The University at Lewisburg was not yet thirty years old when it underwent the most severe crisis in its history. Enrollments were at a long-time low. The University finances were strapped, and with the entire nation in a post-Civil War depression, the future did not look promising.

President Justin Loomis, sensing he was no longer able to guide the University through such difficult times, resigned in December, 1878. On March 11, 1879, the Trustees elected as President, twenty-nine year old David Jayne Hill, an alumnus and professor at the University at Lewisburg.

When Hill accepted the University's offer, a member of the Board of Trustees who had resigned twenty years earlier in disgust with Lewisburg, commented that "any man who would accept the Presidency of the University at Lewisburg was a fool." Hill went to Philadelphia to meet with the man who had called him a "fool." That former trustee was William Bucknell.
... to give a Board of Trustees of the University at Lewisburg, hereafter to be agreed upon, the sum of $50,000, provided (1) that $100,000 be derived from the present endowment of the University by liquidating all its assets except its buildings and its real estate in the campus in Lewisburg; (2) that an additional $50,000 be raised; (3) that all the property of the University be placed in the hands of one governing board to be chosen by the new subscribers; (4) that all claims against the University be met without impairing the funds above named; (5) that Mr. Bucknell’s subscription should fall due and be paid in cash only when the other prescribed funds should be raised; (6) that the present Board of Trustees accept this offer within three weeks from April 2, 1881; and (7) that the whole project be completed before November 1, 1881.

Stipulations of the agreement between Bucknell and the University, April 2, 1881.

William Bucknell was born in Marcus Hook, Pa., on April 1, 1810 to Baptist parents. In his early life, he was successful both in the real estate business and in the church, and in 1845, he became involved in a state-wide movement to found a Baptist college within Pennsylvania.

From the University at Lewisburg’s very beginnings, Bucknell was a major force behind its creation, both in planning and financing. In 1849, he became a charter member of the Board of Trustees, and he provided thousands of dollars to the school’s endowment.

But in 1856, Bucknell voted with the minority in an effort to move the University at Lewisburg to the Philadelphia area.

Bucknell’s resignation from the Trustees, however, came about with a dispute that erupted between the governing boards of the University. At that time, the University was in the hands of two distinct organs: the Board of Trustees and the Board of Curators. Bucknell thought this system of governance was wholly ineffective, and he and several other Trustees sought to dissolve the Board of Curators. When this effort in 1863 failed, Bucknell and the others severed their connections with the University at Lewisburg.

It was not until 1881 that Bucknell’s ties to the University were re-established. The school’s finances and enrollment could not have been worse, and President David Jayne Hill contacted Bucknell almost as a last resort. Bucknell consented to give the University a gift of $50,000 if certain conditions were met. They were, and on April 2, 1881, the University at Lewisburg was saved. Five years later, a grateful Board of Trustees renamed the institution “The Bucknell University.” But for the University at Lewisburg, and later, Bucknell University, this episode was but one chapter in a long history that began in 1846.
The time had long been ripe for a Baptist college in Pennsylvania. For years, the Baptists of the state had sent their youth to Rhode Island (now known as Brown University), to Columbian College in Washington, D.C. (now George Washington), to Hamilton in New York (now Colgate) and to Granville, Ohio (now Denison). Baptist groups in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh had tried and failed. James Moore III decided that the institution should begin near the center of the state.

The Northumberland Baptist Association agreed. Largely through the efforts of the Rev. Eugenio Kincaid, George F. Miller, Dr. William Ludwig, and Moore, interest became widespread. The Association needed only a general agent to develop a college.
Professor Stephen Taylor of Madison University was hired as general agent on December 27, 1845. He immediately drew up a charter for a university — rather than a college, for there was little difference in the fee for either — and on February 5, 1846, the Governor of Pennsylvania signed the charter for the University at Lewisburg.

Classes began in the basement of the Baptist church in Lewisburg, but the trustees soon purchased the Brown farm on the hill overlooking the town. Ground was broken on February 25, 1848, and by the end of that year, the Academy Building, later named Taylor Hall, was completed at a cost of $8,000. By 1849, the $100,000 required by the charter had been secured.

