Pullman’s Military College

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In July of 1891, the city of Pullman won what the July 24th Pullman Herald titled “a great prize” – a new college to be located in the town. However, this college was not what later became Washington State University; that school had been awarded to Pullman just a few months earlier on April 25th. However, legal and political issues were still being contested, and whether Pullman would actually receive the college was in doubt. This “great prize” was instead a military college, the Latah Academy of Latah, Washington, and the plan was to move it to Pullman in the fall of that year.

In that July 24th, 1891 Pullman Herald article, the school’s head, Major W.S. Walker, praised Pullman’s unexcelled railroad facilities and the fact that “the moral surroundings of the town are of the best,” as reasons for the move. The same article noted that Pullman closed the deal with the payment of a “handsome subsidy for the location of the school.”

Major Walker had initiated the move, being unhappy with the way the city of Latah funded and oversaw his school, and toured numerous cities in the Palouse region in late June and early July seeking a new location. He knew of the issues affecting Pullman’s efforts to ensure receiving the state college that they had been awarded, and argued that bringing in the Military College ensured that Pullman was a college town, no matter the eventual result of the political wrangling over the state institution. Walker was successful in persuading Pullman’s city elders, and it was agreed that the school should come to Pullman.

Though the Herald reported this process as moving the school to Pullman, the Latah school did subsequently remain active in its original facility, with a Professor H.A. Ellis (a former student of Walker’s at the school) as its head.¹ A public exchange in the letters pages of the Spokane Review followed between G.W. Coplen of Latah and Walker, disputing the “moving” of the school and whether Walker left or was released. Major Walker contended that the departure of all of the faculty, and the non-Latah resident students, constituted moving the school.² A similar debate over whether Walker was truly a military veteran was settled when the city of Pullman received his military records from the government and publicly affirmed his military history in the Herald.

In 1891, Pullman’s new brick public schoolhouse (in the site of the later-built Gladish school) was under construction, rendering their existing wooden schoolhouse next door redundant. While the original plans called for the Military College’s classes to be held in that building, work on the new public school did not proceed as anticipated (it was not completed until fall of 1892) and it soon became clear that the old school would not be available to the Military College on time. Businessmen W.V. Windus, E.H. Letterman, Dr. H.J. Webb, the Farris brothers, Thomas Neill, and M.C. True arranged and donated land for the school’s eventual location on Pullman’s then-unpopulated northwest hill, and also donated the $7500 required to build the buildings.³ Construction of a new school with two sets of barracks began in early to mid-August. The school was located at the northwest corner of what was platted as State Street and True Street (block 24 of the College Hill addition); the classroom building faced south and was located between and slightly north of the two barracks.
While the barracks were smaller one-story buildings, each 64 feet east-west and 20 feet north-south, the main schoolhouse was a grander facility, with three stories and sized at 44 feet east-west and 66 feet north-south. It was designed by Pullman architect William Swain, whose best-known surviving work is undoubtedly Pullman’s Greystone Church, and whose Swain House (across from Gladish at 315 W. Main Street, Pullman) is on the National Register of Historic Places. The College’s main floor consisted of open space and a stage, and could be suited to any number of uses, including chapel, lecture, drill, and gymnastics. A portrait of George Washington “in heroic size” was mounted on the back of the stage. Stairs from the stage rose to the second floor, which was solely a five-foot wide balcony running around three sides of the building. From the balcony, stairs at the school’s front led to the third floor which consisted of several rooms used for recitation and study. A tower above brought the building to a total height of 66 feet. The original plans called for a basement and two stories; it is unclear from later descriptions if the basement in these plans is what became the main floor, or if a basement existed beneath that main floor. The two floors / three floors discrepancy occurs in a number of places, and is likely simply due to whether or not they consider the balcony an actual floor. Local civil engineer and surveyor G.W. Horner laid the buildings’ foundations.
Classes at the Pullman Military College began on October 5th, 1891, though at that point the main building was still unfinished, and only the barracks were available for use. The school was coeducational, attended by young men and women alike; the initial enrollment is given as 46 students, reaching over 60 by the end of the month. Other reports say that in mid-November there were 19 students living in the barracks, but the difference could be a result of local attendees who lived at home rather than in the barracks. In Latah, the school had a population of 85 students, and Walker had hoped to double that in Pullman.

