

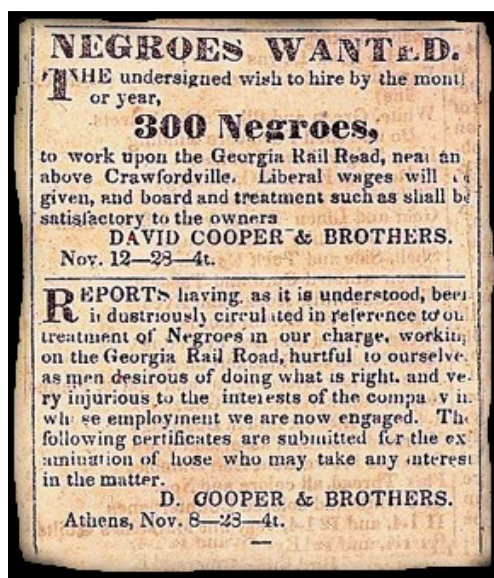
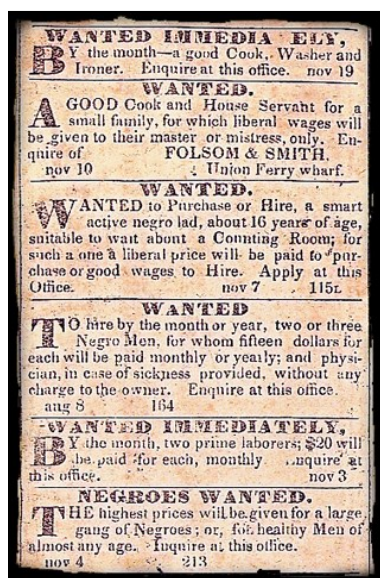
Jonathan Blanchard: Abolitionist

Treasures of Wheaton, 2004

Presented by Larry Thompson, Special Collections Director

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."¹ During America's Revolutionary War there were some who clearly saw the inconsistencies of fighting for freedom and unalienable rights, all the while that slavery was supported or, at least, allowed to continue.² By 1804 most of the northern states had ended the slave system through legislation. However, this did not grant immediate emancipation, nor did it erase slavery from these areas. In fact, as late as 1860 census records indicate that slaves were still being kept and utilized in New Jersey.³

In 1817 the American Colonization Society was begun to populate the newly established country of Liberia with free blacks. By the end of the Civil War only a few thousand emigrated from the United States, while its enslaved population grew to over five million. It was hoped, by the federal government and Southern sympathizers that the society would encourage slave-owners to willingly free their slaves and allow them to emigrate.⁴



Newspaper Ads from Jonathan Blanchard's personal papers

By the 1830s a new strain of abolitionism grew up in America as the last decades made it clear that colonization would not work. Though the importation of slaves had been abolished in the United States in 1808, this did not curtail the growth of slavery. Technological advances in

