

# THE HISTORICAL TIMES

NEWSLETTER OF THE GRANVILLE, OHIO, HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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## *A Memorial to a Beloved Wife Establishes a Literary Tradition*

*He who would do good to another  
must do it in minute particulars.*

William Blake

Denison University glowed in hilltop blue-sky sunshine on Wednesday, May 18, 1960, and the Granville village fire siren delivered its consoling noon wail as I left the second floor classroom and climbed the stairs of old Talbot Hall. Siren test gave way to ringing of the telephone when I got to the open door of my fourth floor Talbot office. I dropped my briefcase and picked up the phone. It was Ruth Elliott, President Knapp's secretary. Her voice came low and soft as though she feared being overheard: "Paul, there's a little old man here in Blair's office who wants to talk to you."

"Who is he?" I asked.

Ruth Elliott's voice became even more guarded: "He says he's a Denison alum but he wouldn't give us his name. He wants to speak to you personally. Would you have time or were you about to head home for lunch?"

"I brought my lunch—the good sack lunch Denison faculty thrive on," I said.

"He seems quite determined," Ruth Elliott put in. "Could I send him right over to your office?"

"The peanut butter and jelly can wait," I said. "Did you say he's a little old man? He shouldn't try to climb those four flights of Talbot stairs. Tell him I'll meet him at the east door. I'll be right down."

Taking my sack lunch with me I descended the stairs and saw through the open door a gray-haired man making his way toward Talbot. At the foot of Talbot's cement entryway I met him with my hand outstretched: "I'm Paul Bennett."

"Good," he murmured. "I'm Gordon Clark Beck." As we shook hands he smiled and asked: "Could you use a hundred thousand dollars?"

"What?"

"I asked if you could use a hundred thousand dollars." The smile broadened, ended in a chuckle. Evidently I looked as stunned as I felt, for the voice continued with just a touch of whimsy: "Of course there are a couple strings attached."

Feeling a bit weak in the knees, I motioned off to our right to the waist-high wall of the sun-brightened chapel walk. "Could we just sit down here a moment and talk?"

"I'll tell you the couple strings," Gordon Clark Beck said, once we were seated. "First and foremost, I want someone to edit my wife Harriet's poetry. She wrote poetry throughout her life, and I want to publish a little memorial volume of her poems for her friends and family. I should tell you she died last November 14. I was always expected to die first, but didn't." Gordon Clark Beck paused, smiled, and I sensed he was a man who liked to deliver humorous verbal punches, for he went on: "If I had died first I wouldn't be here talking about Harriet, would I?"

I shook my head and waited.

He began again, "The second string is this: I want to establish an enduring monument to Harriet, something that will honor her interest in writing." Again he paused, then said severely: "Under no condition do I want my hundred thousand to get swallowed up in Denison University's general funds. That's why I wanted to speak to you—didn't even tell your president what I was up to. Harriet was a student of Willa Cather when she was teaching in the Pittsburgh High School, and I would hope you might set up something in writing that would be a lasting memorial to Harriet and a stimulus to creative endeavors on this campus. Could you do those two things for me?"

Still reeling from his opening question, I needed time to get my sea legs. The paper sack I carried in my left hand served to remind me it was lunch time, and I said, "Mr. Beck—"

"Gordon!"

"Gordon, could I drive you down to the Granville Inn so we could talk about this over lunch?"

"We could." He gave his little self-conscious chuckle, and pointed to the door of the Student Union, which President Knapp had—during a college break—ingeniously located in what had been the carpentry shop under Talbot Hall's east wing. "We could go to the Granville Inn, but isn't that your Student Union, and couldn't we just eat there?" Again the chuckle and his raised hand, right finger and thumb about three inches apart. "Would they have any of those ten-cent packages of Lance crackers? That's what I eat for lunch."

My thoughts ricocheted from hundred thousand dollar gift to ten-cent Lance cracker lunch as we made our way into the clammy depths of the Student Union, but I needn't have been in such a mental muddle, for Gordon Clark Beck was for real, as was his offer. The Student Union had Lance crackers in ten-cent packets; Gordon chose the peanut butter variety, and we both ended up topping off peanut butter fare by sharing six fresh-baked chocolate chip cookies my good Jeanne had packed in my sack lunch.

Although Jeanne was the musician in our family, I responded to Gordon Clark Beck's two stringed offer with this note on May 19:

I want you to know that I greatly enjoyed the opportunity to make your acquaintance and talk with you yesterday. Your general description of the perpetual memorial you wish to establish to your wife Harriet has set my mental wheels turning and I very much hope to be able to respond with specific proposals within the next several weeks. In the meantime I hope you will feel free to send or deliver her poetry manuscripts, for I look forward with pleasure to reading and editing them.

I was not to hear from Gordon until a month later because he fell prey to a sciatic nerve condition that entailed hospitalization and therapy. It was the second week in July before he was able to come to Granville to deliver the bulky file folder containing Harriet's poetry, most of it in longhand on yellow legal sheets. Many of the poems were fragments and some existed in multiple rough draft versions.



