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*The Beall-Dawson House, c. 1815
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THE BRIARLEY HALL SCHOOLS

by Mary Charlotte Crook

Public schools in Montgomery County, and in all of Maryland in fact, had a slow beginning. Hence there were many private schools in the County in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While little is known about many of these private schools, there is sufficient documentation available to piece together the story of a school that operated in Montgomery County for about 50 years. Located in Poolesville on the road between Poolesville and Beallsville, it was originally Briarley Hall Female academy. Later it was known as Briarley Hall Seminary for young ladies and little girls. In its final stage it was Briarley Hall Military Academy for boys eight years old through high school.

Briarley Hall Female Academy was founded in 1874 by Mrs. Mary E. Porter. Mary E.

Porter, born Mary Catlett, was the daughter of Mary Gassaway Dorsey Catlett and her second husband, Grandison Catlett. Mary Catlett was born about December 1816 in Maryland, but at the time of her marriage she was living in Loudoun County, Virginia. She was married on April 23, 1839, at the home of her uncle, Charles Gassaway, in Leesburg, Virginia, to David William Porter of Sandy Spring.¹ The couple had one child, Williametta, born in 1841 before the untimely death of David William Porter on December 1, 1841, at the age of 28.

Mary E. Porter turned to teaching to support herself and her daughter. Her first school was in Brookeville. In 1844, she bought from Solomon Barrick and his wife, Sophia A., Lots 44, 45, and 46 in Brookeville for \$600.² (Lot 44 is now 210 Market Street, Brookeville.) It was here that Mrs. Porter began her Cottage School for young ladies, a school which earned a reputation for thorough and patient instruction and strict family discipline.³

In 1864, Mary Porter sold Lots 44, 45, and 46 in Brookeville to William E. Magruder for \$2000.⁴ However it was not until 1874 that she and her daughter, Williametta, bought 12 3/4 acres of "Chiswell's Inheritance" in Poolesville from Robert J. Isherwood and his wife, Isabella.⁵ In 1876, they purchased an adjoining four acres from the Isherwoods.⁶ It was on the 12-acre tract that Briarley Hall Female Academy was established.

An advertisement for the new school appeared in the *Sentinel* on July 10, 1874. It read as follows:

FEMALE ACADEMY

BRIARLEY HALL,

A BOARDING and DAY SCHOOL FOR GIRLS.

Mrs. MARY E. PORTER and Miss WILLIE E. PORTER, Principals.

Will be opened SEPTEMBER 16th, 1874, one half mile from Poolesville, and four miles from Sellman's Station, on the Metropolitan Railroad.

A Stage between these points passes the premises four times daily.

For farther particulars apply to the Principals, Poolesville P.O., Montgomery county, Md.

1. *Loudoun County Virginia Marriage Records to 1881*, compiled by Aurelia M. Jewell (Berryville, VA: Virginia Book Company, 1975), p. 124.

2. *Montgomery County Land Records*, Book STS 1, p. 45.

3. *Montgomery County Sentinel*, August 11, 1855

4. *Montgomery County Land Records*, Book EBP 1, p. 310.

5. *Ibid.*, Book EBP 12, p. 75.

6. *Ibid.*, Book EBP 16, p. 251.

Little is known about the Briarley Hall Female Academy. A three-story frame building, which faced east, was both school and home to Mary Porter and Willie. A broad expanse of lawn in front of the building was beautified by trees, shrubs, and flowers. Subjects taught at the school in Brookeville had included philosophy, chemistry, physiology, and botany.⁷ It can be assumed that these subjects were also taught at Briarley Hall along with English, French, art, music, elocution, and others. Miss Willie taught music and art; a Monsieur Blanchard taught French. Another teacher was named Mrs. Collins.