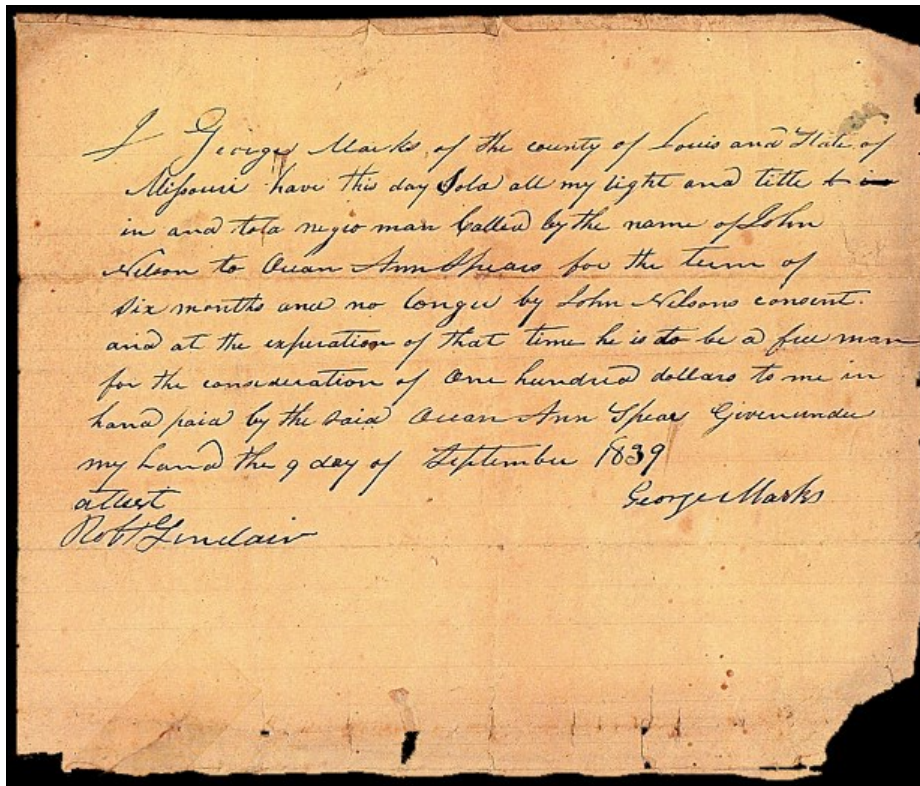
¹ Declaration of Independence

² Hawkins, p. [i]

³ Hawkins, p. [i]

⁴ Hawkins, p. [i]

agriculture, particularly the invention of the cotton gin, allowed farmers to grow more and cheap labor was needed to bring in the harvest.⁵



Original bill of sale
from the Blanchard
Papers of John Nelson
to Ocean Ann Spears,
September 9, 1839.

For many years, the abolitionist movement sought a road of compromise and many abolitionists wanted to get rid of slavery as soon as possible but couldn't find a way to wean the country off of this key economic factor. Therefore, gradual emancipation was the platform advanced by most abolitionists. By the 1830s those seeking immediate emancipation, and for some uncompensated emancipation, had made their voices heard. This shift was influenced by the Second Great Awakening and its emphasis upon improving, or perfecting, oneself and society. Individuals like Arthur and Lewis Tappan help fund the emergence of what has been called the Benevolent Empire, that growth of voluntaristic religious and social improvement societies like the American Bible Society, American Tract Society, American Home Missionary Society, American Temperance Society, and many others.

Jonathan Blanchard was an heir of these principles. He was a pastor, educator, and a social reformer; and a combatant for abolition for over thirty years.⁶ Blanchard was born in early 1811 near Rockingham, Vermont. His formal education began at the age of 4 when he entered the local district school and by 14, he had assumed teaching duties in across-state Shaftsbury. He later entered the Chester Academy and then enrolled in his tutor's alma mater, Middlebury College.

⁵ Hawkins, p. [i]

⁶ Fischer, 5

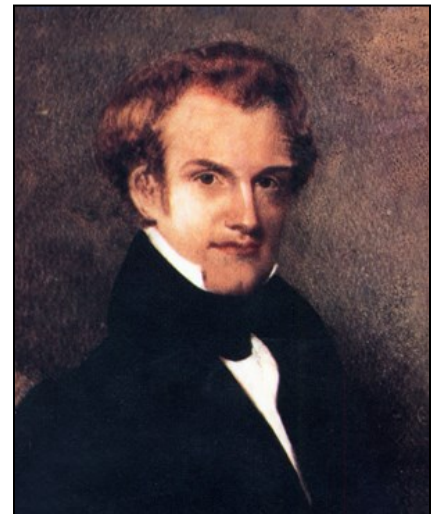
Blanchard had originally begun his studies for the ministry at Andover Theological Seminary, having been introduced to abolitionist thought while an Academy principal in Plattsburgh, New York. He eventually became frustrated with Andover's equivocation on the issue of slavery. He left school in September of 1836 to become a lecturer for the American Anti-Slavery Society in Pennsylvania, as one of Theodore Dwight Weld's "Seventy", working to expand the reach of abolitionist thought and action. Weld was the nerve-center of the abolitionist movement until a schism in the 1840s.⁷



