
“The Diploma Pedler”: Dr. John Cook Bennett and the Christian College, New Albany, Indiana

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On December 12, 1832, Hardin H. Moore, Esq., representative from Floyd County, petitioned the Indiana General Assembly to incorporate a Christian College in New Albany. The first name on the petition was that of John Cook Bennett, identified as the college's agent, president, and bishop.¹ Forty-three days later, after approval by the House and the Senate, a bill incorporating the institution was enacted into law.² As did so many other colleges founded before the Civil War, the Christian College promptly floundered;³ and it would probably have been long since forgotten had it not been for the questionable activities of its chief proponent. As chancellor of the Christian College, Bennett traveled about the country conferring assorted degrees for a small fee. He maintained that his actions were both legal and ethical. Legislative committees, medical societies, religious leaders, even some Masons, disagreed, considering Bennett to be variously an itinerant peddler, an imposter, a fraud, a forger, a vagabond, and otherwise “a notorious individual.”

Bennett had been born in Massachusetts in 1804 but had lived most of his early life in southeastern Ohio. In November, 1825, he was licensed to practice medicine after serving a three-year “preceptorship” with his uncle. He claimed to have attended lectures at McGill College in Montreal and to have received his M.D. from the

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¹ Indiana, *House Journal* (1832), 96; Indiana, *Laws* (1832–1833), 37.

² Indiana, *Laws* (1832–1833), 37–38.

³ The failure rate for colleges created before the Civil War has been estimated at 81 percent. See Burton J. Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and Development of Higher Education in America* (New York, 1976), 242.

"College Medical D'Emulation."⁴ Bennett, who had been raised a Methodist, abruptly became a Christian preacher in 1830.⁵ He did so "in consequence of a preference for those liberal Scriptural and Christian views and sentiments inculcated by Mr. Campbell and other Disciples or Christians."⁶

The Christian church was established by the union of three groups in 1832. Thomas Campbell and his son Alexander strongly advocated Protestant reunion based upon the discarding of sectarian creeds and the restoring of "primitive Christianity." Walter Scott, the evangelist of the Baptist Mahoning Association in eastern Ohio, joined the Campbells as did Barton W. Stone and other Presbyterians in Kentucky. The movement was variously identified as the Christian church, Christian Disciples, Christians, Disciples of Christ, or factiously as the Campbellites, as it was then led by Alexander Campbell.⁷ With the support of Alexander Campbell, Bennett attempted unsuccessfully to launch colleges in Ohio and in Wheeling, then located in Virginia,⁸ before coming to Indiana. Bennett arrived in the Hoosier state in late 1832 and advertised his medical services in New Albany in January, 1833.⁹

The citizens of New Albany were delighted that the Christian church had selected their town as the site for a college. Strategically located below the falls in the Ohio River, New Albany had been founded in 1813 and incorporated three years later. In 1833 it was the largest city in Indiana and was rapidly expanding. Its population of about three thousand was increasing at the rate of 150 people per year. The town had seven hundred buildings, one hundred of which had been constructed in the summer and fall of 1832 alone. Included were twenty bars, sixteen dry goods stores, nine grocery stores, three churches, three steam mills (flour, corn, and saw), two

⁴ St. Clairsville, Ohio, *National Historian and St. Clairsville Advertiser*, August 6, 1831, March 16, 1833; clipping from the *New Albany Gazette*, in John L. Riddell's Journal, vol. VII, pp. 32-34 (Manuscripts, Rare Books and University Archives, Tulane University, New Orleans). Bennett claimed to have attended McGill in 1831. The university did offer courses in medicine at the time but did not confer medical degrees. McGill's records for 1831 have been lost. No information has been located regarding the "College Medical D'Emulation."

⁵ Records of the Pickaway Masonic Lodge #23 as cited in Mervin B. Hogan, "John Cook Bennett and Pickaway Lodge No. 23," October 12, 1983, mimeographed paper, pp. 9-10 (University of Utah Library, Salt Lake City).

⁶ St. Clairsville, Ohio, *Gazette*, March 26, 1831.

⁷ The best general historical work on the Christian church is Winfred E. Carrison and Alfred T. DeGroot, *The Disciples of Christ: A History* (St. Louis, 1948). See also Henry K. Shaw, *Hoosier Disciples: A Comprehensive History of the Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ) in Indiana* (St. Louis, 1952); Shaw, *Buckeye Disciples: A History of the Disciples of Christ in Ohio* (St. Louis, 1952); Alanson Wilcox, *A History of the Disciples of Christ in Ohio* (Cincinnati, 1918); and Charles Crossfield Ware, *Barton Warren Stone* (St. Louis, [1932]).

⁸ Ohio, *House Journal* (1831), 207; St. Clairsville *Gazette*, March 26, 1831; St. Clairsville *National Historian and St. Clairsville Advertiser*, August 6, 1831; *Franklin College Register, Biographical and Historical, by the Board of Trustees, 1825-1908* (New Athens, 1908), 8-9.

⁹ Clipping from *New Albany Gazette*, in Riddell's Journal, VII, 32-34.



JOHN COOK BENNETT DRESSED AS A MAJOR-GENERAL FOR
THE NAUVOO LEGION

Reproduced from John Cook Bennett, *The History of the Saints; or an Expose of Joe Smith and Mormonism* (Boston, 1842); photograph courtesy Andrew F. Smith.

shipyards, a foundry with finishing shops, a courthouse, jail, and poorhouse. The town also had a lyceum, with a "well-selected" library of nearly one hundred volumes, a seminary, a public school, and several private schools.¹⁰

The farsighted citizens of New Albany believed that a college would make an excellent addition to their community.¹¹ Commenting upon the Christian College, the editors of the *New Albany Gazette* predicted that the town would "reap great advantages from it" and hoped that the citizens would "be found worthy of the preference given to them and their town." They prophesied, "a direction will be given to its influence which will result in much benefit to the moral condition of all who shall partake of its instruction."¹²

Other observers were also enthusiastic and hopeful. J. V. Himes, an elder in the Christian church in Boston, hailed with joy "the idea of a University, established on liberal principles, where our young men might be educated."¹³ John G. Affleck, the editor of the *National Historian*, reported that Bennett was "like a mountain at the setting of the sun, casting a shadow of ten times its natural dimensions." Affleck believed that Bennett, who had lived in Indiana but a few months, had "overstepped and overshadowed the whole tribe of Hoosheroons, from Dan to Beersheba."¹⁴

Bennett held the first meeting of the Christian College trustees in his home on February 16, 1833. Eight of the ten incorporators attended the meeting, at which they elected officers and faculty, adopted bylaws, and passed ordinances.¹⁵ Bennett stepped down as president but was elected to the position of chancellor and was

¹⁰ *New Albany Gazette*, quoted in the *Cincinnati Baptist Weekly Journal of the Mississippi Valley*, March 1, 1832; John Scott, *Indiana Gazetteer, or Topographical Dictionary* . . . (1826; 2nd ed., Indianapolis, 1833), 130-31.

