

JOURNAL  
OF THE  
Illinois  
State Historical Society

Volume 17  
OCTOBER , 1924, to January, 1925



Entered at Washington, D. C., as Second Class Matter under Act of Congress  
of July 16, 1894.

BINDING  
MAR 14 '41

F  
536  
.I 18  
**338482**  
v. 17  
pt. 2  
1924-25

ILLINOIS PRINTING CO.  
DANVILLE, ILL.



V. 17  
Pt. 2

Vol. XVII

OCTOBER, 1924

No. 3

---

**Journal**

OF THE

**Illinois State  
Historical Society**



Published Quarterly by the  
**Illinois State Historical Society**  
Springfield, Illinois

---

Entered at Washington, D. C., as Second Class Matter under Act of Congress of July 16, 1894, accepted for mailing at special rate of postage provided for in section 1103, Act of October 3, 1917, authorized on July 3, 1918.

[Printed by authority of the State of Illinois.]

## **GIDEON BLACKBURN, THE FOUNDER OF BLACK- BURN UNIVERSITY, CARLINVILLE, ILLINOIS.**

By THOMAS RINAKEE.

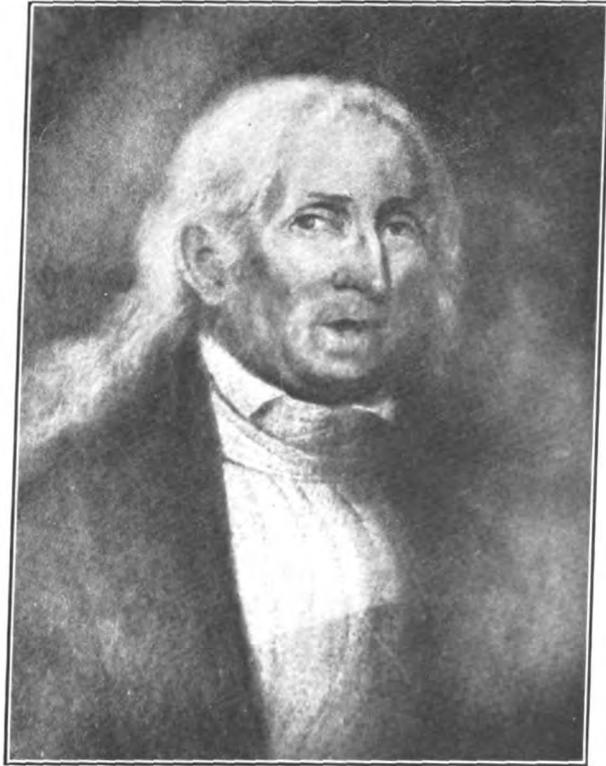
(Address delivered June 4th, 1924, at Blackburn University.)

Following the close of the Revolutionary War, a great tide of emigration from the original settlements in America, flowed south along and westward through the great mountain ridges comprising the Allegheny mountains, to take possession of the rich lands lying beyond those mountains. These lands were the favorite hunting grounds of several Indian tribes and a general knowledge of them came largely through the soldiers returning from service in the Revolutionary armies.

Following the liberal legislation in 1784 setting aside most of Tennessee, Kentucky and Ohio for location of land warrants issued to officers and privates for service during the war, the hunger for land and homes led thousands from the coastal regions of Virginia, English and Scotch-Irish mostly, and Germans from Pennsylvania, back to, along and through those mountains, picking out the best valley lands, following the streams, out into eastern Tennessee. This was the beginning of that marvelous migration, across Kentucky, Indiana and Illinois, covering this richest of all lands with the best class of settlers that ever, in all history, took possession of a wilderness and turned it into a garden filled with homes.

There had been a few scattering attempts at settlements along the western slopes of the mountains, but they had been exterminated by the Indians, so that these new settlers, warned of what they must expect, came in companies and groups, armed with their rifles, prepared to enforce their locations, drive out the natives, and make permanent homes for themselves and those who should follow them.

