal. It is said that his enemies being unable to find any tangible ground of complaint, were so inveterate and unjust as to resort to forgery. The whole dispute and the issue of it bear a strong resemblance to all those cases

in history where the generous minded leader of a dominant liberal party had become so obnoxious to his friends on account of the extravagance, excited by his success, that they turned to be his enemies. And that kind of enmity is always the most violent, because it is always mixed with the exasperation of envy as well as that produced by the apparent dereliction. On being superseded, he repaired to court, successfully vindicated his character, was restored to royal favor, and soon after received his commission as Governor, &c. &c. of the province of New Jersey. He met the Assembly for the first time on the 20th of August, 1746. He died at Elizabethtown, Aug. 31, 1757, aged 76. His body was taken to Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he was entombed. His general character is matter of common history, and as it is seen in connexion with this college, of which he was the chief patron and benefactor, will be amiably apparent in the extracts which follow. The commission of Gov. Belcher is attested in two instruments, one constituting him civil Governor, &c., the other commander-in-chief, &c.; the originals of both of which are in possession of the college. At this day, of course, they are interesting curiosities.

The first entry in the Minutes of the Trustees is a copy of the charter. The general provisions of this instrument are too public to call for any repetition, and that the great aim of the petitioners was the mutual advancement of "sound doctrine" and sound learning is also too well known to need any further extracts. The next entry is as follows:

"On Thursday, 13th of October, 1748, convened at New Brunswick.—James Hude, Andrew Johnson, Thomas Leonsid, Esqs.;—Messrs. John Pierson, Ebenezer Pemberton, Joseph Lamb, William Tennent, Richard Treat, David Cowell, Aaron Burr, Timothy Jones, Thomas Arthur, Ministers of the Gospel.—William P. Smith, Gent. [Those trustees, whose appointment is mentioned in the charter, not present at this meeting were—The Governor, who is ex. off. president of the board—John Reading, John Kinsey, Edward Shippen and William Smith, Esqs.—Peter V. B. Livingston, and Samuel Hazard, Gents. Gilbert Tennent, Samuel Blair and Jacob Green, Ministers of the Gospel.]—thirteen of those nominated in the charter to be trustees of the college, who having accepted the charter, were qualified and incorporated according to the directions thereof; and being a quorum of the corporation, proceeded as the charter directs to choose a clerk.

"Thomas Arthur, chosen Clerk of the Corporation.

"Voted, That an address be made to the Governor, to thank his Excellency, for the grant of the charter—and that at least one of our number be appointed to wait on his Excellency and present the same.

"An address being drawn up by the Rev. Mr. Burr, was read and approved.

* Extracted from "Allen's Biographical Dictionary."

"Ordered, that the Rev. Mr. Cowell wait upon his Excellency, and present the address to him.

"Ordered, that a copy of the address be taken by the clerks and inserted in the minutes."

That the style and temper of the men who undertook the establishment of the college may be understood in the most interesting manner, this address and the answer will be found inserted entire.

"To his Excellency, Jonathan Belcher, Esq., Captain, General and Governor in chief, of the province of New Jersey, and territories thereon depending in America and Vico-Admiral of the same.

"The humble address of the trustees of the college of New Jersey.

"May it please your Excellency—

"We have often adored that wise and gracious Providence, which has placed your Excellency in the chief seat of government in this province; and have taken our part with multitudes in congratulating New Jersey upon that occasion.

"Your long known, and well approved friendship to religion and learning, left us no room to doubt your doing all that lay in your power to promote so valuable a cause in these parts; and upon this head our most raised expectations have been abundantly answered. We do therefore cheerfully embrace this opportunity of paying our most sincere and grateful acknowledgments to your Excellency, for granting so ample and well contrived a Charter for erecting a seminary of learning in this province, which has been so much wanted and so long desired.

"And as it has pleased your Excellency to intrust us with so important a charge, it shall be our study and care to approve ourselves worthy the great confidence you have placed in us, by doing our utmost to promote so noble a design.