Andover Theological Seminary

The work of the Seventy was to propound the "sin of slavery" through preaching with the hopes that the consciences of slaveholders would be pierced and that they would then turn from sin and gain freedom for themselves and those they enslaved. Increasingly, abolitionist rhetoric called attention to the impact that slavery and anti-abolitionist efforts were having on the freedom of white citizens, over and above the issues of freedom for the enslaved.⁸

Abolitionists, like Blanchard, expected to be mobbed while executing their duties. Echoing the words of the Apostle Peter that "... who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled ... For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing"⁹ Though some historians have advanced that abolitionists relished in a uniquely American martyr's complex,¹⁰ nevertheless they viewed persecution as suffering for righteousness sake¹¹ and Jonathan Blanchard certainly experienced persecution and personal injury.



J. Blanchard around age 25

On one such lecture stop, Blanchard went to Gettysburg and obtained use of the courthouse to deliver a lecture. His address was interrupted as Judge McLean encouraged several men and boys to jeer, whistle, stomp their feet, and throw rotten eggs and decayed vegetables at Blanchard until he stopped speaking. Once Blanchard was silenced, McLean and others berated Blanchard and abolitionism and passed resolutions condemning agitation of the slavery question.¹² McLean, when later challenged on his treatment of Blanchard, responded "We have no slaves here. Why come and disturb our borough with a discussion of slavery?"¹³

⁷ Hawkins, p. 15

⁸ Hawkins, p. 22

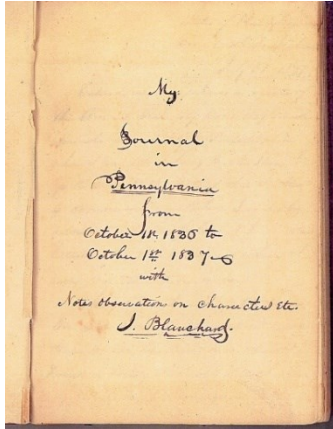
⁹ I Peter 3: 13-14, 17

¹⁰ Wolf, p. 7

¹¹ Wolf, p. 3

¹² Korngold, p.48

¹³ Korngold, p.49



Blanchard's journal from 1836

In Illinois, just as Blanchard was leaving school to lecture, abolitionist printer Elijah Lovejoy called for the establishment of a state Anti-slavery Society, which was formally established on Oct. 27, 1836,¹⁴ as Blanchard was traveling throughout the Pennsylvania countryside. The tensions over abolition grew strong in Illinois. Anti-abolition mobs had destroyed 4 of Lovejoy's presses in the span of two years to halt the printing of abolitionist materials.¹⁵ These mobs eventually killed Lovejoy. According to Henry Tanner (1881), "no personal incident of the antislavery struggle—the fate of John Brown excepted—made so profound an impression on the North as the murder of Lovejoy."¹⁶

Many Americans saw the work of abolitionists as dangerous, one of the reasons was the attempt to limit the personal rights of slaveholders. In many Northern churches slaveholders were kept from speaking publicly, holding office, and receiving the sacraments.¹⁷ Additionally, the potential migration of former slaves northward brought a threat of cheap labor and social tension. Clergy disliked the division among their congregations caused by abolitionist lectures. And politicians loathed the incessant questions directed at them about the issue of slavery. For three decades abolitionists were the brunt of merciless attacks as troublemakers rather than as humanitarians and anti-abolition mobs were seen as defenders of the peace.¹⁸

After his work with the American Anti-slavery Society was complete, Blanchard heeded Lyman Beecher's *Plea for the West*. Beecher, in this noted treatise stated that "It is equally plain that the religious and political destiny of our nation is to be decided in the West."¹⁹ During this time the West was not we know it to be today, but it was the fledgling states of Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, and others, and the emerging western territories. Beecher called the nation to "secure the secular and religious prosperity of the West," to be accomplished through the influence of Protestant seminaries and pastors. To this end Blanchard enrolled in Beecher's Lane Seminary in Cincinnati, Ohio.