Again Mrs. Porter's school earned a reputation for excellence. A letter to the Editor of the *Sentinel* from a resident of Medley's District who had first-hand knowledge of the school says of the 1878 commencement at Briarley Hall: "The young ladies of that famous institution showed such great improvement that it is the talk of the neighborhood, so much so, that I think any one having young ladies under their charge, either parents or guardians, could not do better than to put them under the care of the proficient matrons of the above named school, as they seem by nature, to have a tact in training young minds. Their watchword is kindness and it acts like a charm. They have the well-earned credit of greatly advancing all the young ladies that have been intrusted to their care. I would say to any one who is at sea where to send their daughters, that this is the school to patronize, as the senior teacher thereof acts in the double capacity of matron and mother. ..."⁸

In 1883, tragedy again struck the family of Mary Porter. On April 6, 1883, Williametta Porter died at Briarley Hall of pneumonia in her 42nd year. She was buried in Monocacy Cemetery. The notice of her death in the *Sentinel* states: "Miss Porter was the accomplished principal of Briarley Hall, one of the most flourishing female institutions of learning in this county. She was followed to her last resting place on Sunday by a very large concourse of relatives and friends."⁹ A subsequent obituary says of Miss Willie: "As a teacher, there was that about he(r) which never failed to win the respect and love of her pupils. An accomplished woman herself, she placed very high the standard which she wished each scholar to attain; and the enthusiasm of her own example could not fail to prove, both in the study and the class-room, a noble stimulus to increasing diligence on the part of those whom she taught."¹⁰

Mary Porter must have found it impossible, at age 69, to carry on without the beloved Miss Willie for, in 1886, she sold the Briarley Hall property to Mary Farrow Gassaway, wife of William A. Gassaway.¹¹ The deed provides that "Mary E. Gassaway is to use and occupy the said premises and property for the purpose of carrying on a female school." It also provides that "The party hereto of the third part (Mary Gassaway) is to board and have the washing done of the said Mary E. Porter during her life and the said Mary E. (Porter) is to have the room over the hall for herself and her own use." Mrs. Porter eventually went to live at a home in Washington, D.C., built and endowed by Mr. W.W. Corcoran for "Indigent Southern gentlewomen." It is said that her pupils remembered her with affection. At Christmas she would receive many gifts. The following year she would redistribute them, sometimes making the mistake of returning them to the

7. *Montgomery County Sentinel*, August 11, 1855.

8. *Ibid.*, July 5, 1878.

9. *Montgomery County Sentinel*, April 13, 1883.

10. *Ibid.*, April 27, 1883.

11. *Montgomery County Land Records*, Book J.A. 3, p. 65.

original donors. Mary Porter died on July 4, 1906; she was buried in Monocacy Cemetery.

Mary Elizabeth Farrow was born March 7, 1843. In about 1860, she married William Augustus Gassaway, son of John and Eliza Dorsey Gassaway. Eliza Dorsey was a half-sister of Mary Porter, and John Gassaway was a second cousin. The William Gassaways had been living in Baltimore prior to the time they came to Briarley Hall. Their children were Sallie, Mary F., Florence, Laura, and William N.

Mrs. Gassaway operated the school under the name "Briarley Hall Seminary." She advertised it as a home boarding and day school for young ladies and little girls. An 1890 advertisement states: "This school offers great advantages for a thorough education in the English branches, mathematics and the languages. Vocal and instrumental music, drawing, painting and crayon are taught."¹² Under Mrs. Gassaway the school grew steadily. The building was enlarged, and porches were added.



Students and Teachers, Briarley Hall Seminary, 1897

Front row (seated): Lizzie Clarke, Sallie Williams, Mary Broome, Jessie MacDonald, Sadie Reading, Alice Wise. Second row (kneeling): Sallie Griffith, Anna Darby, Emily Williams, Eleanor Moffatt, Hallie Norris, Nellie Plaster, Edith Clark, Freddie Clagett, Miss Plaster (teacher), Carrie Gott. Third row (standing): Evelyn Orrison, Betty Williams, Florence Pyles, Birdee Rouzee, Eleanor Chiswell, Stella Hoskinson, Mary Hoskinson, Dawson Williams, Laura Clarke, Rachel Clark, Miss Florence Gassaway (teacher), Dolie Jones, Miss Jennie Young (teacher).

