



# The Technology Review

VOL. I.

OCTOBER, 1899

No. 4

---

WILLIAM JOHNSON WALKER, M.D.

The Act of Incorporation of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, dated April 10, 1861, contained the very important provision that

“within one year after the passage of the Act” (the incorporators) “furnish satisfactory evidence to the Governor and Council that the Institute has funds subscribed, or otherwise guaranteed, for the prosecution of its objects, to an amount of at least one hundred thousand dollars.”

Owing to the distractions and excitement of the Civil War, the friends of the Institute had little to show at the expiration of that year, beyond some small subscriptions and a cordial letter from Mr. Ralph Huntington, stating that the Institute would receive \$50,000 from him by will. These the State authorities refused to regard as a compliance with the terms of the Act, and it was necessary, therefore, for the projectors to petition for a supplementary Act, which was passed, extending until April 10, 1863, the time during which the financial guarantee might be secured.

Notwithstanding the efforts of those deeply interested in this great project of an Institute of Applied Science, the unsettled condition of the business world, the many demands upon its leaders for money to prosecute the war,

and the temporary diversion of interest and financial aid toward the Boston Society of Natural History, which had actually begun to put up its handsome building, conspired against them, and the spring of 1863 found the Institute with little more to offer to the Governor and Council as an earnest of its good faith than it had been able to present the year before. Therefore, on March 7, 1863, the Finance Committee (consisting of Messrs. M. D. Ross, J. M. Beebe, E. S. Tobey, and N. H. Eldredge), to whom great honor is due for their exertions at this critical time, issued an earnest appeal for contributions. At the end of the month, however, less than \$40,000 had been pledged, and it seemed that the weary work of persuading the General Court to further extend the time must be undertaken, and that, with so little to indicate popular interest in the plan, the many forces working against the Institute might this time compass its defeat. With this discouraging outlook, and upon the very last day of the extended year of grace, President Rogers received the following letter :

“ BOSTON, April 10, 1863.

“ DEAR SIR : — It is with sincere pleasure that we have to inform you that, by an instrument bearing date Newport, second of April, 1863, a gift of property has been made to the ‘ Massachusetts Institute of Technology,’ by Dr. William J. Walker, at present a resident in Newport, R. I., but formerly a citizen of Boston, which is worth not less than sixty thousand dollars, and probably from ten to twelve thousand dollars more.

“ We cannot forbear to congratulate the friends of this valuable Institution on this munificent donation, made so opportunely and at a moment peculiarly important in its history, while at the same time we would also gratefully recognize the voluntary manner in which the gift has been bestowed, as well as the truly liberal spirit which marked the personal intercourse between the generous donor and the undersigned, through whom he has been pleased to indicate his benevolent purposes in reference to this Institution.

“ We may add, that it is probable that Doctor Walker may at an early day

communicate directly to the Government of the Institute his views as to its future mode of carrying out its objects.

“With great respect, we have the honor to remain,

“Your obedient servants,

“EDWARD S. TOBEY,

“JAMES M. BEEBE.”

The instrument referred to read, in part, as follows :

“KNOW ALL MEN BY THESE PRESENTS :

“That I, William J. Walker of Newport, in the State of Rhode Island, do hereby give and grant to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology the proceeds in money of six hundred shares in the Old Colony and Fall River Railroad Company, belonging to me, provided that there shall be subscribed or pledged by persons of supposed responsibility on or before the tenth day of the present month of April, an amount of money for the benefit, use, and endowment of the aforesaid Institution, which, when added to the sum hereby granted and given by me, shall together amount to not less than one hundred thousand dollars, and thus enable the said Institution to comply with the terms and conditions of an Act of the Legislature of Massachusetts so far as to acquire and make available for the purposes of said Institution a certain parcel of land located in Boston in the State of Massachusetts, and which has been granted by said Act to said Institution.

“In testimony of the foregoing Instrument, I, William J. Walker, have hereto affixed my signature and seal in Newport aforesaid on this second day of April in the year Eighteen Hundred and Sixty-Three.

“ (Signed) WILLIAM J. WALKER.”

Subsequently, by arrangement between Doctor Walker and the Corporation of the Institute, the property specified in this deed of gift was returned, and the sum of \$75,000 in cash received in its stead.

In this almost dramatic way the expiring charter of the Institute was saved.