Major Walker was popularly described as the school’s commandant, and in addition to running the school he also taught sciences and ancient and modern languages. Wayne Scott Walker had been born in January, 1846, in Scotland, a native Gallic (Scots) speaker, and emigrated to the U.S. in 1862, taking up residence in Terre Haute, Indiana. Upon his 18th birthday in January of 1864 he enlisted in the Union Army (11th Regiment, Indiana Cavalry), and his rank when he was honorably discharged in June of 1865 is listed as “bugler.” At some point he moved to Neoga Township, Illinois, and began teaching school. He married Florence Helton there in late 1871, and their first child, Byron, was born less than six months later. By 1875 Walker was at the Lebanon Valley College (Pennsylvania) chapel, and in 1876, following the July birth of his second son, Neil, he brought his family west to Philomath, Oregon, where he had been appointed President of Philomath College, a religious school affiliated with the United Brethren of Christ (UBC). By his time in Philomath, Walker was listed as holding an A.M. (Master of Arts) degree, though his college is unclear. According to UBC archivists, his college was most likely Westfield College, in Illinois, though the records from that time are lost. Years later his Philomath colleague Henry Sheak described Walker as “a man of profound scholarship, extensive research, commanding presence and of administrative ability.” In addition to serving as school president, Walker was listed as “Professor of Mental and Moral Science, and Ancient and Modern Languages” as well as “Teacher of Drawing, Painting, and Vocal Music.” Some reports from his time in Philomath list him as a Reverend, but this is not uniformly the case, leading to the assumption this may have been an honorary school title, as his rank of Major at the Latah/Pullman schools appears to have been. He remained in Philomath for eight years (no other president of that era at that school lasted more than one or two years). While some
reports note his moral strictness and discipline, others say that his administration was torn by
dissension; the greater UBC itself was undergoing an internal crisis that resulted in an 1889 schism.
Apparently, however, Walker’s departure was more related to funding disputes than religion.  Leaving
Philomath in 1884 as a result of conflicts within the administrative board there, Walker moved to an
1885-1887 position as principal in a United Brethren-owned Brownsville, Oregon school, from there to
the same role in the UBC’s Washington Seminary in Huntsville, Washington from 1887-1889, and then to
the non-religious Latah Academy in 1889, where he also served as chaplain.

Other Pullman instructors included First Lieutenant Charles Milton Baldwin of Pomeroy, intermediate
grade (Baldwin had been with Walker at his two previous positions, and later became a Washington
State Senator from Garfield County); Second Lieutenant M.E. Hall, Adjutant, grammar and history, of
Latah (later of Tekoa); Captain F.L. Evans, tactician; Captain Flavus Brooks of Farmington, math; and
George W. Bailey of Milton, Oregon, chaplain. The latter two subsequently both taught at Onecho
(south of Colfax), and Bailey later planned a “Saints Home and School” for Union Flats. The intent to hire
a business instructor was also stated, and it was noted that pupils holding county teacher’s certificates
might also be given charge of certain classes.

In addition to listing the projected faculty, the July 25th Pullman Herald listed the courses of study.
Three primary ones were proposed for the Pullman Military College: literary, scientific, and philosophic.
Advertisements in Palouse-region newspapers and as far away as Spokane described the school as
offering “all courses, with Preparatory, Business, and Teachers’ Drill Departments.”  It should be noted
that although the school was called a Military College it had no official association with any branch of
the military. Only the young men, not the women, were to be given military training. The local
newspaper noted that military training was secondary to education. Moreover, the mandatory uniforms
served as economic levelers, as with everyone in the same clothing “there can be no distinction in dress
between the rich and the poor.”

One of the few known photographs of
Major Walker, taken in the Bonners
Ferry area between 1910 and 1926.

History of Boundary County, Idaho.
Historical Society. Bonners Ferry, WA.
Used with permission.
Unlike the coming state college, the Military College charged tuition to support itself; in January of 1892 a three month term cost $8 for preparatory schooling (equivalent to modern elementary school, but offered for adults), $9 for academic (equivalent to modern high school), and $10 for collegiate. In addition, room and board, if needed, cost between $2.25 and $3 per week. Students who excelled were rewarded with discounted tuition and board, along with advances in military rank.⁸

Before the college’s location on Pullman’s northwest hill was announced there had been no buildings there, but its placement led to immediate development. School faculty built homes there (Walker, Evans, and Bailey all had homes near the school), and townspeople quickly began moving onto the hill. The Pullman Herald of August 14ᵗʰ, 1891 noted the sale of 25 lots on that hill in the preceding week, and in late October the city ordered the grading of State Street up the slope of the hill. By November of 1891 there was $12,000 in total building value on the hill, with more houses under construction⁹; Commandant Walker’s own home was noted as nearing completion in the November 6ᵗʰ Pullman Herald.

As the year 1892 and the school’s second term began, the main building had been completed and the school was solidly established with 40 desks, 48 chairs, and 40 yards of blackboard. The Spokane Review reported enrollment in January at between 66 and 69, with the school having a capacity of 200. A school newspaper, The Cadet, to be 8 pages with 3 columns per page, was planned for production in March or April, though it is unclear if any issues were ever actually printed.¹⁰

January of 1892 also saw the first classes of Pullman’s second college, the Washington Agricultural College and School of Science (later WAC, WSC, and then finally Washington State University). The two
schools apparently built a supportive relationship, and on February 21st the Military College held an open house and reception for the citizens of Pullman and the new students and staff of the state college, presenting a number of diverse exercises. The schools’ relationship quickly extended to athletics, and on Saturday, March 10th of that year both schools met in the first baseball game for each. The farmers of the state college proved to be too much for the Military, and the game was called after six innings with the state school having a 26-0 lead. Reports note that Military College first baseman Hale Daggett suffered a broken arm when WAC right-fielder John Jacobs collided with him at first base.