This photograph was in the collection of papers which the Montgomery County Historical Society received from the estate of Miss Katherine Poole. The identifications, which the Society cannot verify, are from her notes.

After they completed their own education, Florence (Florrie) and Laura Gassaway taught at Briarley Hall. But not all the teachers were local girls. In 1902, the

12. *Montgomery County Sentinel*, August 8, 1890.

music teacher was Jennie Birdsall of Otego, New York, and the elocution and art teacher was Miss Frances Bell of Richmond, Virginia.¹³

School opened in mid-September. Financial terms were described as moderate. For the school year 1894-1895, board, room, and tuition were \$175 for the entire year. Students had a ten-day holiday at Christmas and three days at Easter. Tuition for day students was \$25.

Excerpts from the catalog of the Briarley Hall Seminary for the school year 1894-1895 tell much about the school and the accepted way of life of the times.

Under the heading "Home Influence" the catalog states: "The scholars have all the advantages of a home, combined with the necessary discipline of school. The pupils are under the personal care and supervision of the principal and her daughters. The government is mild but firm, and the boarders are treated as members of the family. All the discipline of the school looks beyond girlhood to the future woman, and it is the aim of this institution to educate girls to sustain their true position in life as refined, cultured, Christian women. Pupils committed to our care are watched over and cared for in health and in sickness, in school and out of school; and the development of character, as well as the formation of habits and manners, is carefully watched. The same interest is felt in each pupil as though bound by the ties of kindred. The Faculty and scholars constitute one family, so that gentle, lady-like deportment and good table manners, as well as unrestrained, quiet conversation, are encouraged. The young ladies are never allowed to leave the Seminary grounds unattended by a teacher. ..."

The subject of "Health and Recreation" is addressed as follows: "The pupils enjoy vigorous health. This is due to careful watchfulness, also to the amount of physical exercise required. In good weather, the attractive grounds invite the students to innocent amusements and gentle out-door exercises; Lawn Tennis, Croquet, walks, etc., promote elasticity and bouancy of spirits. In door exercises are encouraged, and, in most case, required, when the weather does not permit the pupils to go on the ground or porches. ..."

Religious instruction held a prominent place in the teaching at Briarley Hall. On this subject the catalog says: "As a balance to all learning, and in order to attain the highest end, it is claimed that the teachings of our Christian religion should hold the first place; and that Christianity should be the true incentive to a noble development of character. The girls are taught to act from a high sense of honor and duty, and to love all that is beautiful and right. Religious instruction, *without sect or creed*, is constantly given, as it is this alone gives learning its true value. Each young lady is allowed to attend the church of her parents' choice, but always accompanied by one of the teachers. ..."

Admonitions and requirements included the following: "Parents are requested not to encourage extravagance in dress, as simplicity of apparel is always commendable in school girls." "Parents and guardians are also earnestly requested to confer with the principal in regard to the amount of spending money allowed. This Seminary does not encourage a large allowance to daughters or wards, as it is frequently spent in trifles or sweet-meats that are injurious to the health of the girls." "Neatness and industry are at all times required; and the young ladies are expected to keep their rooms in perfect order." "The rooms are all large and neatly and comfortably furnished; also heated in winter. The table fare is abundant and wholesome."

13. *Montgomery County Sentinel*, December 26, 1902.

The school was divided into four departments: Preparatory, Junior, Intermediate, and Senior. In all departments courses were given in English language and literature, mathematics, natural sciences, and history. Also taught were Latin, French, psychology, music, art, and elocution. Science courses featured physics in the Junior department, geology and chemistry in the Intermediate Department, and astronomy and physics in the Senior Department. The English curriculum required weekly essays on assigned subjects. Latin grammar was followed by study of the writings of Caesar, Virgil, and Cicero. Instruction in music included piano, organ, and voice. Public and private musicales were held frequently, and each music scholar was expected to take part.

