



# Quaker Hill Quill

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## Discovering an Unfinished Friends School History: Part I - Isaac Johnson & 19th Century Friends

*by Terence Maguire*

In 1997 a team of Wilmington Friends teachers and administrators were researching and writing a new history of the school in honor of its 250th year of continuous operation. Back in 1948 a similar history had been written to commemorate the school's 200th year. Former student (class of '00) and Headmaster Charles Bush was the primary writer.

What was unknown in both 1997 and 1948 was that there had been an earlier effort, begun in 1894, in preparation for the school's 150th year. The researcher and writer was the school's then-headmaster, Isaac T. Johnson.

In 1898, however, instead of publishing the first volume of his history, Johnson left Friends School. Why he left is unclear. What is clear is that the results of his research were broken up and dispersed throughout our material archives.

Wilmington Friends School, modern of aspect as the present pile of buildings stands, facing the old meeting house, is quite a venerable institution and dates back one hundred and fifty years, to the days when "Willingtown" was a village, and Friends were just beginning to come to the new settlement in New Castle. The quiet small schools of those primitive days did their good work without much record, and the history of the school in the last century mainly passed away with the passing of successive generations of pupils.

And so the old building stood at the beginning of the present century, and within the memory of many still living, a long, one-story building of red & black brick with ample yard for playground in which grew several willow trees, and an old pump on the West St. pavement. So it stood when the present Meeting House was built in 1816-17, an operation, as one pupil remembers it, which "was of great interest to the school children, and we watched its progress from the digging of the

cellar to the roofing & the completing of every detail with much enjoyment. When the timbers were laid for the first flooring, we used to run along them and jump from one to another, at the imminent risk of falling into the cellar—but I remember no accidents."

This passage, apparently the introduction to his unfinished history, was written by Johnson 120 years ago and refers to a yet earlier time nearly 80 years before that, almost 200 years ago. The delighted child quoted was Miriam Lamborn (later Worrell), who attended Friends School starting in 1816.



Isaac T. Johnson, 1881-1898

Johnson had come to Friends straight from being an undergraduate at Haverford College in 1881. Despite his lack of experience, he was appointed headmaster. It turned out to be a wise choice. Johnson exercised a degree of leadership unmatched by any earlier principal. Under his guidance, the school grew significantly in physical plant, student body, and the depth and range of curriculum, adding such diverse features as a kindergarten teacher training program, gymnastics, mechanical drawing, Greek, astronomy, and physics. The school had never been more focused or more prominent in the little world of Wilmington, Delaware.

Johnson was quite aware that Friends was even then the oldest school in Delaware. Catalogues under his direction stress that fact, and the charm of age was much appreciated in youthful America. As the school approached its

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# Isaac Johnson: An Unfinished History of Friends School

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150th year of continuous existence (from 1748 to 1898), Johnson apparently decided to write its history.

"...good work without much record..."

One wishes Johnson had finished the task, for his phrase above was largely true. The sources of the school's known history had been scant and sometimes unreliable. In his 1846 *Original Settlements on the Delaware*, the first work of history written in Delaware, Benjamin Ferris expended a few pages on the building itself. Elizabeth Montgomery, in her 1858 *Reminiscences of Wilmington*, made a few references to masters, mistresses, and students. Thomas Scharf's comprehensive 1888 *History of Delaware* has about one page on the school's history (much of it incorrect, we find).

Neither Friends School nor its parent Wilmington Monthly Meeting at Fourth and West Streets (hereafter WMM) had any known systematic listing of teachers and students of its first 130 years. In 1879 (and possibly earlier) the school published a "Circular," or catalogue, detailing its faculty of four, the School Committee, calendar, rules, courses, and student names. Only with these catalogues did organized information become available. We find no gathering of recollections or stories-until Johnson's effort.

"What are thy earliest recollections...?"