¹¹ This "booster" belief was not uncommon at the time. See Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Americans: The National Experience* (New York, 1965), 152-61; Don Harrison Doyle, *The Social Order of a Frontier Community: Jacksonville, Illinois, 1825-70* (Urbana, Ill., 1978), 62-91.

¹² Clipping from *New Albany Gazette*, February 18, 1833, in Riddell's Journal, VII, 32-34.

¹³ *Christian Palladium*, IV (September 15, 1835), 148. This journal was launched in Boston in 1831 and was edited by a Mr. Barger.

¹⁴ *St. Clairsville National Historian and St. Clairsville Advertiser*, March 16, 1833. John Gladstone Affleck was a physician born and educated in Scotland. He had been Bennett's partner in 1830. In addition to his medical practice Affleck edited four newspapers during his life. See A. T. McKelvey, ed., *Centennial History of Belmont County, Ohio and Representative Citizens* (Chicago, 1903), 209.

¹⁵ Barton Stone and Walter Scott stated that they did not attend this meeting. The seven other incorporators in addition to Bennett were: M. Cole, Jesse Bledsoe, N. Field, F. E. Becton, C. Bosworth, B. H. Miles, and Seth Woodruff. Field, Becton, Bosworth, and Miles were not elected as officers or faculty in the college. "N. Field" was probably Nathaniel Field, who was an ardent abolitionist from Jeffersonville, Indiana. He served in the Indiana state legislature in 1838-1839, was the president of the Indiana Medical Society, and edited the *Christian Review* and the *Journal of Christianity*. DeWitt C. Goodrich and Charles R. Tuttle, *An Illustrated History of the State of Indiana* (Indianapolis, 1875), 668-69. No biographical information has surfaced about Becton, Bosworth, and Miles. Cole, Bledsoe, and Woodruff are identified below.

empowered to preside at trustees' meetings, confer degrees, remove officers or faculty members, and commission "agents for any purpose connected with the interest of the Corporation."¹⁶ Prominent leaders of the Christian church from Virginia, Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana were elected officers. Included were Alexander Campbell (president), Thomas Campbell (vice-president), Barton W. Stone (vice-president), David Burnett (vice-president), Walter Scott (president of the faculty), and Jesse Bledsoe (secretary).¹⁷ The versatile Seth Woodruff from New Albany—he alternately was a bricklayer, a tavern keeper, a Baptist minister, and a judge—became the treasurer.¹⁸

The medical faculty included Dr. Chauncey Perkins, Bennett's friend since the mid 1820s, then living in Erie, Pennsylvania, and John L. Riddell, an adjunct professor at the Reformed Medical College, a small sectarian college in Worthington, Ohio.¹⁹ Bennett asked Riddell to approach Dr. Thomas Morrow, president of the college, about the possibility of relocating to New Albany. Morrow expressed little interest, mainly because he was engaged in a lucrative private medical practice in the Worthington area and did not want to abandon it.²⁰

Several provisions of the bylaws for the Christian College were highly innovative. The charter and the bylaws, for example, proclaimed that Christian College was nonsectarian, a policy unusual at the time as most colleges were launched by churches to promote

¹⁶ Clipping from *New Albany Gazette*, February 18, 1833, in Riddell's *Journal*, VII, 32-34.

¹⁷ Bledsoe had served as a judge, a United States senator from Kentucky, a member of both houses of the Kentucky legislature, and a professor of law at Transylvania University in Lexington. Ware, *Barton Warren Stone*, 196.

¹⁸ *New Albany Ledger*, November 3, 1852; L. A. Williams & Co., pub., *History of the Ohio Falls Cities and their Counties* (2 vols., Cleveland, 1882), II, 202; Mary Scribner Davis Collins, "New Albany, With a Short Sketch of the Scribner Family," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XVII (September, 1921), 221. Other officers selected were Thomas Henley, a Christian minister from Fayette County, Kentucky; Jacob Creath, Jr., a Christian minister living in Lexington, Kentucky; James Fishbeck, also a Christian minister in Lexington and a professor of religion at Transylvania University; James Challen, a Christian minister living in Cincinnati; and Mordecia Cole, a Christian minister in neighboring Clark County, Indiana.

¹⁹ Chauncey Perkins attended the University of Pennsylvania but received his M.D. from the College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York City in 1818. He practiced medicine in Athens, Ohio, until 1828 and then moved to Erie, Pennsylvania, where he ran an all-purpose drug emporium. Perkins had been acquainted with Bennett since the early 1820s and had served on Bennett's medical examination committee in 1825. At New Albany, Perkins was appointed secretary of the Medical College and a professor. Riddell had been born in 1807 and had studied under Amos Eaton at Rensselaer School at Troy, New York. He received an A.M. and in 1830 began traveling and lecturing on chemistry in upstate New York and Pennsylvania. Riddell had met Perkins and Bennett while lecturing on chemistry in Erie, Pennsylvania. Bennett wrote to him on the subject of medical colleges and encouraged him to visit Wheeling. When Riddell arrived, Bennett unsuccessfully tried to acquire a position for him at the Western Reserve College in Hudson, Ohio. Riddell's *Journal*, May 6, 1832, IV, 42.

²⁰ Riddell's *Journal*, March 18, April 4, 1833, VI, 108, 125.

their specific religious beliefs. The bylaws also offered doctorates in fifteen academic subjects. During the early nineteenth century M.A. degrees were unusual, and "Doctorates" in areas other than medicine, theology, and law were nonexistent.²¹ Perhaps just as unusual, Bennett proposed to confer doctorates on women. Riddell tried to dissuade him from this course of action, particularly in medicine, as "prejudiced beings" would oppose it. Bennett roared that he had hung out "the *banner* of reform" and wanted others to rally around it;²² nevertheless, he meekly revised the bylaws to exclude women from receiving medical degrees. Women could still achieve doctorates in seven other areas of study, however, and the Christian College became one of the first publicly chartered coeducational colleges in America.²³

A reform that Bennett refused to compromise was a provision that permitted the awarding of diplomas based upon examination. Bennett had been interested in this concept since the early 1820s when, at the completion of his own three-year preceptorship in medicine, he was required to pass a six-hour examination administered by several physicians, including Perkins. During the examination he defended the proposition that "all applicants for a Diploma granting plenary power to practice Medicine and Surgery according to the laws of the State, shall be examined by the Censors, and, if found qualified, received into full membership without regard to the time studied." Bennett believed that practical experience with a competent mentor was the best way to become proficient as a physician.²⁴

The Christian College bylaws stated that degrees were "merely certification in attestation of the attainments of the persons on whom they are conferred." While the degrees "should never be bestowed too cheaply," they should be based upon merit and not upon "the length of time spent in preparatory studies." Therefore, "public quarterly meetings of the Faculties and members of the Corporation" would be held

²¹ Frederick Rudolph reports that Yale conferred the first Ph.D. in the United States in 1861, almost thirty years after Bennett's granting of "Doctorates." See Frederick Rudolph, *Curriculum: A History of the American Undergraduate Course of Study Since 1636* (New York, 1977), 115.