Before the war thrifty settlements and a few towns had



GIDEON BLACKBURN.

been scattered along the eastern slope and in some of the beautiful and rich valleys of the Blue Ridge, mostly included in what was then Augusta County, Virginia, but from which domain several counties have since been carved. The population was mostly the second generation, the first American born descendants, of these kindred peoples, Anglo-Saxon and Saxon, most of them religious enthusiasts of the various Protestant sects, rather fanatical, most of them, but earnest, zealous, serious minded people, who, for the most part, meant to live and deal righteously with all mankind, but were insistent on their own rights and resentful of encroachments upon them.

The records of the County Court of this County of Augusta in 1754, evidencing the fact that tea was not the only beverage that would incite to protest against outside interference with local rights, and probably the original precursor of the present day McNary-Haugan Bill, contain a numerously signed petition to that court, reciting the evils resulting from the shipping of liquor into the county by the tavern keepers, and praying that it be stopped by the court, in the language of the petitioners, "to encourage us to raise sufficient quantity of grain which would sufficiently supply us with liquors, and the money circulate in this county to the advantage of us."

Among the signers of this prayer for a limited and discriminating prohibition is as thrifty and inspiring a name as that of Alexander Ritchey, a smith, farmer and road builder of those early days.

In this County of Augusta, on August 27, 1772, was born Gideon Blackburn, to whose vision and effort we are indebted for the inspiration and opportunity of this occasion. He was a son of Robert Blackburn, and he a son of Benjamin Blackburn, who, in his will dated August 10, 1786, and recorded in 1791, in Jonesboro, Tennessee, describes himself as "of the State of Franklin and County of Washington," and he was probably a son of the John Blackburn who acquired land in Isle of Wight County, Virginia in 1724. Robert's wife, Gid-

eon's mother, was a Miss Ritchey, whose first name is unknown, but may have been a daughter of the petitioning Ritchey, on the liquor question.

The records of Augusta County contain no mention of the name of Robert Blackburn, either as a taxable, a land owner, or in any way, and the first federal census of heads of families of that county in 1790 contains no such name, and he was probably then living near his father in Tennessee. These same records do show, however, that in August, 1783, it was proven in the County Court that Benjamin Blackburn had been "disabled in the battle of Pt. Pleasant by losing the use of two fingers of his left hand."

These records, however, do mention an Archibald Blackburn, a son-in-law of Rosanna Steele and who must have been grown in November, 1772, and the marriage on August 17, 1785, of Samuel Blackburn and Anna Matthews, daughter of George Matthews, whose will, recorded in the present County of Bath in July, 1835, provides for his wife, Ann, daughter of General George Matthews, frees his slaves, gives his "sword, rifles, silver mounted pistol and imported shot guns and 'Marshal's Life of Washington' to my nephew, Samuel Blackburn, Jr., son of Archibald Blackburn; to my nephew, the Reverend Gideon Blackburn, son of my brother, Robert Blackburn, the balance of my library not hereinbefore specifically disposed of"; and to these and other nephews named the rest of his large estate, which included 815 acres of land in Madison County, Ohio, "patented to him by the Government of the United States."

This uncle, from these records and other dependable authority, was a lawyer of unusual eloquence, for a time a teacher in Georgia, where he served in the Legislature, as he later did in Virginia, and was General Samuel Blackburn, who served under General Washington in the Revolutionary War. Some biographies of Dr. Blackburn say he was a grandson of General Samuel Blackburn, but this is a mistake, as the will, a copy of which I have, shows.

This was not the only Blackburn who, scorning such contemptible pacifist ideas as those embodied in the resolutions recommended to the recent Methodist General Conference, fought bravely for the establishment of this nation of ours and made possible the liberty and blessings now enjoyed by such degenerate weaklings as comprised the Committee on Resolutions of that Conference.

