



Quaker Hill Quill

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

by Terence Maguire

Struggle, Expansion, and Assistant Teachers

Wilmington Monthly Meeting had difficulty in replacing Newlin. They set about doing so vigorously, publishing a notice on 7 mo, 1857 "Friends Select School for Girls" with an enriched curriculum including "the rudiments of French and Latin, all at no extra charge," to be taught by Sarah Mitchell Gawthrop. However, she only taught from September until October! For some reason, she resigned. In Friends School archives is an unsigned letter from that autumn, with a description of what seems to be a severe mental breakdown of a gentleman dear to the writer. In addition, it contains a recommendation of "AK" as a substitute teacher. Almost certainly this was written by the unhappy Gawthrop, for according to at least four of Johnson's respondents, Ann F. Kent succeeded her. Fothergill recalls instead, "Annie Kent was a poetess and writer," but that she married a doctor in Philadelphia. Everyone recalled, however, that she stayed for only the one year.

Ann Fothergill arrived in 1858, according to her own and others' accounts. She remained until April, 1861 but returned in 1873 for another stint of nine years. Apparently the girls' school enrollment supported regular assistants, and Fothergill supervising a series of women assistants or teachers in charge of the downstairs Primary Department. Mary Tyson had continued from the Taylor/Newlin days, followed by

future School Committee member Caroline Oakford, according to J. A. Richardson, and then by Mary E. Passmore.

In 1857 Thomas Griffith took Taylor's position as principal of the boys' school. Pusey Bye wrote of him that he was "an excellent teacher, especially well-versed in mathematics and foreign languages" (PB, p. 1). Worrell recalls his "flourishing boys school under the care of the Meeting" (EW, IV.) Richardson recalls that, about 1860, he "went downstairs--the school for large boys was in charge of Thomas Griffith and occupied the entire lower floor with an attendance of about 40." (JAR, I.d.) Bye recalled Hannah Griffith assisting her brother.



Emalea Pusey Warner and Emma Worrell

Bye also remembered that Friends School children were not always saintly but like all other children loved mischief. The boys indulged in

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Isaac Johnson: An Unfinished History of Friends School, Part III

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hazing newcomers, in which the marked lad was told to look for the "mythical bird's" nest in a large willow. While the gullible one looked up, some classmate would kneel behind him, and another would push him over. He remembered another:

We had among the scholars the regulation "dull boy" ... During a question contest between 2 classes, this particular bright youth purposely was asked, "Who was the father of Zebidee's children?" A wicked companion at his side whispered to him, "Napoleon Bonaparte" ... out it came in all innocence with the tone of Victory that showed only too plain his thought that he was not caught that time. His glory soon vanished amidst the shouts of laughter that came from the boys, and even the teacher had to rest a few moments to regain his equilibrium. (PB, p. 6)

Griffith left Friends' School after the 6 mo 1863. That month he took the trouble to publish his boys' year-end grades for all courses, plus an overall average. Perhaps Alfred Warner (99.1% overall) and Pusey Bye (95.2%) thought this public parade of grades was admirable; however, the four with less than passing averages may have been happy to see Griffith depart along, especially the unfortunate lad with a 43.5% average, who shall here, 150 years later, be given the anonymity he then deserved.

Ann Fothergill believed that the Boys' Upper School remained closed from 1864 until it reopened under George R. Thompson in 1879. The lack of any specific male recollections of Wickersham or thereafter suggests this belief might be so. However, the Primary School and Girls' School were still, to use that favorite adjective of the time, "flourishing."

"Our Beloved Teacher"

In 1865 one of Friends' School's most affectionately remembered teachers arrived: Emma Worrell. Born in 1834 in Hockessin, she did not attend Friends School as did her mother Miriam. Only after she and her family moved to Wilmington in 1863 did they re-connect with the school. Her father Thomas was a member of the School Committee by the 1870's. By 1865 Emma had begun to work at the school.

Isaac's Johnson had written to Emma Worrell because he knew her to be a former principal. He reaped a bonanza. First of all, Emma responded for her mother Miriam, who had attended 78 years before Johnson's request but retained a vigorous memory. Second, Emma

added her own recollections of the five years she taught. She described in great detail the room arrangement, the heating system, her several assistants. She named 64 of her students, 46 girls and 18 boys.

Emma Worrell apparently began in one of two rooms upstairs; "The large first story room was occupied as a primary school (independent of the meeting) by Miss Patty Burns." (EW, IV.) She began with primary students --boys and girls-- in the north room, assisted by Mary E. Flint. The room on the southern end of the second floor was "for advanced scholars, mostly girls, but there were always a few boys." In 1867 she became the Principal of the older children upstairs.

What was Friends' School like under Emma Worrell? She herself gave a clear description of the curricular program and fundamental aims.