Lyman Beecher (center, seated) and Harriet Beecher Stowe (far right)

¹⁴ Wolf, p. 38

¹⁵ Wolf, pp. 36-42

¹⁶ Wolf, p. 49

¹⁷ Hawkins, p. 25

¹⁸ Wolf, p. ix-x

¹⁹ Hawkins, p.11

The students of Lane put Beecher's ideas into practice. They were not simply young upstarts, but many were older than the average age of seminary students. "Thirty members of this theological class were over twenty-six years of age, fourteen were over twenty-eight, and nine were between thirty and thirty-five."²⁰ Blanchard easily fit into this group of "older," more directed, students. They brought with them knowledge of life and the needs of society. According to slavery scholar Dwight Dumond, the influence of these seminary students—these "apostles of freedom"—during a few years, was significant.²¹

When Blanchard returned to his theological studies, he moved to a city that was a hotbed of abolitionist thought and action. The seminary had worked through a difficult battle with Asa Mahan, a trustee at Lane, and a contingent of students who left for Oberlin after they had been restricted in their abolitionist speech and activities. Mahan was the only trustee to vote against those restrictions.²² The cultural and moral struggles between the North and South over slavery were heightened in this border city and were reflected in the seminary. By the time that Blanchard enrolled the restrictions on academic freedom had been lifted.

Upon completing his studies at Lane, Blanchard was ordained to the ministry with Calvin Stowe and Lyman Beecher conducting his ordination service. Afterwards he became the pastor of 6th Presbyterian Church in Cincinnati, replacing Asa Mahan. Though a pastor, Blanchard continued his abolitionist lecturing throughout the state and regionally. Through these lectures he clearly articulated the influence of leading minds upon the direction of churches, societies, and colleges. From his experiences at Andover and Lane seminaries he saw the position they were in to influence the culture. He called for a "martyr-age of colleges and seminaries" where the faculty would "lead their students, both by precept and example ... into a zeal for reformation."²³ His thoughts on this subject were published in pamphlet form and reprinted widely. Ultimately, Blanchard wholeheartedly believed that "society is perfect where what is right in theory exists in fact; where practice coincides with principle and the law of God is the law of the land."²⁴

Blanchard dedicated his life to such a society. One of the biggest barriers to a perfect society was slavery, which, he said, exhibited "all the worst principles of European despotism and Asiatic caste."²⁵ One could not simply judge social ills to be wrong, but must do something to change them and this could only be accomplished through changed hearts. Blanchard wrote, "An enlightened intellect with a corrupt heart is but a cold gas-light over a sepulcher, revealing, but not warming the dead."²⁶ For Blanchard, changed hearts led to changed minds.

In spite of the language of the abolitionist's Declaration of Sentiments in 1833, that outlined a more spiritual direction for the abolitionist movement, those who held the immediatism abolition position began a campaign of agitation as the central method for advancing the abolitionist