Johnson's effort was discovered early in 1998. As the research editor for the 1998 A Gift in Trust, I pored over every document in our archives. At some point I was puzzled as to why a hand-written passage had a Roman numeral next to it (V, e.g.). It occurred to me that I had seen others like this. On a hunch, I sifted back through the 19th-Century material archives and found a great many—and finally I found the key: the set of questions in Table 1. Johnson had mailed these questions on mimeographed sheets to at least twenty respondents--former students and teachers and present School Committee members-- asking for all the factual information within their recollection about the school and WMM. Later I found the introductory passage quoted above in what was clearly Johnson's handwriting. I then gathered and organized all his dispersed research material. [Table 1] These responses supply much previously missing information.

**Responders to Isaac Johnson's 1894 Queries**

Not all are included here. The arrangement is roughly chronological, based on time spent at FS. [Table 2]

## Table #1

**Isaac Johnson's Queries-1894** [The mimeograph sheet is too faint to reproduce. Below are transcriptions of his questions.]

*Put answers in blanks or on a reverse side of the sheets.*

- Ia. Hast thou ever been a pupil in Friends School?
- Ib. In what years?
- Ic. How many teachers were there in the school at that time?
- Id. Give names of such teachers as thou canst recall, of thy time, of earlier and more recent years.
- Ie. What branches were taught?
- II. Give names of some of thy school fellows now living or of others who attended here during thy childhood.
- III. Do the names of any former pupils of the school occur to thee who have risen to eminence in the society or business worlds state or nation?
- IV. What are thy earliest recollections of the appearance and size of the school house and what additions or changes were made prior to 1883?
- V. Please give any incidents connected with school or its management which may occur to thee and which have not been given above.
- VI. Please refer me to any books, documents, or manuscripts which will assist me in securing information in regard to the school.
- VII. What is thy recollection of the history of the Meetings and Meeting Houses at 4th & West?
- VIII. Who have been some of the prominent Friends connected with the Meeting within thy recollection?

## Table # 2

### Name

### Years at Friends School

**Worrell, Miriam Lamborn** —

1816-19 or -21

*She did not write out her own, apparently, but her information was supplied by daughter Emma, who also gave information about her own five years of teaching*

**Worrell, Emma** (daughter)

Taught — 1865-70

**Bancroft, Sarah Poole** — We

1820s

*don't have her written response, only a story quoted by Johnson from her*

**Ferris, Deborah/Sara Bringhurst** —

1822-25

*These two answered together, using "we."*

**Garrett, Ellwood**

1826-28

**Smyth, Clement B.**

1834-42

**Bringhurst, John R.**

1839-46?

**Smith, Albert W.**

Taught — 1841-45

**Bartram, Anna Marshall**

1842-56

**Garrett, Howard**

1846-50

**Newlin, Edith** [partial]

Taught — 1852-57

**Bye, Pusey P.**

1853-63

**Gawthrop, Alfred**

1854-56

**Richardson, Joseph A.**

1855-65

**Fothergill, Ann**

Taught — 1858-61; 1873-82

**Michener, Patience**

Taught — 1870-72; 1877-78

**Hayes, Emma Gawthrop**

1873-75

**Richardson, Anna B.**

1874-80



References such as JRB IV mean John R. Bringhurst's response to question IV.

### Early Evolution of the Schoolhouse

In his History, Ferris described the school building as unchanged since 1748. However, according to some of the oldest former students from whom Johnson received responses—Deborah Ferris and Sarah Bringhurst (1822-25)—the 1738 Meeting House was almost immediately enlarged by adding another room of equal size. (Deborah Ferris, incidentally, was Benjamin's daughter.) Johnson wrote, "Those pupils ... remember it as appearing 'as old as the other end of the school,' and also built of the same red & black brick." This addition, according to Ferris and Bringhurst, was used as a boys' school, and the original room was the girls' school.

Miriam Lamborn Worrell's recollections were the earliest, and they are detailed and vivid. She speaks of a solid wall between the two rooms, with no passage between them downstairs. In the attics above "there was a large window space (without sash or glass), which evidently had once looked out on the south yard towards Fourth Street, before the new end had been built against it.

