John Finley Crowe,
History of Hanover College
(1857)

Excerpts from the digitized text in the Hanover Historical Review.

John Finley Crowe was the founder of Hanover College; near the end of his career, the Board of Trustees asked him to write a history of the College's first thirty years.

(NB: Paragraph numbers apply to this excerpt, not the original source, and the text has been minimally edited. Crowe provided the footnotes.)

[The] Salem Presbytery, which embraced at that time almost the entire state of Indiana and a large part of Illinois. . . . at their fall Sessions, l825, appointed a committee to devise a plan for a Presbyterial Academy, and to fix on a place for its location. A variety of considerations led to the selection of Hanover as the place, and the Manua1 labor system as the plan*. . . .

[At the beginning of the 1827-1828 school year, the students] resolved to organize themselves into two literary Societies . For this purpose they held a public meeting and appointed two of their number to make the division. Having decided by the toss of a copper, who should have the first choice, they divided the company by alternate choice. One of the companies thus formed took for its name "The Union Literary Society," the other, "The Philosophronian" . . . .

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[In 1831, after John Finley Crowe returned from a successful fund raising trip, the school could finally move forward with ideas for a manual labor system of education:] The Building Committee were directed to contract for the burning and moulding of one hundred and fifty thousand brick, and for such other materials as would be needed in the erection of the two houses.

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*Note: As the system proved a failure, involving the institution in a heavy debt, it is due to all concerned, to notice briefly, some of the reasons which induce the Presbytery to adopt it. The circumstances of the churches in Indiana absolutely forbade the adoption of any plan, which would require a large amount of means to carry it into successful operation. . . . [Also], the manual labor system, then but recently introduced from Europe, had been adopted by the Oneida Institute, N. York, and was represented as working admirably. . . . finally it was urged that men of more than ordinary nerve and muscle were needed as pioneers of the church, and that consequently those who had been early thrown upon their own resources, and had learned to bear hardness as good Soldiers, were just the men for the field. . . .

While these buildings, and other appliances for carrying on a manual labor school on a large scale, were progressing the school itself was in a prosperous condition. Abut fifty young men and boys, of industrious habits and good morals, enrolled as students, were prosecuting their studies, and at the same time clearing up the land of the corporation for a farm. The timber was converted into fence-rails and cordwoods, and the students credited the usual price for such labor on their bills for Board and tuition. But still much solicitude was felt for the result. It was emphatically an experiment, in which no one concerned had the least experience. . . .

[The plan the Board of Trustees developed for the manual labor system included the following points:]

1. All students connected with the institution are required to board with the Steward, excepting in cases where they can board with their parents, and extraordinary cases to be decided by the Board.
2. The price of boarding in the refectory, viz, shall be one dollar per week.
3. Each student connected with the institution shall be required to labor at least two hours each day in the week, Sabbath excepted.
4. Those students over sixteen years of age, who labor in the garden or on the farm, shall be entitled, each, to five cents per hour: which shall be taken cut of their bill for board. Moreover they shall have the privilege of working as much as will cover the whole expense of their board at the same rates, provided they maintain a respectable standing in their classes. And all students under the age of sixteen, shall be allowed pay at such rates per hour as may be agreed upon by the steward and parents or guardians of the student.
5. Those students who labor at some mechanical art, shall have the privilege of making their own arrangements respecting their work; provided they labor the above named period of two hours per day and pay the steward the stipulated sum for boarding. . . .

[In 1832, the Board of Trustees asked the state government to approve a modification of the school's charter, changing it from "Hanover Academy" to "Hanover College." On January 10, 1833, a representative from the Board] returned from Indianapolis bearing the long wished for Charter. The determined opposition that had been made the previous' year, by some of the friends of the State College, had produced much solicitude for the immediate result of the application. But success had crowned their efforts, and the faculty at once consented to gratify the students in giving vent to their patriotic feelings by a brilliant illumination of the College Edifice.

It was indeed a magnificent sight. The flood of light poured from the one hundred windows of the tall edifice, contrasted charmingly with the dark background of the surrounding forest.

The Charter was not just what the Board wished it to be; but it was the best they could obtain. They had, from the experiment already made, their misgivings of the practicability of carrying out the Manual labor system on a large scale; and they very much wished a modification of the charter on that subject. But the Legislature were anxious to have the principle tested and would

not yield.

[The charter included the following regulations:]
Section 1:
that the name of the Institution created by the act to which this is an amendment shall be changed to "Hanover College." And the same shall hereafter be known by the name and style of "Hanover College." And the Faculty of said College, consisting of the President and Professors thereof shall have the power of granting and conferring, by and with the approbation of the Board of Trustees, such degrees in the liberal arts and sciences as are usually granted and conferred in other Colleges in the United States. . . .
Section 2.
Those students in said College who are of sufficient bodily ability, shall, during the time they continue as such, be exercised and instructed in some species of mechanical or agricultural labor, in addition to the scientific and literary branches there taught. And the Trustees shall annually report to the Legislature the plan, progress and effects of such mechanical and agricultural exercise and instruction, upon health, studies and improvement of the students. . . .