Instruction in music and elocution provided excellent preparation for the elaborate and lengthy programs of the annual commencement exercises. These exercises included instrumental music, songs by individuals and small groups, essays, and recitations. Commencement exercises were usually held in the Poolesville Town Hall on an evening in June.

Another era at Briarley Hall came to an end with the sudden death of Mrs. William A. Gassaway in 1905. She died on August 31, in Frederick City Hospital following an operation for appendicitis.¹⁴ Her daughter, Miss Laura Gassaway, and Miss Laura Clark operated the school for a year after the death of Mrs. Gassaway.¹⁵

Briarley Hall Seminary reopened on October 2, 1906, under the management of Mrs. Theodora Ames Hooker of Boston, Massachusetts. Mrs. Hooker was a graduate of Mount Holyoke College and also attended Boston and Yale Universities. Before coming to Poolesville, Mrs. Hooker had had 15 years of teaching experience at the high-school, college-preparatory, and college levels. At Briarley Hall she was assisted by her daughter, who had attended Bryn Mawr College, and other competent teachers. Because of her deep interest in the higher education of women for the business world, Mrs. Hooker added a School of Finance in which she herself taught. The School of Finance was advertised as preparing "College graduates for commercial teaching, secretarial positions and Civil Service examinations."¹⁶ Advertisements for Briarley Hall Seminary appeared in the *Sentinel* through October 19, 1906; however, in the *Sentinel* of October 26, 1906, the school is advertised as Mount Holyoke School, formerly Briarley Hall. According to Noma Thompson, Mrs. Hooker managed the school for three years.¹⁷ However, no other documentation of a school after the 1906-1907 school year has been found.

The three-story frame building of Briarley Hall School had often housed boarders during the summer months. In the summer of 1910, the *Sentinel* reported: "Briarley Hall boarding house has several boarders and expects more." And later in the same issue: "The Hall transient boarding house is full of boarders nearly all the time."¹⁸ Perhaps the Hall was a year-around boarding house between its days under Mrs. Hooker and its new life as the Briarley Hall Military Academy.

In April 1910, Sydney Johnston Lodge spent the Easter holidays with his mother, Mrs. Alice V. Lodge, at her home "Armore" in Gaithersburg (now 10 DeSillum Avenue). At that time Sydney Lodge was an instructor and athletic coach at the New York

14. *Montgomery County Sentinel*, September 1, 1905.

15. Noma Thompson, *Western Gateway to the National Capital* (Rockville, Maryland) (Washington, D.C.: Stewart Printing Co., July 1950), p. 44.

16. *Montgomery County Sentinel*, July 20, 1906.

17. Thompson, *op. cit.*

18. *Montgomery County Sentinel*, August 5, 1910.

Military Academy at Cornwall-on-the-Hudson.¹⁹ Perhaps it was on this visit that he began to dream of his own school at Briarley Hall.



Briarley Hall Seminary, circa 1905

Sydney Lodge was born in Gaithersburg in 1887, the son of Dr. James L. Lodge, a Baptist minister, and Alice Virginia Lodge. He attended Fork Union Military Academy and graduated from Richmond University.²⁰ He then began his teaching career at the New York Military Academy. He married Edna Beatrice Van Camp of Ontario, Canada, on June 9, 1910, in Newburg, New York.²¹

By December 1911, the *Sentinel* reported that "Captain Lodge, Commandant of the Briarley Hall military Academy, ... will soon take up his residence at Briarley Hall, where he will be engaged during the spring and summer in improving and beautifying the grounds and barracks preparatory to the opening of the school in September, 1912."²² By March arrangements had been completed to move furniture and school equipment into the buildings. According to the *Sentinel*, "Capt. Lodge expects to be settled at the academy by April 1st, and will rapidly push forward the improvements he is making on

19. *Montgomery County Sentinel*, April 8, 1910.

20. *Washington Evening Star*, April 17, 1952.

21. *Montgomery County Sentinel*, June 24, 1910.