Our curriculum was varied without being very deep or scientific; we tried to know a little of the additions to knowledge that were continually being made. The so-called 'common branches' were thoroughly taught--as far as we went. Good reading and Spelling, correct elementary arithmetic, some knowledge of History and Geography, with an insistence on correct English Speaking, as well as truthfulness & honorable actions were the prime objects of the school. To make gentlemen & refined good women, who knew something was the aim. [EW, p. 1, underlining original]

Curiously, none of the other respondents to Johnson's queries mentioned Emma Worrell and her time of schooling there. She certainly touched some of her students, though. As a 16-year old, she so impressed her new Hockessin neighbors, the Puseys, that they used her name for their daughter, Emalea Pusey Warner, one of the great women in Delaware history. Emalea, in privately-published *Childhood Memories*, recalls "our guide" and "beloved teacher" at Friends' School, whose "power of friendship cemented her close to a wide circle of friends during her 96 years" (p. 34). Warner and other members of the New Century Club lovingly prepared by hand a memorial book, "Emma Worrell's Trip to Europe, 1873," which resides in the Wilmington Friends School library. In it Warner describes Worrell as...

....a woman of broad vision, a pioneer in all progressive movements... She was actively interested in the Woman's Suffrage Cause, the Anti-Slavery Movement, better education of young people, the Women's Christian Temperance

Movement, and all activities that fostered a higher culture and a nobler civilization.

Worrell spoke at the state constitutional convention in 1896 in favor of women's suffrage. Admirers named two libraries after her--that in the 1937 Friends School building in Alapocas, and another in New Castle Hall in the Women's College at the University of Delaware.

"Schollars"

Because of the payment vouchers and the Johnson responses, many hundreds of previously unknown Friends' School students are now named. Lists are available at Wilmington Friends archives. The listing of those remembered by Johnson's respondents numbers about 240. The precise count is uncertain because, while obvious duplication was avoided, in some cases the same names are given 10-15 years apart. There are many Bringhursts, Ferrises, Garretts, Pyles, and Richardsons; it is easy to imagine that different persons of the same name might have been noted.

Conclusion

At least by 1879, Friends' School was publishing its "Annual Circular," and the kind of information that had to be gleaned from the payment

vouchers and Johnson's respondents could easily be found. By that time the "schools" had become singular, under the direction of one principal; and decades before the School Committee had concentrated its resources on the buildings across from the Meeting House. While much has been learned and organized, many details of the school's early life remain unknown, perhaps forever --or at least until someone discovers another box, crammed with dried, browning "Reports of the School Committee," or a schoolmistress's record book, or letters from the past.

"I love the old school house, many a royal good time I had therein."

--Anne Marshall Bartram, 1894

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Edited Transcription of Robert (Bob) Seeley's Oral History (Part 1)

The following edited transcription is from the oral history interview conducted with Robert (Bob) Seeley on April 9, 2011, at Wilmington Friends Meetinghouse. Mary Starkweather-White oversaw the interview process, Jim Bierbaum was the videographer, Michelle Rana transcribed the recording, and Lisa Samson was the interviewer and edited the transcript.

Robert (Bob) Seeley (RS): I was born in Delaware County, Pennsylvania in a town called Havertown. I grew up with my grandparents. My grandfather worked for the Pennsylvania Railroad, my grandmother was a stay-at-home mom and she was a fantastic grandmother, a good example for us. She took all five of us children in. My grandfather died when I was 5 years old so Grandmom raised us all. We had food on the table and we had a lot of love and we worked together as a family. We did the dishes together, we vacuumed, we mowed, whatever had to be done because we were lucky we had a roof over our heads. So we are grateful for our grandmother for keeping us all together.

I'm married and have four children and many

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Bob Seeley, dressed as Thomas Garrett, in Wilmington's Tubman-Garrett Park for the 2013 dedication ceremony of a statue depicting Harriet Tubman & Thomas Garrett.

Seeley Oral History

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grandchildren. I'm still living in Havertown. I was an Ornamental Horticulture major at Penn State and after I graduated I moved to Lititz, Pennsylvania and I worked for Stauffer's in the garden center. I then moved back to Havertown and worked for another nursery called Mostardi's Nursery. Then I decided to take the big step of going into my own business. I opened Robert E. Seeley Landscaping in January 1985. It was a big risk to take. I also taught Ornamental Horticulture and Landscape Design, first in Haverford in an adult school. Then I decided to take it onto college-level so I started teaching at Delaware County Community College in Ornamental Horticulture.

Lisa Samson: You also have another passion. Talk about what you knew about your ancestor, Thomas Garrett, growing up, or when you learned you were related to him. Tell us the story about him coming into your life.

RS: I started doing genealogy and I really didn't get to know my father, growing up with grandma. But I got to know my father's brothers, Henry Seeley and Ronald Seeley. And I had talked to them to get some genealogy on the family. And they said that there was a famous person that we were related to who was involved in the Underground Railroad. So I did research. I went to Swarthmore College and also Haverford College to look up some records there. I went into Philadelphia to look at their archives in historical societies, West Chester Historical Society, also the

archives in West Chester, Delaware County Historical Society, and their archives.