Taylor's help in starting the University was invaluable. One colleague wrote "without him it is almost certain that our University would never have existed."
Malcolm Chosen First President

Progress at the infant institution moved quickly. Thomas U. Walter, the architect and planner for the Capitol Building in Washington, agreed to design the main college building. By 1850, the west wing was completed.

1851 marked two significant events. The first class — seven in number — was presented for graduation, and the diplomas were awarded by James Buchanan, a member of the Board of Curators, who later became President of the United States. Soon after commencement, Taylor resigned as Acting President. On August 19 of that year, the Reverend Dr. Howard Malcolm was elected as the first president of the University at Lewisburg.

Malcolm’s administration saw some permanent changes in the University; the impetus for many of these changes was Malcolm himself. Concern with the beauty of the campus became important and the hill and the grove below were extensively landscaped. University Avenue was designated as the main approach for the campus, and the street was to be lined with stately homes. Malcolm built the first of these — the President’s house — on the property now owned by Kappa Sigma and Phi Gamma Delta Fraternities, and it later served as the Kappa Sigma chapter house, until it was demolished for a new chapter house.

The library of the University became a reality under Malcolm, and it was given a home in Old Main. General education was important to Malcolm as well, and a more practical-oriented curriculum edged out Greek and Latin. Bucknell’s academic stature increased dramatically, and the school was able to attract faculty like Robert Lowry, who was world-renowned as an author and hymn writer. Changes in student life occurred also, as Phi Kappa Psi became the first fraternity at Bucknell in 1885.
Female Institute Opens

In 1852, the University purchased the Casey House to house a female seminary. The Women's Institute (later renamed Larison Hall) was built in 1857, and the Casey House was sold.

The Institute was totally separate from the college, and major steps were taken to keep the men and the women apart. A high fence surrounded the building, and the first floor windows were whitened.

But its success was evident; even while the entire university hit a severe depression, the Institute showed a net profit.
Depression and Civil War

The entire nation entered into a depression around 1857, and the University suffered greatly. Work on the completion of Old Main was halted. Malcolm resigned as President, and Professor Bliss was named Acting President. Almost one year later, Professor Justin R. Loomis was elected to fill the post, after James Moore III had exerted pressure.

With a great amount of difficulty, the main building and the east wing of Old Main were completed in 1859. The University at Lewisburg now possessed one of the largest collegiate buildings in the nation. President Loomis built a beautiful new President's house, still used for that purpose today, with his own funds. But even these improvements were of little interest to a nation about to enter a civil war. Enrollments dropped; finances bottomed out.
The actual fighting of the Civil War affected the University only slightly. In June of 1863, Company A of the Pennsylvania Militia, numbering fifty-nine students, was organized. The entire campus closed, for nearly every male student had enlisted. They were to prevent Lee’s Confederate troops from gaining bridge access to Harrisburg. For some reason, the Confederates chose instead to attack Gettysburg, and the University “soldiers” were not needed.

The economic effects of the war, however, were devastating. The university buildings had fallen into disrepair because neither the funds nor the materials were available. Salaries of professors were at pre-war levels; frequently they were not paid for months at a time. The curriculum had remained stagnant for thirty years.

Of all the difficulties with which the University was plagued, perhaps the most damaging was the deepening rift between the two governing bodies of the University: the Boards of Trustees and Curators. Each board tried to increase its power at the expense of the other. Neither was willing to yield; neither was able to remain effective. Even within each board, there was hostility. Several trustees, including William Bucknell and Samuel Crozer, long two of the University’s largest donors, resigned in disgust. The damage to the school by this withdrawal of support was incomprehensible.

For nearly fifteen years following the end of the war, the University at Lewisburg plodded along, with poor enrollments and an even more dismal financial situation. From its very beginnings, President Loomis’ administration was plagued with external problems. In fact, only the Female Institute, the under the principalship of Katherine B. Larison (for whom the Institute building was named) remained solvent. In late 1878, Loomis gave the trustees his resignation.
Hill Elected President; Convinces William Bucknell to Return

David Jayne Hill, a professor at and alumnus of the University at Lewisburg, was elected to replace Loomis. Any optimism over his selection was guarded; the financial situation of the University was more desperate than ever.

