

History Corner

War Caused Mount Joy Girls' School To Close

MOUNT JOY — Before Mount Joy was chartered as a borough, it was the location of several important Lancaster County schools.

Schools flourished around the villages of Rohrerstown and Richmond, the largest of several villages in the area that would be Mount Joy.

The Mount Joy Soldiers' Orphans' School, the Mount Joy Institute for Boys and the Mount Joy Academy, all popular in their time, were in the area.

Perhaps the most famous of the several then well known schools, though, was the Cedar Hill Female Seminary, founded in 1837 by the Rev. Nehemiah Dodge, a Presbyterian minister from New England who settled in Lancaster County.

Dodge set up Cedar Hill Female Seminary, a private school for pre-teenage and teenage girls, in an old farmhouse. As the school's enrollment increased, Dodge needed a larger building, and about 1840 he moved the school into another structure, about a quarter of a mile from the original school.

Enrollment at Cedar Hill continued to grow as its reputation as a fine school spread across the country. By the middle to late 1850s, the enrollment of Cedar Hill reached nearly 1,200 girls, with residents from as many as 11 states attending the seminary.

Many of the young women enrolled in the Cedar Hill Female Seminary were from wealthy families of the South. When the Civil War broke out, parents of many Southern Cedar Hill students withdrew them from the school and brought them home. By 1864, when the war was raging at its worse, Dodge had no choice but to close Cedar Hill Female Seminary and hope to revive and continue the school after the war.

Unfortunately, he couldn't. Dodge, ruling elder of the Mount Joy Presbyterian Church, continued to live with his family in the building that housed the school, but he abandoned the idea of starting it up again.

The school stayed closed until 1871, when the Rev. W. R. Brown, a Baltimore clergyman, visited Mount Joy and made an unsuccessful attempt to revive the school.

The last time the school was opened was in 1874, when Professor David Denlinger reopened it as the Cedar Hill Seminary, a school for young women and men. Denlinger, however, could keep the school open only for a few years before he had to abandon it.

Dodge, although he didn't try to open the school again, remained in Mount Joy. He served as ruling elder of the Mount Joy Presbyterian Church for 24 years. He died on July 25, 1876. The building in which the seminary had been burned down in 1891.