22. *Ibid.*, December 22, 1911.

the buildings and grounds. Briarley Hall has always been a school of culture and high standing, and we feel sure that under the management of so progressive and efficient a man as Capt. Lodge it will not only retain but surpass the standing of former years."²³

A public invitation to the official opening of Briarley Hall Military Academy appeared in the *Sentinel* as a letter from Captain Lodge. It read: "The official opening of the Briarley Hall Military Academy will be held upon the academy lawn on Wednesday, September 25th, at 2 P.M. The public at large is most cordially invited to be present.

"Addresses will be made by several men of prominence, followed by short talks by members of the academy faculty. It is planned that a band be in attendance to give life and spirit to the occasion. The exercises will come to a close after the public raising of the national emblem.

"It is my desire and intention that personal invitations be sent out, but owing to a fear that some friend might be overlooked in the rush, this form of invitation has been adopted.

"I want it distinctly understood that each man, woman and child in the State or elsewhere is thus officially invited to be with us.

"The academy opens upon September 18th, but the public exercises have been postponed until a week later in order that the school may become thoroughly organized and settled. No school ever opened with more brilliant prospects. The student body is a splendid group of young men and boys, the faculty is strong, and location most beautiful and the equipment thoroughly up-to-date in every respect. Come help us make our opening exercises an occasion of pleasure and rejoicing.

"Remember the date - Wednesday, September 25th at 2 P.M.

Sincerely Yours,

S.J. Lodge

Superintendent"²⁴

Although the Academy opened in 1912, purchase of the property was not recorded until the following year.²⁵ At that same time (August 1913), Briarley Hall Military Academy was incorporated with Sydney J. Lodge as President, John I. Cassedy as Vice-President, James E. Lodge (brother of Sydney Lodge) as Secretary, and Edna B. Lodge as Treasurer.²⁶ Shortly thereafter title to the land was transferred to the Corporation.

It is not possible to put into chronological order the changes which Lodge made

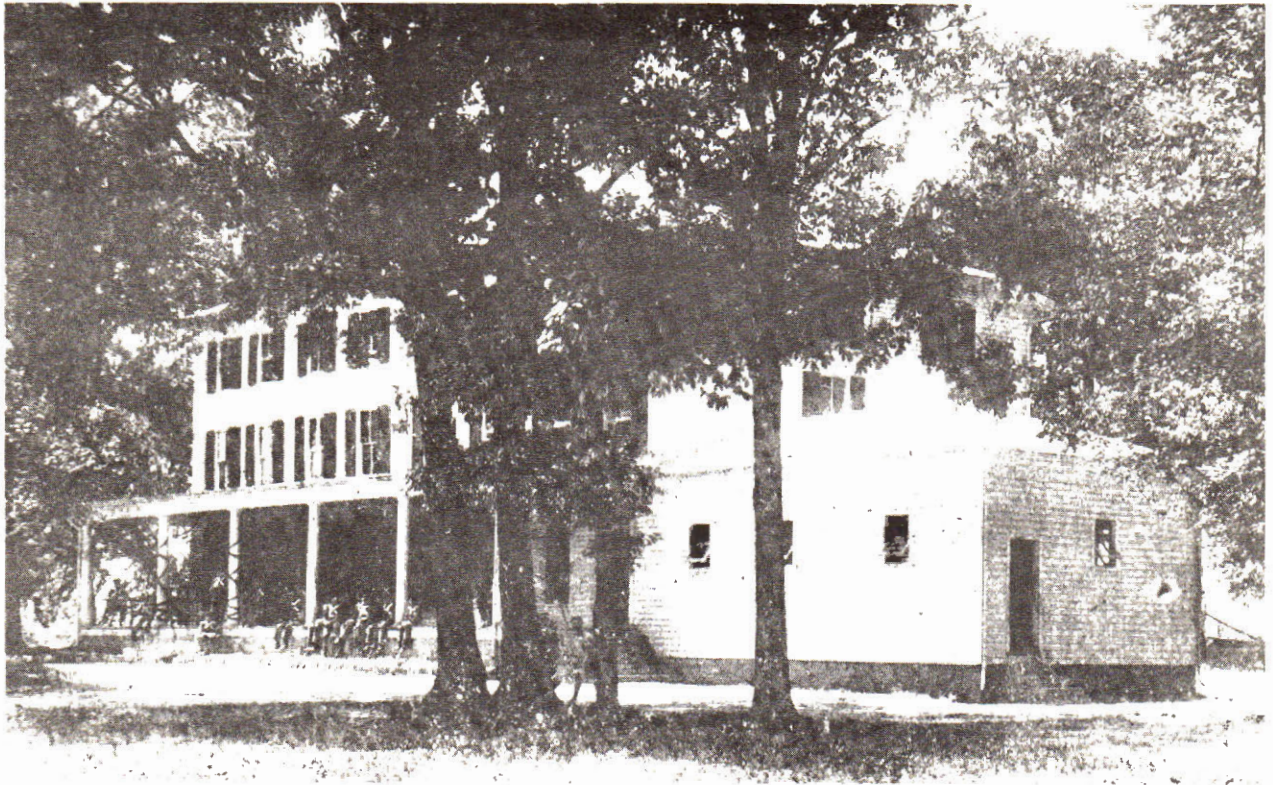
23. *Ibid.*, March 29, 1912.

