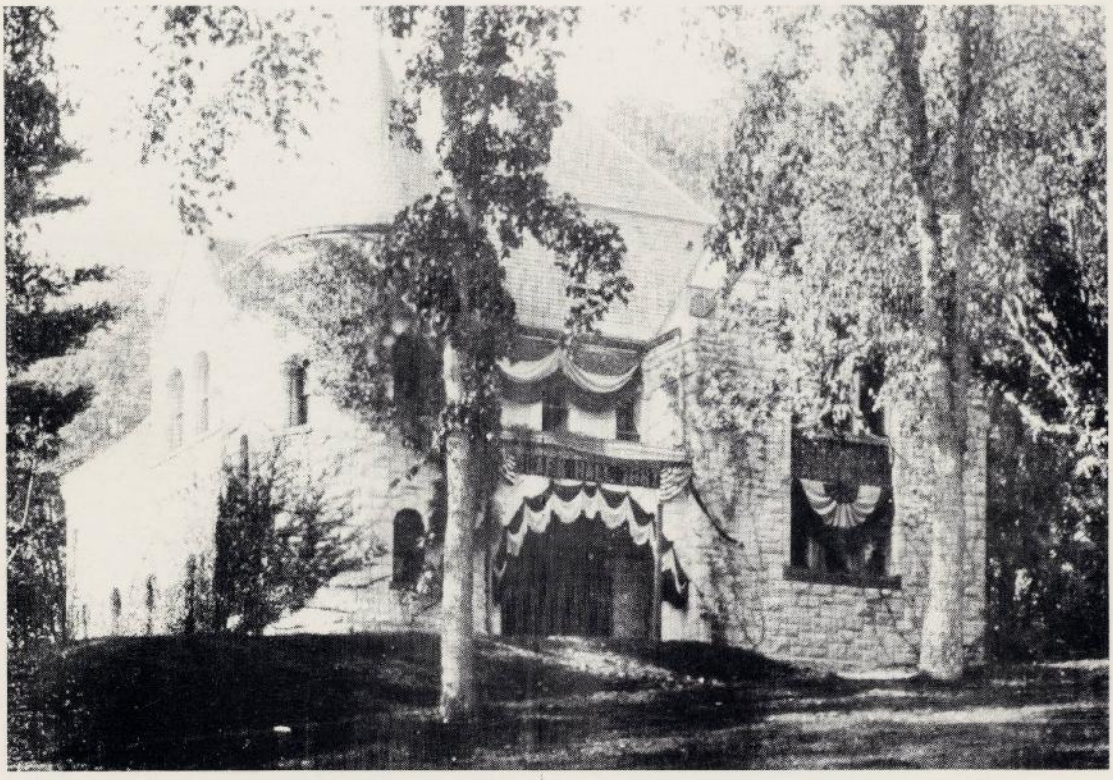
WILLIAMS GEOLOGY NEWSLETTER



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WILLIAMS GEOLOGY NEWSLETTER

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Cover: The original Clark Hall, in the Berkshire quad, decked out for the Williams Centennial in 1893.

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T. Nelson Dale: Diminuitive Giant in New England Geology

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Thomas Nelson Dale (1845-1937) was described by one of his grandchildren as a "tiny [five-foot-six]...dynamo of a man" who walked "as far and fast as he was able for as long as he lived." His professional career spanned seven decades, four of them with the U.S. Geological Survey, and included a teaching position in geology and botany at Williams College (1893-1901) preceded by shorter appointments at Vassar and Drury Colleges. Yet he had virtually no formal education beyond preparatory school. Trained largely through field experience in Europe with mentors such as Prof. Carl Zittel of the University of Munich, his "formal" university credentials consisted of attending, over years, a total of five geology lectures (two at Harvard and three in Germany) and four months' residence (in mathematics) at Cambridge University. Illness and his father's business failures conspired against any sustained undergraduate experience, but he overcame this deficiency by innate curiosity, keen powers of observation, and sheer energy.

In 1880, while living in Newport, RI, he was hired by Raphael Pumpelly of the USGS to assist in collecting mining statistics. Pumpelly later directed Dale's summer field studies of fossil localities in the metasedimentary rocks of western New England, a project which grew into the systematic mapping of the Mt. Greylock massif, the Rensselear Plateau, and substantial parts of the Taconic and Green Mountain ranges. This work led to his appointment as Assistant Geologist in the USGS in 1890 and his promotion to Geologist in 1892, a position he shared during his generally frustrating teaching career at Williams over the next eight years. His field studies of the complex structures of Western New England and eastern New York, involving over 12,000 miles of hiking and more of driving the primitive mountain roads, resulted in 28 published reports, many complete with maps, photographs, and his meticulously hand-drawn figures and field sketches. After the turn of the century, he became an expert for the USGS on the sources of commercial building stone (slate, granite, and marble) of New England and the U.S. and was author of more than 20 reports (mostly USGS Bulletins) on these industries. During his retirement years he resided in Pittsfield, MA, lecturing frequently on the geology of that region and continuing to pursue his life-long passion for religion and philosophy.

(Submitted for presentation at the 1993 Annual Meeting of the Geological Society of America this October in Boston.)