The Board now felt prepared to invite to a participation in the privileges of their college, the aspiring young men of the North West, very few of whom had enjoyed the opportunity of acquiring anything more than the mere rudiments of an education. . . . And as to facilities for labor they had, in addition to their farm, a carpenter's shop, a cooper's shop and a wagon maker's shop, all furnished with tools and competent men to boss them. These facts were published and assurances given that young men of industrious habits might defray the whole expense of their board by their own labor without impeding their progress in acquiring an education. The intelligence was soon spread by means of the Press, throughout the country; and the consequence was, "a mighty rush" of young men and boys from all quarters. Gentlemen of the South, wishing their sons to be taught to work, as well as to read Latin and Greek, sent them to Hanover. While Gentlemen of the North, sent theirs, that they might receive the advantage of an education without losing their industrious habits.

The Summer session 1833 opened with one hundred and sixty students, collected from fifteen of the United States. But this rapid increase in the number of students, developed as rapidly the difficulty, if not impracticability of successfully carrying on a large establishment on the Manual labor scheme.

The great object aimed at by the Board was, so to lower the expense of a liberal education, as to bring it within the reach of the masses of Society, thus elevating them to their proper grade in the community. For this purpose they put down board to the lowest practicable point, $1.00 per week. Then, taking as sound, the published statements of Oneida Institute, that three hours per day might be profitably employed by students in manual labor, they required the students in Hanover College to labor three hours per day, five days in the week; which would at five cents per hour, give seventy-five cents, leaving Saturday to provide the remaining twenty five cents.

But it was soon found that three hours per day were more than the students generally could be induced to work, and in the judgement of the faculty, more than was consistent with reputable progress in their studies. The requisition was consequently lowered to two hours per day, and each student as required to pay at the commencement of each session five dollars in advance on his board. And subsequently it was found necessary to require five more when the session as half advanced.

But notwithstanding these changes, the Boarding house soon became a source of trouble. The Steward could not for one dollar per week keep such a table as was found in the hotels, and the students not appreciating the object in view, complained of their fare.

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The number of students continued gradually to increase from session to session, until the Catalogue of 1835 recorded the names of two hundred and thirty; twelve of whom were in the Theological Department. In order to furnish employment for so large a number of students, other workshops were opened, and furnished with tools, A chair factory, a second cooperage for making barrels and a cedar cooperage for making small ware.

But the employment of more than two hundred young men and boys, of every variety of habits and disposition, in a way that would prove profitable to the corporation, seemed to be out of the question. Especially when it is considered that many of them had never been accustomed to work at home, and that with the most of them, the great object was to get through the time set apart for labor, with the least possible amount of fatigue.

Experience had proved satisfactory to the Board, that the cultivation of the soil could not be made profitable. Their farm could hardly be called second rate land and the price of produce was very low. . . . And besides the months of April and October, most important months to the farmer, were vacations in the college, the students being dispersed on visits to their homes. The farm was consequently abandoned, and attention turned exclusively to mechanical operations. . . .

With the view of preparing the public mind for a change, the Board, had, in their report to the Legislature, the year before, intimated that the great advantages of the system, were not of a pecuniary, but of a physical, intellectual and moral character. . . .

Manual Labor

[The report explained that a manual labor system could not support the entire cost of running a college. Rather, it had the following advantages:]

1. As a preservative of health, as the means of giving that firmness of muscle and that elasticity of nerve which shall be sufficient to sustain the operations of the most powerful intellect. What prudent engineer would think of placing a steam engine of 40 horse power in a light and crazy boat? The body is merely the organ of the mind's operations, and unless the organ be of a substantial material and in a sound condition, there must be, not only a crippling of the operations of the mind, but an excitement so disproportioned to the

energies of a feeble system, as to ensure its speedy dissolution. . . . The fearful ravages of sedentary habits on the health and lives of students . . . have long been seen and deplored. The exhortations of parents and instructors have all proved unavailing, as have also the irregular and capricious exercises of the gymnasium. . . .

3. But what is perhaps still more important, manual labor is found to be a most effectual safeguard to morals. The opinion of Dr. Bush, that "idleness is the parent of every vice," is corroborated by every day's experience and every day's observations. Moreover vice is infectious: especially to the ardent and unsuspicious character of youth. A multitude of boys, suddenly released from restraints of parental authority, and thrown together not only tempt each other to wickedness, but encourage each other to deeds of daring, which otherwise would never have been thought of. . . . [The Board supported this point by quoting an unnamed source on how students spend their time:] "Often in mere idle lounging, talking, smoking and sleeping; often in sedentary games, which whether in themselves lawful cr unlawful, are always injurious to the student, because he needs recreation of a different kind; but what is still more to be deplored, the time is often spent in drinking and gaming, and in low and degrading dissipation, to the utter neglect of every duty and to the utter abandonment and sacrifice of every principle of honor and virtue."