²² John L. Riddell to John Cook Bennett, April 4, 1833, copy in Riddell's Journal, VII, 125-27. Bennett's letter to Riddell has not been found, but his comments are quoted in *ibid.*

²³ Copy of the *New Albany Gazette*, February 18, 1833, in Riddell's Journal, VII, 32-34; "Proceedings of the Physicians and Surgeons of the County of New York Convened on the First Day of July MDCCCVI," bound typescript, pp. 539-43 (New York Academy of Medicine, New York City). The "Proceedings" are actually minutes of meetings, which were begun in 1806, of the Physicians and Surgeons of the County of New York. They were typed and bound at some unknown date. See also Frederick C. Waite, "The First Medical Diploma Mill in the United States," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, XX (November, 1946), 495-96. Oberlin College did not grant degrees to women until 1841. See Rudolph, *Curriculum*, 139.

²⁴ *Botanico-Medical Recorder*, XIII (September 13, 1845), 354.

for the purpose of examining applicants for degrees, as well as for conferring them upon the Alumni of the Institution. Persons self taught or taught any where in public or private schools, who appear before these quarterly meetings of the College, for the purpose of graduating, and who shall stand an examination in any department for which degrees shall be conferred, shall obtain such degrees as they are entitled to from merit.²⁵

Despite this seemingly well-organized effort to get the Christian College underway, problems emerged almost from the beginning. Some editors of regional sectarian newspapers promptly attacked Bennett's pretentious plans. John M. Peck, a Baptist elder and editor of the *Pioneer* in Rock Springs, Illinois, reported on the grandiose "absurdities" of the Christian College with "much merriment and sarcasm."²⁶

A more serious problem arose with leaders of the Christian church. When Bennett applied to the legislature for the charter, he listed ten petitioners including Stone and Scott. The Christian College's charter identified Stone as the corporation's secretary, and he was subsequently elected a vice-president. Stone, however, stated that he "had no knowledge, nor hint that application was to be made to the legislature for such a charter, or had been made, or granted" until he saw it announced in the *New Albany Gazette*. He was ignorant "of the appointment of presidents, vice presidents, secretaries and all other officers, till informed by the same journal." He claimed "that not half dozen of our influential friends, or brethren, had been consulted."²⁷ Bennett sent him a "pompous letter" requesting that he print an announcement about the college in the *Christian Messenger*. Stone ignored the letter.²⁸

Scott also claimed that he had first heard about the college when he received a letter stating that he had been unanimously elected "President of the Faculty." Bennett also sent Scott a copy of the Christian College charter that listed Scott's name as one of the original petitioners. Scott viewed this "as an absolute forgery" and "declined every and all connection" with the school. He refused to publish a notice about the college in the *Evangelist* and wrote against it in his private correspondence.²⁹

In a letter dated March 1, 1833, Bennett informed Alexander Campbell of the creation of the Christian College and reminded him of a discussion they had once had about the importance of nonsec-

²⁵ Copy of *New Albany Gazette*, February 18, 1833, in Riddell's *Journal*, VIII, 32-34.

²⁶ Rock Springs, Illinois, *Pioneer*, quoted in the *Christian Messenger*, VII (June, 1833), 190-91. The *Christian Messenger* was edited by Barton Stone, who lived in Paris, Kentucky, and John T. Johnson. It was published in Georgetown, Kentucky, in 1833 and 1834. In 1835 it was edited solely by Stone, who had moved to Jacksonville, Illinois, where the journal remained until it ceased publication.

²⁷ *Christian Messenger*, VII (June, 1833), 190-91.

²⁸ *Christian Palladium*, IV (September 15, 1835), 148-49.

²⁹ *Evangelist*, III (September 1, 1834), 205-206. The *Evangelist* was launched in 1831 in Carthage, Ohio. It was edited by Scott and was subsequently published in Cincinnati.

tarian education. According to Bennett, from that day on he had "been endeavoring to excite an interest in the community in behalf of a literary institution." He had, he announced, finally succeeded in establishing just such a school in New Albany. Bennett encouraged Campbell to attend the April trustees' meeting and reported that the academic programs of the college were to begin shortly thereafter. Finally, he requested that Campbell publish a favorable announcement about the Christian College in the *Millennial Harbinger*.³⁰

Whatever Bennett's motivation, his actions were extremely undiplomatic. Campbell was upset with the entire undertaking. The establishment of a Christian college was "wholly unexpected." He had, he affirmed, "heard nothing of this project until it was consummated." Campbell had believed that Bennett's failure to establish colleges in Ohio and Virginia had broken his spirits and that he "had given it up." Campbell stated that the remarks to which Bennett alluded "were not made with a design to enlist" him in such an enterprise, particularly as Bennett was already involved in it. Distressed that the members of the Christian church had not been contacted before submission of the proposal to the Indiana legislature, Campbell commented that it would "have been more respectful to the judgment and wishes of the brethren to have consulted them on the propriety of such a scheme." He presumed, however, that in "the pressure of events" Bennett had "not time to confer with many of them upon the matter." Campbell was particularly concerned with the purported connection between the college and the Christian church, a connection he wanted severed. He refused to attend the trustees' meeting scheduled for April.³¹

Although Campbell's election as president of the Christian College had been announced in newspapers, Bennett's letter to Campbell made no mention of this fact.³² Even after the exchange of letters Bennett continued to publish statements identifying Campbell as the president of the institution. It is likely that Bennett believed Campbell's involvement would encourage the participation of Scott, Stone, and other Christian ministers. Campbell's connection was also a necessity for potential fund raising activities within the Christian church.

The second meeting of the trustees of the Christian College was held on April 24, 1833. Campbell, Stone, and Scott refused to

³⁰ *Millennial Harbinger*, IV (April, 1833), 189-91. *The Millennial Harbinger* was edited by Alexander Campbell in Bethany, Virginia (now West Virginia). It began publication in 1829.

³¹ *Ibid.* It is interesting to note that Campbell addressed Bennett as "Bethren" and not as "Bishop," which suggests that Bennett's title of bishop may have been self-conferred.