²⁰ Hawkins, p. 19

²¹ Hawkins, p. 22

²² OhioPix, Mahan

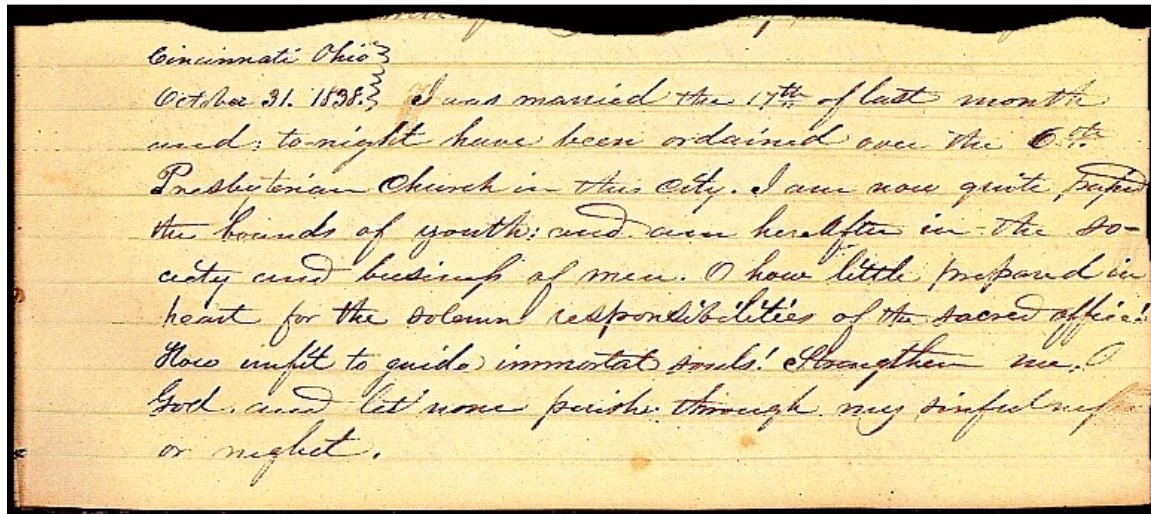
²³ quoted in Meulder, p. 226; Public Men and Public Institutions repub. in Gale's Brief history of Knox College, 1845

²⁴ Perfect Society" Address, Oberlin, 1839

²⁵ Sermons and Addresses, p. 116-117

²⁶ Sermons and Addresses, p. 116-117

cause. This created a grassroots political movement that involved traveling lecturers and newspaper publishing to get their message to the masses. For some, the logical outcome of verbal agitation was physical action and John Brown was the epitome of physical efforts at ridding America of slavery. William Lloyd Garrison believed that if George Washington was justified in his actions to secure colonist's liberties, then Brown was justified in his actions to bring liberty to the enslaved.²⁷



Journal entry citing Blanchard's ordination service, October 31, 1838

This shift from slavery being a moral concern to a political one created a division between moralist and political abolitionists.²⁸ While pastoring in Cincinnati and lecturing against slavery, Blanchard, like William Lloyd Garrison, was disinclined to support the abolitionist Liberty Party slate of 1840 because of the detrimental effects that it would have on the abolitionist cause. Instead, he publicly supported William Henry Harrison against Martin Van Buren and received the wrath of fellow abolitionist Gerrit Smith. Blanchard's rationale was that a vote for the Liberty Party's James G. Birney, a member of Blanchard's own congregation, was one less vote that Van Buren needed to be elected.²⁹ Harrison was a choice between the lesser of two evils.

As Blanchard's views on an abolitionist political party changed, he became more involved in helping shape the direction of the Liberty Party in Ohio. He introduced Salmon P. Chase to noted Pennsylvania legislator Thaddeus Stevens and solicited Stevens to speak at an Ohio convention with the hopes of Stevens joining the Liberty Party. Stevens declined, but the introduction of Chase, a future Wheaton trustee, and Stevens was significant as both men later moved on to political careers at the national level.³⁰

²⁷ Hawkins, p. [ii-iii]

