Family Letters of Andrew Wylie, President of Indiana University

Edited by Donald F. Carmony
*Contributed by Mrs. Thana Wylie**

The four letters which follow[1] are personal and family letters from the pen of Andrew Wylie, the first president of Indiana University, 1829-1851. Wylie's letter to his wife, Margaret, was written in 1835, while she was visiting in Cannonsburg, western Pennsylvania, where they had lived before he became president of Indiana University or Indiana College as it was known from 1828 to 1838. It alludes to difficulties in the construction of "the building"—presumably the residence now known as Wylie House which was erected during the 1830's. In a very human way it evidences Andrew Wylie's concern for his wife, how much she was missed, and the problem of managing household and family affairs in her long absence. It also pictures some of the common perils and hardships of travel in pioneer days. Moreover, the letter to Mrs. Wylie, like those to sons Craig and Sam, reveals the considerable hold which religious faith and views had on Dr. Wylie.

The three remaining letters from President Wylie to his sons Craig and Sam suggest much regarding the mingled hopes and doubts, aspirations and frustrations, and promises and setbacks which he faced as president of Indiana University. President Wylie not only administered the internal affairs of the infant university, but he also did some of the teaching and spent much time ironing out thorny problems with trustees, placating legislators, and giving addresses at meetings of importance. Within the institution there was frequent turmoil among faculty members, between the professors and students, and in relations between town and gown. Faced with a multiplicity of duties, Wylie, as the letters amply illustrate, was vulnerable to attack on several fronts.

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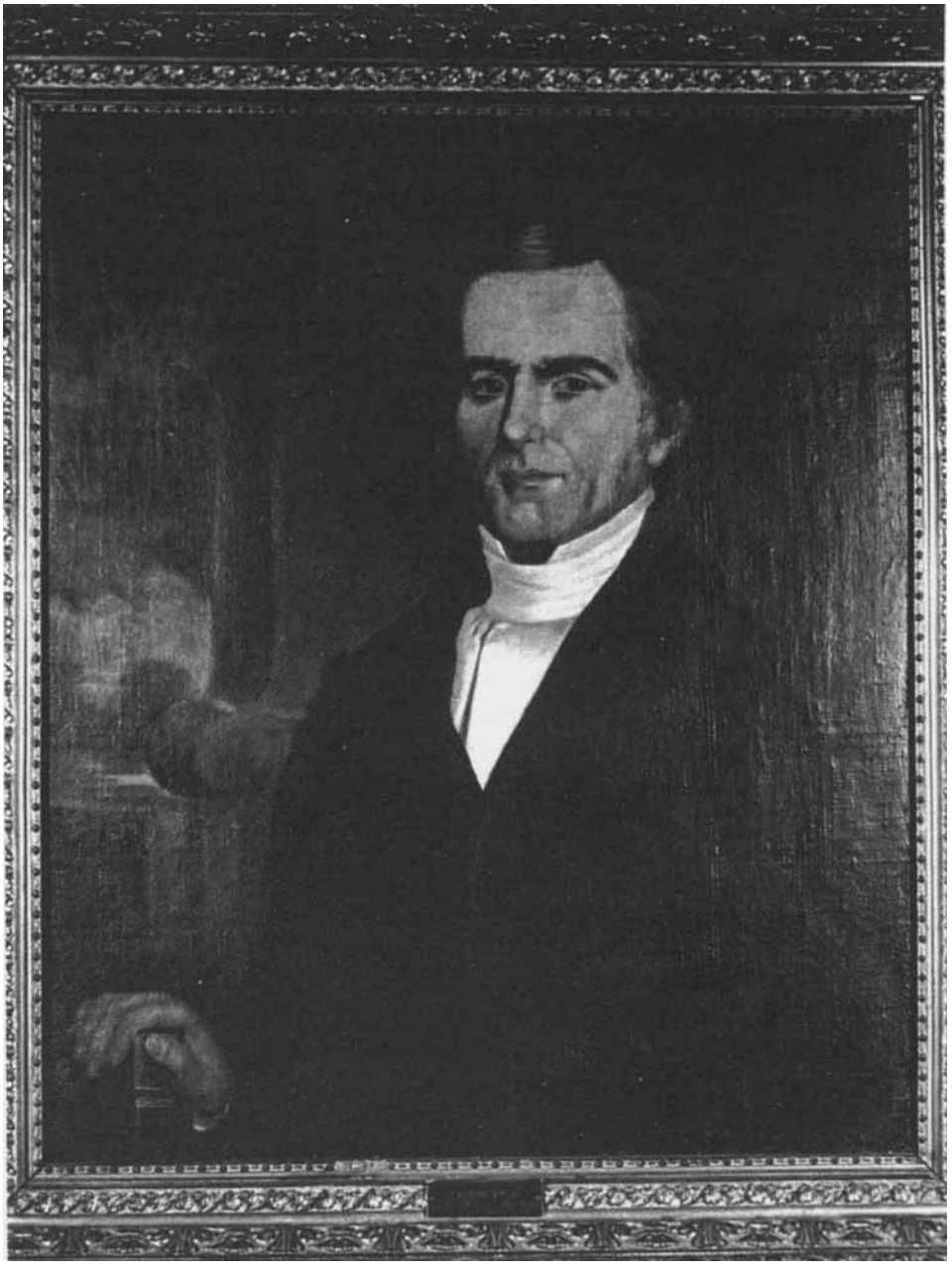
[1] The biographical material in this introduction largely follows James Albert Woodburn, *History of Indiana University, 1820-1902* (Vol. I; Chicago, 1940), 204-207 and Herman B Wells, "The Early History of Indiana University as Reflected in the Administration of Andrew Wylie, 1829-1851," *The Filson Club History Quarterly,* XXXVI (April, 1962), 113-27. The editor thanks Mrs. Mary B. Craig, archivist, Indiana University, for her assistance concerning illustrations. Thanks also are due Mrs. Karen Tannenbaum, former assistant editor of the *Indiana Magazine of History,* for doing much of the research for this document.