Paul Bennett

While waiting to receive the poetry I had discussed with the English staff and President Knapp the possibilities for establishing a permanent memorial to Harriet Beck. The English staff had been quite helpful and President Knapp had been his usual great-hearted self (dealing with him was always like working with a brother), and he had not been at all put-out that Gordon Clark Beck had been less than open with him on his May 18 visit. "Paul," he said, "you go right ahead and work out whatever you and the English staff think best. We'll run what you propose past Clark Morrow (the college lawyer), if and when the time comes."

Once I had Harriet's poems in hand—the total manuscript ran to well over 100 pages—I spent every spare minute with them, and on August first I wrote to Gordon:

I have now had an opportunity to work through your wife's manuscripts and it seems to me that you could count on about twenty short poems that would make a nice little booklet. There are as many as thirty poems in the total manuscript but the twenty I have edited and retyped appear to me to represent the quality of your wife's thinking at its best and to be those most likely to be treasured by her friends. In such matters I think quality is more important than quantity, and I have developed a real enthusiasm for these particular poems.

On August 31 Gordon came to Granville (we met in Doane Library) to pick up Harriet's edited poems, and he took them for reading and evaluation by her sister in Pittsburgh. Harriet's sister approved the poems without exception, and Gordon asked me to write a brief foreword, which I did:

This volume contains twenty poems by the late Harriet Ewens Beck. These twenty short poems, one a couplet and the longest only nineteen lines, owe their existence in no small part to a great teacher's influence on a perceptive and talented student. The teacher was Willa

Cather; the student was the Pittsburgh schoolgirl Harriet Ewens, who in later life was to marry Gordon C. Beck and settle in Cincinnati where she lived out her life and died on November 14, 1959.

In style the twenty poems in this volume range from the traditional iambic of the sonnets to the free verse of "O Mesa" and "Pittsburgh." In content they range from the deceptively simple observed fact in nature:

In spring, Japonica, I find  
Your ways perplexing to my mind

to the most incisive world view  
("Sunarama").

Because Harriet Ewens Beck felt "called to poetry" by Willa Cather it seems appropriate to usher a reader to her poetry with these shining lines by which Sara Ome Jewett summoned Willa Cather to literature in her famous letter of December 13, 1908: "You must find your own quiet center of life, and write from that. . .to the human heart, the great consciousness that all humanity goes to make up. Otherwise what might be strength in a writer is only crudeness, and which might be insight is only observation..."

While the English Staff and I pondered and discussed several ways for using the Beck money to establish an enduring memorial to Harriet, Gordon privately printed and distributed *Twenty Poems*. Here are two representative poems from the collection:

#### LAST DAFFODIL OF SPRING

Alone, take your hero's stance.  
Survivor of a gleaming band  
That greeted spring with radiance,  
Trumpets lifted at the sun's command.

Trumpeter, play your requiem  
Over these green remains.  
Boldly play on till your vernal music  
Wakes these green hills to gold.

### PITTSBURGH

City of steel,  
Formidable and tall,  
You stand between your rivers  
Intent on mighty tasks.  
Your high-tensile strength  
Resists all forces;  
When you blaze your passion on the night  
You defy the gods.

All these cradled in your smoke-fog,  
Who with first breath inhale your acrid air,  
Have blood the redder for your ore dust  
And wills the harder for your steel.

So well you forge your youths and temper them  
That when they strive with you  
To win to manhood,  
Steel rings on steel.

And when your sons go forth to meet the foe  
They bear within their hearts your iron  
And in their hands your thunderbolts of war!

I took a copy of *Twenty Poems* to President Knapp who read them with his usual enthusiasm and promptly got off a letter that delighted Gordon. In our conversation I had told President Knapp that we in the English Department were working toward a definitive proposal for use of the Beck money, and he again expressed confidence we'd use the money well.

During his campus visits and our exchange of letters I had come to appreciate Gordon Clark Beck as a graduate Denison or any liberal arts college would be proud to claim. He had achieved an exceptional academic record, so exceptional that he, a graduate of 1906, had been elected to Phi Beta Kappa under the "grandfathering clause"

when Theta Chapter of Ohio was established at Denison in 1911. His extra-curricular performance balanced nicely his classroom excellence, for he had become a force in the Franklin Literary Society, business manager of *The Denisonian*, manager of the football team, and president of the Athletic Association.

Upon graduation and his marriage to Harriet Ewens he had entered the real estate business in Cincinnati, where for 30 years he was associated with the Warren E. Richards Agency, retiring in 1960 as vice-president. Not given to pushing himself into the limelight and always conditioned by a fine sense of humor, he had kept close to Denison—"my school"—since the day of his graduation. He was a faithful and close reader of Denison publications, including the literary magazine *Exile* and *At Denison*, and he referred to both and the writing program in speaking of his hopes for the memorial to honor Harriet.

During his campus visit on August 31, Gordon and I discussed in some detail several proposals for Harriet's memorial. In preparing to depart he said he sensed I knew about where his expectations lay in his desire to honor Harriet and enhance creative intellectual endeavors on campus.