[Figure 3.]

Worrell describes other features also. The yard outside the girls' south entrance was unfenced on either the Fourth or West Street sides, but a "high board fence" separated the boys' from the girls' play-ground yards. No danger was posed yet by the town outside, but there was less certainty about boys' intentions toward girls (or perhaps vice-versa).

Ellwood Garrett, son the abolitionist Thomas Garrett, attended Friends' School from 1826-28.

Garrett recalled the building well, enclosing in his response a neatly drawn overhead view of the property (Figure 4.) A fence had been added to set off the girls' yard from Fourth St. In front of the West St. entrance to the boys' school, he showed a water pump. This pump was recalled also by John R. Bringhurst (1839-46). "An old pump in Stratton's time stood on West St. in front of school also one on 4th St. (south side) opposite the grave yard." Boys were sent to fetch water with an old stone pitcher.

### Upward Expansions

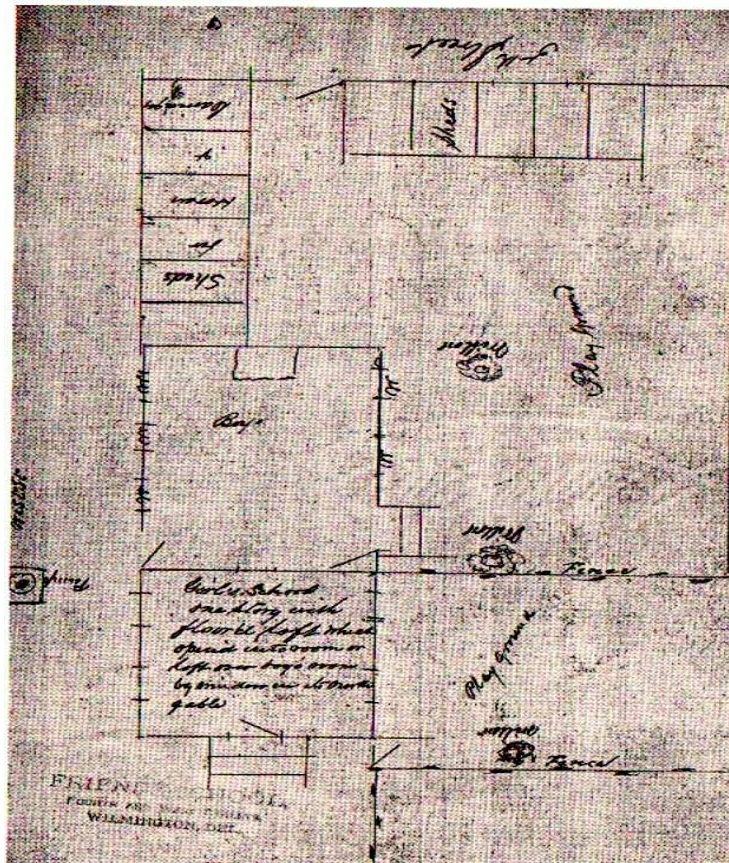
In 1829, shortly after Garrett left, the school underwent its second major renovation. The northern end was raised a story. "The second story was put on the first, for the girls' school, & the boys' school was on the first floor," recalled Emma Worrell. Monthly Meeting records (10th mo. 4th. 1829), however, show concern was about the "declining state of the school for boys." The Committee decided, therefore, in order to... command the respect of parents and guardians...the Northerly part of the said school house shall be raised to make one commodious room over the present school room...this school room shall be furnished with such books and apparatus for the use of the school as may be needful to instruct our youth in the history of our society...and the useful branches of natural science.