PORTRAIT OF MRS. ANDREW WILEY

Courtesy Indiana University Archives



PORTRAIT OF ANDREW WILEY

Courtesy Indiana University Archives

These three letters also indicate an abiding paternal interest in what his sons were doing and in the kind of men he hoped they would become. His comments to Sam about health and exercise now seem a bit amusing; but they, and his emphasis on the even greater importance of the "health of the soul," indicate a father's deep concern for his children.

Andrew Wylie, born on April 12, 1789, grew up on a farm in western Pennsylvania and performed the usual hard work typical of rural life of that day. Of Scotch-Irish extraction, the family was Presbyterian. Wylie himself was licensed as a Presbyterian minister in 1812 and was ordained an Episcopal minister in 1841. In 1810 Wylie graduated from Jefferson College, in western Pennsylvania; two years later, when only about twenty-three years old, he was elected president of the college. In 1817 Wylie became president of nearby Washington College and in 1829 he moved to Bloomington, Indiana, to assume the presidency of Indiana College.

As a farm boy Wylie had learned how to swing the ax in chopping and felling trees. While president of Indiana University, he at times performed such labor for exercise. In 1851 while so doing, he cut his foot; the resulting complications led to his early death from pneumonia.

Bloomington June 24th 1835[1]

My Dear Margaret.

Through the great goodness of God our lives & health are still preserved. Last week we received your letter by Eliza which gave us the very welcome account of your safe arrival at Wheeling & of the welfare of our friends generally. It is here, as yet, a time of general health: though we have had almost incessant rains & tremendous floods since within a few days after you left us till this week which has been fair. But now it thunders, the sky is overcast & we expect rain again. Mrs Nichols departed this life last monday week. This was, you know, not an unexpected event. You would, doubtless, like to know how we make out to get along without you. And I am afraid & almost ashamed to tell. The amount of it is, we do the best we can, & that is bad enough. We have Nancy Swift, without whose assistance we could not get along at all. In the house things are broken & lost at a sad rate. The

[1] In the preparation of these letters for publication, every attempt has been made to transcribe President Wylie's handwriting accurately. However, both his writing and the condition of some of the letters have forced the editor to use some discretion in interpreting certain words or phrases. In those instances where a word or part of a word was unclear, the most likely correct choice has been inserted in brackets. In a few cases, a blank indicates complete illegibility of the word omitted. As was common in his day, Wylie did not always use standard capitalization or punctuation; his style has not been corrected. Likewise, abbreviations and obvious misspelling remain untouched. Raised letters and numerals have been brought down to the line.

