

DENISON

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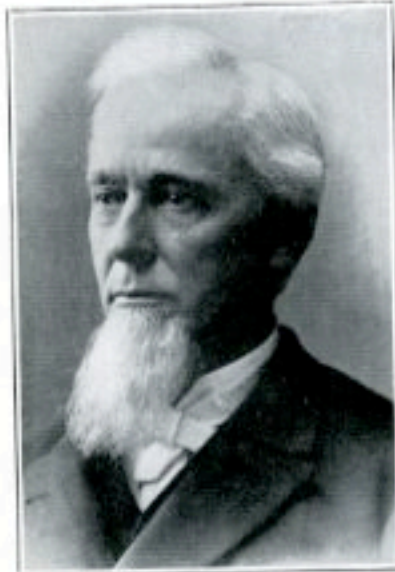
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## The Burton Tradition

Another of the historical series that pays tribute to the founders of Denison.

**B**URTON Hall on the lower Shepardson Campus was so named in honor of Dr. and Mrs. Nathan Smyth Burton, co-founders of the Young Ladies' Institute in Granville, in the fall of 1859.

The story of their lives and the curious intertwining of those lives with the careers of others associated with Granville and Denison is dramatic in many of its features.



Dr. N. S. Burton

Dr. Burton was a man of great dignity of bearing; of gentle and peaceful expression of countenance suggesting reserve; of fine courtesy of manner, and possessed of the highest qualities of manliness. He was born in Manlius, New Jersey, on February 5, 1821. He graduated from Western Reserve College, then at Hudson, Ohio, in the class of 1846. In college he was a member of the Alpha Delta Phi fraternity, whose Hudson chapter was established in 1841. When, on October 28th, 1847, the Western Reserve chapter of Phi Beta Kappa was organized, he was chosen as an alumnus member, his name being third on the list of the graduates selected.

In his first year out of college he taught in the Norwalk Institute at Norwalk, Ohio. The principal of this school was named Jeremiah Hall. One of his fellow teachers was Fletcher O. Marsh. A few years later all three of them were in Granville. Jeremiah Hall, who had been pastor of the Baptist church from 1851 to 1853, had resigned to become president of Granville College; Mr. Burton had succeeded him in the pastorate of the Granville church; and Professor Marsh was one of the most valued teachers and administrative assistants of Dr. Hall in the struggling institution. President Hall knew both of the men and their exceptionally fine wives, and so acted with knowledge and with wisdom when he enriched Granville life by securing both of them as co-workers.

Perhaps here is a good place to leap half a century ahead to note another interesting association. Dr. Burton and Professor Marsh were two of the most influential correspondents who urged and finally persuaded Dr. Daniel Shepardson to move to Granville and purchase the Young Ladies' Institute founded by the Burtons in 1859. One of Professor Marsh's sons married a daughter of Dr. Shepardson. A son of Dr. Shepardson was named Ernest

after Dr. Burton's son Ernest, who later became president of the University of Chicago; and, for some years, while Francis W. Shepardson, son of Dr. Shepardson, was superintendent of the Sunday School of the Hyde Park Baptist Church in Chicago, two of his efficient cooperators were Ernest D. Burton, son of Dr. Burton, as director of religious education, and Charles A. Marsh, son of Professor Marsh, as principal of the primary department—all three of them graduates of Denison University, and two of them, Mr. Burton and Mr. Marsh, born in Granville at the time when their fathers were associated here as previously noted. So strangely are human lives intertwined in the story of development of Denison history.

Dr. Burton spent most of his life in the Baptist ministry. After a course of training from 1847 to 1850 in the Newton Theological Institution, he was ordained in November, 1850, and became pastor of the Baptist church in Elyria, Ohio. After three years he went to the Third Church in Cleveland for a year, and then came to Granville for a pastorate covering the years 1854 to 1862. From Granville he went to Akron for four years; and then to Ann Arbor for five years; then to the Calvary Baptist Church at Davenport, Iowa, for five years; then became professor in Kalamazoo College, Michigan, for two years; then returned to Akron for a second pastorate of eight years, from which, in 1886, he was called back to Granville to serve as acting president of Denison University during the interim between the resignation of President Alfred Owen and the coming of President Galusha Anderson.