I said, "I sense a little order there?"

He smiled, gave his little chuckle, and said: "Could be."

On September 4, 1960, I sent him this draft proposal:

The Harriet Ewens Beck Chair of English at Denison University, Granville, Ohio, is to be established by the gift of a fund to Denison University by Gordon Clark Beck, a Denison graduate in 1906, as a perpetual and enduring memorial to his deceased wife Harriet Ewens Beck. Harriet Ewens Beck, a Denison student in the Class of 1910, began her life-long interest in creative writing in high school as a student of Willa Cather, and it is most fitting that this memorial chair in



*Eudora Welty signs books for Denison students during a Beck Fund sponsored visit to Granville.*

creative writing be known as the Harriet Ewens Beck Chair of English.

The income from the principal of the fund to be established is to be used at the discretion of Denison University to bring an established writer and/or to maintain a writer/teacher on the Denison campus for whatever period of time seems most appropriate as a stimulus to creative intellectual endeavors.

Voicing my hope that the pleasant "order" he had given me had been fulfilled, I wrote, "I have been concerned that the proposal do two things: celebrate Harriet's interest in creative writing and reflect credit to you for this magnanimous offer to Denison." Having already cleared the phrasing of the proposal with the English staff and President Knapp, I supplied a carbon of the proposal and my September 4 letter to Clark Morrow, the college attorney, should Gordon wish to consult him on the legal phrasing. Gordon and his attorney, James H. Van Matre, accepted the proposal without change, and this wording legally established the Harriet Ewens Beck Chair of English, Denison University's first endowed lectureship.

Although every note or letter from Gordon came

with the formal salutation: "Dear Mr. Bennett," he and I got on so well that he took to stopping off in Granville every time he was passing near. One of his visits led to a nice little exchange between President Knapp and me, that had he heard it, would have bent Gordon double in laughter. Gordon had called, informing me that he was hauling an antique chair to Harriet's sister in Pittsburgh and that he would like me to see the chair since it had belonged to Harriet. He and I met on the parking lot between Talbot Hall and Life Science Building, and Gordon showed me the chair which he had wrapped for hauling in a heavy shawl. He was delivering the chair, driving what he called "Harriet's car," a 14 year old Plymouth sporting the most bald tires I ever saw on any vehicle. As we were inspecting the chair—itsself a matchless antique in needlepoint—who should pass on the walk between Talbot and Life Science but President Knapp. Gordon and I talked for some time and then he departed for the long drive to Pittsburgh.

Later in the day I chanced to run into President Knapp, and he asked me: "Didn't I see you chatting with Gordon Clark Beck there on the parking lot this afternoon?"

"Right," I said, and I explained that Gordon had

wanted me to see the chair he was delivering to Harriet's sister in Pittsburgh. I added: "Blair, I sure as hell hope he makes it. He was driving what he told me had been Harriet's Plymouth. That car had the worst tires I've ever seen on a car—bald as my head or more so. I wouldn't have driven on those tires the six miles to Newark, let alone from Cincinnati to Pittsburgh."

"Paul," President Knapp said, with a twinkle in his eye "that's just the difference between you and Gordon Clark Beck. That's why he can give this college a hundred thousand dollars."

How I would have liked to tell that story to Gordon, but I never had the chance. My next communication came April 20, 1962, from James H. Van Matre who informed me that Gordon had collapsed and died April 18, and that he was to be buried on Saturday, April 21 in Cincinnati. I called to tell President Knapp, and he asked me if I would care to represent the college at the funeral. Naturally I said I would, and I did.

As executor of Gordon's estate, Attorney James H. Van Matre passed on to Denison University between December, 1962 and July, 1963 cash and securities worth \$103,582.74, more than fulfilling Gordon's promise of May 18, 1960. With the income from this sum assured, the English Department, now chaired by Dr. Lenthil H. Downs, initiated the Harriet Ewens Beck Lectureship in 1964 by inviting the distinguished fiction writer Eudora Welty of Jackson, Mississippi, to spend the week of April 13-17 on campus.

Eudora Welty's visit met fully Gordon's desire that the Beck Lectureship be a stimulus to creative endeavors, and in its totality it established a pattern for the Beck lecturers to follow. Eudora Welty met with English majors as a group; she spoke at the Tuesday Faculty Lunch; she visited two writing classes; she held individual half-hour conferences with 15 students; and she spoke on three different evenings, in meetings open to the public, including her "Words Into Fiction" address, delivered before a large college-community audience on Tuesday evening, April 14, in Swasey Chapel.

Gordon and Harriet Beck's relatives from Columbus and Pittsburgh and the Van Matres from Cincinnati were invited to the ceremonial dinner and Tuesday evening address. Later James Van Matre wrote to me:

This was indeed a memorable occasion, and I felt privileged to be present, both personally and as a representative of the Estate of Gordon Beck. I can testify that Mr. Beck would be highly gratified and rewarded by the way you and Denison have made his memorial to his wife come alive. The selection of Eudora Welty to inaugurate the Harriet Ewens Beck Chair of English was a particularly happy and fitting one. I shall remember especially the inspiring presentation you made concerning Mr. Beck when you introduced Miss Welty.

