

## LAWS OF NEW LONDON ACADEMY, 1802

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Public high schools were extremely rare in the pre-Civil War era, and students who wanted to continue their education beyond the elementary level usually had recourse to private academies or tutors. While Kentucky had several academies at an early date, a number of young Kentuckians were sent across the mountains to attend schools in the seaboard states. One of them was Joseph Cabell Breckinridge who attended New London Academy in Bedford County, Virginia in 1802-1804.

Born in Virginia in 1788, Cabell had become a Kentuckian in 1793 when his father, John Breckinridge, moved westward in search of better economic opportunities. In the autumn of 1801 when Senator Breckinridge went to Washington he carried his family with him as far as Virginia where they visited relatives and friends while the Senator was in the nation's capitol. Thirteen-year-old Cabell enrolled in the Bedford County academy which had been chartered in 1795.

The Breckinridge Papers in the Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, contain a handwritten copy of the "Laws of the Academy, 1802." They may have been sent to Senator Breckinridge when he was considering enrolling his son in the school, or they may have been forwarded later as proof that the students were carefully supervised. The rules were somewhat pretentious in view of the size of the student body of that period. Cabell wrote in November, 1803, that only ten or twelve students were in attendance. Of those, at least three were not living at the academy. Cabell was boarding with a Mr. Bell, "an old man, turned 60, and a strict Presbyterian," who nevertheless set a good table and provided good quarters for studying. Cabell and two of Bell's sons walked together to the school a mile distant from the house.<sup>1</sup>

There is no proof that the laws were strictly enforced, but they do give considerable insight into academy life of that period. The spelling follows the original copy.

1. Every student shall rise at 5 o'clock in the morning.
2. They shall all assemble at 6 o'clock for public prayer cases of sickness only excepted.

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Cabell Breckinridge to mother, November 22, 1803, Breckinridge Papers (Library of Congress).

3. From morning prayer, till half past 7 they shall attend to their studies.
4. From half past eight till twelve, they shall again attend strictly to their business.
5. From 12. till 2. they may refresh themselves at some genteel recreation, and take dinner—Dinner to be ready at one o'clock.
6. From two till six they shall attend to their studies and at six six [sic] there shall be public prayer.
7. Every student shall be in bed at 9. o'clock.
8. No student shall leave his room, or his apartment in study hours.
9. No noise shall be made at any time either within or without of doors.
10. Every student shall at all time appear decently and cleanly.
11. They shall treat each other, and all other persons with politness and proper respect.
12. No student shall visit any tavern without particular and lawful business, or without having first obtained permission from the president.
13. No student shall be engaged in, or be present at any Horse-race, cock-fight, Card playing, Dice or any other kind of Gambling. Nor be seen in the company of disorderly, or dissolute persons.
14. Cursing, swearing, Fighting, quarreling, all indecent language, Reveling and dauncing are possitively forbidden.
15. Playing at fives, or engaging in any kind of sport at New London or other public place are also forbidden.
16. The students shall be compelled to give a strict account for every time of absence, from public worship, from morning, and evening prayers, or from their regular recitations.
17. At the commencement of every session the President shall appoint, to every student their respective apartments, and they shall in no case intrude on each other.
18. There shall be one, or more moniters appointed weekly in rotation—They shall regulary call their lists on Sunday, morning when ther is sermon at the Academy just before service begins—Every morning, noon, and evening. Keep proper bill for the purpose and make their returns, every Saturday at 12. o'clock.
19. Ther shall be also a seperate bill, kept for such students, as lodge at the Accademy, which shall be called regularly just before 9 o'clock at night—Read on Sunday morning before Breakfast.

20. The punishment shall be reasonable correction, private and public admonitions, Suspension, and expulsion either of which may be inflicted on disorderly students, at the discretion of the President. Suspension and expulsion excepted.
21. When expulsion is thought necessary the President may suspend, the transgressor until a Board of Trustees be called, which in such case must be done without delay—But Suspension, merely as a punishment shall not exceed three days unless by order of the Board.
22. No student shall be expelled without first having a fair, and impartial trial before the Board, seven of whom must concur in the sentence for expulsion.
23. On the eight, and 9th days of April, and of October every student shall be examined in the presence of the Board, and such other gentlemen, as they may invite on the studies of the proceeding Session and on the 10th of each of those months there shall be a public exhibition.
24. There shall be a quarterly examination also, on the 25th of July for the summer session, and for the winter on the 25th of January—But should Sunday prove to be the 25th the examination shall be on the Friday following.
25. If any of the students make a bad examination and it appears to be the consequence of negligence, he, or they shall be re-proved by the Board—and set Back as far as their deficiencies may warrant.
26. At every quarterly examination the Trustees will allot suitable honors to such of the students as shall distinguish themselves for their proficiency but such allotments may be forfeited, through delinquency in the close of the session.
27. Every student shall produce a letter or essay of his own composition, and deliver a committed oration every week except that the President may at discretion excuse such as members of a Literary Society established at the Academy.
28. Every student, or his parent, or Guardian for him shall advance the sum of ten dollars for tuition one dollar for room rent before he can be intitled to the privileges of the Academy.
29. Every student who has the benefit of the Library shall, furthermore pay, for each session one dollar.
30. All extra damages done to the Academy or any part of the Building, appertaining there to shall be charged in common to all the students unless it be discovered who actually committed

them. But when that can be done, He, or they alone shall be chargeable—

Test

James Callaway<sup>2</sup>

James Pen, Secy.

Cabell evidently profited from his two years at the academy and the additional work he did with Colonel Samuel Wilson of Jessamine County after returning to Kentucky in the spring of 1805. When he entered Princeton College in December, 1805, he was admitted to the sophomore class on the basis of his examination by the faculty.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> James Callaway and James Penn were members of the first Board of Trustees when the charter was granted in 1795, and Callaway gave the school its land. L. L. Barnes and others, eds., *The Story of New London Academy, 1795-1945* (Forest, Virginia, 1945), pp. 6-7, 30.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Cabell Breckinridge to father, December 22, 1805, Breckinridge Papers. Cabell quit Princeton in 1807 as a consequence of the great student riot, but he returned in 1808 and graduated two years later. See Lowell H. Harrison, "A Young Kenruckian at Princeton, 1806-1810," *The Filson Club History Quarterly*, Vol. 38 (October, 1964), pp. 285-315.