Apparently that space did not long remain adequate. Expansion for "an additional girls' school" was debated. Meeting minutes for 7th mo 24th 1846, recount discussion about whether to build a second story on the old portion or to take down the walls to the ground, and start over, using the same roofing material. "Upon considering the state of the old walls, [the joint School Committees] are united in recommending as their judgment to the Mo. Mtg. the rebuilding of the house." The building was completed in time for the new school year. Ferris included in his History the following description:

Figure 3



Figure 4



continued on page 6

# Origins of the Friends Meeting House (part 3): Dollars & Sense

by Lisa Samson

Wilmington's Friends Meeting house at Fourth and West Streets is the third structure at this corner in which Quaker worship has been held in Wilmington since 1738, and all three structures have reflected Friends' testimony of simplicity. Indeed, building the present Meeting house seems to have been achieved following a process of simplicity, observable from minutes that begin with a record of the initial idea for a new meeting house in 1815, through slips of paper recording various aspects of its construction from 1816 to 1817. Consider the following extracts, taken from minutes and slips of paper saved during the process (now archived at Swarthmore College's Friends Historical Library), and note the speed with which decisions were made, designs were created, and estimates were generated:

[All extracts are taken from the minute book (found in folder RG2/Ph/W57 6.6) kept by the building committee, which is located at Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College.]

- The idea for a new meeting house began on the 26th of October 1815, and a committee was appointed immediately ... to take the subject generally into consideration and to report what way might to them appear most eligible to remedy these inconveniences.

- On the 28th of October the committee met, agreed that a new meeting house was needed, developed a tentative size for it, and proceeded to assign two smaller groups the tasks to prepare:

- ... a ground-plan and elevation of a house of the size aforementioned together with plans for stabling and other outhouses, and report to next meeting

- cost estimates for a building 75 feet front by 50 feet deep suitable for a meeting house together with the necessary appurtenances.

- On the 9th of November the committee minuted the following:

... the Friends appointed to make the plans & elevation produced one in which was laid down the usual outlines of a ground plan together with the position and number of benches [etc., etc.] which meeting with general approbation it was directed to be placed in the hands of the Friends who were nominated to make the estimates.

At this committee meeting the size was reconsidered so that it would be longer in proportion to its width in order to divide the

house to greater advantage; after deliberate discussion it was concluded to recommend forty-eight feet wide by seventy-six feet long, as the size best adapted to our situation and wants.

- One week later they met again and at this meeting an elevation was also produced in which the Dividing Partition was described, and the manner of raising and lowering it as now practiced at Friends meeting house in Green Street Philadelphia.

The work of the two subcommittees resulted in the development of estimates. Recorded in the minute book for the building project, they provide details regarding the building's architectural elements:

*Estimates as follow Verbatim et Literatim*

*Carpenter's*

*"Estimate of a Building 48 ft by 76 ft"*

52.428 ft scantling	at 250	1320 .. 70
10000 ft Wt pine boards	@ 7	700 .. 00
20000 ft panel do.	@ 4	800 .. 00
7000 ft lath	@ .75	52 - 50
12000 shingles	@ 35	420 -- --
700 lb nails	@ 12	84 -- --
6 boxes glass first quality	@ 20	120 -- --
100 lb putty	@ 12 _	12 .. 50
Spikes, bolts, rivets and window bars 400 wt at 2		100 .. 00
52 pr window on sash pulleys		26 -- 00
13 do Cords		3 -- 00
104 sash weights say 850 lb	@ 7	59 .. 50
9 gross screws	@ 125	11 .. 25
Cords and pulleys for double partition		4 .. 00
64 pair shutter hinges and fittings		512 .. 00
12 pr door hinges		90 .. --
1 large lock and 11 fastnings		12 . --
Painting and glazine		150 . --
Carpenter's bill		<u>3032 .. 55</u>
		7500 .. 00

*Bricklayer's and Mason's*

*"Estimate of a Building 48 ft by 76 ft"*

Cellar walls 9 feet high 175 perches @ 300[ct] per perch	528
Brick walls 26 feet high 178 thousand bricks	2459
including bricks lime sand and laying	
Digging the cellar 1200 yards at 25 Ct	300
Plastering including materials 1315 yards at 37 _ Ct	493
Materials for scaffolding	103
Building two funnels for stoves	8
	Dolls. 3891 .. 00

To which add Carpenters' 7500 .. 00  
Total of the two estimates 11,391 .. 00



The committee submitted a report on their work to the Meeting on the 20th November 1815 and on the 1st of December 1815 the Meeting recorded: On this day was held our Monthly Meeting ... and on due deliberation the proposal for building a New meeting house was united with and Friends authorized to build on the Burying Ground Lot as proposed ...