It was a pleasure for us to see you again and to visit in your distinctive home, as well as to meet the other members of the English faculty.

As I have suggested, Eudora Welty more than fulfilled our hopes for launching the Beck Lectureship successfully, and she responded to what was to become the first of her five visits to Denison with this note on May 9, 1964:

How often I've thought of that lovely week that came my way when I was asked to Denison. It was one of the very nicest times I ever had at a college or university, and will be remembered by me for a long time. All of you were so sweet to me—I was surrounded by kind and thoughtful people—faculty and students...

I did *enjoy* everything. It made me proud to be the first of your Harriet Ewens Beck writers, and I only hope the others will be half as happy as I was at Denison.

During one of her subsequent visits to Denison

# Alphabetical Listing of Beck Lecturers (1964-1996)

(\*Two or more visits to Campus)

Abbott, Lee K.  
Abse, Dannie\*  
Addonizio, Kim  
Aijaz, Ahmad  
Alexie, Sherman  
Allbery, Debra\*  
Allen, Dick  
Allen, Patrick\*  
Allison, Dorothy  
Anderson, Jack  
Arnow, Harriette S.  
Ashour, Linda\*  
Atsumi, Ikuko  
Barbour, Julia Watson  
Barrax, Gerald  
Barron, Frank X.  
Barth, John  
Becker, Geoffrey  
Bell, Marvin  
Benedikt, Michael  
Berry, Wendell\*  
Bierds, Linda  
Blaise, Clark\*  
Blue Cloud, Peter  
Blumenthal, Michael  
Bly, Robert  
Bogle, Donald  
Bohm, Robert  
Boland, Eavan  
Bowles, Carol  
Boyer, Rick\*  
Brant, Beth  
Brathwaite, Edward  
Bringhurst, Robert  
Brooks, Gwendolyn\*  
Brown, Herb  
Brown, Rosellen  
Bums, Ralph

Butcher, Grace  
Butor, Michel  
Cameron, Peter  
Carby, Hazel V.  
Came-Ross, Donald  
Carter, Jared  
Castaneda, Omar  
Church, Philip D.  
Citino, David\*  
Clampitt, Kamky  
Clarke, Cheryl  
Collins, Billy  
Collins, Robert J.  
Coover, Robert  
Cowley, Malcolm  
Cruttwell, Patrick  
Cullinan, Elizabeth  
Daniels, Jim  
Dawkins, Richard  
Delbanco, Nicholas  
deMille, Agnes  
Derricotte, Toi  
Dickey, James  
Dickinson, Charles  
Dintenfass, Mark  
Dove, Rita  
Duncan, Robert  
Dunn, Stephen  
Eberhart, Richard  
Emanuel, Lynn  
Engle, Paul  
Epstein, Daniel Mark\*  
Epstein, Joseph  
Erdrich, Louise  
Evans, Mari  
Ewart, Gavin  
Feldman, Irving  
Field, Edward  
Flanagan, Robert  
Forche, Carolyn  
Ford, Richard  
Frucht, Abby  
Fulton, Alice  
Gaines, Ernest\*  
Gibson, Margaret  
Gilbert, Sandra  
Ginsberg, Allen

Giovanni, Nikki  
Gluck, Louise  
Goldbarth, Albert  
Goodman, Diane  
Gregerson, Linda  
Grennan, Eamon  
Grigsby, Gordon\*  
Hacker, Marilyn\*  
Haines, John  
Hales, Corrine  
Hall, Daniel  
Hall, Donald  
Halpern, Daniel  
Hamilton, Ian  
Hamilton, Jane  
Hamilton, Jeff  
Hammond, Mary Stewart  
Hannah, Barry  
Harjo, Joy  
Harms, Jim  
Hawkes, John  
Hayden, Robert  
Hecht, Anthony  
Heller, Joseph  
Herman, Michele  
Hernton, Calvin  
Hicks, Granville  
Hilberry, Conrad\*  
Hillman, Brenda  
Holden, Jonathan  
Houston, Pamela\*  
Howard, Richard  
Hudgins, Andrew  
Hughes, Glyn  
Hummer, T. R.\*  
Hyde, Lewis  
Hymes, Dell  
Inez, Colette\*  
Jackson, Fleda Brown  
Jones, Rodney  
Joseph, Allison  
Joseph, Lawrence  
Kasdorf, Julia  
Kelly, Brigit Pegeen  
Kennedy, X. J.  
Kermode, Frank  
Kingston, Maxine Hong