²⁸ Wolf, p. xi

²⁹ Meulder, p. 228

³⁰ Meulder, p. 231



Blanchard's entrance pass to the Anti-Slavery convention in London

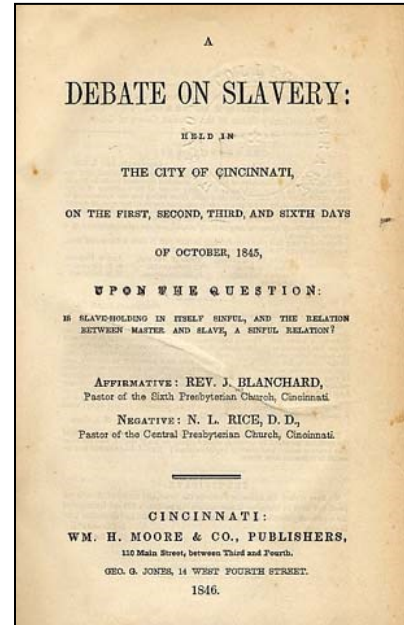
A zenith of Blanchard's involvement in the abolitionist cause came as a delegate from the Ohio State Anti-Slavery Society to the 2nd World Anti-Slavery Convention in London in 1843. Blanchard assumed a prominent role and was elected a vice-president for the convention. As vice-president and a member of several committees Blanchard had many opportunities to address the convention—opportunities that some felt were exploited.³¹

Blanchard's traveling companion to London was Hiram H. Kellogg, president of Knox College and a representative from the Illinois Anti-Slavery Society. Through their interaction their friendship grew, so much so that Blanchard endorsed Kellogg's fund-raising appeals while in England. Upon their return to the States Kellogg asked Blanchard to serve as an agent for Knox to raise needed funds that had not been secured. The financial problems at Knox became Kellogg's undoing. While on a trip to explore the presidency of the Mission Institute in Quincy, Illinois, Blanchard visited Kellogg in Galesburg. This visit laid the foundation of Blanchard's future association with Knox College.

Soon after Blanchard accepted his new role as President of Knox College, he underscored his status as an abolitionist spokesperson. His speech, "Public Men and Public Institutions", that so strongly called for a "martyr-age" of colleges, was republished along with a brief history of Knox College for distribution to potential benefactors. Additionally, in the fall of 1845 as his ministry at 6th Presbyterian was finishing, he debated for four days the sinfulness of slavery with Rev. Nathan L. Rice, known nationally for his pro-slavery views.

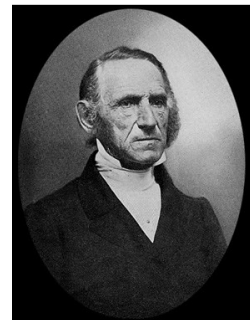
³¹ Meulder, p. 232

During his presidency of Knox, Blanchard remained a vocal champion of abolitionist thought. In 1850 he penned an open letter that spanned 7 newspaper columns to Stephen A. Douglas for aiding passage of the Compromise of 1850 with its Fugitive Slave Act. Later, he openly opposed Douglas for his proposal of popular sovereignty in the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which would likely not stem the tide of slavery. These challenges culminated in a public debate in Knoxville, Illinois on October 13, 1854.³² Blanchard highlighted Douglas' reversal of support for the Missouri Compromise, while Douglas painted Blanchard as an extremist willing to dissolve the Constitution, if needed, to eradicate slavery. After a frustrated finger-waving response from Douglas, Blanchard emerged the clear winner.



Less than a year later Jonathan was traveling through Kentucky and lecturing against slavery along with John Fee, found of Berea College, and Cassius Clay, Yale graduate and nephew of Henry Clay. On this trip Blanchard wrote home that "all but about six of the men were armed for bloody resistance had they been molested. I hope in God that the strife will not come to blows and blood. If it does—may God prosper the right."³³

With Blanchard nearing twenty years of outspoken opposition to slavery, he found himself with more enemies than friends. Agitation for abolition caused friction and discord in Galesburg and many tired of the tensions of disunity and sought calm and tranquility. This left someone like Jonathan Blanchard isolated and alone. A rift began to develop between Blanchard and George Gale, Galesburg founder and Knox professor. The rift swung between smoldering dissent and open hostility and culminated in Blanchard's departure in 1858.