³² The notice of Campbell's election was published in the *New Albany Gazette* in February and was later reprinted in the *St. Clairsville National Historian and St. Clairsville Advertiser* on March 16, 1833; Campbell's response was published in *ibid.*, April 27, 1833.

attend. According to Bennett, Scott did not come because of “very bad health.”³³ It is probable that other Christian ministers also stayed away as a result of Campbell’s published concerns and the private correspondence from Stone and Scott. Whatever the attendance, business was conducted. Faculty members were appointed, and three new ordinances were passed. “Ordinance No. 2” stated that all male members of the Christian Church were members of the corporation. “Ordinance No. 3” changed the bylaws to give Bennett the power to call trustees’ meetings “at any time he may deem it expedient.” This revision was in direct violation of the college’s charter, which required quarterly meetings of the trustees. Based upon Campbell’s concerns, “Ordinance No. 4” stated that the trustees retained the name of the Christian College as required by their charter but changed the name of the institution that they supervised to the “University of Indiana, at New Albany.”³⁴ This strange twist of logic satisfied Campbell. He indicated that “as a *literary* institution, liberal and anti-sectarian, we wish it all success.”³⁵

The most serious problem confronting the Christian College was financial. Western colleges were usually supported through a combination of subscriptions from local residents, financial support from the church affiliated with the institution, and charity from eastern sources.³⁶ Bennett personally had little money, and there was no indication that other trustees were willing to help launch the college. Bennett had counted upon financial support from the Christian Disciples. He asked Campbell to solicit funds for the college, but Campbell refused. Bennett then approached leaders of the Christian Disciples on the east coast.³⁷ He claimed to have received a grand total of fifty-four dollars in contributions for his efforts. This money he used in part to reimburse his out-of-pocket expenses, which totaled one hundred fifty dollars. Others later claimed that he had received more money and had pocketed the remainder.³⁸ Whatever the amount raised, it was not enough to launch the college. Bennett needed another way to generate revenue.

³³ Copy of *New Albany Gazette*, in Riddell’s *Journal*, VIII, 32-34.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Millennial Harbinger*, IV (May, 1833), 240. In fact, these were not the only names used. At the first meeting of the trustees Bennett referred to the school as the “Christian University College” but later called it the “Christian University.” The *Indiana Gazetteer, or Topographical Dictionary* referred to it as the “University College.” A diploma from the Christian College identified it simultaneously as the “University at New Albany, Indiana,” and the “University of Indiana.” Others referred to it as the “Indiana College” and the “Bennett Medical College.” See the *Indiana Gazetteer, or Topographical Dictionary*, 131. Isaac S. Smith diploma, Burton Historical Collection (Detroit Public Library, Detroit, Michigan).

³⁶ For example, see the early history of Illinois College in Doyle, *The Social Order of a Frontier Community*, 22.

³⁷ *Christian Palladium*, IV (September 15, 1835), 149.

³⁸ Bennett to John M. Henderson, May 12, 1835, mss 533, 1818-1850, Dr. John M. Henderson Papers (Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio).

His solution to this dilemma was unique and creative. In 1833 there were only two medical schools west of the Allegheny Mountains. There was no such school in Indiana, and none would be established until 1844. Westerners interested in formal medical education mainly attended eastern colleges, where the cost was prohibitive to all but wealthy individuals. As the population west of the Alleghenies was rapidly expanding, state legislatures approved a variety of systems to meet the medical needs of their citizens, including licensing medical practitioners after an apprenticeship and the successful completion of an examination conducted by a medical society or district. Passage of the examination granted physicians the right to practice medicine but not the honor of listing an M.D. after their name. As medical degrees were difficult to obtain, they were highly prized by their possessors and appreciated by the public, who viewed them as status symbols that certified the possessor as a medical authority. Many qualified practicing physicians, however, did not possess M.D.'s.

Bennett decided to provide the valued status by conferring M.D.'s upon anyone who passed examinations or who was otherwise obviously qualified. He expanded this concept to include other academic areas such as law, theology, and the arts and sciences. Seventeen days after the Christian College had been chartered by the Indiana legislature, but six days before the first trustees' meeting that approved the bylaws, Bennett told Riddell that an M.D. would be immediately conferred upon him.³⁹ Subsequently, Bennett conferred an LL.D. upon Riddell. At that time Riddell had no background or preparation in medicine or law, nor did he successfully pass any examination. When Scott rejected the offer to become the president of the faculty, Bennett "garnished" an LL.D. upon him to encourage his participation. Scott rejected the degree.⁴⁰

In late May, 1833, an article in the *New Albany Gazette* announced that in November Riddell would lecture on chemistry at the Christian College. Another announcement in the same issue of the newspaper reported that Bennett planned to travel east "to procure some Anatomical preparations for the College, and to make arrangements for the University in general."⁴¹ According to Stone, "Soon after this, Mr. Bennett disappeared."⁴² However, Bennett traveled throughout the midwestern and eastern states conferring M.A.'s, D.D.'s, LL.D.'s, and M.D.'s for ten dollars, except in New York City where he charged twenty-five dollars.⁴³ As medical colleges regularly charged students considerably more for graduating,

³⁹ Riddell's Journal, February 11, 1833, VII, 56.

⁴⁰ *Evangelist*, IV (March 2, 1835), 64-65.

⁴¹ Copy of *New Albany Gazette*, May 31, 1833, in Riddell's Journal, VIII, 32-34.

⁴² *Christian Palladium*, IV (September 15, 1835), 148-49.

⁴³ "Proceedings of the Physicians and Surgeons of the County of New York Convened on the First Day of July MDCCCVI," entry for December 16, 1833, pp. 541-43.

Bennett's fee was not excessive, and he did incur some expenses connected with the examinations and the printing of diplomas.

Only two diplomas issued by Bennett have been found, and both were issued to the same person. Frederick C. Waite, a medical historian, identified only six recipients of diplomas, but he suspected six others of receiving medical degrees from the Christian College.⁴⁴ Clearly, however, many more degrees were conferred. Scott claimed that Bennett "rained down his L.L.D.'s, D.D.'s, A.Bs., & A.Ms., like a shower of hail."⁴⁵ Riddell asserted that Bennett lavishly conferred diplomas and "that numerous diplomas were vended and disposed of."⁴⁶ Another observer reported that Bennett dispensed the "diplomas to every ignoramus who could raise ten dollars to buy one." He knew "many who did buy them, though they were not worth a cent." Bennett filled in the diplomas and "peddled them out."⁴⁷ J. V. Himes reported that Bennett "lavished his diplomas upon various gentlemen of the different sects in different parts of the United States." Himes, who had "acquaintance with some of the gentlemen whom he thus delighted to honor with M.D., A.M., and D.D.," questioned the soundness of Bennett's judgment or "the purity of his motives."⁴⁸ According to Himes, Bennett

*conferred degrees upon various gentlemen, some of whom were worthy—others were not. The degrees of D.D. and L.L.D. were conferred in some cases, in which A.B. would have been more than justice called for. The course he pursued was very unwise, if not disgraceful to any American institution. He has degraded the Indiana College, very—very much, in the minds at least of all men of letters.*⁴⁹

James R. Manley, later president of the New York County Medical Society, reported that Bennett sold the degrees "about the country at various prices, like the merchandize of an itinerant peddler." In New York, Bennett reportedly granted diplomas to many student residents without examination. One recipient was not even in the city at the time the degree was conferred. To save labor Bennett engraved the seal of the corporation of the Christian College and lithographed the diploma, leaving only two blanks, one for the name of the recipient, and the other for the day in the date.⁵⁰ Bennett's signature, as well as those of Perkins, identified as dean, and Riddell, identified as the "Bursar & Registrar," were also lithographed.