I looked online on Ancestry.com. I went to get all the resources, as many as possible and then also to check in the family bibles and to see how many bibles we had with the information. When I got all this information together I found out that I was related to a famous abolitionist by the name of Thomas Garrett and I read more about the Underground Railroad and I know when I studied history at Haverford, we didn't talk much about the Underground Railroad.

I thought, "This is part of our American history that has been left out." And it is a love story about people caring about other people that were enslaved. And their freedom was taken away from them and they were treated like animals to be sold at auction and here is a relative of mine, Thomas Garrett, who put his life on the line for freedom. He was unwavering in his efforts and I thought, well, besides Thomas there were other people involved. So I researched the other people too: Harriet Tubman who would visit Thomas quite a bit; Williams Still who was in the Vigilance Committee in Philadelphia who Thomas would write letters to. I was able to connect with some of my cousins from Eli Garrett's line or Henry Garrett's line. They were the sons of Thomas. I wanted to get some information, letters, documents, pictures, as much as possible. So I interviewed and talked to many family members. A lot of the collection was donated in Delaware. There is a large collection at the Delaware Historical Society on Market Street.



LEARN ABOUT QUAKER HILL

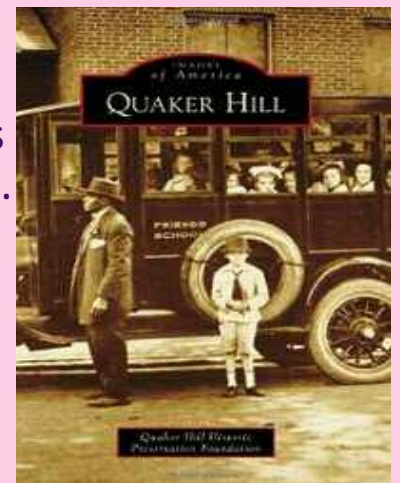
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127 pages brimming with pictures and illustrations of Quaker Hill, from its earliest days to the present.

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Upcoming Quaker Hill Events
Underground Railroad Workshops

The Quaker Hill Historic Preservation Foundation is very pleased to present four Underground Railroad workshops for children at the Wilmington Friends Meeting House at 401 North West Street, Wilmington, DE, 19801. They will be offered from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. on Saturdays in January and February in 2015.

The first workshop on January 24, 2015, will feature a story about Wilmington's Underground Railroad Stationmaster Thomas Garrett and a related art project as well as refreshments.

The second workshop on February 7, 2015, will feature the story of Harriet Tubman, an art project and a re-enactment of the Underground Railroad, as well as refreshments.

The third workshop and fourth workshops, on February 14 and 28, 2015, will feature the story of Frederick Douglass and the early struggles for African-American education.

All of the workshops are free and open to the public. For more information, call (302) 299-5600.

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Become A Member—As a Member of QHHPF you will receive many benefits, including invitations to lectures, workshops, and social events, and the satisfaction of knowing you are helping QHHPF be a strong voice for preservation as a means to enhance the economic and cultural health of the city.

For more information, go to www.quakerhillhistoric.org & click on "become a member."

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A View From the Hill

from the Editor

Happy New Year, and welcome to another issue of *The Quill*. Difficult as it may be to believe, this issue marks the third anniversary of our first issue. *The Quill* as a publication of QHHPF existed before in years past, of course, but after several years of hiatus, QHHPF Board President Bayard Marin, Executive Director Mary Starkweather-White and I, your humble editor, decided to relaunch a new edition of the Quill to spread the word about the fascinating history of one of Wilmington's oldest neighborhoods.

We are proud of the informative, entertaining and high-quality material we've brought you in these past three years, and are very grateful to all of the talented contributors who have shared of their knowledge and hard work in these pages.

The Quill, by design and in fitting with the nature of QHHPF, tends to focus on the past, on history. But we also like to look toward the future, and find ways to promote Quaker Hill as a living, breathing neighbor-

hood in the present and work towards its growth and revitalization. We believe that Quaker Hill has many admirable qualities and has the potential to become one of Wilmington's showcase neighborhoods, a great place to live, a place to work, to worship, to refresh and relax. A particularly exciting recent development is the announcement by Wilmington Renaissance Corporation of a downtown Creative District. This project has been endorsed by Mayor Williams and Governor Markell. And Quaker Hill is right, smack dab in the middle of the district.

Along those lines, the QHHPF Board is working on some exciting projects that we hope will make quite a splash within the next few months. Details are still being worked out, so we can't announce any specifics, but expect the May issue to announce a one-of-a-kind event we think will attract a great deal of positive attention to Quaker Hill. In the meantime, we hope you enjoy this issue, and we'll see you next time.

j.b.



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