"And since we have your Excellency with us in this important and difficult undertaking, we shall engage in it with the more freedom and cheerfulness; not doubting but by the smiles of Heaven under your protection, it may prove a flourishing seminary of piety and good literature; and continue not only a perpetual monument of honor to your name, above the victories and triumphs of renowned conquerors, but a lasting foundation for the future prosperity of church and state.

"That your Excellency may long live a blessing to this province, an ornament and support to our infant college; that you may see your generous designs for the public good take their desired effect, and at last receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away,—is and shall be our constant prayer.

"By order of the trustees,

"THOMAS ARTHUR, Cl. Corp'n.

"New Brunswick, Oct. 13, 1748.

"To which his Excellency was pleased to return the following answer:—

"Gentlemen,

"I have this day received by one of your members, the Rev. Mr. Cowell, your kind and handsome address; for which I heartily return you thanks; and shall esteem my being placed at the head of this government, a still greater favor from God and the king, if it may at any time fall in my power as it is in my inclination, to promote the kingdom of the great Redeemer by taking the College of New Jersey under my countenance and protection as a seminary of true religion and good literature.

J. BELCHER."

"Thus were the trustees possessed of a naked charter, without any fund at all to accomplish the undertaking. This in the eyes of some gave it the appearance of an idle chimerical project. Their only resource indeed under the smiles

of heaven, was the beneficence of the advocates and friends of learning." (Pres. Finley.)

This first meeting of the corporation adjourned to meet at Newark.

"On Wednesday November 9, [1748,] the trustees met, according to appointment, at Newark.

The Governor and some gentlemen not previously qualified took the oath directed by the charter.

"The Rev. Mr. Lamb opened the session with prayer.

"The Rev. Mr. Aaron Burr was unanimously chosen to be the president of the college; the vote of the trustees being made known to Mr. Burr he was pleased modestly to accept of the same, and took the oath required by the charter.

"Agreed, that the commencement* for graduating the candidates, that have been examined and approved for that purpose, go on this day.

"It was accordingly opened this forenoon by the president with prayer, and public reading of the charter in the meeting house.

"In the afternoon the president delivered a handsome and elegant Latin Oration. And after the customary scholastic disputations, the following gentlemen were admitted to the degree of bachelor of arts, viz. Enos Ayres, Israel Read, Benjamin Chanut, Richard Stockton, Hugh Henry, Daniel Shaw.

"After which his excellency the Governor, was pleased to accept of a degree of master of arts: this was succeeded by a salutatory oration, pronounced by Mr. Shaw, and the whole concluded with prayer by the president.

"Met this evening. A set of laws were presented &c. Voted [among other things] that the anniversary commencement, for the future, be held on the last Wednesday of September, and that the next commencement be held at New Brunswick.

"That William Smith Esq. be appointed to draw up an account of the proceedings of the commencement and insert it in the New York Gazette.

"That Messrs. Pierson, Cowell, Jones and Arthur be appointed to make application to the General Assembly of this province now sitting at Perth Amboy, in order to get the countenance and assistance for the support of the college.

"Voted that the following gentlemen be desired to take in subscriptions for the college.

Messrs. Kinsey and Hazard, at Philadelphia. P. Vanbrugh Livingston and P. Smith, New York. Read and Smith, at Burlington. Read and Cowell, Trenton. John Stevens, Amboy. Sam. Woodruff, Elizabeth Town. Thos. Leonard and John Stockton, Esq., Princeton. James Hude, Esq. and Thos. Arthur, at New Brunswick. Henderson and Furman, Freehold. John Pierson, Woodbridge. Major Johnson, Newark.

"That all the trustees shall use their utmost endeavors to obtain benefactions to the said college; That this meeting be adjourned to the third Thursday in May next to be held at Maidenhead.

"Mr. Tennant [Rev. William,] concluded with prayer."

The committee appointed to make application to the Assembly afterwards reported their ill reception—and was sent back on successive occasions with more urgent representations, but still reported the same success. And even

* That word simply denotes the time when students in colleges commence bachelors; and the same word without much extension of its meaning is very naturally applied to the day and the public exercises of the day, when and whereby that event is celebrated.