Bennett initially had no authority to use Riddell's name. When Bennett visited Worthington in late September, Riddell was sur-

⁴⁴ Waite, "The First Medical Diploma Mill in the United States," 496.

⁴⁵ *Evangelist*, IV (March 2, 1835), 64-65.

⁴⁶ Riddell's Journal, November 19, 1833, IX, 127; *ibid.*, December 30, 1833, X, 15.

⁴⁷ *Western Medical Reformer*, V (June, 1845), 12-14.

⁴⁸ *Christian Palladium*, IV (September 15, 1835), 148-49.

⁴⁹ *Evangelist*, IV (March 2, 1835), 64-65.

⁵⁰ James R. Manley, "An Address Delivered before the Medical Society of the County of New York," July 25, 1836, pamphlet, p. 15. A copy of this pamphlet, published by the Medical Society of the County of New York, can be found at the New York Academy of Medicine.

prised to find his name followed by an "LL.D." affixed to the diploma.⁵¹ A few months later Bennett returned to Worthington hoping to join the faculty of the Ohio Reformed Medical College, but Riddell told him that it would not work as Bennett's vending of diplomas had caused much "excitement."⁵² Some students, of course, liked the idea. While at the medical college in Worthington, Bennett and Riddell granted degrees to two students. One, named "DeLathule," had had only a few days' instruction in medicine, but was so pleased with the diploma that he promptly left Worthington to set up practice. Bennett and Riddell later maintained that DeLathule had passed a "protracted" examination.⁵³

While in Worthington, Bennett had a brief conversation with Thomas Morrow, president of the Reformed Medical College. This occasion was purportedly the only time the two men ever met, and Morrow claimed that the conversation had nothing to do with diplomas or degrees. However, Bennett conferred degrees upon Morrow and another faculty member, Ichabod Jones. Perhaps by design Riddell gave the degrees to the two men after Bennett had departed. Riddell and Bennett claimed that Morrow, who did not possess an M.D., accepted the degree with eagerness. When Morrow discovered that DeLathule had also been awarded a degree and had subsequently left his college, he refused to pay for his own M.D.⁵⁴ Morrow claimed that Bennett granted degrees to prominent individuals as an inducement to encourage others to purchase them.⁵⁵ He later asserted that he wrote to Bennett objecting to the practice of selling degrees but that the letter was not delivered as the bearer could not find Bennett.⁵⁶ Under pressure from Morrow and Jones, Riddell rejected the LL.D. degree and the position of treasurer and bursar at the Christian College. On November 24 Riddell and Jones confronted Bennett, who had by then relocated to Columbus, Ohio. Bennett promised that he would not confer more degrees on the Reformed Medical College students "until after they shall have graduated," and he also promised that Riddell's name "should not hereafter appear on any of his diplomas under penalty of death!"⁵⁷

In addition to granting degrees himself, Bennett claimed that the Christian College bylaws authorized him to send out other commissioners to perform the same service.⁵⁸ During the summer of

⁵¹ Riddell's Journal, October 2, November 20, 27, 1833, VIII, 56, 134, 142-43.

⁵² *Ibid.*, November 19, 1833, IX, 127.

⁵³ *Botanico-Medical Recorder*, XIII (September 13, 1845), 354.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Western Medical Reformer Extra*, V (September 8, 1845), 1-8.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Riddell's Journal, November 20, 24, 1833, VIII, 134, 140.

⁵⁸ "Proceedings of the Physicians and Surgeons of the County of New York Convened on the First Day of July MDCCCVI," entry for December 16, 1833, pp. 541-43. The Christian College bylaws authorized the "Bishop" to "commission and send out Agents for any purpose connected with the interest of the Corporation"; however, the bylaws clearly required that the trustees vote on all degrees confirmed by examination. Clipping from *New Albany Gazette*, in Riddell's Journal, VIII, 32-34.

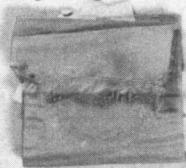
UNIVERSITAS NOVÆ-ALBANIÆ,
INDIANA.

A LEGIBUS CONSTITUTA;

Omnibus ad quos hæc pervenerint; SALUTEM:—

Quum Reipublicæ Indianaensis summa auctoritas Universitati Novæ-Albanie (Collegio Christiano) jus et privilegium concessit, ut *Art. Medicina* cultores, qui artem suam fideliter ediscendo, vel recte exercitando, famam honestam consecuti sunt; illos eligeret et sibi socios adjungeret:

Notum esto;—quod his propositis exequentis, Cancellarius Universitatis Novæ-Albanie Socium accepit et *Art. Medicina Socium* creavit *Franciscum L. Bennett* in oppido *Nov. Albaniæ* comitatu *Nov. Albaniæ* habitantem, virum vitæ integerrimum, *Art. Medicina* peritissimum, qui suis et auxilio et decori semper fuit; et quem omnibus honoribus et privilegiis Universitatis dignissimum judicavit.

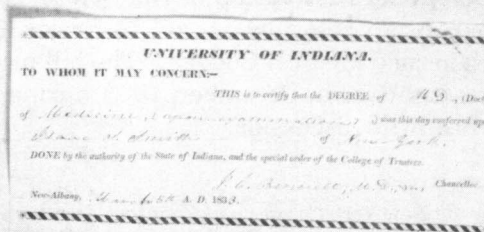


ATTESTANTE

J. C. Bennett Sc.

Quorum in Testimonium Sigillum Facultatis affigendum dedi et Chirographum meum apposui Novæ-Albanie Die Mensis Martii quinto Annoque Salutis humanæ Millesimo Octingentesimo et Trigesimo *1833*.

J. C. Bennett, M.D., 1833, Canc.



DIPLOMA ISSUED BY JOHN COOK BENNETT, 1833

Burton Historical Collection,
Detroit Public Library,
Detroit, Michigan.

1833 he commissioned Drs. John Gray and John Baxter, both members of the New York County Medical Society, to examine prospective students and confer degrees in New York. Gray "solicited the appointment" to examine candidates and disperse diplomas that differed from those granted by Bennett.⁵⁹ On December 9, 1833, the society appointed a committee, chaired by Manley, to investigate "the subject of diplomas purporting to be issued by the University of Indiana." Seven days later the committee reported that they had made a "diligent search" into "the character and validity of Diplomas of the degree of Doctor of Medicines" issued by the "University of Indiana." In fact, most of their information came from an article published in the *New Albany Gazette*.⁶⁰ The committee considered the granting of diplomas to be against the laws of New York and concluded that this presented "an entire new case in the medical annals of this county, and in their opinion a very proper one for the attention of a Grand Jury." Baxter and Gray were expelled from the society. At a meeting held the following week, however, the expulsion was reversed, and Gray and Baxter were reprimanded. The society sent copies of the report, charter, and bylaws of the Christian College and a copy of a diploma to the New York legislature "in order to induce them to pass an act which shall require every person coming from any other State, or any foreign country, to be examined and licensed by the constituted authorities in this State before being admitted to practice physic and surgery." In addition, the society published a statement of the proceedings and sent a copy "to the Governor of the State of Indiana."⁶¹

By the time the report was issued, Bennett had set up an office in Columbus and was advertising his professional services in the *Ohio State Journal*.⁶² He was also lobbying the Ohio legislature for the creation of another university, "The Classical, Literary, and Scientific Institution of the Scioto Valley." Bennett planned to establish the new school in Franklin County, near the Ohio Reformed Medical College.⁶³ The bill passed the Ohio House of Representatives in December, 1833, during the first week of the session with little discussion.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ *New York Courier and Enquirer*, January 17, 1834.