At some unknown date Robert Blackburn and the son, Gideon, joined this exodus and traveled down the Wilderness Pike into eastern Tennessee, where, with the special assistance and encouragement of his mother's brother, Gideon Ritchey, he was educated, chiefly in Martin Academy, Tennessee, but in part by his uncle, John Blackburn, of Jefferson County, and, by 1794 was ordained a minister of the Presbyterian Church, and, as his first charge, went with a company of soldiers to garrison a fort for the protection of the settlers against the Indians, located upon the site of the present city of Maryville, Tennessee, where he preached to these pioneers, he and they, all carrying their rifles to their only place for services, the open air, sheltered only by the trees, and with sentinels stationed to warn against the approach of the hostile savages.

With the same spirit and under equal personal danger, one of the first class from this his own college, another pioneer on the further frontier of Utah, threatened by direct warning from Brigham Young, carried his pistol into his pulpit and preached with it, loaded, lying beside the Bible from which he took his text.\*

By 1803, with a wide reputation as a very remarkably eloquent and successful pulpit orator, Gideon Blackburn was a member of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, meeting at Philadelphia, prominent and active in its proceedings, was by it made a missionary to the Cherokee Indians in their home land, then comprising part of Tennessee, North Carolina and Georgia, with what was then a large appropriation for his mission, and later raised over \$5,000

---

\* Rev. Duncan J. McMillan, now of New York, Class of 1870, Blackburn University.

and many supplies for that work by an extensive tour he made through the northern states, and established schools with several hundred Indian children in attendance upon them, and for seven years encouraged them in their efforts toward civilization.

About 1812, as recorded in Parton's *Life of Jackson*, he formed the acquaintance of General Andrew Jackson and assisted him in raising and organizing troops in the Creek Indian War, and formed a lasting friendship with that remarkable character, whose wife was a member of his congregation, calling him in her letters as quoted in that work, her "spiritual father," "her father in the Gospel, Parson Blackburn." Out of regard for her interest in him and his work, General Jackson built on his Hermitage farm, the little brick church, which Mr. Bell, of the class of '75 has visited and described, where Dr. Blackburn often preached with General Jackson in his congregation, and in which, as Parton says, Jackson himself was admitted into the Presbyterian Church in 1839, on open profession of the faith of that church.

The territorial legislature of Tennessee on August 29th, 1794, incorporated "Greenville College," naming Gideon Blackburn the sixth of its fourteen trustees and on June 29, 1795, it incorporated "Washington College at Salem," with Gideon Blackburn the seventh of its twenty-nine trustees. He taught at Hiwassee, Georgia, Harpath Academy, Independent Academy, was for three years president of Center College at Danville, Kentucky, while all the time preaching and adding to his reputation as a remarkably effective minister of unusual eloquence.

John Reynolds, then a college student in Knoxville, Tennessee, and afterwards Governor of Illinois, says in his book, "My Own Times," "About 1809, I well remember, at one of these exhibitions, the celebrated pulpit orator, Gideon Blackburn, was present. This gentleman was the most eloquent divine I ever heard and his address to the students was a matchless piece of eloquence."

In 1830 he served as an agent of the Kentucky State Temperance Society and for a time in 1835 was a trustee and financial agent of Illinois College in an effort to raise funds in the east for that institution.

In 1831 he made his first, a short visit to Illinois, and in March, 1833, returned and entered 560 acres of land some three miles southwest of Chesterfield, Macoupin County, Illinois, and in October of that year, freeing his slaves in Kentucky, he led a colony of his kinspeople out to this land where they located around what is yet known as the Blackburn Bridge over Macoupin Creek, and the following June, 1834, he organized at that place, "Spring Cove Presbyterian Church," and a few days later, the Presbyterian Church in Carlinville, of which his son, Samuel E. Blackburn, was first pastor and whose daughter, Mrs. Ranney, yet lives in Bloomington, Illinois.

It is proper to note that at the time Dr. Blackburn moved to Macoupin County, his close personal friend of more than twenty years standing, Andrew Jackson, was at the height of his power and influence, in the first year of his second term as president, and that no citizen of our county was ever so personally intimate with a president as Dr. Blackburn, not excepting the long and well-known friendship of President Lincoln and Governor Palmer. Dr. Blackburn, the founder, and Governor Palmer, for forty years president of the board of trustees, of this "Institution of Learning" of ours.