The following month, WAC President George Lilley held an elaborate Arbor Day festival on April 15th, and Military College commandant Walker brought his students over to participate. They entertained the agricultural school with a military drill performance, and Walker himself gave a lengthy speech regarding “the pioneer and martyr of civilization in Washington, Dr. Marcus Whitman,” and planted a Douglas Fir there in Whitman’s honor. The full text of Walker’s speech can be found in the April 1892 College Record (the predecessor paper to WSU’s Evergreen). Walker was an active public speaker in the greater Pullman community; the program from the October 22nd, 1892 Columbus Day dedication of Pullman’s new public school building features Major Walker giving a dedicatory address.

As the school’s second full year neared its start, enrollment was expected to be at least 100, and it reached 114 in the spring. Fall of 1892 also saw the addition of a night school, run by Lieutenant Hall, for students in the commercial program. On Saturday, December 10th, 1892, the Military College
cleared the floor of its main school building for use as a roller skating rink, and invited the students of the agricultural college to a skating and whist party. Wagons were provided to transport the 30 state students over, but inclement weather and insufficient teams forced the men to hike up the hill to the Military school; the women, traveling by wagon, took 15 minutes longer to accomplish the climb. Reports in the December, 1892 College Record report the event as a great success, despite tracked-in snow proving to be a hazard to skaters, and despite the return trip to the state college taking so long that the skaters found themselves locked out of their dormitories upon making it back, after hours, to their school. The favor was shortly returned as on the following February 24th the state school invited the military students to their College Hall for a joint dance. When the state college purchased a supply of rifles in February for military training the two schools announced that joint drilling would begin once the state college constructed an armory. 15 Sadly, this pleasant state of affairs ended less than two weeks later.

The evening of Thursday, March 9th, 1893 began normally, with a Military College debating society meeting in the main building past 11 PM before retiring for the night with a fire still burning in the stove. Shortly after midnight on Friday morning, the building caught fire; this was quickly discovered and the alarm bell sounded at 12:10 AM but proved sufficient to rouse only a small portion of the town. The March 17th Pullman Herald reports that the bell-ringer was insufficiently trained, and failed to sound the bell loudly enough. By the time the hose cart arrived and the hose reached the fire the main building was a lost cause, though firemen did save both barracks. Only the guns were saved from the main building; the total loss was estimated at $4,500. Since the Military College was only partially insured (the building itself was insured at $2,000 plus $325 for furnishings) the school was left well shy of the necessary funds to rebuild. 16

Although that week’s Pullman Herald opined that classes should continue, possibly in Pullman’s old schoolhouse which had once been planned for the Military College’s home, classes were instead canceled. Plans were drawn for a $15,000 building to replace the burned college, and in early May it was announced by Major Walker that $2000 had been raised. 17 However, by 1893 the town was in debt following numerous community improvements, and with the country and region in the early stages of a depression the city proved unable or unwilling to rebuild the school. On May 15th Major Walker and his family left Pullman and moved to Hayden Lake, Idaho. 18 The Military College never reopened. After his time in Pullman, Walker spent the rest of his working life teaching, store-keeping, and truck farming in Hayden Lake, Kellogg, Moravia, and Bonners Ferry, where he retired in 1910. He served two terms in the Idaho State Senate, from 1917-1920, but is best remembered in Bonners Ferry for painting murals of historic events in his house and around town, though no murals have survived to present day. He apparently returned to Pullman only once, twenty-seven years after the fire, to retrieve a family-owned historic pipe organ which had been left with a local church. 19 After moving to Spokane in 1926, Major Walker passed away there at his son Byron’s house on February 20th, 1934, and was buried in Bonners Ferry’s Grandview Cemetery. 20

In early July, 1893, only four months after the fire, the two remaining barracks were sold off to Chaplain George Bailey in a tax sale. 21 Later reports say that a number of the students transferred to the state college, but that most simply returned to their homes. Judge Thomas Neill noted that the presence of
the state college, which was in a more secure financial position, hindered the rebuilding of the Military College. 22

Despite existing for less than 19 months, the Pullman Military College had a lasting effect on the town. As site of the town’s first college, the northwest hill had become popularly known to townsfolk as College Hill (the optimistic label actually predated the placement of either school), but after the military school had burned to the ground, leaving the agricultural school as Pullman’s only college, the name quickly proved confusing. It didn’t take very long before Pullman’s northeast hill also became known as College Hill, and to clarify which College Hill was being referred to, townspeople were soon referring to the hill which had hosted the Military College as Military Hill.

References:

5. College Record. December, 1892.
6. Pullman Herald. October 9, 1891.
10. College Record. March, 1892.
11. College Record. February, 1892.
12. College Record. March, 1892.
   http://refbase.wsulibs.wsu.edu/pullmanherald/
17. Pullman Herald. May 12, 1893.