Having received approval to move forward, the committee continued to oversee the building of the meeting house until it was completed and the first Meeting for Worship was held in it in 1817:

... the Committee continued their attentions to the concern with diligence until the House was ready for use and meetings held in it. The first time it was used as a place of worship was on the 25th of 9th month 1817. While the work was progressing the committee generally met on the Ground where it being inconvenient to use the pen, the minutes were discontinued.

Though it was inconvenient to record minutes in the minute book on the site, other documents were created there, sometimes on small bits of paper one can imagine were then stuffed into a jacket or shirt pocket and later retrieved and added to other such papers. One scrap of paper records a contract between the committee and Thomas C. Alrichs, a member of the committee, to make gutters and spouts for the roof:

[All other documents are found either in folder RG2/Ph/W57 6.5 or in RG2/Ph/W57 6.5.]

I will agree to make 260 feet of spout & gutter 24 (? Flaps) 12 elbows and irons & put it up with the assistance of one carpenter for seventy dollars cash.

I will agree to make 260 feet of Spout & Gutter 24 flaps 12 Elbows and put it up with the assistance of one carpenter for seventy dollars cash  
Thos C Alrichs

Contract with Thomas C. Alrichs for gutters & rain spouts.

Another records loads of sand delivered during the months of April, May, June, and August 1816:

Sand for new Meeting House  
1816 Day Loads

Handwritten ledger titled "Sand for new Meeting House" showing daily loads of sand delivered from April to August 1816. The table includes columns for date, day, and load, with various calculations and totals.

Above — Detailed record of loads of sand delivered for the project.

Below— Tally of unpaid bills.

Handwritten ledger titled "Bills unpaid 6m 1817" listing various expenses for the meeting house project, including plastering, platforms, stone, painting, and more. The table includes columns for item and amount, with a final total of 14587.

And, as the project wound down, yet another records the bills remaining to be paid in 1817,

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## Origins of Friends Meeting House

*continued from page 5*

including bills for plastering, building platforms, steps, and curbstones, painting, and the building of "two necessities."

Almost two hundred years ago work ended on a new Meeting house at Fourth and West streets. Today the simple beauty of the Quaker Meeting house that now stands on Quaker Hill aptly reflects the process followed by those 19th century members who envisioned, built, and first worshiped in it. With its brick façade and front wall, its black iron fences surrounding the green lawn of its Burying Ground, and the small, curved, white headstones sitting close to the grass, it is an embodiment of the Quaker testimony of simplicity. Those of us who pass by it can be thankful that through the thoughtful stewardship of the individuals who worked on the building, the records they created during the project still exist and allow us to follow their process today.

**Archivist Lisa Samson is Historian of Wilmington Friends Meeting and member of the QHHPF Board. All document images were scanned from originals of the Wilmington Monthly Meeting records, archived and open to researchers at Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, PA.**

## An Unfinished History of Friends School

*continued from page 1*

That house is yet standing, with the date of its erection marked by black glazed bricks in the gable wall...To this useful purpose, it has been devoted since the year 1748, and thousands of children have there received the first rudiments of an English education ( p. 298).

By the fall of 1846, that was no longer true.

On the other hand, a tradition in school publications, including those under Isaac Johnson, indicates that one wall of the original building remained in the building that kept expanding. If that is true, the point is now moot; in 1970 the former Friends School building was demolished.