building is at a stand. I am distracted & ready to sink under the burden of so many cares. I wish a thousand times every hour that you were safe at home with us. I feel lost & miserable without you & am so much reduced in flesh & spirits that you would hardly know me. I count the hours as months till you return. I say not this to urge your return. For I tremble to think of the danger by the way. The cholera, as you have, no doubt, heard, has lately broken out with fatal violence at Madison, where as many as from 12 to 20 have been buried in a day. And rumor says it is also at Louisville & other places along the river. I have sometimes the most melancholy foreboding.—this, you know is my besetting sin, & I strive against it as well as I can. The death of our lamented William, presses harder on me also since you left us, so that my spirits are sometimes quite sunk. Then "I chide my heart that sinks so low" & look around to count the many & unmerited blessings which Our Heavenly Father—blessed be his Holy Name!—still allows us to enjoy—& then again I reproach myself with ingratitude & unprofitableness. Thus wretchedly do I waste my life & strength. Most fervently to I pray, & try to hope, that your life may be preserved, & that you may be kept in health & peace & restored to us once more. But I know & *feel* that the time will be long. For I cannot think of advising you to come so long as the cholera continues on the river: & to come through in the stage as I did last year would be, *for you,* out of the question, unless you had some kind & intimate friend for a protector. Even then, I should hardly advise it, for the road, unless greatly improved since last year, is, towards this end of it, scarcely passible. So that, on the whole, I must try & content myself the best way I can, till frost comes in the fall, when, if you live, you can descend the river without danger from cholera. But what shall take place, or what shall become of us before that time, God only knows. Our duty, in the mean time, is meekly to resign ourselves to his most holy will, making it our great & main concern to commit the keeping of *our souls* to Him, in welldoing as to a merciful Creator, seeking his face & favor with our whole hearts, & encouraging ourselves in the cheerful hope, that *whenever* & *wherever* & by *whatever* means "our earthly house of this tabernacle may be dissolved we may have a building of God an house not made with hands eternal in the heavens." There, my dear Margaret, might it please our gracious God, that *you* & *I* & *all our dear children* should meet at last—after all our crosses, trials & sorrows in this short life— O the transporting thought! it is too much—my unbelieving heart will not let me entertain it. This—alas! alas! is my infirmity. God strengthen my faith & hope! God, of his boundless mercy & grace grant us this great & amazing blessing for Christ's sake! Amen! Amen! Amen! O were *his* Amen to it, how would my burdened soul bound, exult & triumph. Well, let me say, "Thy will be done"! But *I* have something to do for the attainment of this end! O what responsibility!—

I never yet in all my life engaged in any thing with so little spirit as this *building;* & nothing to which I ever put my [hands?] dragged so heavily. But yet it seems to have been forced upon me by necessity.—Things, too, seem to go against in the undertaking. At this moment the rain descends in torrents. Craig, poor fellow, is, likely, out in it; for he went with the waggon, this morning to the mill, for boards to cover a lime kiln which the rains have nearly spoiled. Three days ago, John went a black berry-gathering on the old mare without my knowledge. The mare threw him & only came home this morning. Yesterday the luckless fellow (John) fell off the sawpit & hurt his head against a log. He is well enough now; but I was sadly frightened for a while lest he had sustained some serious or perhaps fatal injury. I see, from these escapes, how easy it would be, did a guardian Providence intermit his care, for us to have sorrow upon sorrow. How thankful should we be for safety, health, *reason* & all Gods other precious gifts & mercies!—Anderson continues to enjoy pretty good health. If the weather permitted him to be taken out, he would not be any thing the loser by his weaning.

All join me in love to you & all our friends.

Your ever loving & affectionate husband

Mrs M. Wylie Andrew Wylie

P. S. Should the cholera cease, & good company offer & should *you wish so to do,* we, particularly *I* , would be *very, very* desirous how soon you could get away from dear friends, at Cannonsburg & Wheeling to meet once more *a dearer friend* in this miserable Bloomington. Yours as ever A. W.