Kinnell, Galway  
Kinsella, Thomas  
Klappert, Peter  
Kline, Morris  
Knott, Bill (Saint Geraud)\*  
Komunyakaa, Yusef  
Kumin, Maxine  
Laidlaw, Brett  
Lavin, Mary  
Lea, Sydney  
Lee, Valerie  
Levertov, Denise\*  
Levine, Philip\*  
Levis, Larry  
Liddy, James\*  
Lord, Audre  
McCafferty, Jane  
McFee, Michael  
McHugh, Heather  
McKean, James  
McKnight, Reginald  
McPherson, James Alan  
McPherson, Sandra  
Mandlebaum, Allen  
Masten, Jeff  
Mangan, Kathy\*  
Mason, Bobbie Ann  
Mathias, Roland  
Matthews, Jack  
Matthews, William  
Meinke, Peter  
Miller, Jim Wayne  
Miller, Vassar\*  
Mitchell, Karen  
Mitchell, Susan  
Mizener, Arthur  
Mora, Pat  
Morgan, Robert  
Mott, Michael\*  
Mukherjee, Bharati\*  
Muske, Carol  
Nemerov, Howard  
Nissenson, Hugh  
Nye, Naomi Shihab  
Oates, Joyce Carol  
O'Brien, Tim  
O'Leary, Tomas

Olds, Sharon  
Oliver, Mary  
Olsen, Tillie  
Orlen, Steve  
Ostriker, Alicia  
Painter, Pamela  
Paley, Grace  
Pastan, Linda  
Patrick, William  
Peckenpaugh, Angela  
Penner, Jonathan  
Perrin, Noel  
Piercy, Marge  
Platt, Kathleen G.  
Platt, Eugene  
Plumly, Stanley\*  
Pope, Deborah  
Redmond, Eugene  
Reed, Ishmael  
Reiss, Edmund  
Rich, Adrienne  
Richards, Caroline  
Richie, Elisavietta  
Rogers, Pattiann  
Rosen, Michael  
Ruggles, Eugene  
Ryan, Michael  
St. John, David\*  
Sanders, Scott\*  
Santos, Sherod  
Scholes, Robert  
Schultz, Philip  
Seay, James  
Shakely, Lauren  
Shapiro, Karl  
Sherinutt, Eva  
Shelton, Richard  
Sherman, Charlotte Watson  
Siegel, Robert  
Silkin, Jon\*  
Simic, Charles  
Simpson, Louis  
Singer, Isaac Bashevis  
Skinner, Knute  
Sloan, James Park  
Smith, Arthur  
Smith, Charlie

Smith, Dave\*  
Smith, Ken  
Smith, William Jay  
Snyder, Gary\*  
Spires, Elizabeth  
Stafford, William  
Starbuck, George  
Stern, Gerald  
Stoppard, Tom  
Straight, Susan  
Strand, Mark\*  
Styryk, Lucien  
Sulau, Bill  
Summer, Hollis  
Taylor, Peter  
Thomas, Annabel  
Thomas, Lewis  
Thompson, Phyllis  
Tilghman, Christopher  
Tillinghast, Richard  
Tipton, James  
Toelken, Bane  
Trachtenberg, Inge  
Trudell, Dennis\*  
Turner, Alberta  
Turner, Frederick  
Ullman, Leslie  
Vendler, Helen  
Voigt, Ellen Bryant  
Wakoski, Diane\*  
Walcott, Derek  
Waldrop, Keith  
Walker, Alice  
Walker, Margaret\*  
Wallace, Robert  
Waniek, Marilyn  
Whitlow, Carolyn  
Welty, Eudora\*  
Zinsser, William

Eudora Welty taught a writing class for half a semester, and on yet another visit, Denison bestowed on her an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters Degree.

Well over 250 distinguished writers—poets, novelists, short story writers, dramatists, and critics—have followed Eudora Welty as Harriet Ewens Beck lecturers at Denison in the past 32 years. More than 30 of that number have been invited to campus more than once.

Of the 250, 17 have been Denison-educated writers: Debra Allbery, Linda Phillips Ashour, Clark Blaise, Rick Boyer, Herb Brown, Diane Goodman, Jeff Hamilton, Pamela Houston, Kathy Mangan, Jeff Maston, Angela Peckenpaugh, Kathleen Gemmell Platt, Deborah Pope, Lauren Shakely, Robert Siegel, Dennis Trudell, and Frederick Turner.

In keeping with the Welty pattern all Beck lecturers read and speak to students, faculty, and townspeople, and many of them meet with students in classes or individual conferences.

As with any program drawing on many people, a few of the Beck lecturers have proved unworthy of the opportunity afforded them. Among that few would be the poet who assumed that Denison not only supplied its guests with overnight lodging in Middleton Guest House but supplied a co-ed bedmate for the evening. And in the special niche marked "no return" would also be the well-known critic who begged off meeting his two days of scheduled classes saying: "I am terribly behind in my research and writing and have yet to put the finishing touches on my major all-college address." Imagine the feeling among the audience in Swasey Chapel when the critic began to read a canned speech in which he told how pleased he was to be speaking at the University of Illinois at Champaign. Minutes later—following an apology—a second reference to his Champaign surroundings told his Denison audience just how far west of Granville he had been throughout his four days of steady tipling at Middleton House.