Again, in April, 1865, two months after the opening of the School of Industrial Science, when its prospects were far from encouraging, when all the money that the Government of the Institute could command must be put, as

President Rogers expressed it, "into brick and mortar," aid came from the same generous source. For it was found that by Doctor Walker's will — he having died at Newport on the second of the month — the Institute, the Society of Natural History, Tufts College, and Amherst College were made residuary legatees of his estate of more than a million dollars. Although, to avoid litigation, these beneficiaries consented to a modification of the original terms of the will, the Institute eventually received a practically unrestricted addition to its scanty funds of not less than \$200,000.

Dr. William Johnson Walker, this earliest large benefactor of the Institute of Technology, was the second son of Major Timothy and Abigail (Johnson) Walker, of Burlington, Mass. He was born at Charlestown, Mass., on the fifteenth of March, 1789, was prepared for college at Phillips (Andover) Academy, and was graduated at Harvard in the class of 1810. He first studied medicine, as was the custom in those days, with an active practitioner, Dr. (afterward Governor) John Brooks, of Medford, and was thereafter graduated at the Harvard Medical School in 1813. In the same year he received the Boylston Medical Prize for an essay on hydrocephalus.

Sailing for Europe almost immediately upon graduation, in a privateer fitted out to prey upon British commerce, he had the singular good fortune to enter the Paris hospitals at a time when the sweeping conscriptions of Napoleon had taken away almost all the younger French medical men, and had put the care of the sick practically into the hands of foreigners. After this unique experience under the most eminent French surgeons, he went to the London hospitals, studying and working for six months under Sir Astley Cooper.

After a training so unusually broad for those early days of American medicine, Doctor Walker settled in Charlestown, practising his profession there for thirty years with signal success, performing nearly every one of the capital operations in surgery, attaining a wide reputation as an anatomist and pathologist, and guiding the studies of more young men than any other New England physician, not of the medical schools, of his time. He served, also, as physician to the Massachusetts State Prison and as consulting surgeon to the Massachusetts General Hospital.

Retiring from his profession in 1845, Doctor Walker removed to Boston, and interested himself with great success in manufactures and railroads, then entering upon a period of wonderful development. He thereby amassed a fortune large for the time, a fortune the greater part of which went to the furthering of education and other good works. So completely did he dissociate himself from his profession when he made this change of residence that thereafter he steadfastly refused to prescribe for even his closest friends. Late in life Doctor Walker changed his residence to Newport, R. I., where he died, on the second of April, 1865, in the seventy-seventh year of his age.

Of a singular and somewhat perverse disposition, of a hot and hasty temper, decided in his opinions, and often harsh in manner, Doctor Walker's enmities were as bitter as his friendships were devoted. His worst side seems to have been shown toward his fellow practitioners, his best toward young medical students, to whom he was always ready to give help and advice, and toward the poor, who benefited greatly by his charity. Shrewd in his judgments, keen in business, of a dry and pleasant wit, yet obstinate and sometimes overbearing, he was a type of man com-

At Home & West R.R. July 2. 1864

Dear Sir  
I received your note of June 29 with the pamphlet accompanying it: "Scope and Plan of the School of Industrial Science of the Mass Institute of Technology". I have read the same with great pleasure and am neither able nor desirous of altering it in any point for the better; It meets my unqualified approbation = God speed the Institute;.

I should not wish the Plans copied on my account. I am satisfied all is going on well; I can do but little mental labour;.

When you write Professor Rogers, give him my best compliments and wishes for health, happiness, and prosperous visit to Europe, with safe Return

I am Dear Sir, Truly and Sincerely Yours & William J Walker

When our work is complete & collated The subscriptions for Second Building, I wish to have it done

mon in New England, a type analogous to its unfriendly and yet beneficent climate.

This almost providential gift of Doctor Walker's, and his subsequent equally welcome bequest, greatly stimulated the work and enlarged the aims of the nascent Institute, exerting no small influence upon its entire subsequent career. The gift, President Rogers declared at the meeting of the Government called to accept it, opened a "glorious prospect" to the Institution, but it also laid upon it "heavier responsibilities," so that "it had become still more incumbent upon both the officers and members of the Institute to strive to the utmost to form and sustain for it a character which should place it in the front rank of learned associations of a similar kind." And again, writing to his brother Henry, in 1865,<sup>1</sup> President Rogers refers to the lately announced bequest of Doctor Walker as a reason for projecting the work of the school upon a much larger plan than had seemed before possible.