N. B. Should any of our married ladies be disposed to make themselves merry & witty at my expense, now that I am left in the sad predicament of a lonely lover whose dearest jewel is so far away, you can tell them—I trust from your own experience—but I know not how that may [be?]—that 20 years acquaintanceship in the marriage life [m]akes the parties, if they love each other, only the more [ne]cessary to their mutual happiness. A W. So with one thing & another, I have let my pen run on till my space is all filled. Remember me *specially* to our dear mother.

Bloomington July 1st 1840

Dr Craig.

If you get but few letters from us, do not think we forget you but only that we are busy. I am particularly so. Dodds & Mary have come back from Spencer to which they had removed—not being pleased with things &

prospects there. Mary is still in ill-health. They talk of going up to Pennsylvania. *If* they go—for it is yet doubtful—Elizth will probably go with them.

As to the University I cannot say very confidently. Ammen proves to be a most efficient teacher.[2] If Morrison who will be here in the fall should do his part as well the Faculty will be second to none this side Yale[3] Foster seems to be sunk—though still not so low as he ought & would were the community high toned in their feelings—He introduced among his charges *one* too atrocious to mention: it related to William & aimed at fixing a black stain on his memory[4] Bennet was summoned to prove the unutterable thing—but did not give testimony: the committee having resolved to adjourn to meet again the week before the meeting of the Board. In this matter my patience has been severely tryed & I have need to pray "lead me not into temptation"—that of doing to Foster what, for my own sake I ought not.

I receive letters from Columbia Mo. from which as well as from other sourses I *suppose* that they will elect me to the presidency of the University to be established there. But I do not much fancy the idea of another removal—especially westward.[5] There are many signs of the tide turning in my favor in this state. But there is no dependence to be put in what we call tides of popular favor—nor indeed in man in any shape.

I find it difficult to get money—So, if my pamphlets are sold, I wish you to take the money & with it pay Fetter. I hope to be able shortly to pay him off intirely. Mary's journey will cost me something, & there are many ways to take away, & but one to bring in money. *You* will have to be frugal & depend on yourself chiefly.—We expect to receive the Equator shortly under better auspices I trust. A periodical is I think indispensible to us.—The family are in tolerably go[od] health. John has had a slight chill [which?] seems what the Irish people call Dr Leatherman wrote me lately. He still has some notion of removing to Missouri.

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[2] Jacob Ammen, a graduate of West Point, was a professor of mathematics at Indiana University, 1840-1843. He also directed the students in military drill; but this practice, begun under him, was discontinued upon his departure from the university. James Albert Woodburn, *History of Indiana University, 1820-1920* (Vol. I; Chicago, 1940), 166-68, 257, 284.

[3] John I. Morrison was professor of languages at Indiana University, 1840-1843. In the latter year he resigned to become principal of a seminary at Salem, Indiana. As a member of the Indiana Constitutional Convention, 1850-1851, and in other ways as well, Morrison made significant contributions to the university. Woodburn, *History of Indiana University,* I, 121, 173-74, 257.

[4] The persistent and vigorous opposition of Dr. William C. Foster, a Bloomington physician, to Dr. Wylie is noted in Woodburn, *History of Indiana University,* I, 119-20. The remarks about Foster are from an historical sketch of the university by Judge David D. Banta which constitutes the first several chapters of the Woodburn history.

[5] Nothing about this invitation has been found in Woodburn.

Give my best respects to Mr. & Mrs. Miller & Bayless & family. Shew respect to the latter they have always been our friends. Of the former I need say nothing. Render yourself as useful as you can: shun vice & the vicious: cultivate the virtues & piety. Study the Bible & pray to God to direct you in all your ways.— "Trust in the Lord & be doing good: so shalt thou dwell in the land & verily thou shalt be fed."

Your afftc father
A Wylie

Bloomington July 6th 1846

Dear Son.

I am happy to find that you have good sense enough to shew you the propriety of writing home without having been particularly charged to do so;—& that you seem to have managed other little affairs with a "quantum suff." of discretion.

I shall have your books and things sent by Woodwards waggon to care of B. O. Davis. It starts on monday next.

I am in a hurry preparing to go to convention[6] John goes with me to Indianapolis (where it meets) & thence on to Richmond. He seems to be still getting better: but his constitution has received a severe shock and it will be long yet before he recovers—if ever.