⁶⁰ Clipping from *New Albany Gazette*, in Riddell's *Journal*, VIII, 32-34.

⁶¹ Gray and Baxter were not permitted to examine the charges against them, nor were they able to offer contrary evidence to the committee. Both felt that the action taken against them was unwarranted. Gray claimed that he acted "according to law and good conscience." Baxter stated that the diplomas he distributed were given only to those deserving of them. Mostly they were conferred upon licentiates of the New York County Medical Society. According to Baxter, if the licentiates were unqualified, the society was to blame. See "Proceedings of the Physicians and Surgeons of the County of New York Convened on the First Day of July MDCCCVI," entries for December 9-30, 1833, pp. 539-54.

⁶² *Columbus Ohio State Journal*, November 30, 1833.

⁶³ Riddell's *Journal*, December 13, 1833, VIII, 163.

⁶⁴ *Ohio, House Journal* (1833), 6.

When Morrow learned that the proposed college was to be located but a few miles from his own, he informed the chairman of the Ohio Senate Standing Committee on Colleges and Universities that Bennett had previously sold medical degrees. The Senate sent the bill to a committee to investigate the charges. The committee reported that the bill included only two petitioners, one of whom was Bennett, who had made no reference to his position as "Chancellor" of the Christian College and who had identified himself as the "President of a Conference of the Christian Church in New Jersey." The petition included the names of forty-nine corporators, of whom only four were found definitely to reside in Ohio. One name, "N. Field," had been previously listed as a corporator of the Christian College in New Albany. Bennett had used most, if not all, of the names in the petition without their knowledge or consent. Referring to Bennett as "a notorious individual," the committee charged him with "sinister" motives in attempting to create the university and contended that he had used, without authority, the name of the Christian church, whose leaders declared that the project met with their "decided disapprobation." The Senate unanimously voted the bill down.⁶⁵

The Columbus newspapers printed much of the report assailing Bennett.⁶⁶ When Riddell received word of the twin debacles in Columbus and New York, he immediately wrote to the New York *Courier and Enquirer* claiming that his name had been used on the diplomas without permission and that he had never been informed of, or accepted, the appointment of "Bursar-Treasurer."⁶⁷ To make certain his denial was published, he enclosed two dollars to pay for a six-month subscription to the newspaper. Riddell believed that the Indiana legislature was about to launch an investigation of the Christian College, and he promptly wrote to the speaker of the House of Representatives denying any connection with the diploma vending scheme, "the whole done without my knowledge or consent."⁶⁸ As Riddell had discussed the diplomas with Bennett on many occasions, and as he had handed out diplomas to at least four persons, his protestations were disingenuous.

Bennett's activities connected with the Christian College haunted him for over ten years. Early in 1834 Bennett applied to the Board of Trustees of the Granville Baptist College to act as an agent for the establishment of a medical department in connection with the college. His application was promptly rejected because of his selling of diplomas.⁶⁹ In February, 1834, George Patterson, a

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 142-44.

⁶⁶ Columbus *Sentinel*, December 31, 1833; Columbus *Ohio State Journal*, January 1, 1834.

⁶⁷ The letter was written on January 1, 1834, and was published in the New York *Courier and Enquirer* on January 13, 1834.

⁶⁸ Riddell's *Journal*, December 30, 1833, X, 15.

⁶⁹ *Western Medical Reformer Extra*, V (September 8, 1845), 7. The Granville (Baptist) College was later renamed Denison University.

minister in Circleville, Ohio, preferred charges against Bennett in an attempt to expel him from the Masons, of which he had been a member since 1826. The charges included Bennett's vending of diplomas for money to persons who had "neither pretensions nor right to such Diplomas."⁷⁰

In July, 1834, the trustees of Willoughby University of Lake Erie in Chagrin, Ohio, received a letter from "J. C. Bennett," who identified himself as a physician from South Bloomfield, Ohio. Bennett requested permission to become their agent. The trustees responded by asking him to establish their medical college. He joined the Board of Trustees as an honorary member and was appointed a professor of midwifery. Subsequently, the faculty elected him president of the medical college. Within a few months, however, Bennett had been publicly identified as the "Diploma Pedler."⁷¹ He was charged with vending diplomas from the Christian College and was fired from Willoughby University at the end of the first term. Two of the Willoughby faculty who attacked Bennett were Dr. George Jones and Dr. Francis W. Walsh. When Bennett heard that he had been fired, he claimed that he had never conferred the diplomas "upon unworthy persons—excepting the cases of Walsh and Jones."⁷²

Bennett claimed the right to confer degrees in the name of the Christian College for a ten-year period. He presumably based his claim on a stipulation that prohibited the Indiana legislature from amending the college's charter for that length of time. In the summer of 1834 Isaac S. Ashton, bishop of the Christian church in New Albany, reported that Bennett was still "going about selling diplomas,"⁷³ and despite his appointment at Willoughby University he continued to do so. In October, 1834, he traveled to New York and Boston, ostensibly to raise money for Willoughby, but he sold numerous degrees from the Christian College on his travels. Six months later, when Bennett was charged with peddling diplomas, he claimed that he had "quit that, you know, long since."⁷⁴

Sectarian critics disparaged leaders of the Christian church because of their purported connections with the Christian College.⁷⁵ In return, representatives of the church assailed Bennett. Ashton reported in the *Millennial Harbinger* that Bennett had "done much harm" and warned "the public against him." Campbell stated that he was "sorry to have heard from other quarters that the disciples

⁷⁰ Hogan, "John Cook Bennett and Pickaway Lodge No. 23," 9-10.

⁷¹ Painesville, Ohio, *Telegraph*, March 20, 1835.

⁷² Bennett to John M. Henderson, May 12, 1835, Henderson Papers.

⁷³ *Millennial Harbinger*, V (August, 1834), 384; *History of the Ohio Falls Cities and their Counties*, II, 206.

⁷⁴ *Evangelist*, IV (March 2, 1835), 64-65; Bennett to Henderson, May 12, 1835, Henderson Papers.