The Indian titles to lands in Illinois were finally extinguished by the treaty following the close of the Black Hawk War in 1832 and there followed at once a renewed flood of immigration into the State, coming largely from Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina and Georgia, most of them opponents of slavery who sought homes which should be free from its influence, and a period of rapid and extravagant improvement and development swept the State and continued until the collapse and panic of 1837.

During this time Illinois lands were in demand. Illinois College, Shurtleff and McKendree, affiliated with different

denominations, had recently been established, and, with his experience and enthusiasm in educational work, and his clear vision of the future of this rich region, Dr. Blackburn saw an opportunity and devised a plan of establishing another college, not controlled by or restricted to a single denomination. His plan was to locate and enter lands for capitalists upon a percentage basis, whereby two-thirds of the commission charged should be invested in Illinois lands for the endowment of "an Institution of Learning, the object of which shall be to promote the general interests of education, and to qualify young men for the office of the Gospel ministry by giving them such instruction in the Holy Scriptures as may enable them to perform the duties of that high and holy vocation acceptably and usefully in the world," to quote his language in the deed of trust as executed by him, broad and explicit enough to include all denominations.

Under his eloquent and vigorous efforts, this plan disposed of over 64,000 acres of land in this part of Illinois, at two dollars per acre, a total, prior to May 31st, 1837, of over one hundred twenty-eight thousand dollars, and provided a total of 16,656.18 acres, practically all of it in Macoupin County, which, with the four town lots in Carlinville, now constituting the Knotts homestead, he conveyed by deed of that date to seven trustees, but one of whom, Tristram P. Hoxsey, was a citizen of the county.

The other trustees were already interested in Illinois College and, probably through this fact, the entire endowment was at one time transferred to Illinois College and a Blackburn Theological Professorship established by it, until, through the litigation that followed, two decisions by the Supreme Court restored the property to the control of trustees to be administered under the terms of Dr. Blackburn's Deed of Trust and permanently upon the eighty acres of land designated in it as "the site for the permanent location of the institution," notwithstanding the vigorous opposition of Illinois College with Abraham Lincoln its chief attorney in the Supreme Court. William Weer, husband of a grand-daughter

of Dr. Blackburn, is the only attorney reported as opposing the obvious attempt of the then trustees to confirm the absorption of the endowment by Illinois College.

The trustees were, under the deed of trust, charged with the duty of procuring the incorporation of the institution, which duty was performed by the acceptance of an Act of the Legislature passed and approved February 13, 1857, a former Act having been refused as not sufficiently conforming to the requirements of the Deed of Trust.

Thus, after twenty years, confirmed by our Supreme Court and encouraged by the State, particularly, with the sixth clause of its charter, "All property, real, personal or mixed, of said incorporation, shall be forever free from taxation for all and every purpose whatever," the plan was in complete and perfect operation, ready to begin the work designed by Dr. Blackburn, with Hon. John M. Palmer, president of the board, and Hon. David A. Smith of Jacksonville, one of the original trustees, and Dr. Blackburn's attorney and administrator, and his son, Anderson M. Blackburn, two of the incorporators.

To a daughter of this Anderson M. Blackburn, Mrs. Emma Blackburn Corn, wife of Judge S. Thompson Corn, our former townsman, now of Ogden, Utah, and to Mrs. Jane M. Ranney, another grand-daughter who lived in his family and remembers his sickness and death, I am indebted for much of the information contained in this paper, designed to localize and to familiarize us with this very remarkable man to whom we as citizens and students are so much indebted.

On August 23rd, 1838, lacking but four days of completing his sixty-sixth year, at his home on the farm next east of the College farm, after months of confinement to his bed from a broken hip, and years of suffering from a cancer on his face, from a short, acute illness, Dr. Gideon Blackburn died and was buried in the Carlinville cemetery where a modest but appropriate marble monument marks his last resting place. This monument also contains the name of his

son, Gideon H., and of his wife, Grizzel, a daughter of John Blackburn.