With nowhere else to turn, Hill contacted William Bucknell. Bucknell was won over by Hill’s personality, and made an offer on April 2, 1881 to save the school: he sensed that he could force some changes which he had seen as desirable twenty years earlier.

The conditions of his offer were accepted, and the University at Lewisburg had found its savior. In addition to the original $50,000, Bucknell donated Reunion Hall, which served as the chapel, and later became Bucknell Hall.

In June, 1886, the trustees resolved unanimously that the name be changed to the Bucknell University.

The Observatory, donated by Bucknell in 1886

End of Document
David Jayne Hill was appointed in 1908 by President Theodore Roosevelt as Ambassador to Germany, following his ambassadorial posts to the Hague and elsewhere in Europe. A national scandal erupted over the Kaiser’s refusal to accept the appointment, and the story dominated national newspapers for several weeks. Although the Kaiser’s objection was later denied, the negative impression which the occurrence left on much of the American public remained until World War I.

Bucknell’s gifts continued, and in 1886, he agreed to donate the funds for an astronomical observatory if alumni would raise enough money to build a gymnasium. Both goals were achieved, and the gym was dedicated as the Tustin Gymnasium, in honor of Professor F.W. Tustin who had been instrumental in its building campaign. The observatory was located on the hill, between present day Trax Hall and the Carnegie Building.

Hill resigned the presidency on July 9, 1888 to embark on an illustrious ambassadorial career that would take him throughout Europe. John Howard Harris was elected President in 1889.
Bucknell Dies, 1890

On March 15, 1890, William Bucknell died, following an eight-day coma as the result of an apoplectic stroke. His will, dated Jan 29, 1884, left his entire estate to his wife and children. Papers which had been drawn up and were to go into effect on April 1, 1890, left much of his fortune — estimated to be $7,500,000 — to the University and other charities. But Bucknell died before those stipulations became effective: the University was left with nothing.

The loss of Bucknell to the school, however, was evident. The faculty and trustees passed motions in his honor. Former President Hill wrote, "no one so well as myself can now realize the condition of affairs at Lewisburg in 1880. This is not the place to picture that situation: but we cannot rightly appreciate one of the many benevolent actions of Mr. Bucknell without knowing that the situation was very desperate. He saved the institution from closing its doors."

RESPECT TO MR. BUCKNELL. — At a meeting of the Faculty of Bucknell University, the following minute, prepared at their request by Prof. Perrine, was adopted:

"The death of our honored friend and patron, Mr. William Bucknell, brings to our minds a fresh recollection of his many wise benefactions to the University which bears his name. In its early days he was a faithful counselor and a friend in need; while in these later years his ample means have been at its disposal to such an extent as to make him by far its greatest benefactor. He has been permitted to see the University develop, very largely by his efforts, from small beginnings until now it occupies an abiding place among the institutions of our denomination and country, and in the hearts of our people. As a Faculty, being conversant with his plans and labors and knowing the results accomplished, we wish to place upon record our appreciation of his devotion to our interests, and of his desire to do good, in this most disinterested way, to the youth of the land. Coming to the grave "like as a shock of corn cometh in in its season," we feel that there is nothing but our own regrets at his departure to disquiet us in a death so noble; and we are sure that the University which he so magnificently befriended will be for him, in the days to come, a monument which even kings might envy. We can desire no better thing than that God will raise up others like him, who will take up his work and carry it on in his spirit."
“The Bucknell University” Prospects; Co-Education Becomes Official

Bucknell's family consented to fulfill his pledge to construct a building for sciences, and in 1890, the Chemistry Building (presently the Music and Arts Building) was dedicated. It was William Bucknell's last gift to the school.

The effects of the Hill and Harris administrations on the university were remarkable. In 1855, Bucknell officially became co-educational and the College and Institute classes were combined; it was one of the nation's first schools to do so. Both the student enrollment and the faculty roster had increased by over three-hundred percent under both presidents. Sports not only became "legal," but they became an important part of student life. And the endowment had increased to the point where Bucknell was a multi-million-dollar institution.