⁷⁵ *Christian Messenger*, VII (June, 1833), 190-91; *Evangelist*, III (September 1, 1834), 205-206.

have lost confidence in the professions of Dr. *Bennet*." He quoted St. Paul: "From such, turn away."⁷⁶ In March, 1835, Scott stated that Bennett was a vagabond without character, "a false brother and an imposter, a person of no solid learning and of very bad morals."⁷⁷ Six months later the *Christian Palladium* reported that the Christian church disclaimed "all connection with Mr. Bennett." Leaders of the church also announced that "as he has the names of some of our ministers," they wanted it perfectly understood "that he can make no further use of them, by our consent, to assist him in the prosecution of his villainies."⁷⁸

In 1845 Bennett was appointed a lecturer at the Literary and Botanical Medical Society in Cincinnati. Morrow had also relocated and established the Eclectic Medical Institute in the Queen City.⁷⁹ In addition, he was editing the *Western Medical Reformer*. When Morrow learned of Bennett's appointment at the rival medical school, he attacked Bennett, who responded by stating that he was not aware that he had ever conferred more than "one that was UNDESERVED, and that one, which is YET UNPAID FOR!! was on THOMAS VAUGH MORROW!!!"⁸⁰ Bennett also restated his position with regard to granting degrees based upon examination. He believed that the medical schools' requirement for a specified term of study was based upon "purely mercenary considerations." Bennett pointed out that other colleges had similar provisions. The University of Virginia permitted the granting of medical degrees without reference to the time spent studying medicine provided that candidates passed appropriate examinations.⁸¹ In fact, until after the Civil War many colleges granted various degrees based upon examination alone.⁸²

Dr. Alva Curtis, editor of the *Botanico-Medical Recorder*, defended Bennett and attacked Morrow. Morrow's Ohio Reformed Medical College had advertised that there was "no specified time to complete a course of studies, but whenever a student is qualified to pass an examination he will receive a diploma."⁸³ Curtis reported that the Ohio legislature had stripped Morrow of the power to confer degrees because Morrow had abused it, and subsequently Morrow had been run out of Worthington. Morrow responded by reporting that Curtis, who otherwise did not have an M.D., had received one from Bennett. This Curtis denied. Curtis concluded

⁷⁶ *Millennial Harbinger*, V (August, 1834), 384.

⁷⁷ *Evangelist*, IV (March 2, 1835), 64-65.

⁷⁸ *Christian Palladium*, IV (September 15, 1835), 148-49.

⁷⁹ Cincinnati *Ohio Union*, October 30, 1845.

⁸⁰ *Botanico-Medical Reformer*, XIII (July 19, 1845), 307.

⁸¹ *Western Medical Reformer*, V (June, 1845), 12-14; *Botanico-Medical Recorder*, XIII (July 19, 1845), 307-309; *ibid.*, XIII (August 30, 1845), 339-40; *Western Medical Reformer Extra*, V (September 8, 1845), 1-8.

⁸² Waite, "The First Medical Diploma Mill in the United States," 502.

⁸³ Advertisement for the Ohio Reformed Medical College, dated April 28, 1831, in Riddell's Journal, VIII, 29.

that "Bennett may have erred, but Morrow is not the proper man to cast the first stone at him."⁸⁴

Although subsequent historians have focused almost exclusively upon the medical degrees conferred by Bennett,⁸⁵ he also granted diplomas in numerous academic areas, including law, divinity, and the arts and sciences. Bennett had few, if any, qualifications that justified his examining anyone or conferring degrees in these areas. At the time, M.A.'s (or A.M.'s) were mainly honorary degrees. A few colleges conferred them on alumni who had sustained a good moral character, which sometimes meant little more than that they had stayed out of jail since graduation. In 1835 there was no position in the United States that required an M.A. degree.⁸⁶

During the early decades of the nineteenth century the field of medicine was in a state of ferment, and the public was justifiably confused as to the competing claims of advocates of various medical theories such as those proposed by the Thomsonians, homeopaths, eclectics, and others.⁸⁷ A medical degree was the only certification that transcended this debate. Medical schools were mainly controlled by "regular" physicians, who fought every attempt by proponents of other medical beliefs to confer degrees. Bennett's vending of medical degrees was therefore perceived as a serious threat to their control of the profession. Bennett's educational reform might have had more support had he carried out what he had argued for: awarding degrees based upon merit and demonstrated proficiency. However, he conferred degrees upon individuals who did not take examinations or who otherwise did not merit them. While contemporary colleges granted relatively few degrees by examination, Bennett conferred a massive number of degrees in a very brief time. While most colleges granted degrees only at the place in which instruction was conducted, Bennett handed them out from New Albany to Boston. In addition, Bennett commissioned others to confer degrees, a practice not known to have occurred in other institu-

⁸⁴ *Western Medical Reformer*, V (June, 1845), 12-14; *Botanico-Medical Recorder*, XIII (July 19, 1845), 307-309; *ibid.* (August 30, 1845), 339-40; *ibid.* (September 13, 1845), 353-55; *Western Medical Reformer Extra*, V (September 8, 1845), 1-8.

⁸⁵ Illinois State Board of Health, *Medical Education and the Regulation of the Practice of Medicine in the United States and Canada* ([Springfield, Ill.], 1883), 64; Burton D. Myers, "A Summary of the History of Medical Education in Indiana," *Indiana History Bulletin*, XIX (March, 1942), 111-13; Adolph E. Waller, "The Vaulting Imagination of John L. Riddell," *Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Quarterly*, LIV (October-December, 1945), 346; Waller, "A Fictitious Medical Degree of the 1830's," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, XX (November, 1946), 505-12; Waite, "The First Medical Diploma Mill in the United States," 497-504; Charles Cumbs and Edgar Kiser, *One Hundred Years of Indiana Medicine, 1849-1949* ([Indianapolis], 1949), 59-60; Burton D. Myers, *The History of Medical Education in Indiana* (Bloomington, Ind., [1956]), 14-16.

⁸⁶ Rudolph, *Curriculum*, 80-81.

⁸⁷ Alva Curtis, ed., *Discussions between Several Members of the Regular Medical Faculty and Thomsonian Botanic Physicians* (Columbus, Ohio, 1836); Madge Pickard and R. Carlyle Buley, *The Midwest Pioneer: His Ills, Cures & Doctors* (Crawfordsville, Ind., 1945); Norman Gevitz, ed., *Other Healers* (Baltimore, 1988).

tions. While the bylaws of the Christian College granted the power to confer degrees to the chancellor, the right to conduct examinations was solely vested in quarterly meetings of the faculty and members of the corporation. Bennett's legalistic claim that he was empowered to examine applicants was false.

Bennett might merit some sympathy had he handed over the funds generated by his vending of degrees to the Christian College, but he apparently appropriated the monies for his own personal use. He never accounted for the expenditures generated by his selling of degrees, but during this time he was seen gambling by two separate sources and was accused of speculating in real estate in Michigan.⁸⁸ Whatever Bennett did with the money, he was not a financial success. By the summer of 1835 he was in desperate need of funds.⁸⁹ As no previous example of degree selling for an individual's personal profit has been uncovered, the Christian College may well have been the first publicly chartered diploma mill in the United States.