You will be in danger of a thousand things from which no care of mine—nor your own, nor any other mortal can preserve you. Think of this.

As to health: you must take exercise every day & keep the pores clean by *sweeating* washing is good; but it acts on the end of the tube: whereas the *sweat* goes through and cleanses out the whole channel

But health is not the chief thing, important as it is. You may rise early—take the morning air, avoid late hours & hard eating & drinking and all other things which tend to disease & yet you may get into ways which are not good, as to the health of the Soul. Put it down in your inmost thoughts that all those things are evil and will prove so in the end which tend to make one forget God.

You will do well to remember that you are poor; have no fortune in prospect and that the people among [whom] you live being wealthy you may not safely imitate their expensive habits. Be plain & decent in your dress: this is enough to please sensible people, and the less you follow such as are not so the better.

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[6] This convention was probably an educational or religious meeting, many of which Wylie attended.

What remains of the price of the mare—having paid for the Corn-Sheller—consider as yours: but the other is yours only *to use* till you come home. Being in a slave-state I suppose you cannot readily get the privilege of working enough for exercise. If so, you must ride

God bless & guide you in the right way

Your affct father

Mr S. Wylie A Wylie

Bloomington Feb. 21st, 1847

Dear Sam.

Lest you should think yourself forgotten, I fill up an interval by writing to you. Your mother is still in bad—very bad health—chills and fever with regular irregularity sometimes very violent. We have no girl. Poor 'Liz is our only dependence. She is a heroine. But I am sorry she is so oppressed. We have two boarders Charles West & Chris. Graham good boys enough: but in a month or so they will leave, & then no more of that. — New Years night Dodds had a party the Faculty all at it but myself. I was sick. Williams & Trimble members of the Senior class & leaders of the Philomathian Society organized the Society that night as a band of Chivareers—they blacked themselves &c and cut up capers round Dodds's house, in short the Faculty, finding Williams & Trimble to have been in the affair called them to account.[7] They brought the rest—Some twenty—to share their fate. The Faculty demanded an apology. It was given such as it was. That of Williams & Trimble was *hardly* an apology. But the Faculty agreed to accept it with the rest & ordered me to dispose of the case with remarks on the impropriety of such conduct. I did so. Williams & Trimble, offended because the remarks were not postponed till some distant period when they might not be thought of in connexion with said remarks, demanded an honorable dismission. It was not granted. They, aided by Millan & some others of the Law Department, threw the Philomaths into a phrenzy. They passed certain resolutions censuring the Faculty & giving Diplomas to Williams & Trimble who went out of town with the mob shouting for Greencastle! So the thing ended. But the end is not yet. Of cour[se] I will be made the butt, at which shafts from all who for any reason may think it the time to join in, will be aimed. Of course, too, the sectarian opposition will take advantage of it and at the next meeting of the Legislature I expect a scheme for some time in agitation will be pushed into execution if possible to divide the funds of the University

[7] The Philomathean Society was one of various literary societies which played an important part in the early decades of the university's development. As here indicated, however, not all of their activities were literary. Woodburn, *History of Indiana University,* I, 77, 201-202, 230-31, 303-304, 316-17.

among the leading Sects.[8]—There is no telling what the event may be. The students are quiet now: but there is in some of them a bad spirit.

From 'Mag. & 'Rene I hear almost every week Margaret thinks she can learn nothing, & of course will not learn much. Irene learns well: but has gone to balls: a thing [of?] which I do not approve

From John I hear nothing lately.

The rest join in love to you. You like not your present occupation. I'd rather clean streets like a scavenger than be a dirty pettifogging puppy such as some of these in our Law School will be if they live.

Be an honest man at any rate: be a Christian and then in the end you will find what in this world you will not find—peace & happiness

Your afftc father

A Wylie

[8] Continued charges claimed that Indiana University was sectarian, often insisting that Presbyterian influence was dominant. Woodburn, *History of Indiana University*, I, 21, 29-30, 32, 33, 73-76, 112-16, 211, 251-52, 265, 363, 374. As these references indicate, both David D. Banta and James Albert Woodburn defended—perhaps more vigorously than warranted—the university against the charge of sectarianism.