24. *Ibid.*, September 13, 1912.

25. Montgomery County Land Records, Book 238, p. 303.

26. Montgomery County Corporation Records, Book JLB 1, pp. 11, 12, and 18.

in the buildings and grounds. The original Briarley Hall school building, now called the barracks building, was enlarged some time after 1914 by an addition to the front of the north wing and an addition to the back of the building. The porch was extended to the full length of the building. The barracks building contained the students' quarters, reception room, dining hall, study hall, and recitation rooms. Students' rooms were arranged for one, two, or, in some cases, three cadets. The building was heated by steam and lighted by gas.



Barracks Building of Briarley Hall Military Academy
Showing Recreation Room to the Right

The 1913-1914 catalog describes a gymnasium, a separate 60-by-40-foot building equipped for gymnastics and basketball. However photographs show a recreation room attached to the north side of the barracks building. Adjoining the north end of the building was the athletic field and parade ground. A playground for the younger students was located on the opposite side of the barracks building. In the course of time Lodge also built two cottages which were used for various purposes including classrooms, a storage building, and a small, square concrete building which was located on the front lawn to the south of the barracks building and served as duty post for the Officer of the Day. The entrance was marked by gate posts with the name Briarley Hall Military Academy in an arch over the posts.

As with the prior schools the Hall also served as home for the Lodge family. All of Sydney and Edna Lodge's children were born during their days at Briarley Hall. Their children were Sydney J., Jr., John M., Thomas V., Lee D., Winthrop D., Alice, and Gale.

Thirty-three cadets were enrolled for the first school year; some were boys who

came with Captain Lodge from New York. The faculty for the 1913-1914 school year consisted of Captain Lodge, Superintendent and Commandant, who taught English, history, and military science; Captain Miller A. Cassedy, Head Master, who taught languages and science; and Captain Carroll Dolman, who taught mathematics. Captain Cassedy was a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania; and Captain Dolman, of Harvard University. Junior school instructors included two of the upper class-men: Captain Sidney Thompson who taught English and mathematics and Captain L.W. Driscoll who taught history and geography. The Academy staff also included Captain Elijah W. White, M.D., as Post Surgeon and Mrs. W.B. Magruder as Matron. In 1915, Charles W. Woodward came to Briarley Hall from the University of Georgia to teach history and mathematics. Woodward became a lawyer and later the Chief Judge of the Montgomery County Circuit Court.²⁷ It is for him that the Woodward High School on Old Georgetown Road, Rockville, is named.

The course of study for the Junior School, boys age eight to fourteen, included thorough drill in reading, writing and arithmetic plus geography, history, letter writing, and physiology, supplemented by easy Latin, French, or German lessons. It constituted a preparatory course for the Upper School. The Upper School offered a four-year program of study designed to meet the entrance requirements of any college or university, West Point, or the Naval Academy at Annapolis. The curriculum included four years of Latin, mathematics, history, and English; two years of French or German; and two years of science (physics and chemistry).