Epilogue

It is unlikely that the trustees of the Christian College ever assembled after their meeting in April, 1833. There is also no indication that Bennett ever returned to New Albany after he departed in the summer of that year. Although he subsequently traveled on the Ohio River, he usually stopped in Louisville. No college courses were ever offered at the Christian College, and no property or facilities were ever acquired. In spite of the actions of the New York County Medical Society, the Ohio legislature, and Riddell's letter of disclaimer to the *New York Courier and Enquirer*, neither the Indiana governor nor the state legislature examined Bennett's activities. The charter of the Christian College was not repealed.

Despite this debacle with the Christian College in New Albany, the Christian church founded several institutions of higher learning, beginning with Bacon College in 1836 in Lexington, Kentucky. Scott was selected as the first president, and David Burnett, who had been appointed a vice-president at the Christian College, was Bacon College's second president.⁹⁰ Alexander Campbell launched Bethany College shortly thereafter.

Hardin Moore, the representative who originally presented Bennett's petition for the Christian College to the Indiana legisla-

⁸⁸ *Millennial Harbinger*, V (August, 1834), 384; Minutes of the Pickaway Lodge, as noted in Hogan, "John Cook Bennett and Pickaway Lodge No. 23"; *Affidavits and Certificates Disproving the Statements and Affidavits Contained in John C. Bennett's Letters*, Nauvoo, Illinois, August, 1842, broadside (reprint by Joseph Smith, Jr.'s Rare Reprints, Independence, Missouri, 1990).

⁸⁹ Bennett to Henderson, July 18, 1835, Henderson Papers.

⁹⁰ Winfred Garrison, *An American Religious Movement: A Brief History of the Disciples of Christ* (St. Louis, [1945]), 106; Garrison and DeGroot, *The Disciples of Christ*, 223-24.

ture, left New Albany in 1833 and moved to New Orleans. In the same year Jesse Bledsoe, one of the initial corporators and secretary of the trustees, left Kentucky and moved to Mississippi. He died in Texas four years later. Whether these moves were related to their relationships with the Christian College is unknown.⁹¹

Chauncey Perkins, who was elected the secretary and was a member of the faculty of the Medical School of Indiana, continued to operate his drugstore in Erie, Pennsylvania. In the fall of 1835 he joined Bennett in an unsuccessful attempt to launch the Sylvanian Medical College. He retired in 1855 and moved to Walnut Creek, New York, where he died in 1872.⁹²

Riddell left Worthington in the spring of 1834, probably in part as a result of problems related to his connection with Bennett and the Christian College. Two years later he received his M.D. from the Ohio Medical College in Cincinnati. Shortly thereafter he moved to New Orleans and began teaching at the Medical College of Louisiana, which later became Tulane University. He was a respected professor and civic leader. He later became the director of the federal mint in New Orleans, a position he retained during the Civil War. He received an award from President Andrew Johnson for his efforts during Reconstruction and died in 1867.⁹³

Bennett continued to engage in a variety of nefarious schemes and activities. Despite criticism for conferring degrees based upon examination, he incorporated this provision into bylaws of other medical colleges with which he was affiliated, including Willoughby University and Sylvanian Medical College in Erie, Pennsylvania.⁹⁴ In addition to his involvement with medical schools, Bennett launched a campaign on behalf of the medical virtues of tomatoes in 1835.⁹⁵ In 1840 he moved to Nauvoo, Illinois, and joined the Mormon church, becoming a close confidant of Joseph Smith. Bennett lobbied through the Illinois legislature an act for the incorporation of Nauvoo University. As president, he conferred LL.D.'s upon selected prominent Americans such as James G. Bennett, editor of the New York *Herald*. John Cook Bennett was expelled from the Mormon church twenty-one months later and promptly attacked both Smith and the church.⁹⁶ Four years later he repeated the per-

⁹¹ *History of the Ohio Falls Cities and their Counties*, II, 213; Ware, Barton Warren Stone, 196.

⁹² College of Physicians and Surgeons in the City of New York, *Catalogue of the Alumni, Officers, and Fellows, 1807-1891* (New York, 1891), 50.

⁹³ Waller, "The Vaulting Imagination of John L. Riddell," 346; "The Late Dr. J. L. Riddell," *The Southern Star*, October 8, 1866, copy in the John Riddell Archives (Manuscripts, Rare Books, and University Archives, Tulane University).

⁹⁴ *Erie Gazette Extra*, September 25, 1835, quoted in the *Albany Evening Journal*, October 10, 1835; *Botanico-Medical Recorder*, XIII (August 30, 1845), 339-40.

⁹⁵ Andrew F. Smith, "Dr. John Cook Bennett's Tomato Campaign," *The Old Northwest*, XVI (Spring, 1992), 61-75.

⁹⁶ John C. Bennett, *The History of the Saints; or An Exposé of Joe Smith and Mormonism* (Boston, 1842); Nauvoo, Ill., *Times and Seasons*, April 30, 1842.

formance with Jesse Strang, the leader of the Strangite Mormon Church at Voree, Wisconsin. Bennett was expelled and in the late 1840s returned to Massachusetts where he began raising poultry. In 1849 he sponsored a poultry convention in Boston. The meeting drew over ten thousand attendees, and it, along with his subsequent book on poultry, contributed to “hen fever,” which swept the nation in the early 1850s.⁹⁷ In 1854 Bennett moved to Iowa where he died in 1867.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ John C. Bennett, *The Poultry Book. A Treatise on Breeding and General Management of Domestic Fowls* (Boston, 1850); George P. Burnham, *The History of the Hen Fever* (2nd ed., Boston, 1855).

⁹⁸ James J. Tyler, “John Cook Bennett, Colorful Freemason of the Early Nineteenth Century,” (reprinted from the *Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Ohio*; Columbus, 1947), 3-6; Mervin B. Hogan, *John Cook Bennett: Unprincipled, Profligate, Cowan* (Salt Lake City, 1987); O.W. Riegel, *Crown of Glory: The Life of James J. Strang, Moses of the Mormons* (New Haven, Conn., 1935), 72; Thomas Ford, *A History of Illinois*, ed. Milo M. Quaife (2 vols., Chicago, 1946), II, 61-69. See also Garrison, *An American Religious Movement*, 83-87; Dwight Stevenson, *Walter Scott, Voice of the Golden Oracle: A Biography* (St. Louis, [1946]), 164; Garrison and DeGroot, *The Disciples of Christ*, 223-24; Charles Bonsett, “An Old River Town and Two of its Unusual Physicians,” *Indiana Medical History Quarterly*, I (October, 1974), 36-41; Bonsett, “Medical Museum Notes,” *Journal of the Indiana State Medical Association*, LXXI (April, 1978), 359; Charles P. Bennett, *Yankee Clippers, Golden Slippers and More: A Bennett Family History and Genealogy* (Mount Ayr, Iowa, 1986), 33.