Mrs. Burton was one of the four children of Rev. Micajah Fairfield. He was the valedictorian of the class of 1809 in Middlebury College, Vermont. He graduated from Andover Theological Seminary in 1811, in that immortal class which originated the missionary enterprise. Judson, Newell, and Rice were his classmates; Mills was his roommate; and he himself was prevented from joining the missionary movement solely by reason of protracted infection of the eyes. He was educated as a Congregationalist; but, when he appeared before an ecclesiastical council, his views were found to differ from those of that denomination, and a recommendation adverse to his ordination was made. He



Mrs. N. S. Burton

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then was examined by a like council of the Baptist denomination; was approved by them; and soon settled over a parish in Troy, Miami County, Ohio. There was one incident in his life which was interesting and must have influenced his career greatly. At one time he became a resident of Virginia, and a slave-holder by his marriage to Hannah Withers Wynn Neale, widow of Richard Henry Lee Neale. As early as 1825 he repudiated the system of slavery; liberated his own slaves; and took such a



Burton Hall

decided anti-slavery stand that he was compelled to leave the state of Virginia. It was then that he went to Troy, Ohio, where he cast the first anti-slavery vote in that county, and where Mrs. Burton was born on April 4, 1825. One of his sons became president of Hillsdale College.

When Mrs. Burton grew up she was hungry for educational advantages. The public schools had little to offer; she could not afford to attend the expensive female seminaries of the East; and so she was attracted to Oberlin College, which had opened with two notable innovations, one the admission

of women, and the other a welcome to Negro students. So, when she was sixteen years old she entered the freshman class at Oberlin. Her plan for taking the regular four years classical course was interfered with by reason of eye trouble, and because of poverty which forced her to do extra work to pay her way through. But, she finally graduated in 1848 in the so-called Ladies' Course, which omitted Latin and Greek. After one year of teaching she married Mr. Burton, and her subsequent career was identified with him.

One who knew her well said, "The establishment of a first-class school for Baptist girls adjacent to Denison University appealed to Mrs. Burton's enthusiastic zeal for the higher education of women; and it was to her wisdom, courage, energy, and sacrifices, that obligation is due for the launching in the fall of 1859 of what the Burtons called the "Young Ladies' Institute". This enterprise, of course, was an additional burden undertaken by two individuals already furnished with abundant opportunities of service in connection with the Granville church and a growing family. One other sentence might be quoted to show the significance of the Burton tradition at Denison: "Her inspiring influence vitalized everything she touched, and she not only bravely and cheerfully bore her own burdens, but helped others to bear theirs victoriously through all the difficulties necessary to the successful establishment of a new and great enterprise."

There is a great temptation to turn aside to consider the life work of Dr. Burton and his wife as they assumed and met the responsibilities of leadership in various ways and in other places in connection with the Baptist ministry; but, space forces a restriction of consideration of them to the life at Granville.

Perhaps a quotation from a letter written by Dr. Burton to Dr. Daniel Shepardson of Cincinnati, urging him to come to Granville and take charge of the Young Ladies' Institute, will have value because of its far-seeing thoughtfulness:

"Have you thought how much we as a denomination need such a school in Ohio; that we are already at the mercy of other denominations for the education of our daughters; how many will go without an education in consequence, whose parents would give them an education if there were a Baptist school to send them to; what an efficient handmaid to the college such a school would be here; and what a mighty influence for good such a school, under strong religious influence, must exert, forming the character of the wives and mothers of the coming generation? . . . One thing more. Some of us had our hearts set upon a female department for the college. At present it is impracticable; but, if you want to work in that direction, you may count on some earnest fellow laborers here."

These sentences indicate the thought which was behind the action of the Burtons in opening the Young Ladies' Institute in 1859.

The Granville Opera House, as it is now called, formerly was the Baptist church building. It stood on the site of the present stone structure. In the middle of the basement on the east side was a door into a hallway from which several rooms opened. The largest of these was used for prayer meeting and Sunday School purposes. The smaller rooms