

# Yorkville had prep school Franklin Institution in 1840

*Progressive headmaster  
Thomas Davidson put  
science in curriculum*

The Franklin Institution was founded in 1840 in Yorkville. It was a preparatory school that in today's terms would be referred to as "college prep."

The subject matter included English, geometry, algebra, mensuration (measurement or applied geometry), Latin, Greek and French, all of which would be included in any college prep curriculum of the time. Science courses were not likely to be offered in such schools, although they would be a part of course offerings in colleges.

Thomas Davidson, headmaster of the Franklin Institution, believed the sciences were neglected. He introduced new ideas and a new system of education that he called "The Eclectic System."

He said the sciences should be taught from the first entrance of the pupil into an academy and carried on through the whole course of academic education.

John R. Schorb, known today almost entirely for his photography, taught science and mathematics at the school. For many years, Schorb's photography studio was something he did on the side.

The school year at Franklin Institution was two sessions, or semesters, of five months each. On the last Friday of each month, students performed in public by answering questions put to them by both their instructors and the community at large. The tuition charge was \$20 per session.

A special department of the school trained young men to be-

come qualified teachers. This was more than 40 years before the state of South Carolina financed a teacher training college (Winthrop). The Franklin Institute accepted girls at the entry levels but not to be trained as teachers.

Thomas Davidson was a master teacher, if we can believe what was written about him by an observer in the Nov. 21, 1840, edition of the Yorkville Compiler: "So confident was Mr. Davidson of success, that he put us upon our generosity to subscribe much or little to him

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a half months. He has already secured the reverence and esteem of our children in the short space of two weeks, in so much that they would not stay from school."

Davidson employed the "oral method of teaching." It was not common for teachers to instruct. Most teachers of that time gave their pupils much "seat work" and would tell them only whether their answers were right or wrong. If wrong, students sat down and worked on the problems or translations until they got it right.

In his book "The Story of My Life," J. Marion Sims of Lancaster County vividly describes his early experiences in schooling.

He could only recall about his

first year that the teacher flogged the boys occasionally, very severely. Some were put in the corner wearing a fool's cap. The next year when he was 6, he was sent to a boarding school run by an Irishman who was "very tyrannical, and sometimes cruel." Sims was so unhappy that he became convinced children under the age of 10 should be with their mothers.

His third year, Sims was taught by a man with a terrible temper - except on Mondays.

It seems the schoolmaster got drunk every Saturday night and was still "feeling his oats" when he got to school on Monday. He never whipped anyone on Mondays. No one liked this cruel schoolmaster, but he was the only schoolmaster in the county and the parents would have no one to instruct their children if they fired him.

Lancaster had its own Franklin Academy, established in 1825. Five prominent citizens built a two-story brick house 20 by 30 feet, and advertised for teachers. Henry Connelly, a recent graduate of Washington University, was hired. He performed well but left after his second year. But he sent a good man from Pennsylvania to replace him, and the school kept its good reputation.

On the basis of what he had learned in Franklin Academy, Sims was able to enter South Carolina College on the sophomore level.

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