Putting bizarre occurrences aside, I would close

this account by speaking of the sublime. Surely one can surmise that the spirits of a loving husband and wife relish what has been achieved by Gordon Clark Beck's notion to do good at Denison and memorialize his wife. Not only is Harriet Ewens Beck's name attached to Denison's first endowed lectureship but that lectureship has set a pattern for such programs throughout the curriculum. The Beck name is permanently identified with Denison's writing program, and every one of the eight or 10 writers who appear on campus each semester reminds us that the caring, creativity, and achievement exemplified by both the Becks lie at the heart of a Denison education.

### ***GHS 2005 Publication Project***

Paul Bennett's article on the Beck Lecture Fund represents a significant first step in the publication portion of what our society's members know as the "2005 Project." Between its inception in 1996 and the bicentennial celebration of Granville's 1805 founding by pioneers from New England, the 2005 Project will encompass the following things:

- Articles in *The Historical Times*
- Special Programs such as the Pearl Harbor Day evening in which six residents recollected the Granville of Dec. 7, 1941.
- Displays and exhibits in the Granville Historical Society's museum and in the Old Academy Building.
- Ultimately, a three volume publication which will include a narrative history of Granville from pre-settlement to present, a set of essays on aspects of Granville's history, and a book of historic maps, photographs, and other graphic items.

A committee of past and present members of the Board of Management of the Society is overseeing the project, which is the brainchild of former Society President, Tony Stoneburner.

The aim of all of this activity is to produce a sketch of the richness and complexity of life in the Granville community over two centuries. One aspect of a village's heritage is its guest list. When considered in this light, Professor Bennett's article quickly transcends strictly Denison's history to become part of our community's story. We hope our readers enjoy this fascinating account of famous writers who have visited our village through the generosity of the Beck Lecture Fund.

Tom Martin  
Chair of the 2005 Project Committee.

# Granville:

## A Planned Community from the Beginning

*[Editor's Note: This article was written for the "Granville : Planning for the Future II" Seminar which took place in September, 1996. Because it considers in some detail the village and township planning undertaken by the Granville pioneers, we considered this account suitable for inclusion in The Historical Times.]*

Visitors coming to Granville for the first time often remark on the beauty and uniqueness of our village. Adjectives like "quaint," "New Englandish," "picturesque," "beautiful," "charming," are often heard applied to Granville. Travelers and residents alike refer to Granville as a "bit of New England located near the Welsh Hills of central Ohio."

What we need to remember is that Granville didn't just happen. Granville was not founded because the wheels fell off the Conestoga wagons forcing the early Granville settlers to remain in what was originally Sections 2, 3 and 4 of Township Two in Range Thirteen of the Military District. The

settlers coming from Granville, Massachusetts and Granby, Connecticut in the early nineteenth century knew from the beginning where they were going. And they knew they were going to a plat of land they had designed as a planned community. This was not always the case with settlers coming from the east to the vast new lands of Ohio. But

planning based on discussions by the settlers before they ventured from central New England was essential to the Granville pioneers. The citizens of Granville in Massachusetts and Granby, five miles to the south in Connecticut, determined the kind of place to which they wanted to journey. And the journey from central New England to what was to become Licking County was not one to be undertaken without earnest preparation.

The Land which eventually became Granville Township was part of the United States Military District, given as a reward in the form of land warrants by the Continental Congress to soldiers in the

Continental Army following the Revolutionary War against Great Britain. Land companies often purchased these tracts from the veterans and established companies. The citizens of central New



England in the Connecticut River Valley, who had decided to acquire land in central Ohio, formed the Licking Company in 1804. This Company purchased land grants from various organizations. One hundred seven persons signed the document forming the Licking Company.

Once the land had been purchased by the persons making up the Land Company, meetings and discussions ensued on the type of community the new land owners would have. From these discussions evolved the village plat of Granville much as it remains today.

The village plat was in the form of a rectangle containing twenty-four city blocks. Streets were designated around the perimeter. All lots had approximately the same frontage. The center square, or commons, of the village was to remain as land for churches, schools and public buildings. There was to be a wide roadway, known as "The Broadway," down the center of the village from east to west, ten rods or one hundred sixty five feet wide. A north-south main thoroughfare, today's Main Street, was to be six rods wide. The other streets in the village were to be a lesser width, four rods wide. What today remains as beautiful Broadway was part of the original plan of the settlers before they left the remote area of the Connecticut River Valley where Granville and Granby are located.

The commonweal of the village and the surrounding township was of paramount importance to the settlers and their agents, the surveyors who platted out the land. The original plan called for one hundred acres to be set aside for churches and another one hundred acres reserved for public schools. Moreover, the Company established an area for a burying ground and a town quarry on what later became known as Sugar Loaf.

One suspects that an idealized New England model was used in laying out Granville. The plan re-

sembles that of Worthington to the west, which was established four years earlier. In reading and reflecting upon the history of the early foundation days of our village, it is readily apparent that the commonweal of the community was the driving force behind the plat design. This commonweal determined what was necessary so that the settlers could have at least a modicum of that vibrant New England village life they so ardently desired to continue in their new Ohio homeland. To achieve this goal was not permitted to depend upon chance alone.