[Since the students' farming and manufacturing labor was not sufficient to pay for the costs of running the College, one of the Trustees proposed to establish a student-run printing business instead.] The Board of Trustees knew that they were indebted to the manual labor system for the unparalleled success of the College; and [feared] that to abandon it, would be to dismiss most of their students. Every other kind of business tried, had failed to sustain itself; and there was at least a possibility that this might succeed. . . .

The new business was very popular at Hanover. Most of the boys wished to become printers. Franklin was a printer, and who could tell how much of his fame was due to his business; and besides they were to be paid for learning to be printers. But the charm was soon broken. The boys soon learned that there was more of sober prose than of poetry in the printers occupation. Those who were most industrious and persevering, were very far from realizing their hopes. Working but two hours per day, protracted greatly the time of apprenticeship, and prevented their labor from being profitable either to themselves or to the corporation. It was soon found that it would be impossible to keep the press in motion without employing regular compositors who could give their whole time to the business. And then the footing up of the monthly bills for the salary of the foreman, the wages of the compositors, press men and roller boys, together with the expense for paper, ink, and other indispensibles, convinced the Board that they were playing a losing game. [Nevertheless, they were persuaded to give the project more time to succeed.] . . .

[By 1834,] the College . . . appeared to be in a very flourishing condition. The number of students still increasing. But this increase of students, only increased the pecuniary embarrassments of the Board. They were by their Charter bound to find employment in some kind of manual labor, for all the students, and then bound by contract to pay them for the time

employed, however unprofitably it might be. . . . It was manifest that something must be speedily done.

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But the problem whether Manual labor could be profitably introduced into colleges, composed of young men of every variety of characters, was yet to be solved. The experiment so far as it had been made at Hanover was decidedly unfavorable, and the conviction was becoming strong on the minds of many that it was not feasible, not possible. Yet many among the wisest men of the day were of a different opinion and were very urgent that the experiment should not be given up as a failure until thoroughly tested. . . .

[Once it was] evident to all, that the manual labor system could not be sustained without great modifications, the Board . . . changed their plan. They no longer required the students to labor as a part of college duty, yet felt bound to furnish employment to all who desired it. Hence all the various kinds of employment, except the cooperage and printing press were abandoned. . . .

The friends and advocates of the manual labor system were, by the failure of these varied experiments, convinced that however well the system might be adapted to a European population, it was not suited to the genius and habits of American youth. And that although it might succeed even here, on a small scale, with a select company of young men, who "had a mind to work," yet it would be impossible to carry it out successfully with a large number of boys collected together promiscuously, from every grade of society, and with every variety of habits.

The failure of the system soon became apparent in its effects. Those students who were dependent on their own e forts were compelled to leave. This discouraged others who were preparing to enter; and a gradual and pretty rapid decrease of the number of students in the College was the result**. . . . .

[Then] the Board convened for their regular semi-annual meeting at Hanover March 29th, 1836, and found the community greatly excited by the recent appearance of a Pamphlet from the "Hanover Press." It purported to be the Constitution of the "Anti-Slavery Society at Hanover College and Indiana Theological Seminary." As the whole West was just then deeply agitated by the organization of Abolition societies, both in the slave-holding and non slave-holding states, by which churches were divided and fierce political parties formed; the Board regarded the subject as being of sufficient importance to justify some investigation.

**Note: Other causes doubtless concurred in producing this result. The venerable Dr. Blythe, at the close of the college year 1836, resigned his office as President and an interregnum of two years followed. Moreover it was a time of great pecuniary embarrassment throughout the whole West.

[A committee proposed] the following resolution:

Resolved unanimously that it is with deep regret, the Board of Trustees of Hanover College have seen a Pamphlet, recently printed at "Hanover Press," entitled, "Preamble and Constitution of the Anti Slavery Society of Hanover College and Indiana Theological Seminary."

The Trustees and Faculty of Hanover College simply desire the public to know that no such society is authorized by them; nor will be encouraged by those who are interested with the management of the Institution. They moreover have reason to believe that at least nine tenths of the students connected with the institutions entirely disapprove and condemn the course pursued by said Society. It has been the uniform wish and practise of the Faculty of the College, as far as may be consistent with the freedom of personal and private opinion, to discountenance among the students the public discussion of those exciting questions which at present agitate the American public. A leading principle with the authorities of the Institution has been to impress the minds of the students that they come here, not to attempt to guide the public mind, but to be qualified to act an eminent and useful part in future life. They are taught to obey that they may be prepared to command.

In fine the Committee are convinced, that the most prudent and effectual plan of obviating any injurious effects likely to result from the formation or the existence of such a Society, will be to leave it to the influence of the voluntary disapprobation of an enlightened public, and of the officers and students of the Institutions implicated.