Cadets were required to wear uniforms from the time they reported in September until the close of the school year in June. The uniforms corresponded exactly in design to those worn at West Point; they were made of cadet gray cloth, trimmed with black braid with an Academy emblem on cap and collar.

The charge for the school year of 1913-1914 was \$300; this sum included tuition, board, room, laundry, light, heat, and military drill. Textbooks cost between \$5 and \$10. The uniform was furnished by the school at a cost of \$20. An athletic fee of \$5 was required of every cadet.

Each year in the spring, the Cadet Battalion went on a one-week encampment. Camp was pitched on the banks of the Potomac River. Military discipline was in force, and U.S. Army regulations pertaining to camp life were followed. The entire week was given over to military drills and maneuvers, fishing, swimming, and boating.

The opportunities for sight-seeing trips afforded by the proximity of the school to the Nation's capital were not over-looked. The entire school, students and instructors, made several trips each year to Washington, Mount Vernon, Annapolis, Baltimore, and other places connected with American history. Students were required to take notes on these trips and prepare papers on subjects assigned to them.

On the subject of vacations, the Academy's catalog states: "Acting upon the firm conviction that too numerous and too lengthy vacations are a serious handicap to a cadet's progress in his work; a detriment to discipline, and a source of general distraction, we have arranged our school calendar ... allowing for but one regular break in the routine of the school This is the customary Christmas vacation" In addition to the Christmas vacation two days were allowed for Thanksgiving, Washington's birthday, and Easter, but at these times the students remained under

27. *Montgomery County Sentinel*, April 14, 1955.

school discipline.

Discipline at Briarley Hall was strict military discipline. The philosophy of the school was that "Military discipline develops the mind and the body; it teaches strict obedience to one's superiors; it brings forth a decisive and clean-cut method of thought and action; and it creates that personal confidence which is a leading factor in every career." There were 35 rules of discipline which every cadet was expected to follow. In addition to rules requiring obedience to orders, addressing each instructor as Captain, saluting members of the faculty, keeping rooms neat and orderly, the list of rules included the following:

"Cadets in order to be allowed to play upon the Academy athletic teams must keep an average grade of 80 per cent in their classes and 75 per cent in conduct.

"Each cadet must take baths at allotted times, and must report to the officer in charge just before and immediately after said baths are taken.

"Cadets sixteen years of age and up may observe evening study period in their rooms. The officer in charge will, however, make frequent inspections. All other cadets must report to the main study hall, where they will prepare their work under the care of an instructor.

"Each cadet must appear upon each formation in a neat and cleanly condition. Special attention will be paid to such matters as shoes, collars, cuffs, hair, finger-nails and teeth.

"Cadets who fail completely in their daily recitations will be required to report for detention work after the close of the regular school session of the day."

Athletics were also an important part of life at the Academy. The school fielded teams in football, baseball, basketball, and track. Opportunities existed for tennis, swimming, and skating.

Briarley Hall Military Academy remained in operation at the Poolesville site until the depression when parents could no longer afford to send their children to private schools. The Corporation was dissolved on March 26, 1930, and the property was conveyed to John I. Cassedy. Captain Lodge moved to Beltsville, Maryland, where he opened a new school in 1934 called Briarley Military Academy, saying he left the Hall in Poolesville. Today there are still a few visible signs of the Hall on Beallsville Road (Route 109). The gate posts still stand at the roadside, a large expanse of lawn dotted with old trees stretches up to the house, the little concrete duty post remains intact, and one of the cottages stands to the north of the main house (although no cottage appears at this location in early photographs). It is difficult to discern how much of the barracks building is incorporated in the present one-story house. But the Academy recreation room, now a large and comfortable family room, is instantly recognizable. Three sets of concrete porch steps show little sign of the generations of young men and women who trod those steps to the schools that prepared them well for their futures.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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