At the time of his death he was easily the leading and probably the wealthiest citizen of the county, his estate, in that year of financial depression, exceeding \$45,000 in value, and including over six thousand acres of land, many town lots in Carlinville, and including one of the three first brick, and the first two-story brick building built on our public square and which yet stands as the front 42 feet of the Boice, Robertson, Sonneman building.

On July 4, 1839, his library of over six hundred volumes, was, with many of his lots, sold at public auction in the public square of Carlinville, with A. McKim Dubois, clerk of the sale, and, among the purchasers, were Judge William Thomas, then a Judge of the Supreme Court; Elisha I. Palmer, David A. Smith, Abram S. Walker, father of Charles A. Walker, who bought a three-volume copy of "Blackstone's Commentaries"; Robert W. Glass, "Theological Seminary" (probably the trustees under the Deed of Trust acting in this name), and Beatty T. Burke.

His administrator collected two installments of the legacies from the estate of his uncle, General Samuel Blackburn, paid taxes on lands in Ohio and collected over \$3,000 as proceeds of a sale of nearly 400 acres of land in Kentucky, and the records of our recorder's office show by two certificates executed by him, that in October, 1833, in Kentucky, he had freed two slaves who had later accompanied him to Illinois as hired servants, one "Peggy," a woman of color, the other, "Basil Gamble," whom his grand-daughter, Mrs. Ranney, writes me, she remembers as living in little cabins near Dr. Blackburn's first Illinois home below Chesterfield.

His was a remarkable life, not long, but wonderful in its activity and accomplishments.

A resident of at least five states and associate of leading citizens of each, a close personal friend of one of our greatest Presidents, an Indian fighter and then a missionary to the Indians, a minister to the pioneers in the wilderness and for

three years in the aristocratic church of Louisville, Kentucky, organizer of schools for Indians and for whites, instructor of students for the ministry in their theological studies, college president, temperance lecturer in the bourbon state, financial agent of Illinois College, dealer in real estate on a vast scale in the then frontier State of Illinois, endowing a college with nearly a township of rich Illinois land secured by his personal solicitation and effort and all before a line of railroad had been built in Illinois, is a marvelous record for one man and its constant repetition should be a continuing inspiration to the young men coming to this his "Institution of Learning," with opportunities and facilities so immeasurably greater than his.

Lacking his vision and his energy, the trustees selected by him and their successors have let slip from their hands every acre of the magnificent endowment he provided, but the inalienable college site, and, but for the providential discovery by the trustees twelve years ago of another man of vision and energy on his brush farm in Pennsylvania, awaiting an opening, the doors of the college would have closed.

We are proud of the great work of Dr. Hudson in building up the assets of the institution to more than three-quarters of a million dollars, a very remarkable achievement; we are grateful for the munificent, the splendid contributions of the Stoddards, and of Senator McKinley and Col. Smith and of Senator Woodson, and of Mr. Damon and for the valued help of many others, but those 16,000 acres of well selected Illinois land conveyed by this backwoods new school Presbyterian preacher, Dr. Blackburn, to his trustees are today easily worth twice our present assets.

So much for the past.

You, the 55th class to share in the advantages provided through the foresight and the efforts of these two men, Dr. Blackburn, in the days of frontier poverty and limited facilities, and Dr. Hudson, in these days when the seed of pioneer struggle and adversity has ripened into a fruitage of wealth and opportunity so great as to be fairly beyond the power of

man to grasp or realize, and we who have so long enjoyed them, should be, and are, far more interested in the future and in planning for the welfare of the people of this wonderful land of ours, than in reciting and praising the accomplishments of the past save as an incentive to further endeavor on our part.

The very development of the present and the wealth accumulated through it, have added enormous responsibilities to those who are to pass along and to participate in the opportunities of the future. The heritage we have received must be preserved and transmitted, with every addition we can make to it, to those to come after us, and it is from such institutions as this must come the leaders of this future, filled with high aspirations and ambitions and guided with sound and sane ideas.