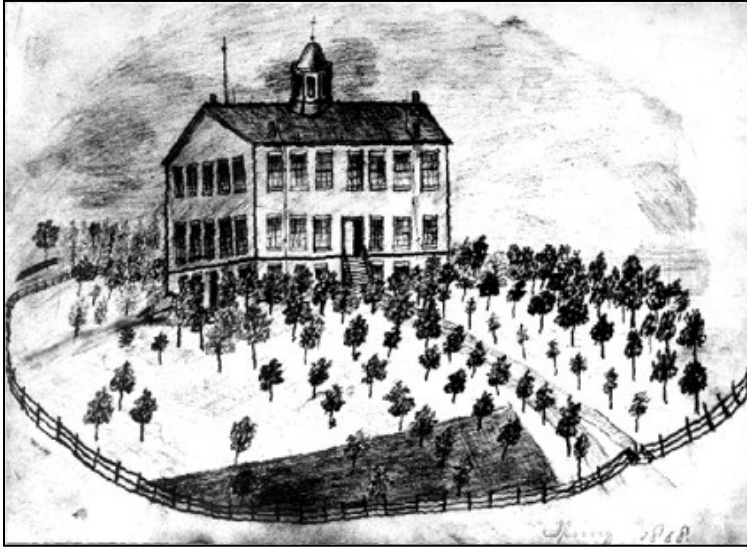
*George W. Gale,
founder of Knox College*

After a year pastoring in Ottawa and Galesburg, Blanchard assumed the presidency of the Illinois Institute, a nearly bankrupt Wesleyan Methodist school in Wheaton, Illinois. As he had done at Knox, Blanchard took this struggling school, renamed Wheaton College, and fashioned it into a strong and vital institution. During his two-decade career as president, Blanchard shifted his focus from eradication of slavery to the elimination of secret societies. In a letter to Gerrit Smith Blanchard expressed his belief that the curse of secret societies was deeper than slavery, believing that Freemasonry played a role in advancing and maintaining slavery.³⁴

³² Kilby, p. 118-9

³³ Personal correspondence, July 30, 1855

³⁴ Personal correspondence, 4/1/1869



A drawing from the east of Main Hall (Blanchard Hall) before it was increased in height and expanded, ca. 1860s

Though connected with many figures of historical note, Blanchard's strong character and unflinching efforts for equality and reform put him at odds with countless individuals, causing one to write that he was "too outspoken to be looked upon by the majority of the Church with cordial sympathy."³⁵ In a less than appealing light, poet Carl Sandburg wrote of Blanchard, that "the ghost of Jonathan Blanchard still goes stalking around Knox County. He was a lion, a bear, a buffalo, and in the realm of human behavior rated himself half horse and half alligator. . . . He enjoyed controversy, seemed to create antagonisms for the secret fun he could have out of them. He saw himself as a crusader hurling spears at Hydra-headed monsters of sin. . . . He fathered five sons and seven daughters, lived to be eighty-one, and died fighting Freemasonry as a blight and a curse. . . . Jonathan Blanchard was born to wrangle and enjoyed wrangling. He is a show piece in the museum of American freedom. . . . He lived without coming to know that he was not one bigot, but several. He strode and roared and the echoes of him linger for me in certain Galesburg corners and I almost catch the ghost of him. I am sure there are plenty of living sinners he would like to haunt and haunt."³⁶ Even one his more friendly biographers noted that he was a "minority of one."³⁷

Clearly Jonathan Blanchard had a strong personality, but despite these somewhat negative portrayals, throughout his days he sought to bring the light of the Gospel to his culture and so change society that the Kingdom of God would be ushered in. When he forged the vision for Wheaton College, he clearly established its motto; *Christo et Regno Ejus*—for Christ and His Kingdom, fulfilling his vision of a college that would influence the next generation of Christian citizens.

³⁵ Fischer, p. 17

³⁶ Sandburg, pp. 298-300

³⁷ Kilby.

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