The rural area around the village in Granville Township was platted for one-hundred-acre farms. In fact, there appears to have been no sharp division between village and township. The plats were long and narrow, thus providing road frontage for most farms. As Bill Utter notes, "the land map of this part of the county clearly shows the permanent effect of this rational plan." [p. 41] One notes Utter's emphasis on the "permanent effect of this rational plan."

Each person who purchased shares in the Licking Company was to receive a lot in the village and a hundred-acre plot in the rural area. This suggests that in the minds of the original planners and settlers, there was to be an important relationship between the rural area for agriculture and the village area for urban living. Making the allocation of rural plot and village lot was determined once the settlers arrived and had seen their new property. But what is important is that the land use was determined in general before the future founding fathers and mothers and children of Granville left the security of their New England homes and farms.

February 25, 1805 saw the last meeting of the full company in Massachusetts. The traveling parties left New England for Ohio at various times over the summer. It is important to note that at this last

meeting, the Company "Voted there be a Committee of three men to Receive Subscriptions for the Incouragement (sic) of a Library for said Company." That this was a harbinger for the educational dimension to Granville's history cannot be overlooked. Again, the tremendous foresight of the Granville pioneers is manifest.

In his farewell address to the settlers as they were about to embark from Massachusetts to Ohio, the Reverend Timothy Mather Cooley spoke these providential words:

As you are about to settle a new country, your example will have a lasting effect upon unborn generations.

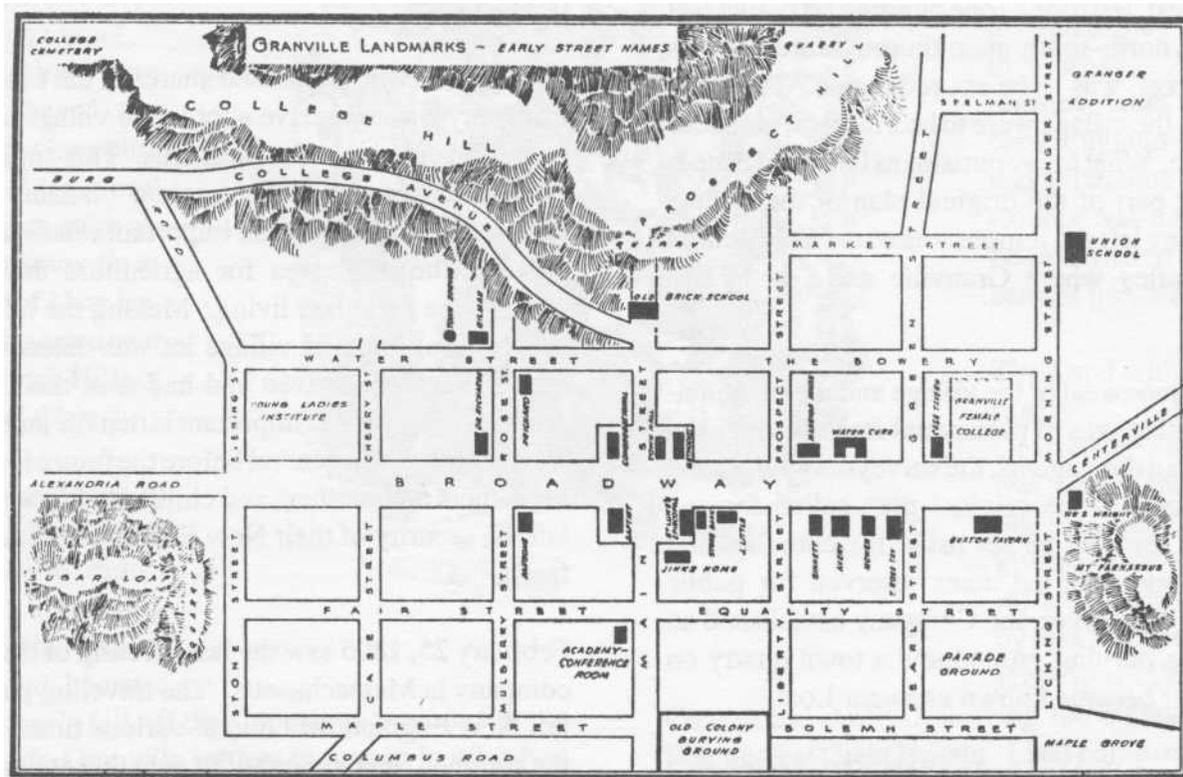
While Cooley was not talking only about a planned community, it is imperative that we today listen to and consider his prophetic words as we determine what our community shall become. For unless we embark on this discussion, we will not leave for the "unborn generations" any semblance of the planned

community which the original settlers so earnestly and so diligently labored to attain.