### Shifting Room Use

For the next 37 years, the building changed only internally but often. Internal architecture seemed to "flex" to accommodate shifting needs. Interior walls were erected and taken down, a laboratory was set up. Ann Marshall Bartram attended from 1842, when Jesse and Maria Kendall governed the primary girls and boys together in a downstairs room; there were separate boys' and girls' school upstairs.

By the mid-late 1840's the two upstairs rooms were for "elder girls" and boys, each being taught separately. By the early 1850's, however, the boys' were downstairs and the primary girls and older ones were aloft (AMB, IV). Ten years later, Emma Worrell recalled a primary school downstairs, and a select primary and an upper school in the two rooms above (EW, IV).

The various divisions of the school seemed during this period to play a kind of musical chairs with classrooms.

**Terence Maguire is a former teacher at Wilmington Friends School, archivist and QHHPF Board Member.**

## Recent Quaker Hill Event

### Tour of Historic Tabernacle Church

On the afternoon of July 26, 2014, Bishop Aretha Morton (center) conducted a tour of Tabernacle Baptist Church at 5th & Washington Streets. Assisting in the tour was Elder Jonesta Ray (who also snapped this picture for us). Originally built in 1868 as the Union United Methodist Church, it is now the Tabernacle Full Gospel Baptist Church. Among those present were QHHPF Board members George Callahan, Lisa Samson, Jim Bierbaum, Board President Bayard Marin QHHPF Executive Director Mary Starkweather-White. On behalf of the QHHPF Board, thank you to Bishop Morton and Elder Ray for a fascinating and informative tour.



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**Upcoming Quaker Hill Events**  
**Film-Showing:**  
***Whispers of Angels***

See the award-winning film, *Whispers of Angels*, about local luminaries of the Underground Railroad, Thomas Garrett, William Still and Harriet Tubman! Ed Asner stars as Thomas Garrett, with Blair Underwood as William Still. Many local Delawareans portray other roles and extras. The film-showing is free and open to the public at the Wilmington Friends Meeting, 401 N. West St., Wilm., DE 19801 on Sunday, 8/24/14, at 2:00 p.m.



**Talk about Lafayette**

Learn about the Marquis de Lafayette and his participation in the American Revolution, both at the Battle of the Brandywine and our own Quaker Hill! The talk by Gene Pisasale is free and open to the public at the Wilmington Friends Meeting, 401 N. West St., Wilm., DE 19801 on Saturday, 9/20/14, at 2:00 p.m.

**Buying and Selling Old Homes & Making Them Green**

Conference: Come learn from experts about tips for buying and selling old homes and making them green! This conference is free and open to the public at the Wilmington Friends Meeting, 401 N. West St., Wilm., DE 19801 on Saturday, 10/11/14, at 10:00 a.m.

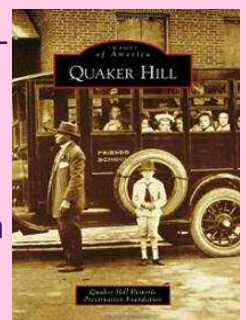
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# A View From the Hill

*from the Editor*

Welcome to another issue of *The Quill*. In recent months, we have brought you many of the fascinating people who have been associated with Quaker Hill over the years, such as Harriet Tubman, John Dickinson, Elizabeth Shadd Williams, Warner Mifflin, Jesu Hollingsworth and others. This issue, we focus not so much on people, but on buildings, namely two institutions — Wilmington Friends School and Wilmington Friends MeetingHouse — which in their own way have as much personality as many of the people we have previously featured here. We thank Terence Maguire for his fascinating research on an unfinished history of Friends School which he discovered buried in the school's archives, scattered in bits and pieces. We also welcome the third installment of Lisa Samson's history of the construction of the current Friends Meeting House, this time focusing on financial records (I took the liberty of subtitling it "Dollars & Sense," hoping Lisa doesn't mind my whimsical little pun. Stay cool through the remaining hot, humid days of summer, and we'll see you again in the autumn.

j.b.



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## Quaker Hill

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