It is not strange, then, that Doctor Walker, although in Newport and mortally ill, was, in the two years prior to his death, kept constantly informed of the progress of the Institute, and frequently consulted in relation to the many questions of policy arising in the launching of a project so new and intricate. The following interesting letters from President Rogers<sup>2</sup> well show this:

"1 TEMPLE PLACE, BOSTON,

"April 14, 1863.

"DEAR SIR:—It gives me great pleasure to comply with the vote of the Institute of Technology, requesting me to communicate the feelings and views of the Institute in relation to your recent donation.

"In doing so I forbear from any added expression of our gratitude further

<sup>1</sup> See "Life and Letters of William Barton Rogers," Vol. II., p. 232.

<sup>2</sup> "Life and Letters," Vol. II, pp. 159 and 163.



than to say that every member of the Institute acknowledges and will ever remember this generous and timely aid, which, besides securing the State grant of land for our immediate use, places our enterprise in a position to command the confidence as well as the helpful sympathy of the public.

“Neither will I obtrude my own feelings further than to mention the delight with which I learned in the most critical juncture of our affairs that so strong an arm was stretched out in support of that popular practical education which it has been my most earnest effort to promote.

“The best evidence which my colleagues and I can furnish of our appreciation of your aid must consist in our faithful effort to make your benefaction productive of the greatest good to the greatest number by causing the Institute to dispense as widely as possible the blessings of sound practical and popular education.

“Permit me to say that it has given me especial gratification to find from conversation with my friends, Mr. Tobey and Professor Wyman, that the views on elementary and practical education and the methods of teaching, which I have long entertained and endeavored to put in practice, are, as far as I can see, entirely coincident with your own.

“To teach exactly and thoroughly the fundamental principles of positive science, with their leading applications to the industrial arts, and to make this teaching as widely available as possible, are the cardinal ideas of our proposed School of Industrial Science. I need hardly add that in carrying them into effect the Institute will be glad to receive any suggestions with which you may please to favor them.

“I remain very gratefully,

“Your obedient servant,

“WILLIAM B. ROGERS.”

“1 TEMPLE PLACE, BOSTON,

“May 4, 1863.

“DEAR SIR :—At the risk of repeating what may be in part already known to you, I undertake the pleasant duty of telling you of the favorable action of the Legislature on the two subjects connected with our Institute, which have come before them.

“You will, I am sure, be glad to hear that they have repealed the ungracious condition accompanying the grant of land on the Back Bay, and the Institute and the Natural History Society are now relieved of possible liability connected with the sales of the surrounding land.

"They have, moreover, shown their appreciation of our claims by appropriating to the active operations of the Institute *three tenths* of the proceeds of the public lands granted by Congress to Massachusetts, for the promotion of education in Agriculture and the Mechanic Arts. What may be the value of this appropriation, when realized, and within what time it shall become available, is, I presume, somewhat uncertain, but the amount, it is thought, will reach one hundred thousand dollars. By a separate Act, the Legislature have given the remaining seven tenths of the grant to the formation and endowment of an Agricultural College. Following the suggestion of the Governor in his inaugural address, a strong effort was made early in the session to secure a union of this entire prospective fund with that of the Bussey estate, and to make the Agricultural College and Institute of Technology parts of a grand plan centering in Harvard University.

"The latter proposition, suggested at the hearing before the Legislative Committee, met with the instant reply from myself and others that the Institute had from the beginning determined to stand alone, that its independence was essential to its success, and that it would accept no grant from the State, or from any other quarter, which should in the slightest particular interfere with this independence. After hearing our statements and canvassing the subject very fully on several occasions, the committee abandoned their original purpose, and framed the two bills, which have been enacted by the Legislature, and of which I have already communicated the substantial features, making the Agricultural College an entirely distinct institution, and giving the Institute the above-mentioned share of the Congressional grant, with no other condition than that the Chief Justice of the State, the Secretary of the Board of Education, and the Governor shall be *ex-officio* members of the Government of the Institute.

"We are now busy planning our building for the School of Industrial Science, and thanks to your munificence, we hope soon to see its foundation laid.

"Believe, me, dear sir, with great respect,

"Yours truly,

"WILLIAM B. ROGERS."

Doctor Walker's gifts to the Institute of Technology, while practically unsolicited, were not the result of impulse. He gave to the new institution because he believed in its general purpose, and foresaw its power for good to the