Anthony J. Lisska  
Denison University  
Granville Historical Society

Endnotes

Much of this account of the early formation of Granville borrows unabashedly from William Utter's fascinating narrative of our village, *Granville An Ohio Village*. Professor Utter's book has been reprinted under the auspices of the Granville Historical Society and may be purchased from the Society, at the Denison University Bookstore, and at other shops in Granville. The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance provided by Bill Hoffman, Flo Hoffman [Archivist of The Granville Historical Society and of Denison University] and Wally Chessman [Professor Emeritus of History at Denison University]. Professor Chessman kindly provided the copy of the early map of Granville Village.



**Granville Landmarks and Early Street Names**



## **The Civil War Roundtable**

Kevin Bennett announces the following events this spring for the Society's Roundtable:

March 18, 1997: **"Pickett's Charge: Feasible or Folly?"**

Returning with our popular debate format, this encounter will explore whether the greatest assault of the Civil War was militarily justified or not. The two protagonists are Lt. Col. Ed McNaul, a West Point graduate, and historian/attorney Jamie Ryan. This promises to be a fun evening.

April 15, 1997: **"Ohio's Other Abolitionist Town"**

Noted Ohio historian, Professor Lorle Porter from Muskingum College will present her research into the abolitionist movement in this part of Ohio and discuss the town that rivaled Oberlin as a hotbed of abolitionist sentiment.

May 20, 1997: **"Ironclads Blue, Ironclads Gray"**

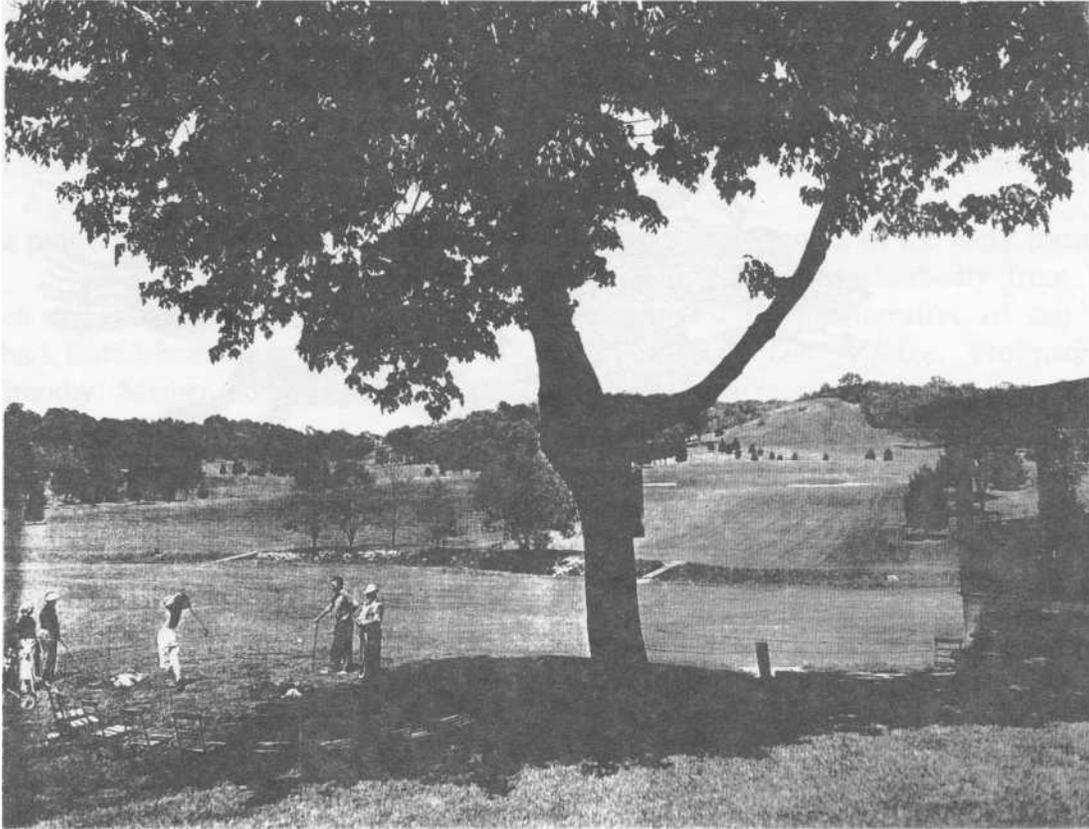
A welcome break from land warfare, this will be a pictorial exploration of the highlights of riverine combat by Union and Confederate vessels of the Civil War. This presentation will be by Ted Collen, a retired aerospace engineer and veteran of the United States Navy.

All meetings of the Roundtable will be in the Society's Old Academy Building, Main and Elm Streets, at 7:30 in the evening. Kevin reminds us that all members and their guests are invited to attend the Roundtable sessions. Kevin can be contacted at 587-4517.

Earlier presentations of the Roundtable this winter have been Kevin's own discussion and early newsreel footage of Civil War Veterans and Eric Whittenburg's account of the tragic Farnsworth's Charge at Gettysburg. Members of the Roundtable express their gratitude to Kevin Bennett for arranging a wonderful series of presentations.

# Can Spring Be Far Behind?

The Granville Inn Golf Course in the 1950's



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