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Hometown History

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### Ridgeville College

In 1867, the Free Will Baptist Society and Reverend John Collier started Ridgeville College. The Free Will Baptist Society is a fellowship of members that believed in the faith and the teachings of the Bible. The college was located on five acres of ground that was given by a fellow community member, Mr. Arthur Mckew. Mr. Arthur Mckew was a grain dealer and Banker born in Cincinnati, Ohio. He lived in Ridgeville, Indiana with his wife Nancy D. Coon. He passed away in January of 1882, and was buried in the Reitenour Cemetery located on Country Road 100 and 28 in Ridgeville. Due to Mr. Mckew's generous donations, the construction for Ridgeville College finally was able to begin.

The foundation of the college was laid in 1867, construction later began in 1868, and the college was finalized in 1869. After the college was finalized it had a rough start due to lack of funds. Jay and Randolph County eventually made an offer that the conference could raise up to \$70,000 to cover the construction of the college. Ridgeville College started classes in 1868, but the building was not finished until the 1870's. The college was a four-story building, with a 2,000 plus volume library, and contained a very large basement that was used as their kitchen and lunch room. In the College hall, it seated 400 people and the chapel seated 150 people. Despite being a one-floor campus, Ridgeville College also served as an entertainment venue; for example, in 1885, they held an opera program for the students to attend. The college was

located at the connection of the “Panhandle Railroad” and Grand Rapids, which was about 20 miles from Union City. Once the school was up and running, students began coming from all around to attend the college.

At the college, they offered two degrees: Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science. Later on, under new owners, students had the ability to study three principles. Those three were scholarship, experience and Christian character. . There are other courses that were added later which included commercial, music, typing and writing, and stenographic. The cost of college was way different back then; for twelve weeks it was \$8.00. Students could live there for \$2.50 a week and it included furnished dormitories. With the school up and running and receiving funds from parents and the community; the students were able to make their first issue about the college in a newspaper called “The College Cycle” in May 1892. “Coup De Plume Translates to Stroke of The Pen.”<sup>1</sup> Students that attended Ridgeville College were some of the very few individuals who were able to attend college at the time. Although they were privileged enough to attend this college, they had many rules they were expected to follow.

When students get to the school, you first go to the president's office. Then the president, or principal, will inform the student about boarding, rooms, and class. Then the students will have to,” Leave your trunk at the depot”<sup>2</sup>. Also the students have to go straight to the office and they can’t make any plans until after they go to the office. These are the things that Ridgeville College students had to do when they first got to the school. Ridgeville college also had many rules twelve in total. One of these rules is rule number seven which was,” 7. All students are required to attend chapel exercises daily, unless excused, and also public worship once on each

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<sup>1</sup> Marshall Chris, “Ridgeville Public Library”, May 24, 2018, <https://ridgeville.lib.in.us/a-homepage-section/ridgeville-college/>

<sup>2</sup> Catalog of Ridgeville College 1890-1891

Sabbath at the College chapel, or at the place of their choice, or where their parents or guardians may direct, unless excused by some member of the Faculty.”<sup>3</sup> Another one of the college's rules is rule number 11 which is ,”I I. Ladies must secure the privilege of the parlor or sitting room at the place where they obtain their private rooms, for the reception of such company would not be proper for them to receive in their own rooms.”<sup>4</sup> These are just some of the many rules that Ridgeville college had. In order to keep the school functioning and running smoothly the school had to hire a staff of professors and others.

Ridgeville College had many individuals who worked for the college and they each had their own important rule to play to make the college the best it could possibly be. One of these people is H.C. Garvin Ph. D, who was a professor of metal and greek sciences, and he was also the president, the school was so small that the president was also a professor. Another employee was Eunice Curtis, instructor in Literature and English. There was also John Trafzer who was a Mathematics instructor. Wilhelma C. Gravin was a German instructor at the college. Another employee was James T. Stanley who was a physiology professor at Ridgeville College. These are just some of the many wonderful professors that worked at Ridgeville college at the time.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Catalog of Ridgeville College 1887

<sup>4</sup> Catalog of Ridgeville College 1887

<sup>5</sup> Ridgeville College announcement, 1899

Unfortunately the college was short-lived and these people were let go as a new ownership took

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over. The ownership of the college was transferred to the Congregational Church in 1892. At this time there was a faculty of 8 men and women. The acting president at this time was William C. Kruse. The college closed in the spring of May 1901. Eventually the college was abandoned but then the Lay Brush and Broom company bought the college and occupied it. Which was a broom company owned by Joseph Lay. The college was destroyed when the Lay Brush and Broom company vacated the facility in 1891.

Ridgeville College was different from what colleges are now. Although the Ridgeville College is not intact anymore it still has all of its history with it. Ridgeville College helped its community during its time and allowed people to further their education and expand their horizons.