The present "Self Help" plan of Blackburn is in complete harmony with the ideas and life work of Dr. Blackburn, and should produce among its graduates a larger proportion of strong and vigorous leaders than other colleges, because its students are particularly selected from those who from their situation cannot realize their ambition for a higher education except by their own efforts. Not that every college has not always had some such students, but that it is undoubtedly true that from their number in all colleges, have come in far greater proportion the most distinguished alumni of whom they boast.

If this assertion is correct, it emphasizes the duty of Blackburn's faculty and trustees to see to it that no unsound or dangerous or merely experimental ideas shall be inculcated, but that they shall "prove all things and hold fast to that which is good."

In the same year, 1837, that Dr. Blackburn's deed of trust laid the foundation for this institution, Robert Owen, in England, first applied to the political and economic theories he was advocating, the term socialism, and from about that time he and his German co-agitator, Karl Marx, proclaimed a theory which, in its popular application, declared a state of

warfare between labor and capital, between the laborer and his employer, and, by its plausibility and its appeal to the improvident, the poverty stricken, the visionary and the dissatisfied, has spread its influence throughout Europe and our country. It demands the taking over of capital and denounces those who have it, as robbers whose capital is the accumulation of the unpaid and misappropriated wages of labor and openly advocates its recapture by such means as the single tax and is easily adapted to justify and demand the harsher methods of the Russian Soviet. It permeates some colleges and taints their students. It has resulted, from the fact that the laborer is no longer urged to a maximum of effort and skill as a means of advancement of himself and his family, in a lowering of individual effort and production, in extravagance, and waste, in a loss of ambition and in the creation of permanent classes of laborers intent only on a maximum of return for a minimum of effort, perverting the equality of opportunity intended by our constitution into a mere equality of income and expenditure, and wholly ignoring the inspiration of individual ambition.

The unrest and strife of the world today is largely due to the conflict between these unsound and destructive theories and the conditions existing as the outgrowth of the countless ages of human existence and experiences which have produced our present civilization, and this unrest will continue until, by education or by such chaotic experiences as that of Russia, their unsoundness shall be demonstrated and they shall be abandoned.

Our civilization is the outgrowth of a theory well expressed in the words "as a man soweth, so shall he reap," and encourages the individual by his own effort to rise above his surroundings and rewards and encourages him according to his efforts, punishing him for his lack of effort, while the Marxian theory deals with the individual as a wholly negligible atom of the class in which he may begin his existence, a pawn in the hands of the leaders of his class in their avowed warfare with the class composed of those who have thrift, initiative, vision and ambition.

The one idea led Dr. Blackburn from Virginia into the wilderness and into a college, and gave him the inspiration for his wonderful effort and accomplishment, while the opposing idea would have left him back in Augusta County, Virginia, content to be one of the protestants against the open shop of that day, demanding only the opportunity to raise enough grain to supply the liquor required for the inhabitants of that county—the “better living conditions” of the present day agitator.

Such a college as Gideon Blackburn founded “to promote the general interests of education” as the greatest necessity for the young of the new empire he foresaw coming upon these prairies, and wisely prescribing “instruction in the Holy Scriptures” as the greatest source of inspiration for and the soundest instruction for right living and in leadership and authority, supplemented in these days of so many colleges, with the inspiring suggestion of Dr. Hudson, that special effort be here made to extend this opportunity to those who can obtain an education only by their own effort, provides here in our midst an opportunity to combat error and to do good that cannot be excelled.

What has been accomplished in these eighty-seven years, if we of today and those who follow us, have only a little of the foresight and the inspiration of Dr. Blackburn, is but the beginning of an influence and a means for good that shall endure while time shall last, for this Institution of Learning is especially consecrated to the education of the young in the “Holy Scriptures,” the lessons of which, whether they be an epitome of the best thought of countless ages of developing man, or a direct message of literal inspiration, applied to the solution of the problems of government and of our social relations, furnish the surest if not the only cure for the present world-wide unrest.